

## Opening Statement of Chairman Bill Delahunt

at a briefing titled:

### Political Reconciliation in Iraq and the Helsinki Process: Lessons from South Africa and Northern Ireland

October 8, 2008

The Subcommittee will come to order. Our purpose today is to explore one initiative to achieve the political reconciliation that must occur in Iraq if that battered and fractured country is to survive as a nation-state after U.S. forces leave and the military occupation ends.

And make no mistake about it -- whoever wins the presidential election, U.S. forces will leave – and I would suggest sooner rather than later. Be assured: we will not be there for 100 years, despite the statement of Senator McCain.

Because the American people simply will not support an open-ended commitment to this war – a war founded on misinformation and faulty analysis – as well as on an arrogant claim that America’s military power gives us the right not just to disrupt an imminent attack, which is clearly legitimate, but also to wage war to prevent other nations from acquiring the ability, at some point in the future, to attack us. That, of course, is the core principle of the Bush doctrine.

The American people have given and given and given – more than 4,000 lives have been lost, there have been tens of thousands of life-changing injuries, and \$700 billion has already been expended, according to the Pentagon – and that’s not the end. Some of our leading economists, such as Nobel-prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, predict that the war will eventually cost between two and three trillion dollars.

And we simply can’t afford it – if you haven’t noticed, our markets are imploding, and most Americans feel that they are in the midst of an economic melt-down. And they are convinced that the cost of this war is in part to blame. My constituents, when they read that Iraq is enjoying a \$70 billion surplus as a result of the increased price of oil, are angry, and frustrated -- and they want their political leadership to craft an exit strategy that is both practical and responsible. And they want it done now.

And that hope is shared by the Iraqi people. An ABC News poll, conducted in February of this year, found that 73 percent of Iraqis oppose the presence of coalition forces in their country. A significant majority of the only elected branch of the Iraqi Government, the Parliament, wrote our Congress this year and took the same position -- in favor of a timetable for full withdrawal.

While we debate the surge, and some speak of victory and others talk of success, we can celebrate that there has indeed been less violence over the past year. But there will be neither victory, nor success, until the surge's ultimate purpose is realized, as General David Petraeus testified before our full Committee earlier this year. And that purpose is the achievement of a political reconciliation that will allow Iraq to move forward.

But there has been no reconciliation surge to match the reduction in violence.

Listen to the Iraqis themselves, as they assess the status of political reconciliation:

“I believe that the thing which will reduce the violence more (is) not military force, but having realistic solutions which will convince others to join the political process. We need the real reconciliation, not only slogans, as being done now.” – **Shaik Khalaf al-Ulwayan, leader of the National Dialogue Council, Member of Parliament**<sup>i</sup>

“Although reconciliation featured high on the benchmarks laid by congress, and much talk has been made on reconciliation in Iraq, yet it largely failed in tackling the main issues of conflict.”-**Ayad Allawi, former Prime Minister of Iraq, and Member of Parliament**<sup>ii</sup>

"There has been no significant progress... There is a shortage of goodwill from those parties who are now in the driver's seat of the country." -**Tariq al-Hashimi, one of Iraq's two vice presidents**<sup>iii</sup>

“Reconciliation will hang on more than a law; it needs political will... I believe there is no political will to achieve reconciliation.” -**Mithal al-Alusi, leader of the Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, and Member of Parliament**<sup>iv</sup>

It would be easy to interpret these gloomy assessments as evidence that there is no hope – but I would submit that implicit in these statements is a recognition that there is simply no alternative. There must be reconciliation. And the good news is that Iraqis are doing something about it.

Today's briefing focuses on what I believe to be a most promising initiative.

Few of my colleagues are aware of the Helsinki Agreement, signed in Baghdad in July by the leaders of diverse and disparate factions, including Kurds, Shia, and Sunni. They were assisted by South African and Northern Irish facilitators – men whose names command respect both internationally and in their own societies.

And that gave me some hope – I am heartened by this initiative, because it means that nobody sitting at a negotiating table in Iraq can say: “It can't be done.” It has been done, by the very people we have with us today – and in conditions that were every bit as daunting as Iraq's today.

Professor Pádraig O'Malley was gracious enough to meet with me and discuss the efforts that led to the Helsinki Agreement. I believe that it is important for the American people and my colleagues in Congress to hear directly from those leaders whose valuable insights undoubtedly contributed to the final product. Now, this might not turn out to be THE agreement from which peace flows and reconciliation proceeds in Iraq, but it is ONE possible process that we should explore. Something like this has to happen, and has to work – everybody knows that.

Our witnesses today will describe the Helsinki process -- a collaboration between Iraqi political leaders and representatives of two other societies that suffered through apparently unending conflict between apparently irreconcilable groups, and achieved political reconciliation nonetheless – South Africa and Northern Ireland.

