



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Brings Smiles to Iraq's Most Vulnerable-

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Muthanna Province, Iraq - Needy children with disabilities and orphans in Iraq's poorest province had their lives brightened for an afternoon as they received attention and gifts, donated by the American public, from the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) operating in the region.

In cooperation with its military counterpart, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Gulf Region South and the 7th Sustainment Brigade (both located at Tallil Air Base), PRT Muthanna organized a toy, clothing, and soccer ball giveaway for the needy children of the Rumaytha Institute for the Deaf and Mute and other orphaned children from the area.

The PRT's previous Public Diplomacy Officer, Barry Greenberg, arranged for youth soccer teams from Northern Virginia to donate soccer equipment and athletic clothing. At the end of the day, the PRT gave away 200 new soccer balls and 150 stuffed animals.

The teams current Public Diplomacy Officer Aaron Snipe and Albert Hadi, PRT Muthanna's Senior Media Specialist, also met with the director of the Institute to discuss ways the PRT could further help the children.

Before handing out the gifts, Hadi spoke softly and smiled broadly as he addressed the classroom of eager children. He then reached deeply into an old laundry bag and pulled out a large white teddy bear. The giddy children, eyes widened in excitement, quickly formed a line.

One by one, Hadi greeted each child using a phrase in Iraqi Arabic and handed them all a new stuffed animal. By the end of the hour, every child at the Rumaytha Institute for Deaf & Mute Children was grinning from ear to ear.



PRT Muthanna Senior Media Specialist Albert Hadi with children at a party at the Rumaytha Institute for the Deaf and Mute sponsored by the Team.

Conspicuously absent were Muthanna's television media. The PRT has, in recent months, developed strong relationships with local television stations, but the Team made a decision to not invite the media to the event.

Snipe told the director of the Institute, "Our outreach today is for the children, and keeping this event private ensures that the dignity of the most vulnerable members of society is preserved." Word of the event, however, quickly spread through Rumaytha and a local official praised the PRT for their efforts.

The director cited many infrastructure concerns and an overall lack of resources. He said he hoped the PRT could help provide any assistance. These children, the director explained, "are facing the greatest challenge of anyone in Iraq. They are deaf, mute, and are girls. In rural Iraq, who will speak for them?"

The event was of special significance to Hadi, who is Iraqi American and was an orphan himself. "We have much in common," he told the group of orphans assembled at the Rumaytha Public Library. "I am here today, not just as a diplomatic representative of the United States Government, but as a friend.

"I, too, have walked in your shoes," he said, encouraging them to be strong, noting that even under their own very difficult circumstances, they were still an integral part of Iraq's future.

The most moving moment of the day for both Hadi and Snipe came when the team sat down to have lunch with the children. Snipe held up a large bag overflowing with toys and asked the children if they wanted to eat or receive their first.

Expecting a resounding, "Presents first!" both men were surprised to hear the children ask for their meals instead. It was a somber moment for everyone in the room, one that clearly highlighted the need for greater focus on Iraq's most vulnerable citizens.