

## **UMass Professor rallies Iraq's political leaders as they announce the Helsinki II Agreement in Baghdad**

On 5 July, at the Al Rasheed Hotel in the Green Zone in Baghdad, Iraqi parliamentarians and diplomats from several countries gathered to participate in an event hosted by Iraqi participants from two meetings previously held in Helsinki, Finland to celebrate the signing of the Helsinki Agreement.

The Agreement defines 17 principles to which all parties subscribe and designates the contextual framework that will enshrine the rules of behavior and conduct among and within parties and alliances and among parties and government that will inform discussion and provide the guidelines for resolving matters of procedure and process. To monitor compliance with the principles, the agreement contains 15 mechanisms, which outline the implementation measures that will be developed.

The meetings in Helsinki were organized by the Iraq Project, a joint venture of the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies (MGS); and Institute for Global Leadership (IGL), Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts; and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), Helsinki, Finland.

Project Director, Padraig O'Malley, who is the John Joseph Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at MGS, spent six of the last twelve months in Baghdad speaking with members of the Iraqi parliament and government to arrange the meetings in Helsinki.

The Iraqis met with the senior negotiators from South Africa (SA), including Cyril Ramaphosa, chief negotiator for the African National Congress (ANC) under the leadership of Nelson Mandela; Roelf Meyer, chief negotiator for South Africa's last whites-only government; and Mac Maharaj, who was co-secretary of the South African negotiating process and with senior negotiators from Northern Ireland (NI) including Martin McGuinness from Sinn Fein, reputedly former chief of staff of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and currently Deputy First Minister of NI; Jeffrey Donaldson from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the hard-line pro-British party of Rev. Ian Paisley and Lord John Alderdice, Chairperson of the International Monitoring Commission (IMC), which oversaw the decommissioning of arms by paramilitary groups in NI.

In 1993, at the height of negotiations in South Africa, the University of Massachusetts Boston conferred honorary degrees on Ramaphosa and Meyer, who were also joint commencement speakers.

O'Malley had organized a similar type of meeting (known as the *Indaba*) for the Northern Irish in South Africa with their South African counterpart's in 1997.

The meetings that led to the Helsinki Agreement were largely funded by Robert Bendetson who is CEO of Cabot House furniture, a trustee of Tufts University, member of IGL's external advisory board, and a former student of O'Malley's at Tufts.

Reached for comment in Beirut where he is currently working on another book (O'Malley's last work, *Shades of Difference*, a political biography of Mac Maharaj is available at the University of Massachusetts bookstore), O'Malley paid tribute to the role played by Mr. Robert Bendetson: "Bobby is a special human being. He gives new meaning to the word philanthropist. He epitomizes the values of doing the right thing for no other reason than it is right. Besides his enormous generosity, he made a number of significant interventions that kept the process going when it might have otherwise broken down." O'Malley also paid tribute to Iraq's two Vice Presidents who saw the value in going forward with this initiative when he first proposed it to them in June 2007. "They jumped on board. They caught the

idea behind the process right away and gave it their full blessing. That made bringing others on board a lot easier.”

O'Malley said: “It was no accident that the participants from the SA *Indaba* (gathering) were in Helsinki. These were people who knew each other and who had developed camaraderie over the years that made them the a seamless team of facilitators at Helsinki and that camaraderie made their interaction with the Iraqis easier and at the same time more forceful. The principle underlying these talks is very simple: the almost too obvious notion that people from divided societies are in the best position to help people from other divided societies.

The conflicts, of course, are different, but the behaviors of peoples in conflict tend to be similar. In this way they can benefit from hearing the narrative of what negotiators from other conflicts went through as they struggled out of violence into nonviolence, from positions of “never” to positions of compromise, from facing the tasks of carrying a new message to their constituencies as they moved from one course of action to another to bringing them fully on board. Hearing the NI and SA narratives of conflict and negotiation and then settlement, the Iraqis were able to identify with what they were hearing and adapted some of the documents used in both conflicts to their own use.

Now we have transferred ownership of the process we began in Helsinki just one year ago to the Iraqis. Whatever role, we the conveners and the facilitators from Northern Ireland and South Africa play in the future depends entirely upon the Iraqis. We stand ready to serve if called upon. But the Iraqis are now equipped with a set of tools to bring to reality the prospects of a stable & secure Iraq.”

Nancy Riordan is a McCormack Graduate School of Policy studies MSPA IR graduate of 2007 and accompanied O'Malley to Helsinki 1, 2, and Baghdad. Others from UMass Boston who attended Helsinki 2 include Patricia Peterson, on the staff of the McCormack Graduate School's Moakley Chair; Professor Ranjini Srikanthan, English department; Andrea Crowell MSPA IR 2007(H1&2); and John Lewis Moore, a 2008 dispute resolution graduate.