



*NDI Assessment Mission to Iraq  
June 23 to July 6, 2003*

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## **Introduction**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), organized a 14-member assessment mission to Iraq holding in-country meetings between June 27<sup>th</sup> and July 6<sup>th</sup>. The assessment team, comprised of individuals with decades of combined political and civil society experience and representing nine nationalities, including five native Arabic speakers, divided into three groups to cover northern Iraq, southern Iraq and central Iraq including Baghdad. The team visited 10 communities and met with Iraqi individuals and organizations and officials from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the U.S. Military and the United Nations (UN). The Iraqis with whom the team met were chosen through research prior to the commencement of the assessment mission and through random and unannounced visits to both established and newly formed Iraqi parties and organizations. A preliminary list of parties and organizations active in Iraq may be found in Appendix A. A listing of individuals and groups with whom the team met is in Appendix B. Biographies of the assessment team members are provided in Appendix C.

In addition to holding meetings, the NDI team conducted training sessions and seminars for Iraqi political and civic activists in Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk and Hashemiyah. Concurrently with the assessment mission, NDI conducted 15 focus groups in eight cities and towns, with randomly selected participants representing Shiite, Sunni, Kurdish and Christian segments of the population. A report on the findings of the focus groups is available under separate cover. It can also be found on NDI's website: [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org). A preliminary report written by Les Campbell on an earlier assessment mission to Baghdad in mid-June is included in Appendix D. Appendix E contains comments of Iraqi participants following an NDI training workshop in Baghdad. Appendix F includes acronyms and initials used in this report.

## **Executive summary**

NDI's overwhelming finding – in the north, south, Baghdad, and among secular, religious, Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish groups in both urban and rural areas – is a grateful welcoming of the demise of Saddam's regime and a sense that this is a pivotal moment in Iraq's history. A leading member of a newly formed umbrella movement, The Iraqi Coalition for Democracy, put it this way, “ We already see the positive results the Americans have brought – we are free to talk to you, to organize a movement and party, free to meet and demonstrate and all of this was made possible by the Americans.”

Of equal importance, the assessment team found among Iraqis a debilitating anxiety and disappointment brought on by rapid and unprecedented change, uncertainty about the future, confusion about the will and plans of the coalition authority and a profound lack of confidence in their own ability to harness the centrifugal forces threatening to tear the country apart. One former general, previously part of the Free Officers Movement, summed up the state of Iraqi “anxious ambivalence” this way, “People need a rest. They need security and jobs and, maybe after a year they can be educated about political parties and democracy and then they can choose their future properly. They've gotten rid of Saddam but now we don't know what to do”. When asked if the military or the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) should withdraw from Iraq, most people expressed a sentiment similar to one we heard from a former secretary general of the Iraqi Communist Party, “If the CPA were to withdraw from Iraq, there would be a civil war and democrats would have no chance”.

Anxiety, not opposition to the coalition's aims and mandate, drives the apparent souring of Iraqi opinion to the presence of an occupying force. Faced with rising crime, uncertain economic prospects and chaotic daily conditions, complaining – to anyone who will listen – has become a national pastime. Part of the problem is a perceived lack of access to those in authority, but mostly the complaints are a symptom of uncertainty, not an expression of hostility to the United States or its aims for Iraq. One woman, a vice-president of the new “Iraq Movement for Democracy” expressed her frustration this way,

“The CPA is not accessible to internal people and we don’t know what they think and what they are planning. We have too much dignity to beg [for a meeting]”.

In fact, most Iraqis express fantastically unrealistic expectations of the United States as liberator and savior, hence the disappointment so evident in the country. Problems decades in the making – lack of paved roads, sewers, plumbing, steady electricity, reliable phones, educational infrastructure, jobs, help for families victimized by Saddam – are all to be fixed by the United States in months. One ordinary woman told NDI that her children were waiting for “amusement parks” to be built by the Americans, a touching but telling anecdote of naïve hope. The U.S. role in the future of Iraq has been dramatically oversold, to some extent by rhetoric originating in the United States, but more through Iraqi fantasies of what the future might bring. There is a certain sense of disconnect between U.S. authorities and the Iraqi people: Iraqis, unrealistically, waiting for all of their problems to be solved from above, the CPA, unrealistically, waiting for Iraqis to express themselves coherently and to organize themselves.

The prevailing sense of anxiety and disappointment does not herald an overall failure nor does it indicate that the CPA is on the wrong track; instead it indicates the urgency of filling the political vacuum that has allowed sentiment to sour and destructive interests to assert themselves. Time is not on the side of the coalition or Iraqi democrats. Current conditions play into the hands of extremists – religious and nationalist – who point to lack of progress as proof of the need for a strong hand.

In fact, many Iraqi political forces are benefiting from the societal chaos. Islamic forces, including the Shia dominated Da’awa party and Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), with their inherent legitimacy, established networks and communications facilities through the Mosque, are flourishing and establishing positions of dominance in Shiite slums, small cities and the underdeveloped countryside. Islamists are also making moves to dominate the professional associations and syndicates, long bastions of Iraqi liberalism.

The Kurdish north is composed of two benevolent one party states – the area’s political and civic life controlled completely by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). Kurds are aggressively extending their presence to areas around Kirkuk and are becoming increasingly evident as an organized force in Baghdad. One high profile Kurd with whom NDI spoke bemoaned the fact that the Kurdish north, a haven of relative freedom and liberalism during Saddam’s reign, is quickly becoming an area where the entrenched parties exert “shameless political control” while Baghdad has become a haven for free speech and association.

Some Sunni Muslims are finding temporary refuge in newly strengthened tribal groupings, or in some cases, in violent nationalist activity, while searching for their political home in an increasingly Balkanized environment. The people that one would hope would form the political backbone of a new Iraq (i.e. secular professionals, technocrats, women, business people and educated urbanites) have no organized political voice, although dozens of fledgling parties are springing up to give form to the former middle class.

There are important exceptions to the balkanizing trend embodied in the rise of the religious and ethnic dominated parties. Long established groups and parties, some formerly underground, some founded among the exile community, are organizing to promote a secular and united country. The Free Officers and Civilians Movement, the Iraqi Communist Party, the Iraqi National Congress, the Iraqi National Accord (Al Wifaq), the Democratic Centrist Tendency and many others are quickly establishing offices and a presence throughout the country. Their real strength remains to be seen. There is a plethora of new parties and movements being formed by secular business people, professionals, former government employees and the more progressive tribal interests. Resentment of the exile community is high, though, and prospects for broad like-minded coalitions, at least at this early stage, are low.

There are dozens of organizations springing up to represent a potential democratic middle, part of what can be described as an “explosion” of politics in the capital and its

environs, but, unfortunately, they form a largely undifferentiated mass. Most incipient civil society groups and parties seem to resemble mini-Baath parties in their structure, having, for example, departments of education, culture, human rights, women's affairs, environment, youth affairs, tribal affairs and international relations. When asked what their first priorities as parties and movements are, the answer is always the same, "We want to help the people and build democracy". The concept of developing achievable goals is a new one and few of these democratic groups are prepared for the kind of organizing it will take to challenge radical Islamists. Lacking any other organizational models and cut off for so many years from the rest of the world, even educated Iraqis find themselves paralyzed, convinced of the need to act but utterly unable to take the first practical step.

