



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Dispatch from PRT Volunteer in Iraq-

By Diane Crow
Special Correspondent

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Mosul - If it is a clear day you can look out over this city from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Marez and it looks like any other city in any country. You can barely see the destruction and the damaged buildings caused by terrorists that become evident as you travel through the city of just over two million inhabitants.



City view of Mosul, Ninewa Province.

Perhaps you've read about Mosul or seen some mention of the city in the news. It is still an active area for Al Qaida in Iraq. But even in the middle of this there are good things happening that you won't hear about on the nightly news.

I've been in Mosul at the Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for 60 days and my goal as the Public Diplomacy Officer is to engage average Iraqi citizens. Trying to "educate, engage and inform" amid the chaos takes a good dose of creativity and you have to remain extremely flexible, accept that things are never as they seem, and be available to meet contacts when and wherever you can.

Even though security is an issue, many people in the province do want to engage with Americans and they have a sincere desire to improve conditions for all Iraqis. I have the utmost respect for these individuals. They are attempting to define the future of Iraq and they put their lives at risk to work with Coalition Forces and members of the PRT.

Here is one of the problems we face every day. Due to the security situation, we are required to travel with military escort. The presence of these high profile military vehicles can make it difficult for contacts. If we roll to their office for a meeting then the terrorists might also know that we've met.

It is much harder than I expected it to be here in Iraq, but also more rewarding. When you're meeting with people you have to expect the unexpected and nothing works as smoothly as you'd like. Communication is the first hurdle. Telephone landlines are almost nonexistent, cell phone coverage is spotty, and since electricity is limited that means that Internet availability is also limited.

Despite that there are now 22 Internet cafés in Mosul. This opens up a lot of information for local Iraqis, but Internet can be expensive for the average citizen.

I've been running a roundtable for journalists. The goal is to build their capacity to become better journalists. They are eager to receive reference materials, to participate in training sessions and receive advice that will help them gain access to political leaders in the community.

I admire their strength and their dedication-- maybe you think being a journalist is an easy task, but more than 20 journalists have been killed in Mosul since 2003. Every journalist I've met has received death threats. Despite the threats, they choose to continue to write stories, to learn new techniques, and they endeavor to become better journalists.

I've found the Iraqis to be dedicated individuals who want to see positive change in Iraq. They want projects that average Iraqis will see in their daily lives. We're talking about simple things that we all take for granted. They want electricity, enough fuel for cooking and for their vehicle. They want clean water, access to basic health care, employment, and a better life for their children.

People are meeting with us and things are happening. It can be frustrating because as the Public Diplomacy Officer, part of my job is to inform people. I'd like to tell everyone all the good things going on in Ninewa Province, but that could put our contacts in danger. As a result, there are many positive things happening that don't get reported in any newspapers.

You have to weigh each action very carefully. If a media outlet places an advertisement on their station about studying in the United States, does that mean someone may target them tomorrow? If someone accepts an opportunity to travel to the United States for a training program or an exchange, might they also become a target?

How can we effectively share the true essence of America if people traveling to the United States are afraid to tell their friends and family? Can we make an impact one person at a time? If we don't work now to engage and inform the general public, then we'll never see success.

(Diane Crow volunteered from her job as a civil servant with the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to serve in Iraq.)