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Subject: Update from David Hovde  
Friends,

Greetings! I arrived here in the city of [Sulaimaniyah](#) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Tuesday. Much has happened since then already. I'll share with you a few of those experiences.

Wednesday I went with several of my teammates to interview a Kurdish Iranian refugee and his family. He had been an activist in Iran, working along with his wife for the rights of women, the environment, and for other important causes. He was arrested four times. Since he was Kurdish and an activist, the authorities wanted him to confess that he was part of a Kurdish group using violence against the government. He wouldn't. He underwent terrible torture while in prison, which he described to us. After his fourth time in prison, when he was physically and psychologically tortured the worst, he left Iran with his wife and two boys. The family still lives in fear of Iranian spies in Iraq. Their situation is similar to many other Kurdish Iranian refugees.

It was a privilege to be trusted with the story we had been told. The family also graced us with Kurdish hospitality, serving us juice, tea, cookies and cold water. We also interviewed a Kurdish Iranian refugee woman whose husband had been killed in Iran. She and her children served us tea as well.

We take Fridays off since weekly Muslim worship services take place then. I went for a long walk Friday toward the center of the city. The city seemed quiet until I got closer to the center, which is the bazaar area. There the streets were crowded with people buying and selling all kinds of things. I walked to the town square. One wouldn't have known that several months ago thousands of people gathered daily there to protest corruption in the government. Back in mid April, government troops cracked down violently on the protesters and the protests ended. However, dissatisfaction with the government hasn't.

Saturday was an exciting day. Most of our team drove up to a village close to the Iran and Iraq border. For the past few years our team has documented Iranian and Turkish bombing and shelling around the border villages. At this particular village, [Kani Spi](#), the team had hoped to have several team members present in the village to accompany them during the growing season (when the shelling usually happens) and document the Iranian shelling of the area. Two of our team members had lived there for eight days, but the team was denied permission to continue there because of the danger. So, today we went to collect the team's things, and to say goodbye and that we hoped to get permission to come back. I was moved to witness the friendship that had already developed between my teammates and the people of Kani Spi, from my teammates spending time with people in their homes and working with them in the fields. As we said goodbye, an explosion sounded in the distance: more Iranian shelling.

We drove home through mountains and canyons and by a waterfall discussing how we might get permission to return. Perhaps we could live in a nearby town and travel daily to Kani Spi. We will have to go to [Erbil](#), the capital of the Kurdistan Region, to hopefully meet with the appropriate government and military officials who can give us permission.

I'm grateful for my teammates and Kurdish partners who have helped me adjust to this new environment. I'm grateful to God for allowing me to have the experiences I've had already. Please pray for the Kurdish people we partner with and for our team's relationship with them. Thanks!

God bless,

David

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