

Sent: Sunday, July 03, 2011 5:41 AM

Subject: Update from David Hovde 07/02/11

Hello again. Much has happened since my first letter.

One of my teammates, our team coordinator, Peggy, left the team a week earlier than scheduled because of the sudden death of a son in Ohio. That was quite a shock. She let us know that she made it home safely and is doing well, considering the hard circumstances.

Sunday, June 26 a man shot Karwan Kamal in a car park here in Sulaimaniya while he was paying for parking. He shot him in the foot. As he raised the gun to shoot a second time, Karwan jumped over a small wall for protection. The man fired five more shots. One of Kamal's friends and a car park attendant were injured from shrapnel when a bullet hit a concrete wall. Then the man got into a waiting car and it took off.

Karwan is a lawyer who is documenting the cases of people who participated in the demonstrations in Sulaimaniyah (which took place this past spring) who have been arrested, abducted, followed or beaten. Thousands of people gathered in Azadi Square daily to demonstrate against corruption in the two ruling parties. The demonstrations began February 17 and ended April 19, when security forces violently crushed the demonstrations. Since then, many participants in the demonstrations have been threatened or harassed in some way. We visited Karwan in the hospital the day after he was shot. He seemed very glad to see us. He had heard that the authorities had a "list of 200" of the protest leaders who they planned to arrest or kill. We asked him if he was the first one. "Yes," he said, "only 199 to go." Since then, he informed us that the government has put out a story that the man who shot him was taking revenge because Kamal had had an affair with his wife or sister. It seems that the authorities are trying to spread rumors to ruin his reputation.

On Thursday we went to visit Ismail Abdulla, a man abducted and severely beaten after midnight May 27. Ismail worked as a driver for a retired government official. When the protests started, he started participating everyday for several reasons: the security forces killed a teenager during the first days of the protests, the forces sometimes fired randomly into the crowd, and the people demanded freedom and justice. Ismail daily spoke from the microphone on the stage.

Once, one of the highest government officials called him and offered him a new apartment, if he stopped participating in the protests. Ismail recorded the call. He gave the recording to the local TV station and also played it from the stage in the square.

When the forces used tear gas to disperse the people and burned down the stage on April 19, Ismail went into hiding for 45 days. When he heard the two ruling parties were talking with the opposition parties, he thought it was safe to come out.

(WARNING: THE NEXT FOUR PARAGRAPHS CONTAIN GRAPHIC IMAGES.) The night of May 27 he went to the local supermarket with friends. When he came out, two cars stopped in front of his car. Eight men in ski masks came out and put a mask on him and put him into the car. They drove for about 30 minutes, beating him while he was in the car. When they let him out of the car, they beat his legs with cables. One of the men got a phone call and said they weren't to kill him, but were to beat him so that there'd be a sign on his face that he was beaten. They took off his mask. One of them used the butt of his gun and broke his nose

in three places. They stabbed him with knives in his arms and back as he tried to protect himself.

They told him that if he ever participated in demonstrations again, they would kill him. Ismail said that if a demonstration was happening today, he'd participate. One of them took one of his fingers and broke it. Ismail became unconscious from the pain. They put him back in the car and dumped him out about 25km out of the city. They told him not to take off his mask until three minutes had passed.

Ismail began walking toward the city. When the people in the passing cars saw that he was covered in blood, they kept driving. He walked all the way into Sulaimaniya. He asked if he could use the phone at a store and called his brother-in-law to take him to the hospital. While waiting, a taxi driver recognized him, put him in his taxi and drove him toward the hospital. On the way, they saw his brother-in-law, who then took him to the hospital. Many friends and supporters came to visit him. The doctors took good care of him.

The day before we interviewed him, Ismail had had surgery on his nose to fix the bones. His nose was bandaged when we saw him. He showed us the scars from the knife wounds on his arms. He also showed us the ski mask that he had been made to wear backwards. Ismail said that three officials had talked to him and said there is an investigation to find out who did this to him. Ismail says they either don't know who did it, or they're lying. The people don't know if the government or party militias are doing this. Ismail thanked us for coming and said that, when his nose heals, he'll take us to meet others who have been harassed.

Friday, some visitors told us that a demonstration in the square had been planned in response to the shooting of Karwan. The security forces found out about the plan and were present at the square. They arrested one of the organizers, took him away and disconnected his phone. As of now we still don't know where he is.

On a positive note, a cafe has begun to offer regular talks and debates on political issues. So far the authorities have left it alone. On another positive note, I've reconnected with some friends I made last year at the Chaldean Catholic church I attend while here.

Pray if you will that our team will have wisdom to know how best to support those who are threatened because of their involvement in the demonstrations. Also, prayers for the spirits of our team members and our work as a team would be appreciated. Thanks! The three of us seem to be doing well. A fourth team member joins us Tuesday.

God bless,
David