Even the terms of modern democracy and civil society are strange and new. Political parties are universally regarded as corrupt, violent organizations. Non-governmental organizations were non-existent under Saddam, and terms like the rule of law, checks and balances, accountability and representative government must be defined in every day conversation. For many, democracy seems to only have two meanings: freedom, which many Iraqis equate with chaos and immorality, or unadulterated rule of the majority; there is little sense of the responsibility and citizen involvement that democracy requires. For example, a senior Shia Da'awa party political leader in Hillah, echoing a common call among the Shia, suggested the immediate formation of a representative Iraqi government. When challenged by NDI to describe how minority rights would be protected under a Shia majority government, in a country with no credible legal system, no answer was forthcoming. This call for representative government is about the struggle for power, not the struggle for democracy.

In conclusion, this is not a time for despair or second-guessing but for action. There is an urgent need for democratic education, for party strengthening, for coalition building and for material assistance to democratic movements and organizations. The political vacuum is being filled by those with an interest in destroying and separating rather than

uniting and building – only concerted efforts to strengthen the democratic middle can help stem that tide.

## **NDI Assessment Team Reports**

### **Baghdad and Central Iraq – An Explosion of Politics**

(Assessment Team: Les Campbell, Alina Inayeh, Rahman Al Jebouri and Tom Melia)

The central Iraq team held meetings with various individuals and organizations in the cities and towns of Baghdad, Hillah, Mahmudiyah, Hashemiyah and Najaf.

Despite the volatile political and security climate, there are an impressive number of organizations on the ground, ranging from the old and well established to brand new, and from self-sustainable to having no resources at all. Although all were somewhat different in their resources and, to a limited extent, goals, the organizations the team met with could be grouped into three categories:

- 1) Well-established political organizations – these organizations have a history of opposing Saddam’s regime and have mainly carried out their activity in exile. These organizations have returned to Iraq, have established central offices as well as local branches (Free Officers Movement, Iraqi Communist Party, Iraqi National Congress, Da’awa Party, PUK) and are currently being consulted by the CPA in the formation of an interim political council. While some of them do not call themselves political parties (for example, the Free Officers’ Movement), all have a political agenda and stated electoral ambitions.

Each established party or group the central team met with is at a different organizational level – with the PUK apparently being the best organized, with clear internal communication and an established internal decision making system, although it is somewhat unclear in its message and political agenda, at least in its Baghdad office. The party’s new slogan is “Build a new, democratic Iraq”, and the PUK is trying to reach out to Kurds, Shi’ia and Sunni with this message. As a well-established party, they seem to have good relations with, and easy access to,

the media, and they also produce their own newspaper. The party is interested in receiving NDI's assistance in training party members and helping the party promote a dialogue with other groups.

The Da'awa Party also seems well organized. The party has a clear political/religious message and a strong regional presence in the south of the country. Although the party was consulted in the creation of a provisional government council, the president of the party's branch in Hillah believed the CPA could and should follow their advice more closely. According to the leaders in the town of Hillah, the Da'awa party requires no outside assistance as they have all the resources they need to compete effectively in any electoral exercise.

The Free Officers' Movement has a clear democratic agenda and message, but an unclear organizational strategy (if any) and recruiting methods. The Movement seems to fall behind other established political parties in resources available for party activity. The Free

## From Ceausescu to Saddam: Reflections on the Downfall of Two Dictators

*By Alina Inayeh, NDI assessment team member and founder of Romania's first democracy NGO, the Pro-Democracy Association, PDA.*

In December 1989, at the time when the events culminating in the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu began to unfold, the Romanian dictator was visiting Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Both men were infamous for the lavish lives they led, to the detriment of their people, and the cult of personality surrounding them. Perhaps, this exchange between dictators included discussion of building more grandiose palaces, or erecting more statues and portraits in their honor. Whatever the content of their discussions, Ceausescu did not have time to bring the results of the exchange to fruition, having been removed from power a few days after returning home. Saddam lasted another 14 years.

The fall of a dictator brings joy and hope to the people, no matter how or when the fall comes about. Iraqis, just like Romanians 14 years ago, rejoice in the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, feeling they own their lives again. No longer subject to dictatorial whim, their nation's future once again seems full of promise.

Officers welcome NDI's assistance in training party activists, especially on the topic of recruitment of members.

The INC has lost some of its centrality and importance in Iraqi politics with its leaders return from exile. All other former constituent political parties of the INC agree that the organization's role as an umbrella for opposition parties is not needed or wanted in the current environment, and the former constituent parties are uninterested in the INC's current political activities. Although it is difficult to assess the national party's organizational level, the INC branch in Hillah was poorly organized and lacking in resources.

Although initiated and organized in exile, the established political parties do not employ "western" organizational techniques and party building strategies (with the exception, to some extent of the PUK), but seem to be relying heavily on the popularity they believe they have gained while opposing Saddam's regime.

Years ago, Ceausescu's fall was surrounded by confusion, gunshots, and riots, not unlike what is now happening in Iraq. Uncertainty about the fate of the dictator, concerns about violence and personal safety, and anxiety about restoring everything as if it had never been destroyed – are difficulties both nations have faced. After decades of humiliation, suffering, and fear, people feel a profound need to rest, "at least for a year", so wounds can heal and memories can fade. A year of simple, safe and happy life, "without political parties" (seen as a necessary, yet postponable evil). The need for peaceful "political rest" overcomes the desire for revenge - to get back at those who ruined the country and so many lives. And while people rest, it would be good if a strong leader would restore order.

Back in the days right after Ceausescu's fall, the joy of a new beginning mobilized tens of thousands of Romanians in passionate, mostly irrational, political activity. The effervescence Iraq is now experiencing is built on the same desire for change – not knowing to what, on the same enthusiasm that bad times are over – not knowing what lies ahead, on the same feeling that a great opportunity is emerging – not knowing of what sort.

However similarly people react – Iraqis are not Romanians. Danger of deep societal divisions, (religious) extremism, and a volatile regional environment are specific Iraqi pieces in the transitional puzzle, a puzzle Iraqis have already started putting together.

2) New, relatively wealthy organizations – The team met several new organizations which were apparently able to mobilize the resources to establish a national presence and carry out at least some political activity. These organizations have an undifferentiated democratic agenda, with the broad and vague goal of building democracy. Following the organizational model of the Ba’ath party, these organizations usually have several departments, and a clear (but not necessarily efficient) internal communication and decision-making system. Some publish their own newspapers, yet are not too concerned about circulation numbers. Following very general goals, these organizations plan activities covering a very large spectrum of subjects – from distribution of humanitarian aid to proto-advocacy campaigns. While not displaying overt political ambitions these organizations resemble political parties. The mobilization of resources in a very short time raises doubts about the independence of these organizations, and raises the possibility of them being a front for various political parties and/or foreign interests.

The Assembly for Democracy is a coalition of newly formed organizations, some of them headed by tribal leaders, each of them sharing the same general, vague democratization goals. The Assembly has branches in several regions in the country, and is currently organizing a national conference to be held in the next few months. The organization is also organizing street demonstrations on July 14, to celebrate the 1958 Revolution. Although including famous dissident names and people with obvious tribal authority, the organization has made no formal attempt to communicate with the CPA perhaps hoping that the CPA would contact them.

The team met with a second organization of a similar type – the New Iraqi Organization. This organization has financial resources and has already carried out humanitarian aid activities. Equally vague in its goals and objectives, the organization, just as the Assembly, has a clear internal structure and decision-making system. Given the apparent wealth of this organization – newly renovated

offices, top of the line equipment and new vehicles – it is possible that it is sponsored by a foreign government with interests in Iraq.

