



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Iraq Proves Fertile Ground for Rule of Law Programs-

By Armand Cucciniello  
Special Correspondent

March 18, 2008

**Baghdad** - Following a year of partnering with Iraqis to improve their judicial system, U.S. Embassy Rule of Law Coordinator Jim Santelle reflected over what he termed the “steady effort” that proved as fulfilling as any work he ever did as a U.S. Federal prosecutor.

“The extent to which the Iraqi courts are responding to the violence out there and doing it in a thoughtful, judicial way is a very significant thing,” Santelle said shortly before returning home in January to his job as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern district of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.



Left to right: Jim Santelle, Iraqi Bar Association head Aswad Abu Muhammed and Baghdad PRT Leader Andrew Passen attend a lawyers conference in Baghdad.

Santelle volunteered to work in Iraq while taking a leave of absence from his regular job as a government lawyer. According to Deputy Chief of Mission Ambassador Patricia Butenis, Santelle is “an amazing inspiration of perseverance and creativity...[who] has tackled some of the hardest, most difficult issues” in Iraq.

Asked if he felt the U.S. investment in rule of law was paying off and that the Iraqis will pick up and move forward, Santelle said, “I do. I am still very optimistic. I would not have stayed here as long as I did if I did not think we could do some profound good.”

I think our biggest impact is planting seeds with individuals,” he explained. “And that means that it may not come to fruition while we’re here, but if you literally are able to inspire a police officer, inspire an investigative judge, inspire a corrections officer, inspire a lawyer or a law school professor or a legal aide to do something, that may have a small but significant impact, and that may, in time, grow.”

Of the Iraqi judicial system in general, Santelle – who oversaw Department of Justice programs worth \$100 million a year – said: “Is it perfect? No. Does it need improvement? Yes. Is it moving in the right direction? Yes.”

The U.S. Government wants to be a partner in that judicial transformation, he added, and would help not only with training programs but with physical infrastructure like the five new courthouses being built in Iraq at \$15 million each.

While violence has diminished since Coalition Forces began their surge operations in spring 2007, killings and bombings still continue but investigations and trials are on the rise and supported by the public.

“Some of that has been reported on, but I don’t think there is an appreciation for the extent to which the war quite literally is also being brought into the courtrooms” through trials of terrorists, Santelle said.

Another thing that goes underreported, Santelle said, is “that there is a sense of taking ownership of this by some responsible people in the Government. “I see the trend of Iraqis saying ‘We can do this. We don’t need you anymore.’ That’s a good thing. After all, our role as Department of Justice officials here is really all about capacity building, encouraging them to do just that.”

The Department of Justice has worked in Iraq since Operation Iraqi Freedom when it deployed 26 officials to Baghdad in March 2003. It now has more than 300 employees and contractors in the country assisting Iraqi efforts to promote the rule of law.

Rule of Law officers also cooperate on programs with other Federal agencies including: the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS).

Much of his office’s work, Santelle said, is conducted by Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs) who help judges, investigators and courts administrators upgrade their skills in the area of criminal justice. There are currently six RLAs working with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in several of Iraq’s provinces while a seventh a law and order task force in Baghdad.

The RLAs also design and coordinate curriculum for courses presented to Iraqi police investigators and police trainers on Iraqi criminal law and the gathering and preservation of evidence.

More than 600 Iraqi jurists and prosecutors have been trained in courses created and taught by RLAs in Iraq, including topics such as human rights, scientific evidence and special challenges presented by the prosecution of terrorist cases.

Other programs in the U.S.-Iraq Rule of Law effort involving law enforcement include:

- The International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), responsible for improving the quality of the Iraqi police force consisting of more than 239,000 officers. In addition, more than 24,000 Iraqi police participated in specialized and advanced training on basic criminal investigations, interviews and interrogations, critical incident management, civil disorder management, violent crimes and kidnapping. ICITAP also founded and currently advises the Baghdad Police College, the Irbil Police College, and 10 regional basic training facilities throughout Iraq.
- The Iraq Commission on Integrity (COI), established with the help of the rule of law program, as an independent, autonomous governmental body whose mission is to prevent and investigate corruption and promote transparency in government.
- COI personnel trained 146 Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) and 161 Special Investigative Unit (SIU) investigators who have been given responsibility for more than 6,190 public corruption cases to date.
- The training of more than 9,900 corrections officers who graduated from ICITAP-established training programs, including the National Corrections Training Academy and various regional pre-service training courses. Training focuses on human rights practices and international standards.

The Iraq Corrections Service (ICS) Development Program is another rule of law program aimed at reconstituting a modern Iraqi corrections system.

“We forget that this corrections service, this prisons system, is three and a half years old. When Saddam left, he opened the doors and 65,000 prisoners fled out. We’re trying to now create a whole new system of corrections officer and facilities,” Santelle said.

Santelle explained that ICS personnel developed and assisted with the implementation of a records review system that ultimately resulted in the release of more than 175 detainees from the Diyala Provincial Jail. This records review system has become a standard operating procedure throughout Iraq and has provide essential in the timely review of detainee cases.

In addition, Santelle said ICS personnel assisted in the closure of the Abu Ghraib Prison in February 2006. Approximately 2,000 inmates were transferred out of the facility.