Let me now introduce the distinguished witnesses we are honored to have with us today, who have been offering their formidable talents and unique experiences to this undertaking.

From the South African side we have three of the central figures from the negotiations that led to the stunning transition within South Africa from brutal, race-based rule to a tolerant, multi-ethnic democracy whose powerful

economy is driving regional growth -- and whose political leadership has been a powerful force for stability and democracy throughout Africa.

Union leader Cyril Ramaphosa and cabinet member Roelf Meyer led the negotiating teams for the African National Congress and the apartheid government of South Africa, respectively, and ANC underground commander Mac Maharaj served as the joint secretary of the working group that hammered out the details of the transition to democracy.

Their distinguished, and frankly amazing biographies require book-length treatment to do them justice – and I note that Professor O’Malley has indeed done just that for the life of Mr. Maharaj. Let me simply say that their activities since the transition continue to speak loudly of their devotion to their country and to the cause of dignity and democracy for all peoples.

Mr. Ramaphosa has become a leading businessman, a shining example of the opportunity that can exist for those who take to heart Nelson Mandela’s warning after the transition to democracy in 1994 that black South Africans were not yet fully free, but simply “free to be free” to take their talents into sectors that had previously been barred to them.

Mr. Meyer served in President Mandela’s cabinet, also became active in the business sector, and recently founded an organization to respond to one of the great challenges to both personal security and economic growth in South Africa, violent crime. And Mr. Maharaj made a huge contribution to both democratic transition and economic growth as Minister of Transport, and is now passing along the lessons of his life-long struggle for justice by teaching at Bennington College, in Vermont.

All three of these South African heroes have drawn on their experiences to advise and assist reconciliation processes in other countries, including Northern Ireland, Kenya, and Iraq.

From Northern Ireland, we had planned to have three of the central figures from the successful political reconciliation of the supposedly irreconcilable. I am sorry to announce that Sein Fein leader Martin McGuinness has had to cancel due to the recent passing of his mother, and I am sure that the panel joins me in sending condolences to Martin and his family.

We do have with us today, though, two witnesses who took part in the intense “Good Friday” negotiations led by our distinguished and dear former colleague, Senator George Mitchell – they are staunch Unionist Jeffrey Donaldson, and non-sectarian leader John Alderdice. Today, they too are collaborating not just in their own domestic politics, but in Iraq as well.

John Alderdice was the lead negotiator in the Good Friday process for the Alliance Party. He is the Commissioner of the International Monitoring Commission that assesses compliance with the demilitarization required by the Good Friday agreement, and is also a member of the House of Lords. Greetings, Lord Alderdice.

And Jeffrey Donaldson was a central figure in the Good Friday negotiations, representing the Ulster Unionist Party. He opposed the final agreement, but has continued to play a role in the implementation process. Mr. Donaldson has since joined the Democratic Unionist Party, which he represents in both the British Parliament and the Northern Irish Legislative Assembly. Again, we are honored by the presence of these facilitators here today -- and I am impressed by their continuing devotion not just to the process of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, but in other countries as well, including Iraq.

Last, but certainly not least, is the man who is herding this distinguished cast of characters in the Helsinki process -- the redoubtable Pádraig O'Malley, the John Joseph Moakley Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

As someone who knew and admired Joe Moakley, I think that Professor O'Malley is a fitting person to bear that title – he has spent a lifetime helping make wine from the grapes of wrath, in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and now in Iraq, just as Joe did in the brutal, 10-year civil war in El Salvador.

Joe Moakley and our colleagues Jack Murtha and Jim McGovern led the Speaker's Task Force that broke the case of the murder of the Jesuit priests and professors by the Salvadoran Army. This led to a congressional cut in U.S. aid and a rapid peace settlement – and I know I am being repetitive, but this illustrates the purpose of this briefing – a settlement that few thought possible. Pádraig is the driving force behind the Helsinki process, and I congratulate him, and welcome him here today.

We will hear first from Professor O'Malley, and then we will turn to our video guest, Mr. Ramaphosa, and then to our witnesses at the table. I will probably interject questions after each country's witnesses, but we also will have time at the conclusion for a roundtable conversation as well. Padraig, please get us started.

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<sup>i</sup> From al-Ulwayan's testimony from Subcommittee briefing, "The Future of U.S.-Iraqi Relations: The Perspective of the Iraqi Parliament, June 4, 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> From Allawi's testimony from Subcommittee briefing, "Possible Extension of UN Mandate for Iraq: Options," July 23, 2008

<sup>iii</sup> Washington Post, "Top Iraqis Pull Back From Key U.S. Goal," October 8, 2007

<sup>iv</sup> New York Times, "Ending Impasse, Iraq Parliament Backs Measures," February 14, 2008