- 3) New, resource poor organizations – Blossoming in virtually every little town the team visited, these organizations, usually named “Iraqi Organization for Human Rights” or “Association of Human Rights” or variations thereof, resemble Ba’ath party cells in their departmental structure, but they state democratic goals and principles. Lacking financial resources or clear objectives, these “revolutionary committees” all aim to build democracy and welfare in Iraq and give material compensation to those oppressed under Saddam’s regime. The team met similar organizations in Mahmudya, Hillah, Hashemiyah and Najaf. Members of these groups lack any education or understanding of democracy and organizational structure but are motivated by a desire for a better and democratic Iraq. With no model for citizen involvement to draw on, these groups are desperate for assistance and welcome any sign of interest from foreign organizations. Being born out of genuine desire to participate, these organizations have dedicated and passionate members.

While the well established political parties are being consulted by the CPA in the formation of the interim Political Council, civil affairs officers within the coalition forces are charged with helping locals get organized in various NGOs, offering them advice and logistical support. There is no nation-wide strategy in this respect; so civil affairs officers within the military are applying their individual vision and understanding of civil society in their respective region.

## A Case Study of a New Iraqi Organization: The Human Rights Association in Hashemiyah

The central Iraq team met with a new human rights association in the small town of Hashemiyah, south of Baghdad. The group has adopted the goal of bringing democracy to Iraq and the organization has an office, but no other resources. The team spent several hours with the group, conducting an ad-hoc training on strategic planning in an attempt to narrow down the goals of the group and to focus them on achievable objectives. Not only did members of the group prove to be thirsty for knowledge, but they showed their determination and genuine desire to action – agreeing to the team’s suggestion to travel to Baghdad the next day to meet various international organizations which could support the nascent organization. A very small action, yet one of unthinkable complexity for a group never exposed to civic activism, members of which have never traveled outside of their immediate province.

The trip to Baghdad proved successful – the Hashemiyah organization met with the Human Rights department within the CPA, with the International Committee of the Red Cross and with an American organization, Women for Women International. All of these organizations promised their support, financial and otherwise. The Hashemiyah organization also received an invitation to a CPA-organized human rights conference to be held in Baghdad, bringing together organizations from all over the country. The most important achievement, though, is the inspiration the trip gave to the members of the organizations – having seen real interest in their activity and achieving small, yet concrete results.

### **The North – Relative Prosperity and Freedom, but Two Party Dominance**

(Assessment Team: Heba El Shazli, Ross Reid, Jim Della-Giacoma, Mohammed Rherras)

#### *Iraqi Kurdistan:*

The years following the Gulf War have provided a marked advantage to Iraqi Kurdistan making it stand out from the rest of the country. There is clear evidence of a developing economy, relative security and prosperity, and an active civil society and political culture. Two main parties, however, dominate civil society and political activity. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have essentially divided Kurdistan between themselves and function either in their own territory or in parallel. The KDP administers the north from Erbil and the PUK the south from Suleimaniya. The parties coordinate “civil society” by sponsoring and guiding groups

that represent everyone from teachers, musicians and retirees to the disabled. Although both the PUK and KDP claim that their groups represent all those in Kurdistan and are open to anyone, these groups are governmental or party organizations in all but name. In fact, governance in the North resembles structurally, but not in content, Iraqi government under the Baath party, in the sense that the dominant parties are seen to be responsible for all facets of life, from social services, to prisons, to culture.

There are other Kurdish parties, such as conservative parties, Islamic parties and workers' parties, but all are affiliated with one of the two primary parties, the only exception being the Communists, who are allied with both. There is little evidence of other party activity except for a small Christian group and two coalitions of Turkmen that focus on ensuring the rights of the Turkmen people in the region while receiving support from Iran and Turkey.

The KDP and PUK are almost exclusively focused on providing services to their members. The parties have branches in cities and towns throughout the region, and sub-branches are organized in villages and neighborhoods, which meet on an as-needed basis only. Members pay a monthly membership fee of about 17 cents and many depend on the party for their income either in staff positions or benefits from the party in the form of pensions or other type of assistance. The heads of the party departments meet monthly to coordinate party activity.

Local municipal councils are active and appear to be working. Erbil and Suleimaniya have elected councils, which meet in public on a regular basis and hold "town hall" meetings. New city elections may be held in February 2004 unless the CPA orders a delay until all cities are in a position to hold elections at the same time based on a new unified municipal government law. The municipal council publishes a magazine and a newspaper.

In a telling anecdote of the relative order and peacefulness of the Kurdish North, NDI's Baghdad based drivers were "fish out of water" driving in Erbil, Sulimaniya and in

between the two cities. They were forced to stop at red lights and to obey traffic rules – unheard of in Baghdad. Kurdish police were even issuing parking tickets.

### *The rest of Northern Iraq – Kirkuk and Mosul*

The KDP and PUK in Kirkuk acknowledge that the arrival of coalition forces has brought greater changes than just the removal of Saddam’s regime. Both parties have stopped underground activity and have opened offices in Kirkuk, Mosul, Baghdad and other centers. Discussions are underway to merge the two Kurdish administrations, and there is some hope that new parliamentary elections will follow. The unification of the parties may get bogged down in the negotiation of shared leadership roles and the division of resources, but it is significant that both parties believe they must put forward a unified front in the new Iraq.

In both Kirkuk and Mosul, the US armed forces have created municipal councils. There are reports that citizens of those cities are beginning to look to their councils for solutions to their problems, and that members of these bodies are taking responsibility for the jurisdiction under their control. Initially, the regional military commander controlled meeting agendas, but the members are starting to moderate discussions in their meetings and add items to the agenda.

It is important to note that Kirkuk holds particular significance for the Kurds. Described by some Kurds as the “heart of Iraq” it has both political and economic significance (oil), and both main parties are working to ensure it is seen as part of the area they control. The KDP and PUK opened offices two months ago, and are actively creating social organizations under their umbrellas. The council in Suleimaniya has twice undertaken to provide support to their colleagues in Kirkuk. During the week of June 30, 160 trucks and 270 people were sent to Kirkuk from the Kurdish north to undertake a city cleanup – an important contribution to the well being of the citizens of Kirkuk, but more important, a significant political statement. Because of the intense Kurdish interest in Kirkuk,

political and civic activity will likely soon reach the level of the other cities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The city of Mosul is a different case. It is not considered by Kurds to be part of “their territory” and the Kurdish parties are not active in a substantial way there. Large Arab clans and tribes have controlled the city and region in the past but they are unpopular with the public and have not been cooperative with the military. Despite the lack of political development, ethnic tensions are not at a high pitch in Mosul; for example, Arabs eat in Kurdish establishments and vice versa while in Kirkuk one would be hard pressed to find such intermingling.

The U.S. military has moved ahead to create local councils but the civil affairs officers are anxious for others (USAID contractors) to take over the task. One question being asked by many is if municipal councils will fall apart if and when the U.S. military leaves the area. Although there is a widely expressed frustration that there is not better communication and coordination with the CPA, a recent announcement that the CPA would create seven offices to begin to solve the question of land disputes was well received by community leaders and the public. Along with Saddam’s forced “Arabization”, land disputes are the biggest issue in the region.

The only television station available in Mosul (without a satellite dish) is official Syrian TV, which airs mostly vitriol against the United States and Israel. In Kirkuk, Al Jazeera, BBC and Iranian Arabic as well as Kurdish TV were available. In Kirkuk, there was a large painted sign reading “Thank You USA!” in English and in Kurdish. In Erbil and Suleimaniya, there were many “Thank you to the USA”, “Thank you to President George Bush” banners as well as “peace and prosperity come with democracy”.

