



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Shares Iftar with Iraqis in Babil Province-

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October 13, 2008

Al Hillah, Iraq - To mark the holy month of Ramadan, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for Babil Province recently hosted an Iftar dinner -- a time for renewing old acquaintances and making new friends – for more than 120 Iraqi guests.

The dinner was held at the province's U.S. Regional Embassy Office (REO). The REO at Al-Hillah serves as the administrative support operation for four Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) covering the South Central provinces of Babil, Najaf, Karbala and Diwaniyah.

During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating or drinking during daylight hours and break their fast at nightly Iftar dinners at sunset. The dinners are often community gatherings at which Muslims invite family and friends to join in a festive meal.

Iraqi government officials, tribal leaders, and civil society representatives attended the dinner, including Mohammad Al-Masodi, chairman of the Babil Provincial Council; Major Gen. Fadel Raddad, Babil chief of police; and Sheikh Ali Shanan of the Al-Tufail tribe and head of the Tribal Union of Hillah.

Sheikh Ali Shanan said, "The [PRT's] yearly tradition of hosting an Iftar dinner during Ramadan is an excellent opportunity for members of Babylon's local government to come together with local NGO representatives, tribal leaders and businessmen."

He added, "Such an invitation reflects mutual respect of the religious rituals and rites of Christianity and Islam. On behalf of myself and all the tribal leaders in Hillah, I extend our thanks to the REO and the PRT."



Babil PRT Team Leader Ken Hillas says goodbye to Al-Tufail tribe leader Sheik Ali Shanan at the end of the Iftar.

Ramadan is an Islamic religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, when the Qur'an was revealed. It is considered the most venerated and blessed month of the Islamic year. Prayers, sawm (fasting), charity, and self-accountability are especially stressed at this time.

PRT Babil's Iftar opened with maghrib (sunset) prayers, followed by brief remarks by Babil PRT Leader Ken Hillas and then a lavish dinner to break the fast in the REO's main conference center. The food served consisted of traditional Iraqi cuisine: hubor over timnin (chicken over rice), lamb kabab, tika (grilled lamb), & hummus.

Each guest also received a complimentary copy of the magazine Muslim Life in America published by the State Department's Office of International Information Programs (IIP).

In his remarks Team Leader Hillas said, "Each year the Regional Embassy Office and Babil PRT celebrate the coming of Ramadan and participate with Babil citizens for one night in a delicious meal. This year I understand there is an increase in the number of attendees from all local society components: government representatives, people representatives, parties and NGOs.

"We view this as an indicator of the success of our combined efforts as security and prosperity continue to grow for the people of Babil Province -- your success and involvement in achieving peace and providing services is our success," Hillas told his Iraqi guests.

Now that Ramadan has come to an end, the entire PRT Babil team wishes all its Iraqi friends and colleagues a joyful Eid-al Fitr!