

The Long Road To Baghdad

A personal account of Muslim Hands Aid Mission to Iraq (May/June 2003)

By A. Naeem and S. Bashir

The journey to Baghdad was filled with excitement. Although the major war was officially over, lawlessness and sporadic battles still posed a real threat. As we entered the city on 21st May, traveling briskly along its splendidly built highways and roads, anxious not to allow night to fall en route, we found the city deserted and lifeless. It was saddening to see how this once opulent and sophisticated city had crashed to its knees - wrecked and crippled.

The streets were littered with debris and rubbish with minimal traffic in sight. Many of the large buildings in the centre of Baghdad were utterly destroyed and those around them had shattered windows and doors. The traffic lights were not working and the electricity was out. As we crossed one of the bridges across the Tigris, witnessed by millions on television as the scene of US soldiers battling for control of the city, we saw how every single governmental and ministerial building had been bombed to ruin - all that is, except the Oil Ministry! At every crossroad and roundabout we crossed we found black banners hung in mourning and respect to those who lost their lives during the invasion. The names on the banners, painted in yellow and white writing, were not of soldiers but of thousands of civilians who were killed as US forces entered the city. Later we were to hear shocking stories of how thousands of innocent civilians had been fired upon including an ambulance that was carrying a pregnant woman, medical staff and the drivers - all of whom were killed.

The first week of our aid mission was hectic to say the least. We visited numerous schools, hospitals, orphanages and elderly homes in **Baghdad, Mosul, Najaf, Kerbala and Falluja**. We were very warmly welcomed by local people everywhere we visited and immediately overwhelmed by the magnitude of their needs. Finding the most needy was not difficult in the sea of misery and suffering that Iraq has now become. What was difficult to accept was the inescapable fact that the people of Iraq will have to endure many months if not years of suffering before their lives are made any easier.

Our mission was two-fold. Firstly, to carry out first hand assessments of humanitarian needs in a number of hospitals, schools and orphanages in Iraq and to initiate immediate relief work, and secondly to establish a Muslim Hands Iraq office to coordinate relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects with our NGO partners, government bodies and other UN agencies.

Al-hamdulillah the mission has been greatly successful: **400 tonnes of emergency food and water, sent from the UK, is being distributed in Baghdad and Mosul. We are rehabilitating 10 of the most needy schools, orphanages and elderly homes and have supplied general medicines and equipment to hospitals in Baghdad and are continuing to distribute food to homes in Baghdad and Mosul.**



Collateral damage in Baghdad



400 tonnes of food & water delivered ▶



Elderly care projects in Mosul ▶



Rehabilitating schools in Falluja ▶



Helping orphans in need ▶

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Palestinians Victimised



Palestinian refugees, many of whom had been living in Iraq since 1967, were targeted by lawless gangs and expelled from their homes across Baghdad during the war. Once again they have found themselves living in camps on the fringes of Baghdad city. Dr Anwar, the camp director explained how un-



inhabitable life is in the camps. The 213 families that lived at this wasteland site lacked water, electricity and privacy. Women found it difficult to fetch water, or enter and exit the camp without passing through un-segregated areas - and the gates to the camp remain locked at all times, for fear of attack by criminal elements who are prevalent in the streets of Baghdad. The look of fatigue and strain on the faces of Dr Anwar and his volunteers, was intensified by his knowledge that there was no viable future for his people to ever return home.

Aid to Palestinian refugees:

- Refrigerators for storing medicines
- Basic medicine
- 10 Water coolers
- 20 fire extinguishers
- Food distribution

Medical Aid for Baghdad Hospitals

Despite being told by the US administration that Iraq does not have shortage of medical supplies, every hospital and clinic we visited cried out for everything from basic medicine and laboratory equipment to refrigeration units and air conditioning systems. Ten years of sanctions, war and looting had left Baghdad's healthcare system, once the envy of Western Europe, in tatters.

On route to Baghdad we purchased two van loads of general medicine and transported it to Baghdad ourselves. Even before we were able to offload the supplies to our warehouse in central Baghdad, doctors from a nearby clinic rushed out to us and pleaded for medicine they so urgently needed. Al-hamdulillah, Mr Aamer Naeem (Projects Manager Muslim Hands UK) is a qualified pharmacist and we were able to make the first medical aid delivery within



and even light bulbs! Medicines were spoiling due to lack of refrigeration units and doctors left unable to operate in the sweltering heat

one hour of arriving in Baghdad!