### *Conclusion*

In Suleimaniya, Erbil and Kirkuk, civil and political activity is dominated by two very powerful political entities that may become even stronger in the future. While the KDP

and PUK should continue to develop into strong, capable, transparent and accessible organizations, it is equally important to create space for other political actors and opinions. Support for independent civic, political and media organizations will be essential for a healthy democratic atmosphere in Northern Iraq. Mosul's political progress will be slower and, unlike Kirkuk, Mosul may continue lagging behind in every area of development.

### **Southern Iraq – Religion and Iran Dominate**

(Assessment team: Makram Ouais, Susan Kupperstein, Hatem Bahmeriz, Joe Gleason)

NDI visited the cities of Aamara, Basra and Nasseriya in southern Iraq, and met with political parties, including the Da'awa party, the Communist Party and the Iraqi National Accord (INA). NDI also met with representatives of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Archbishop of Basra, several tribal leaders from Nassiriya, and civic leaders from various organizations including two human rights groups. In addition, the NDI team met with representatives of the business community, lawyers, university students, unemployed youth as well as officials from the United Nations and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) or Civil-Military Operation Centers (CMOC) offices in three cities.

Across the board, the people NDI met with in southern Iraq supported the forceful ouster of Saddam – a person many described as a “Nero” and a “criminal towards his people”. Although southerners were clearly conscious of the discrimination they had suffered under Saddam's Ba'athist rule, many were quick to add that poor security conditions and a lack of basic necessities are having a negative impact on attitudes toward the U.S.

A range of activities are being conducted by the CPA including the initiation of political processes, repairing of public utilities and rebuilding of schools. Yet, limited information and an absence of mass communications sources has led some political and civic leaders to complain to NDI that the CPA is closed and secretive.

Although the post-war political vacuum is starting to be filled by the creation of local councils, some religious groups used the immediate confusion in the aftermath of the war to impose their own values. For example, several stores selling liquor were fire bombed and forced to close and a number of extremist religious leaders are encouraging resistance to the “occupiers”. In a relatively minor, but telling incident, a religious leader entered a university and chastised students for listening to music in the cafeteria. In another instance, a representative of an extremist religious group entered the Basra Bar Association and demanded to run elections on behalf of the Association. It is also notable that there are only four television stations available to those without a satellite dish in Basra – all four are from Iran, three in Farsi and one in Arabic.

Several human rights groups have established offices in the south after being banned for 35 years. These groups praised the coalition forces for their newly gained freedoms and emphasized the importance of addressing the needs of widows and of the families of Saddam’s victims. Tribal leaders the team met with emphasized that conditions were improving slowly but that the political situation remained volatile and could take a violent course very quickly.

Iraqi citizens in the south demonstrated a hunger for information and a desire to learn about the functioning of democracy. New political and human rights groups are seeking greater influence in local and national political processes. These parties and groups expressed a keen desire to work with other democracy and human rights organizations. Many party representatives expressed their eagerness to be consulted and given a greater role in the governance of Iraq. Most of the groups with which NDI met were not reaching out to the two biggest segments of Iraqi society – namely women and youth. This problem is made more acute by the reluctance of Iraqi citizens to participate in political life as a result of a long history of political repression.

Despite all of the obstacles, virtually every individual and group NDI met with in southern Iraq perceived this as a time of opportunity. Providing public information, managing expectations, and meeting basic needs will be a challenge for the CPA. Iraqis

in the south who are organizing politically and harnessing this largely undifferentiated and unfocussed political energy could provide welcome support for the coalitions efforts.

### **Training Sessions and Seminars**

During the assessment mission, NDI team members with experience in civic and political organizing conducted training sessions and seminars for emerging political and civic activists in Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk and Hashemiyah. The goal of these initial trainings was to provide a protected setting where Iraqis could assemble and discuss how citizens can organize themselves in a free society. The participants came from all walks of life and across generations.

The NDI trainers led discussions on the fundamentals of democratic organizing. These included: strategic planning, advocacy, communication, volunteer recruitment, dialogue, negotiation, coalition building, outreach to women and youth, and transparency and accountability. Participants were provided with resource materials in Arabic on organizational development and civic participation.

### **Public Opinion Research: Focus Groups**

In addition to the assessment mission and trainings, NDI team members Tom Melia and Brian Katulis recruited and trained moderators who conducted 15 focus groups in the northern, southern and central areas of Iraq. A detailed report on the findings of these focus groups is available at NDI. It can also be found on NDI's website: [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

Focus groups are structured group interviews that proceed according to a careful research design, yet they are intended to be free flowing, open-ended, and unpredictable. They are designed to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions held by a selected small sample of respondents on a defined topic. Focus groups are useful in helping understand the language that people use when they discuss particular ideas or concepts. They are also useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants' reactions. As an organized group discussion, it provides a form that enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or surveys that rely on one-on-one questionnaires. Focus groups can help provide an understanding of the many shades of

gray – hesitations, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. Focus groups are first and foremost concerned with understanding attitudes, rather than measuring them.

In a society like Iraq's, which has been closed for decades and has never really allowed open discussion or democratic debate, focus groups can be a very valuable tool for understanding beneath-the-surface complexities. Because of the small numbers involved, however, focus group participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly and statistically representative of the target population from which they are drawn, and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond the small number of participants. They can, however, offer hints of emerging ideas and popular attitudes on key issues.

Some of the issues NDI sought to examine during focus group sessions include:

- the appetite for political democracy and perceptions about the opportunities and challenges associated with democratic governance;
- reactions to emerging political leaders and factions and political cleavages that are developing within communities after the Hussein regime's removal;
- the role of Islam in politics;
- the significance and resonance of Iraqi/Arab culture or nationalism;
- the status or influence of traditional tribal structures in Iraq's new politics;
- views on the structure of a new national government, including ways to balance the competing interests of ethnic and religious groups;
- the timing and organization of national and local elections; and
- attitudes on women's role in society and their political participation in Iraq.

This focus group effort is the first-ever survey research carried out nationwide in Iraq. The NDI-sponsored focus groups, which were conducted from June 29 to July 9, 2003 in north, south and central Iraq, reveal important insights on the attitudes of ordinary Iraqi citizens – men and women, Kurds and Arabs, Sunni, Shi'a and Christian. The main

findings of the research reveal that, in every community, the Iraqis are grateful for the ouster of Saddam Hussein but have a strong desire for order and governance. They feel a mix of excitement and fear about the prospect of freedom and democracy, and have differing views about the role of Islam in the country's new political order. The focus groups show that women face particular challenges in ensuring their full political participation and that emerging political parties must overcome deep skepticism about their motives and role in a new Iraq. Perhaps most striking is how the Iraqis live in a fog of disinformation. The rumor mill and conspiracy theory dominate political discourse and, while Saddam is universally reviled, many Iraqis are still encumbered by the propaganda he spread.

## **Conclusion and Program Suggestions**

All three of NDI's assessment teams in Iraq found a grateful welcoming of the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime – but they also found a struggle for power in the transition to a new authority that heavily favors entrenched interests, including remnants of the Ba'ath hierarchy, Shiite religious leaders, and the two main Kurdish parties. There is an anxiety and ambivalence about the future of democratic governance in Iraq exacerbated by a lack of any prior democratic experience, chaotic post-war conditions and active sabotage by nondemocratic actors. There is an urgent need for focused democracy assistance programs designed to address the following objectives:

### **1) Leveling the political playing field**

The most urgent democratic development need in Iraq is to assist the individuals and groups comprising a potential democratic middle – the urban educated, women, technocrats, members of professional associations and syndicates, secular political activists, business people, exile-based political and civic groups and progressive tribal leaders – all of whom are likely to be supporters of the coalition's efforts to build democracy in Iraq, to put themselves and their organizations forward as a viable alternative to entrenched ethnic and religious interests.

