



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Daughters of Iraq Complete Security Training-

By Carrie Giardino  
Special Correspondent

July 16, 2008

**Al Abarra, Diyala Province** - Nearly eighty women sit in the courtyard in front of the Iraqi Police headquarters in this town just south of the provincial capital of Baqubah. They slowly fan themselves in the hot, unmoving air as they sit quietly in their traditional black robes.

But on this day there is a new ornament, which cuts across the black dress. On this day they are graduating from the first training class in Diyala for the Daughters of Iraq and they proudly wear their bright yellow reflective belts across their chests.



*Volunteers for the Daughters of Iraq program in a training lecture with their newly issued special cross-belts.*

These ladies, many of whom were without employment opportunities in the past, are now being employed by a joint effort between the Coalition Forces (CF) and the Iraqi Police (IP) to work with the security forces to conduct searches of women.

Unlike the Sons of Iraq program, the women are not trained in using weapons and do not carry guns. They will assist with patting down women at checkpoints and entrances to government facilities.

A representative from the CF says they are hoping to expand the program even further out into the province but the town of Al Abarra pushed to be the first to launch the program and the CF were excited by the enthusiasm they demonstrated. For now, the women feel empowered and are taking steps to establish a more secure environment in their own neighborhoods.

In a province that has become famous for the increasingly high number of female suicide bombers, these women are taking a risk by volunteering as the first group of women to reverse the previously non-existent security measures in place against women due to cultural norms that forbid a man to touch a woman who is not his immediate relative.

This threat of female suicide bomber attacks has hit close to home for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Diyala after a woman detonated her suicide vest in front of the Governance Center in Baqubah last month.

The PRT program is a Department of State-led initiative that helps build governing capacity in provincial and local governments and supports economic development. The program was greatly expanded in 2007 in order to leverage improving security conditions and there are now 29 teams serving all 18 provinces in Iraq.

The Diyala PRT has been working with a caucus of women who are Provincial Council representatives to identify projects to increase employment opportunities for women in the region and give women an outlet to discuss their concerns.

Provincial Council and security committee member, Saja Qaduri Aziz says the Daughters of Iraq program is a good initiative but women should also be a full-time part of the Iraqi Police and also be trained in the field of intelligence to truly crack down on the crime now being carried about by women, especially in Diyala province.

The initial contract for Diyala includes three other towns in the area of Al Abarra including Mukhe-sah, Abu Dabba and Quba. There will be 130 Daughters of Iraq operating in this area and more women have put their names on waiting lists in case any of the selected women are not able to fulfill their commitment.

After the ceremony, the ladies discussed their reasons for joining the Daughters of Iraq. One woman says she fully understands the danger she will face because her brother was an Iraqi police officer who was shot to death while driving his car. His wife was also killed in front of their house.

The new security volunteer said her own husband previously worked with the CF and lost both his legs during a mortar attack in Khalis. She says she wishes to join the security forces because it was Iraqis who caused her husband to lose his legs and the terrorists need to be stopped.

Another woman, who is originally from Najat, left her children at her parent's house so she and her husband could both work in the security field. "Sacrificing myself for my country, that is fine because this is the time for Iraqi women to prove themselves and to be more decisive," she says.

Many of the women are widows, which is a group of particular concern in the province as they usually have very little resources to take care of their families once their husbands have passed away. These women are strong and ready for the challenge.