At the largest hospital in Baghdad, Al-Yarmoukh, which had appealed to Muslim Hands in the UK a few days earlier, we were dismayed to find hospital theatres inoperative due to shortages of the most basic equipment such as hospital beds (exceeding 38 celsius) as many of the air conditioning units had been damaged by shrapnel from Allied bombs - we found their remains scattered around the hospitals courtyards.

Thanks to the generosity of Muslim Hands donors and efforts of our workers and partners on the ground, we were able to source, and supply within days the vital equipment needed to rehabilitate the Gynaecology Dept., Blood Banks, clinical laboratories and four operating theatres.



Medical Aid Supplied:

- Emergency and general medicines
- 10 Air conditioning units
- 10 Refrigeration units
- Maternity / Delivery Beds
- Lighting for Operating Theatres
- Suction machines

Elderly care in Baghdad & Mosul



At Baghdad Elderly Home, we found that not only were living conditions very poor, they were also suffering food and water shortages. Muslim Hands will now supply food to this home in the short term and continue to provide monthly stipends to each of the 130 inhabitants and monthly salaries to the staff. We have

also supplied new mattresses, bedding and two sets of clothes for each elderly person. Readers are encouraged to join the **Muslim Hands One to One Elderly Sponsorship Scheme** to help the elderly spend their last days in comfort and dignity. Furthermore, many of the occupants at the home were very old and frail, and some suffered extra disabilities too. For them we immediately provided various types of wheel chairs, walking frames and crutches.

In Mosul we found similar conditions and applied similar types of relief to the Mosul Home for

Elderly. Alongside basic furniture and a new library, we also provided heaters for the living quarters, as Mosul becomes very cold in the winter.



Repairing Schools in Falluja

Like its medical care system, Iraq once had a well developed and effective education system that provided free education up to graduation. Sadly, war, sanctions and looting have left much of the educational infrastructure damaged and in urgent need of repair and rehabilitation. Many schools which have recently opened with no electrical supply, broken doors and windows, are not fit for use but are being used nevertheless.



In Falluja, which is still undergoing daily battles and air raids, we are working to rehabilitate four schools (Al-Quds School, Palestine School, Al-Harriri School and Hafsa School). Combined, they provide education to around 1200 boys and girls from 7 to 16 years of age. Western aid agencies are unable to enter the city due to military activity in the city. Muslim Hands aid teams have been able to enter the city and were warmly welcomed by the local population. The dilapidated condition of the schools we assessed highlighted how much work needs to be done throughout Iraq. In the Al-Quds school we found sewage was seeping into the school grounds and was effecting the drinking water too. We have hence fitted four large water storage tanks inside the school that access water from the nearby main road and will be solving the sewage problem by digging pits and pumping the harmful seepage out of the school grounds.

Aid to Four Schools in Falluja:

- 4 schools being repaired
- New doors, windows & paint
- Safe Water tanks and toilets
- Ceiling Fans and Elec. rewiring
- 12 water coolers
- 1200 school kits

Orphan Care and Rehabilitation



We visited many orphanages in Baghdad and Mosul. Three wars and ten years of sanctions show their effects more apparently in the sheer number of orphans and orphanages in Iraq than in any other way. Considering that Iraqis (like the rest of the Muslim world) have close family ties, it is only the impoverished and destitute children that end up in orphanages. Furthermore, many of the orphans we met had lost both parents.

Despite the fact that Iraq has not had any form of government for months and hence staff at the orphanages had not received any salary, the orphanages were still running. Many orphanages had been looted heavily by the thugs who roam the city openly and needed immediate rehabilitation. For the numerous orphans who are staying within family homes we have also launched Muslim Hands One to One Orphan Sponsorship Scheme in Baghdad.

Muslim Hands Nursery

At the Darul Etim Orphanage for children aged up to 6 years, we found the children in desperate need of a new nursery and

play area. Within a few days of the decision to form a new nursery, we were pleased to return to the nursery and find the once empty, dark and dingy room completely renovated. Seeing the nursery decorated and filled with new toys and furniture, with new carpets, air conditioning units, new lighting and lots of children cheerfully playing, was a joyous occasion for sure. Muslim Hands Iraq will continue to work with the nursery.

I.T. & Sewing Classes at Al Elweeyah Girls Orphanage

In the Al Elweeyah Orphanage for Girls we visited in Baghdad, home to 63 girls aged from 7 to 16 years of age, we provided much of the furniture and equipment such as air conditioning units, fridge, washing machine and even fire extinguishers to bring the orphanage back to working order. All of the staff and the orphans each received a small stipend of \$20 and a set of clothes each to help ease financial hardship. As long term support and vocational training for the girls, we have also initiated an I.T. Class and a Sewing Center within the orphanage.