After a year of similar consultations and training in Afghanistan, NDI was able to bring together forty-five civic organizations and political parties in a coalition – the National Democratic Front – that is providing a democratic alternative to the warlords and religious extremists.

#### **Sample Activities**

- The establishment of “democracy centers” in Baghdad and locations in northern and southern Iraq, to serve as a neutral meeting place, a central media center for dissemination of press releases and other communication, a central location for

written and videotaped training materials on political party development, and a central training center easily accessible to Iraqis interested in political participation. These centers could be patterned after NDI initiatives in Serbia where political party communication centers were once used for training thousands of grassroots democratic activists prior to the electoral defeat of Slobodan Milosevic in September 2000. Today, these 22 centers, dubbed “Contact Serbia,” are being used as meeting places for citizens, government officials and parliamentarians.

- Identifying the individuals, parties and civic organizations that could comprise a democratic middle. (NDI has begun that process, and an initial list of all parties and movements is attached to this report.)
- Providing material assistance to the parties and associations demonstrating grassroots support and membership and the organizational and financial capacity to absorb such assistance. Material assistance could include small grants to be used for office and communications equipment and outreach to potential voters/constituents and in-kind support that would include meeting and conference space, transportation and communications facilities.
- The provision of political party training and organizational materials, both in centralized locations and through a “tour” of rural and outlying areas. Political party trainers should be drawn from the developed and developing world with an emphasis on Arabic speaking trainers from the Middle East and North Africa.
- The organization of focus groups to help nascent political parties and political leaders understand and analyze public opinion and to test potential political messages on prospective voters.
- Advice on the framework for elections and rules for political party structure and registration to help ensure that new parties and organizations compete on a level playing field.

## **2) Increasing Democratic Knowledge, Strengthening Democratic Values and Improving Democratic Skills**

Recognizing the different circumstances and levels of development for political parties and citizens in different parts of Iraq, NDI suggests the creation of small scale but targeted activities aimed at emerging political and civic groups. The activities would aim to strengthen their political skills and increase their ability to participate in the ongoing political process. It would look for and encourage the small and fragmented groups often found in such post-authoritarian environments to become familiar with working together across regional, cultural and ethnic lines as a precursor to future cooperation within democratic institutions. Such activities would also promote the involvement of women in the political process. NDI would promote better organization within emerging groups and encourage direct interaction between these emerging groups with the evolving structure of government.

Specifically, these program activities could be clustered around the following areas:

### Increasing Democratic Knowledge

Newly formed political and civic groups would benefit from a broader access to knowledge about democratic developments, political parties, constitutions, electoral systems, organizing practices and international standards.

Sample activities: Technical and material support for Iraqi led seminars on ongoing political development to raise the profile of domestic expertise and opinion. Expert consultations from political and civic actors drawn from NDI's programs in Arabic speaking countries could provide comparative experience in an organized framework. Organization of study circles or small group discussion series for leading political and civic activists could broaden their level of understanding as well as ability to analyze and discuss these subjects. Provision of Arabic language materials could support such discussion. Ongoing guided practice from NDI resident and visiting staff would

ensure the assistance remained relevant and specific to the evolving circumstances in Iraq.

### Strengthening Democratic Values

By using participatory techniques in trainings that reinforce the right of all citizens to be involved, by setting ground rules that reinforce freedom of expression and the right of all citizens to be heard and by involving men and women, youth and elders, majorities and minorities, NDI can underline values that are important for a democratic society.

Sample activities: Group discussions for political and civic activists could be a first step to developing and increasing knowledge about democratic values and skills. These activists could then graduate with confidence to more public events such as seminars, discussions or public meetings. In time, as open political contests develop, these skills could be applied in candidate forums or broadcast media debates.

### Improving Democratic Skills

Democratic skills are best learnt through practice. NDI could focus on realistic activities that would allow Iraqis to exercise what are for most of them new freedoms.

Sample activities: Technical and material support for seminars and public forums driven by concerns of local Iraqi groups. As a first step to encourage a deeper and more sophisticated approach, for example, study circles, for activists could be organized. These study circles could be designed to conclude with participants spreading their knowledge in a democratic fashion by producing leaflets, articles or other publications. Alternatively, there could be technical and material support for community outreach activities arising from these discussions. Specific sub-groups such as members of representative bodies could also receive specialized assistance with skills such as public speaking training and constituency outreach strategies.

Simultaneously, civic organizations could be supported to organize community events that would invite appointed or elected officials to participate.

## CIVIC FORUM: From Education to Political Action

NDI has effectively employed its Civic Forum approach to democracy education and citizen action in numerous post-conflict societies, including Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, East Timor, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, and West Bank/Gaza. Sierra Leone is the home of the most recent Civic Forum program, which began in 2003.

The **first phase** is to hire and train a group of local field coordinators. From within the ranks of the different citizen associations and organizations, discussion groups comprising 10 to 15 citizens are formed. The process normally takes four to six months from the time the program begins.

The **second phase** is to educate the participants in democratic principles and processes. The curriculum balances theoretical principles with the information and analysis about the actual development of democratic institutions and processes in the country where the program is being carried out. The education phase (or the foundation building phase) has required up to 10 months or more to complete satisfactorily.

The **third phase** is to activate the citizens and begin moving them toward organized collective action to address shared challenges in their communities. Civic Forum helps citizens build on these initial activities by developing political strategies for influencing decision making - an activity that normally is unprecedented in these types of communities.

This begins the **fourth phase** of the program, which is focused on organizing and advocacy. This phase often includes reaching out to other organizations and potential allies, recruiting additional volunteers, targeting decision-makers, mobilizing citizens and, ultimately, taking direct action to influence political policies and processes.

Civic Forum takes a longer-term, building-block approach, where the educational discussions lay the foundation for collective action. In this case, education is a means to an end. Ultimately, Civic Forum should result in greater popular political participation.

## Promoting Democratic Organizational Development

Nascent political and civic groups could benefit from stronger organizational skills that sharpen their sense of mission, identity and purpose while improving their ability to reach out and extend their constituency and membership, particularly to women and where relevant other ethnic or regional groups. Depending on the maturity of an organization, more advanced assistance could be offered such as advocacy and coalition building exercises.

Sample activities: Trainings on organizational development could help groups to move from syndicates or discussion groups to more formally constituted organizations with a distinct political or civic identity. These groups could then be supported to seek a wider constituency or membership through more sophisticated outreach strategies. NDI could continue to tap into its network of regional international and regional contacts as well as through the provision of Arabic language materials to provide ongoing guided practice to these groups. NDI resident staff would be the conduit for these contacts as the organizations mature and develop.

