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2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Iraq Women Contribute to Security as New Police Officers-

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Ashraf, Diyala Province, Iraq — The Iraqi Regional Police Training Academy held its fourth graduation since its opening in May and this time a group participated that had been missing from any of the previous ceremonies. This time the graduating class contained women.



New Iraqi police graduates, including two women, display newly learned skills at Diyala Police Academy ceremony attended by MND-North Commander Major General Hertling.

Twenty-one women stood among the hundreds of men in the hot morning sun and prepared to show off their newly acquired skills as the first female members of Diyala's police force. They are just the beginning of a total force of twenty-one thousand women who will be trained for the Iraqi Police (IP) across the country.

In a province that has become known for having the highest number of female suicide bombers in the country, there is a clear need to train women to assist with searches and general patrols.

Unlike the Daughters of Iraq program, which was launched in Diyala earlier this year with the help of Coalition Forces, the female police academy graduates received weapons training and will carry the same equipment as their male counterparts. Their uniforms have been slightly altered to include a head covering.

Such was the enthusiasm of the recruits that one graduate refused to leave the training program after informing the academy that she was pregnant. She will be granted leave to have her baby and then return to the force.

Members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) were invited to attend the graduation along with members of the Coalition Forces including Major General Mark Hertling who is in charge of the Multi-National Division in the northern region.

He sat on a raised dais with two of the 11 female members of Diyala's Provincial Council (PC); Saja Qaduri Aziz and Amal Shakir Tayeb Al Zankani. Saja, who is also a member of the provincial security committee, has been pushing for more female involvement in all areas of security and law enforcement.

When the PC women first heard about the IP training they submitted over 200 names of women in the province who were eager to sign up. Three months later they were witnessing the first class of female graduates.

Saja also said there was a need for more women in the intelligence forces in order to reach the women being targeted as potential suicide bombers. This is just a step in the process to bring women into the security forces and make the province safer.

Major General Hertling told the PC members that it was because of them that women were entering the police force. In June, all 11 female PC members traveled to Irbil with the PRT to attend a conference held by Major General Hertling. He joked with them that they had yelled at him about the necessity for women in the police and intelligence forces for Diyala province and he was there to show that he had listened.

As part of the graduation ceremony a group of mixed male and female police officers showcased their newly earned skills. They stopped a truck with a man and woman in it. The female IP yelled to the woman to turn around slowly with her hands on her head and then walk towards her. The IP demonstrated how she would search and detain the suspect by cuffing her hands behind her back and walking her to the IP vehicle.

Even though it was only an exercise, the female members of the Provincial Council applaud loudly and told the Americans this was a big step forward for the province. Women in Diyala are feeling their strength and are now providing their share to a more secure province.