New Muslim Hands Baghdad Orphanage

Due for completion and opening before the end of 2003, the new Muslim Hands Baghdad Orphanage will be home to 200 young boys and girls aged up to 6 years. The modern and spacious two storey building has been specifically designed for younger children and will also be home to 35 'mothers' who will be employed to care for the children full

time. In fact this building is just one of the five blocks of a much larger complex (partly built) that will be home to 1000 orphans aged up to 16 years of age and 150 elderly people. This is a very large project by any measure and Muslim Hands is searching for donors and aid organisations to join us in partnership to complete the complex.

400 tonnes of food delivered



400 tonnes of essential food and water has now arrived in Iraq and is being distributed to poor families in Baghdad and Mosul regions. The aid convoy consisting of nineteen forty foot containers of food and water left from three locations in Nottingham, Leicester and Coventry in April and was sent via Syria and Jordan. A further 14 containers are expected to depart before the end of June.

Prior to the beginning of the war, Muslim Hands funds were used to purchase essential items such as dry milk, cooking oil, rice and flour, various utensils, blankets and water containers. These items were kept in store in Baghdad and used during the days of war.



Plans for coming months...

The following work is being done currently, or will start in next few weeks.

Mosul - Building New Hospital: Muslim Hands will be constructing a medical centre in Mosul at the site of Mosul Home for Elderly. The centre will also offer its services to two orphanages nearby that Muslim Hands is sponsoring, as well as those in need locally.

Baghdad - Building New Orphanage: Muslim Hands will construct a new orphanage in Baghdad for 200 orphans.

Mosul - Building New I.T Center: Muslim Hands will be opening an I.T. training centre and provide internet access in Mosul, helping Iraqis to move into the 21st century after decades of isolation.

Baghdad - Setting up New Library:



Muslim Hands will be providing a new library at University of Baghdad after

looters plundered the last one.

Baghdad - Repairing Imam Abu Hanifa Masjid: Muslim Hands will help repair bomb damage to Mosque of Imam Abu-Hanifa.

Elderly Sponsorship Schemes: Muslim Hands will run one to one sponsorship of the elderly in Iraq, helping link individual donors with those in need.

Orphan Sponsorship Schemes: Muslim Hands will now run one to one sponsorship of orphans in Iraq.

How you can help...



Many hospitals, schools, orphanages and elderly homes need the following equipment urgently. Hundreds of orphans and elderly people need sponsors. Please give generously.



- Buy a **WATER FILTRATION UNIT** £500
- Buy an **AIR CONDITIONING UNIT** £400
- Buy a **REFRIGERATOR** £250
- Buy a **WATER COOLER** £125
- Buy a **WATER STORAGE TANK** £60
- Buy a **WHEELCHAIR** for one elderly / disabled person £50
- Buy a **SCHOOL BAG KIT** £10



- SPONSOR AN ORPHAN** £20 per month
- SPONSOR AN ELDERLY PERSON** £12 per month



- Help **BUILD NEW ORPHANAGE** in Baghdad
- Help **BUILD NEW HOSPITAL** IN MOSUL
- Offer your **CHILD'S AQEEQAH** IN IRAQ £45
- FEED A FAMILY** £35 food parcel

Yes! I would like to help the needy in Iraq...

£50 ■ £100 ■ £500 ■ £1000 ■ Other

Name, Address & Postcode: (Use BLOCK CAPS. & write your Donor ID on reverse of cheque)

Card Number: (note: We cannot accept Amex)

Valid From: Expiry Date:

Issue Number: (if any) Signed _____

Spend my donation on:

- Education
- Medical Care
- Food Distribution
- Iraq Emergency
- Water Projects
- Orphan Fund
- Elderly Care
- Where Most Needed**

Amount Zakah £ _____
Sadaqah / Lillah £ _____

Water filtration unit (£500) £ _____
Air conditioning unit (£400) £ _____
Refrigerator (£250) £ _____
Water cooler (£125) £ _____
Water storage tank (£60) £ _____
Wheelchair (£50) £ _____
School bag kit (£10) £ _____
Orphanage building Baghdad £ _____
Hospital building Mosul £ _____
University of Baghdad library £ _____
Aqeeqah in Iraq (£45) £ _____
Family Food parcel (£35) £ _____
Total Enclosed £ _____

Gift Aid Declaration:

I am a UK tax payer and I wish Muslim Hands to reclaim tax on all donations I make hereafter until further notice. I understand that I must pay income tax at least equal to the amount reclaimed.

Signed _____ Date _____