APPENDIX A

**Preliminary List of Parties and Organizations Active in Iraq**

*Identified by NDI as of July 10, 2003*

Al-Da'awa al-Islamiya
Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)
Islamic Action Organization
Ahl al-Bayt Center
Islamic National Front of Iraq
Free Iraqi Council
Higher Council for National Salvation (HCNS)
Iraqi National Movement (INM)
Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)
Democratic Centrist Movement (DCM) Also: D.C. Tendency/Trend/Current
Iraqi Democratic Union
Iraqi National Front, Inc.
Movement of Sacred National Defence,
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)
Kurdistan Islamic Union
Ansar al-Islam/Jund al-Islam/Hamas
Socialist Party of Kurdistan
Turkman People Party
Assyrian National Congress (Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, Assyrian American Leadership Council)
Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party
The Iraqi Peace Party
Office of the Democratic Movement of Kurdistan
Hizb Aliraqi Aljadid (New Iraqi Party)
Hizab Aliraq Alwahid (One Iraq Party)
Harakat Aliraq Aljadid (New Iraq Movement)
Harakat Shabab Aliraq Alnamothajia (Iraq Youth Movement)
Hizb Aluma Althawry Alarabi (Arab Revolutionary Labour Party)
Altajamu Alshaabi Aliraqi (Iraqi People Assembly)
Hizb Alkalima Alhura Aliraqi (Iraqi Free Word Party)
Harakat Altahrer Alwatani Aliraqi (Iraqi National Liberation Movement)
Munatham Alitalia Alislamia (Islamic Organization)
Altajamua Min Agil Alidimucratia'a Aliraqi (The Iraqi Union For Democracy)
"Sadrist"/Sadr II Movement

Badr Corps
Al-Khoei Foundation
Hizbullah Iraq
Iraqi National Accord (al-Wifaq/INA)
Iraqi National Coalition
Iraqi Free Officer Movement (IFOM)
Iraqi National Congress (INC)
Constitutional Monarchy Movement (CMM)
Worker Communist Party of Iraq
Iraqi National Forces
Iraqi national Party
Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)
Faili Kurds
Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK)
Kurdistan Toiler's Party
Iraqi Turkman Front
Assyrian Democratic Party
Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP)
Chaldean Federation of America
Iraq Institute for Democracy
Iraq Communist Party
Aljabha Alwatania Limuthakafi Aliraq (National Front For Educated Iraqi's)
Harakat Aliraq Alislamiyah (Iraqi Islamic Movement)
Hizb Althaawra Alislami Aldimocrati (Islamic Revolution Democratic Party)
Harakat Alakha'a Wal Islam (Peace and Brotherhood Movement)
Hizb Alishtiraki Aldemocrati Alkrdistani Aliraqi (Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Socialist Party)
Karakat Aliraq Alislamia (Iraqi Islamic Movement)
Hizb Alitihad Alwwatani Aliraqi (Iraqi National Union Party)
Rabitat Aliraq Almuahad (United Iraq Alliance)
Hizb Alfadhila Alislamia (Islamic Party)
Altajamu Alqawmi Aldemocrati (Gathering of Ethnic Democrats)

**APPENDIX B**

**NDI Assessment Mission to Iraq**  
**List of Meetings June 27 to July 6, 2003**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>Erbil</b>	Camara Garrett	Project grants officer for OTI based in Northern Iraq	OTI
	Hardin Lang	Program Manager	IOM
<b>Kirkuk</b>	Jamar Hall	Liaison officer with civil society	CMOC
	Lt. John Evans	Liaison officer with civil society	CMOC
	Herish Hamarash	Focus Group coordinator and activist	
	Mostafa Mohammed	Third Branch leader	PUK
	Salah Dello	Leader	KDP
	Khader Akbar Hassan Kusair (Abou Ibrahim)		
	Ghaleed Kafri	Head of the Party Section in Kirkuk	Turkmen Brotherhood
	Ramir El Bayati	Director of Central Communication and Radio	Turkmen Brotherhood
	Salwa Sharika	President	Turkmen Women Union
	Iyad Jallal Eddine		Turkmen Brotherhood
	Swara Kamal	Liaison of the PUK with the Democratic Organizations (47 NGOs), Representative of the Turkomen Brotherhood in Kirkuk	PUK, Turkomen Brotherhood
<b>Mosul</b>	Teresa Raymond	Captain	CMOC & JAG corps with the 101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne
<b>Suleimaniya</b>	Hakem Qader Azez	President	Suleimaniya Municipality Council
	Peshwaz Saadulla	Translator and Publisher/Editor	Hawlati
	Kardo Mohammed	Liaison with the democratic NGOs affiliated with the PUK	Office of Democratic Organizations
	Ms. Shehrmin Mohammed	Liaison with another set of democratic organizations (NGOs) affiliated with the PUK	Office of Democratic Organizations
<b>Baghdad</b>	Abdul Jabar	Media person/spokesperson	Iraqi Human Rights Group
	Jonathan Prentice	Special Assistant to UN Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello	UNOCHI
	Sabah		Iraqi Human Rights Group
	Tom Parker		CPA-Human Rights
	David Denehy		CPA-Governance
	Ahmed Abdul Razaq		Free Spirit Society
	Shaka Al Dijeily	Economist	Communist Party
	Abul Mahdi Abdul Hussein Shabib		Free Officers Movement
	Intisar Abdul Jabar		Iraqi Women's League
	Nasira Abdul Satar Al Qaisy	Electrical Engineer	Iraqi Democratic Union
	Rahim Abu Jeri Sadi	Chairman	Iraqi Democratic Union
	Dr. Thuraya Parazanchi	In charge of women's rights	Iraqi Peace Party
	Dr. Ehsan Almafraji and Dr. Adnan Al-Sodani		Human Rights Group
	Mr Qaiss Abdul Kamona	Vice Chair	New Iraqi Charity
	General Amir El Jebbouri	Chairman	Iraqi Tribes League
	Dr. Ahmed G. Subhi, Dr. Faress Fouad, Mr. Mohand		The United Iraqi Medical Society
	Scott Carpenter		CPA
	Hussain Sinjari	President	Iraq Institute for Democracy

Location	Name	Position	Organization
<b>Hilla</b>	Mr. Mahmoud Hassan and Mr. Nur Watwut		Iraqi National Congress
<b>Aamara</b>	Jasim Muhamad Aali	Businessman	CMOC, British Army
	Major Bob Nicols	Director	
<b>Basra</b>	Bourak Jouad	Iraqi Protection Assistant	UNHCR
	Taha Al Tamimi, Esam Al Serhadh, and Ramadan Al Badran		Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Committee (IRDC)
	Janet Rogan	Senior Staff	CPA
	Paul Reynolds	Governance Advisor	CPA
	Morten Sejr	Advisor for Political Processes	CPA
	Peter Singlehurst	Higher Education Administrator	CPA
	Majeed Hameed	Local Coordinator	UNICEF
	Paul Jensen	Consultant/ Engineer	UNDP
	Walid Abu Ali	Manager of INA, Former Chief Advisor for the Iraqi Police	Iraqi National Accord
	Abbas al Jawrany	Member of Governorate Leadership	Iraqi Communist Party (Basra chapter)
	Mohammed Yaseen	Interpreter with CPA, Student at Basra University	
	Charles Hock	UN Security Officer	UNSECOORD
	Dr. Salim	Deputy Director, Marine Science College	Basra University
	Dr. Naja Hussein	Former Director, Marine Science College	Basra University
	Emad Al Shaway	Office Director	Seid Al Shoheda (an information and Humanitarian Assistance NGO)
	Rahib Sami and Aali Sami	Unemployed young former government employees in the passport division	
	Sabah Al Aamary	Member of the Central Committee	Da'awa Party
	Abou Hasan Al Saai	Party Member	Da'awa Party
	Abou Hamzan		Political Bureau, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution
	Archbishop Gabriel Kassab		
<b>Naseriyah</b>	Major Christopher Stockel	Director	Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC)
	David Right	Director	CPA-Naseriyah
	Ahmed	Spokesperson, Head of Media and Information	Da'awa Party
	Muhammad Jamal Kamel	Director, Naseriyah Chapter	Human Rights Association
	Muhammad Aamar Abd Al Aazim		Human Rights Association
	Muhammad Rahman Kateh Shatb		Human Rights Association
	Jabbar Mussah Muhammad		Human Rights Association
	Sheik Taleb Harbi Al Mezel	Tribal Leader	Bani Rahab Tribe
	Sheik Taleb Al Naseroulah	Tribal Leader	Al Bousah Tribe
	Sheik Taklef Muhammad	Tribal Leader	Ghazi Tribe
	Akram Al Ghazi	President	Chamber of Commerce

*NDI Assessment Mission to Iraq*  
*June 23 to July 4, 2003*  
**Delegate Biographies**

**Rahman Aljebouri**, an Iraqi who left the country in 1991, is currently working for NDI-Iraq in Baghdad. His most recent position before joining NDI was as the Iraqi Community Coordinator for the Iraq Foundation headquartered in Washington, D.C.

