

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ***

***International Negotiators Brief Congressional Committee on First Iraqi-Led Peace Accords ***

Northern Ireland**, **South Africa** Peace Negotiators Speak Out on their Role in **Helsinki** Process**

(Washington, DC, October 8, 2008) Leading negotiators from the conflicts in Northern Ireland and South Africa briefed a Congressional Committee this morning on their involvement and insights into the "Helsinki Agreement" the first Iraqi-led peace accord aimed at fostering political reconciliation.

In the briefing, convened by Rep. Bill Delahunt (D-MA) before the US Congressional Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, negotiators whose work paved the way to peace in their respective countries explained how they facilitated the negotiations between Iraqi delegates that led to agreement for future political reconciliation. With upcoming elections in both the US and Iraq, and the uncertain future of the US military presence in Iraq, Delahunt's briefing provided an important opportunity for analysis of this rare yet successful alternative peacebuilding approach.

"With Iraq between the certainty of US withdrawal but the uncertainty as to when, there will be a void which the Helsinki Agreement can fill," said Professor Padraig O'Malley, director of the project. "For this to happen, the structures that are required to ensure successful compliance have to be put in place, and while that is a matter for the Iraqis themselves, they lack the needed expertise and technical know-how to build these structures. These can be provided by Northern Ireland and South Africa especially, and by the larger international community."

The negotiators attending acted as facilitators to the year-long "Helsinki Process," which involved all the main political parties and, ultimately, led to the signing of the Helsinki Agreement in Baghdad in July 2008. This morning, the negotiators from Northern Ireland (who represented the Ulster Unionist Party and the non-sectarian Alliance party during the preparation of the "Good Friday" agreement in 1998) and South Africa (who represented the African National Congress and the apartheid government during South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994), spoke on the agreement's status and possible next steps in the Helsinki Process, as well as considered the potential lessons for Iraq from their own peace processes.

"The lessons drawn from the Northern Ireland peace process show that the principles of inclusivity and a commitment to peace and democracy are essential," said Jeffrey

Donaldson MP, MLA, Ulster Unionist Party negotiator for the Good Friday Agreement. "Despite the very different circumstances in Iraq, the Helsinki Agreement has proven to be a very important development for Iraq in embracing these principles."

The public briefing took place in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building at 9:00 a.m, and was broadcast on C-SPAN and on live webcast at <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov>. Scheduled speakers included:

Professor Pdraig O'Malley, John Joseph Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation, John McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston

The Honorable Cyril Ramaphosa, Executive Chairman, Shanduka Group,(former Member of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa) (via videoconference)

The Honorable Roelf Meyer, Founder, Action for a Safe South Africa(former Minister of Provincial and Constitutional Affairs of the Republic of South Africa)

The Honorable Mac Maharaj, Professor, Bennington College, (former Minister of Transport of the Republic of South Africa) *(via videolink from South Africa)*

The Right Honorable the Lord John Alderdice, House of Lords, United Kingdom

The Right Honorable Jeffrey M. Donaldson, MP MLA, House of Commons, United Kingdom

BACKGROUND ON THE HELSINKI PROCESS

The Helsinki talks, convened in September 2007 and April 2008, resulted in an agreement signed by 36 political leaders in Iraq, representing all political factions in the country. Iraqi delegates were joined by six facilitators from Northern Ireland, led by Martin McGuinness, who had agreed to a settlement in Northern Ireland in March 1998, and five from South Africa, led by Cyril Ramaphosa, who had agreed to a settlement in South Africa, bringing an end to apartheid in November 1993.

On March 8, 2008, the United States and Iraq commenced talks about the future relationship between the two nations, including a longer-term US military presence in Iraq.

A month later, under a separate, private initiative, the Helsinki Process brought together 36 senior Iraqi political leaders in Helsinki to adopt a set of principles for joint national action, in addition to a set of implementation mechanisms for national reconciliation in Iraq. Most importantly, they agreed that dialogue and negotiation were the primary means of resolving political disputes, and that all political parties and factions would have to abide by the principles they had adopted in order to participate in negotiations.

The John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of

Massachusetts Boston and the Institute for Global Leadership, Tufts University and the Crisis Management Initiative convened the Helsinki Process.

Further information on the Helsinki II Agreement can be found at http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/chair/rep_peace_baghdad1.php.

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