



Widows, Martyred Children and Former Soldiers

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For those who qualify, training is available through which Iraqis are building new lives.

Numbers of men, women and children in the northern part of the country are taking classes ranging from the basics of reading and writing or learning to drive, to the making of crafts, development of carpentry proficiencies, honing of electrician skills, to the exacting, competencies of life saving as to be an emergency responder.

It is the Peshmerga Transformation project funded by Iraqi Security Force Funds through the Multi-National Security Training Command. It is being administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region North (GRN), Erbil office.

Recently Erbil based, GRN Contract Representative Gary York, visited the beautiful mountain town of Galala where he enjoyed the honor of presenting computer and literacy diplomas. Conducted in "a picnic-like setting with a lunch of fruit and tea" following, it was – in his words – a "most rewarding experience!"

York explained that, "The city was heavily shelled during the Iraq-Iran War. As a result, many of those who were young at that time had to focus on simply staying alive and had never been afforded the opportunity of an education."



Continuing, he said, "The more literate often take the computer classes. The computers are hauled up to Galala each week and arrangements were made with the community's mayor for late afternoon and evening classes to work around the town's generator schedule. This is of great importance as the town has no commercial power and only one small generator!"

In Soran, an hour "down the road" from Galala, in addition to the computer classes, English is being taught. Young ladies in Sulahaddin are also being taught English while in Erbil the most comprehensive classes are offered – somewhat like a trade school in the United States. Regularly, handmade crafts are sold and with money raised given back to the students who created them.

All told, over the last six month period 275 individuals have benefited from these classes.

This outstanding program is open to former or disabled Peshmerga "Freedom Fighters" and their spouses (male and female) and children of "martyred" Peshmerga killed in the conduct of their work. The Kurdish Peshmerga – sometimes said to be the forces "first to fight" or "ready to die" - are extremely accomplished, and focused military professionals.

"The focus of the program is to teach these individuals to have commercially applicable skills - be they soldiers or soldier's family members," explained GRN team member Zainah Saffa, who assists in the program's administration. "Sometimes, those who learn make the most moving of statements. Recently an older former soldier who had just completed his literacy training came up to me and said with biggest of smiles, 'Finally I can read the signs I see all around me!'"