**Hatem Bamheriz Hatem Bamehriz**, formerly a journalist for the *Yemen Times*, is the deputy country director of NDI's field office in Yemen and has implemented programs over the last five years in such areas as political party development, civil society organization, parliamentary support and election commission training.

**Leslie Campbell** is now the Director for NDI's programs in the Middle East and North Africa and was former NDI resident director in Croatia, Bosnia and Russia. Prior to joining NDI he was chief of staff to the leader of Canada's New Democratic Party and has extensive campaign experience at every level of Canadian politics.

**Jim Della-Giacoma** is an Australian national and Senior Advisor on NDI's Citizen Participation team. Before joining the Institute in Washington, D.C., he spent two years as NDI's Resident Director in East Timor where he joined NDI after working as a journalist and an advisor to the chief U.N. representative in East Timor

**Heba El-Shazli** is the Deputy Regional Director for NDI's programs in the Middle East and North Africa. She previously served as NDI's Resident Representative in Beirut and came to NDI after 17 years with the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, much of that time spent in the Middle East.

**Joe Gleason** is the Director of Operations for NDI. Since joining NDI in 1998, he has provided logistical and administrative support to the Institute's programs worldwide.

**Alina Inayeh** is a Romanian national and currently co-director of NDI's field office in Russia. From 1992 until 2000, she has been a consultant and trainer for civic organizations in Eastern Europe, Nigeria, Egypt and Ukraine and in the early 1990's she founded Romania's first democracy NGO, the Pro-Democracy Association, PDA.

**Brian Katulis**, a former NDI resident representative for the Middle East and North Africa, most recently with Greenberg Quinlan Public Opinion Research, is currently consulting for companies and organizations such as AOL, NDI and Freedom House on focus groups and other issues.

**Susan Kupperstein**, NDI Senior Program Officer for Middle East and North Africa, manages the Institute's Iraq programs as well as co-manages its Morocco portfolio.

**Thomas O. Melia** is Director of Research at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University and Adjunct Professor at the School of Foreign Service. For more than a dozen years he was an NDI staff member, including the Institute's Vice President for Programs.

**Makram Ouais**, a Lebanese national, is Senior Program Manager for NDI's Asia programs. Previous to coming to NDI, he worked at Amnesty International's Government Office in Washington, D.C. and the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris, France.

**Ross Reid**, a former Member of Parliament, Cabinet Minister and Secretary General of the Progressive Conservative Party in Canada, has been working with NDI since 1994 in such countries as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Ukraine.

**Mohammed Rherras** is the Political Party Programs Coordinator at NDI's field office in Morocco. Before joining the Institute, he served as the Public Relations Manager at First Contact Communication.

**Aleksandar Sukiban** is and Operations Officer at NDI. Prior to working NDI, he was a Repatriation Assistant for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

**Baghdad, June 11, 2003**

**Preliminary Reflections on Iraq**

**NDI Advance Delegation, June 8 – 11, 2003**

**From: Les Campbell**

**Summary:**

After three days in Baghdad it is already clear that NDI will find fertile ground for democracy promotion initiatives on a scale not seen since the heady days of the fall of the Berlin wall. There has been a virtual explosion of politics in Iraq's capital city with as many as 200 parties and movements having made themselves known to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Established political groupings like the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the two main Kurdish Parties, the KDP and PUK, and the Shiite dominated Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI), have also taken up residence in the city, commandeering buildings and hanging banners city-wide to proclaim their presence. Ostentatious displays of political clout are also being staged by religious leaders -- the NDI advance team witnessed several Shiite clerics entering a mosque with 70 or more sycophants in tow -- a display much more about political power than religious piety.

At the same time as politics and political power are a pre-occupation of many, NDI's conversations with would-be political leaders indicate that even the basic principles of democracy need to be defined. "Political party" for example, is a dirty phrase that for most Iraqis describes the Baath party or a shady group of characters controlling a militia. Some people interviewed by NDI pine for the old days of a strongman (but don't want Saddam back) equating democracy with chaos. Most Iraqis, it would seem, are intoxicated with the thought of freedom, but have no idea what independent action and initiative might look like. Everyone NDI met with expressed a desire to be part of a movement or organization to help build a new Iraq, but not one person knew what the

first move should be. Most of the new Iraqi political groups have no material assets – even if they have a building they have no tables, no chairs and certainly no telecommunications or computer equipment.

There are two important exceptions to the overall lack of political direction and dearth of material resources and therein lies the central challenge of democratization in Iraq. Under Saddam’s regime, there were two avenues for political organizing – the Baath party and the Mosque – clerics having been given some maneuvering room even during the periods of Saddam’s worst excesses. In post war Iraq, these two political poles are still dominant forces; Baathis working underground to harass coalition troops and to maintain fear among the population, and clerics openly proclaiming their “legitimate” leadership roles as trusted authorities in a political vacuum. The people that one would hope would emerge as future leaders of the country – the educated, the professionals, the business people, the former middle class once employed as technocrats in ministries – are the ones least able and willing to organize. We have found Baghdad to be a secular-appearing city, resembling Beirut with a large, relatively liberal middle class suspicious of the motives of the clerics and fearing the imposition of religious law. The most ambitious of these secular professionals want to form movements but are frozen, unsure of what to do next.

Although these are early days for NDI, it seems that our efforts and programs should be aimed at encouraging the former middle class to engage in politics; to make their views known to the provisional authority and to the Iraqi people. NDI can also work with established political groupings to help them become more like political parties and less like militias with political names. More specific program ideas will have to wait for the completion of a thorough survey mission but the idea of setting up political resource centers or “democracy centers” has been universally embraced during this short mission. We have also been asked by the CPA to provide some basic training to newly formed Iraqi NGOs and to advise on how a system of “material assistance” to parties might work.

## **Logistics, Transportation and Security**

NDI was able to book seats on a UN flight from Amman, Jordan to Baghdad. There is also a USAID contracted air service called Airserv which NDI can reserve seats on. The alternative is travel by car from Amman to Baghdad, usually in a convoy with journalists or humanitarian groups. We will have to explore the driving option soon because room on flights is limited. Once at the Baghdad airport it is difficult to find transportation to the city center because Baghdadis cannot get access to the hangar which serves as a terminal. On this trip NDI was able to travel in UN vehicles but for future trips we may have to arrange other transport. Amman is clearly the major staging point for getting to Iraq.

