

UMass Professor has Sunnis, Shiites Talking

By Laura Crimaldi

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A University of Massachusetts at Boston professor is being credited with bringing together representatives from Iraq's feuding Sunni and Shiite groups for secret talks in Finland that resulted in a road map for peace.

Padraig O'Malley, the John Joseph Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at UMass-Boston, and the Crisis Management Initiative organized the four-day meeting of representatives from the warring groups.

"The goal was to use the experience that Padraig O'Malley and others had in Northern Ireland and South Africa, and the legacy of Joe Moakley, and start a conversation between the parties in Iraq and begin to take steps toward reconciliation and negotiation," said Steve Crosby, dean of the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, where O'Malley is assigned.

O'Malley, an expert on the peace processes in South Africa and Northern Ireland, was traveling yesterday and could not be reached for comment.

The Iraq session, which ended on Monday, resulted in the "Helsinki Agreement." It calls for resolving political disputes through nonviolence and democracy, disarmament of the rival parties and the formation of an independent commission to supervise the disarmament, according to documents released by UMass-Boston.

Among those reportedly in attendance were representatives of the radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and Adnan al-Dulaimi, who leads the largest Sunni Arab political group.

Prominent peace brokers from the reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland and South Africa also were on hand, Crosby said.

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