NDI's experience of Baghdad bears little resemblance to the Baghdad of news reports. The streets are busy with sidewalks jammed with pedestrians and traffic jams at every intersection. There are coalition checkpoints around certain buildings but car searches seem to be handled professionally by the soldiers – we have witnessed no tension even though we've been told that coalition troops are on high alert. Crime is increasing and several Iraqis have told us of car thefts, for example, but it seems like certain areas of the city are much worse than others. Outside our hotel, for example, which is in a quiet residential neighborhood, hotel guests sip cold beer in the evening while groups of Iraqi men and boys play dominoes. Electricity fails two or three times a day but many buildings seem to have back-up generators. Temperatures are almost unbearably hot with 100 degrees plus being normal this time of year. Temperatures are still 95 degrees at 11:00 PM. Most Iraqis we spoke to concede that conditions are improving with electricity, water and food supplies returning to normal. Expectations for the Coalition Provisional Authority remain high with many people convinced that “America can do anything”

Despite calm outward experiences, there is no doubt that there is danger. Journalists, for example, always seem able to find an aggrieved Iraqi willing to threaten attacks on

coalition forces or Americans, and certain, primarily Sunni, cities north of Baghdad are not fully under coalition control, but the NDI team has not had even the slightest problem and has been able to function entirely freely. Attitudes toward foreigners, at least based on our limited experience, seem both curious and friendly. Everyone is interested in what we're doing in Iraq because we're operating outside a coalition compound. When we walked through a market area in a Shiite part of Baghdad we drew a crowd with people posing for pictures and expressing their hate for Saddam and love for Bush. One of the waiters in our hotel keeps whispering to me, "Saddam bad, thanks to Bush" in a conspiratorial manner as if Saddam's lieutenants might hear him. Heba has engaged in many spirited debates with Iraqis – the consensus seems to be that getting rid of Saddam was good, the issue at hand is the question of who is responsible to make the best of the post-war situation -- the coalition authority or Iraqis themselves.

### **Next Steps**

We can't shake the feeling that Iraq needs outside expertise immediately. The demand for the type of assistance we can provide is already overwhelming. Meetings where we expected four people would have 12 people in the room and four hour meetings generated requests for more meetings. A quick visit to the CPA's NGO assistance center found a British civil affairs officer who had been flooded by requests for advice on how to form civil society and political groups. When he found out what NDI can offer, he beseeched Heba to agree to conduct a training session for would-be Iraqi democratic activists (Heba agreed and will conduct the session Thursday morning). Until NDI walked in the door, the best resource he could find to provide advice to Iraqi civic groups was a grad student (one of Tom Melia's students) assigned to a USAID DART team.

We would suggest that NDI moves forward with the planned assessment team and focus group project, with the focus group advance team leaving the U.S. around June 16<sup>th</sup> and the assessment team following about a week later. We should aim to have a focus group and assessment report completed by mid-July. We may also want to identify two staff people who could stay in Iraq after the assessment team leaves, assuming that the security

risk remains manageable. The assessment mission and focus groups are sure to generate an avalanche of requests for assistance and we should not let the momentum fade.

**Evaluations of an NDI Workshop for Iraqi NGOs Held in Baghdad on June 27, 2003**

As an evaluation exercise at the end of the day-long session the participants were asked to answer three questions: what they thought about the workshop? How they felt about the workshop? And what will they do after the workshop with the information learned at the workshop? Some of the comments for the following questions were:

1. What will I do with the information learned at the workshop?

“I will work hard to implement what I learned to help build an new independent Iraq”

“I will share with others the information I learned today”

“From this workshop, many things were clarified and from now on we will invest everything we learned into developing a new way to work inshallah (Allah willing)”

“Try to do better with details”

“I will think”

“To work quickly to organize ourselves into an NGO and to identify our mission and goals because it appears that we have a long road ahead of us to achieve our desired goals”

“The idea of developing a national Iraqi network of NGOs is a wonderful idea and I will contribute energy towards the implementation of this idea”

“Can we have this workshop repeated again and again? We are still in a state of anxiety and need to learn more.”

“I need more training and to learn from your vast experiences”

“I am going to teach others how to be an NGO and why to be an NGO – it is essential for democratic life”

“The work at hand now is for each individual to do what they can in order for this country Iraq to succeed”

“Spread democracy between the youth of Iraq using meetings, gathering, conferences and the media”

“Work, work, work and may Allah help us”

“Based on this workshop we will review our aims and activities”

“I am happy”

“I got some answers yet I am waiting for the opening of your office in Baghdad so I can benefit from more information”

2. What did you think about the workshop?

“Very Good”

“I developed my ideas about how to organize an NGO and how it should work in a proper manner and what I need in order to do so”

“Excellent – thank you”

“Although the room was slightly crowded in a way but it was very useful with new information, new ideas and new concepts”

“It was a very informative day for me because my brain was spoken to and appealed to in a very different manner than what I am accustomed to. Honestly, my brain was not allowed to wander off outside the conference room – it was riveted to the work at hand.”

“The ambitions are great especially after this period of “a brutal heavy lid on us” i.e. dictatorship eventhough we are going through this period of chaos. Your ideas and thoughts were very well presented and the ways/methodology the trainers used were superb. We still need more!”

“The information that we received was useful in the following way: it organized our ideas and thoughts about NGOs and what they are, etc..., the session added more information to our data base about NGOs and how they work, and we became aware of the magnitude of the work needed ahead of us taking into consideration that our experiences are totally inadequate.”

“Very good job – thank you very much!”

“We benefited greatly yet we still need more information and training from NDI”

“Please provide us with your knowledge to help our poor country which can have a great future!”

“What you did today was the first of its kind here in Iraq – in a country that has never seen or heard of NGOs or an independent civil society. We greatly appreciate your efforts and dedication”

“Your message was logical and made a lot of common sense!”

“This workshop was a good introduction but we need more”

“You made us more organized and you gave us confidence after a period of despondence – thank you”

“We want to learn more about the rules, laws and ethics that govern NGOs”

### 3. How did you feel about the workshop?

“Working with you gives me the feeling of total psychological comfort and joy!”

“I loved it”

“I wish all the participants the best of luck in their future work”

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart”

“We need to build all inclusive and tolerant organizations to develop a brotherly atmosphere in this country”

“We feel very happy with your interventions and assistance”

“We hope to see you again”

“You have become dear and kind friends – thank you for your contributions”

“We are very impressed with the amount of knowledge and culture the trainers possess and especially their strong self-confidence”

“We appreciate your dedication”

“We really liked the way the trainers presented the information and conducted the workshop”

“We would like to cooperate with you”

“Satisfactory”

“It is a great effort to help the Iraqi people so thank you and with great appreciation to all the participants too”

“It was serious work, with patience and energy, and honesty in delivery and a final grade of 90%”

“You helped us plant a flower in each heart by letting us meet and get to know each other today”

“Time passed today so quickly without me realizing it nor did I feel any boredom. It was especially nice that we had electricity”

“I really felt that you care about democracy in t his country and I really need your dedication to help me reach our collective goals”

“I liked this meeting very much and it gave me a chance to get to know many of my own people”

“We fell in love with freedom at first sight – thank you for this initiative”

“I liked it very much and I am not very sorry not to be with my kids today”

“We felt safe in your presence”

“Useful workshop thank you for your hospitality”

“I liked your dedication to your mission”

“A warm feeling of freedom”

“I feel more optimistic about my country and even stronger knowing that they are dedicated people like you to help me and all the Iraqi people”

**Acronyms and Initials**

AFD	Assembly for Democracy
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CMOC	U.S. Civil-Military Operation Center
DCT	Democratic Centrist Tendency
FOCM	Free Officers and Civilians Movement
FSS	Free Spirit Society
HRA	Human Rights Association
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IAW	Iraqi Alliance for Women
ICD	Iraqi Coalition for Democracy
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDU	Iraqi Democratic Union
IHRG	Iraqi Human Rights Group
IID	Iraq Institute for Democracy
IPM	Iraqi Peace Movement/Party
IMD	Iraq Movement for Democracy
INA	Iraqi National Accord (Al Wifaq)
INC	Iraqi National Congress
IRDC	Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Committee
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NIO	New Iraqi Organization
NIC	New Iraqi Charity
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OTI	USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
UIMS	The United Iraqi Medical Society
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSECOORD	United Nations Security Co-ordinator
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development