

Hi Friends and Family!

Attached is an article for Christian Peacemaker Teams that I wrote about my friend from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Mohamed Salah Mahdi. Mohamed is the CPT Iraq team's advisor/translator and he is also a sixth and seventh grade teacher in the city of Sulaimaniya. Mohamed flew to Chicago recently to be a keynote speaker at a CPT Congress here and visited a Chicago middle school with me where he gave the students letters from his students as a way to promote peace.

Peace to you.

David

By David Adem Hovde

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**SULEIMANIYA/CHICAGO: Building peace for the next generation.**

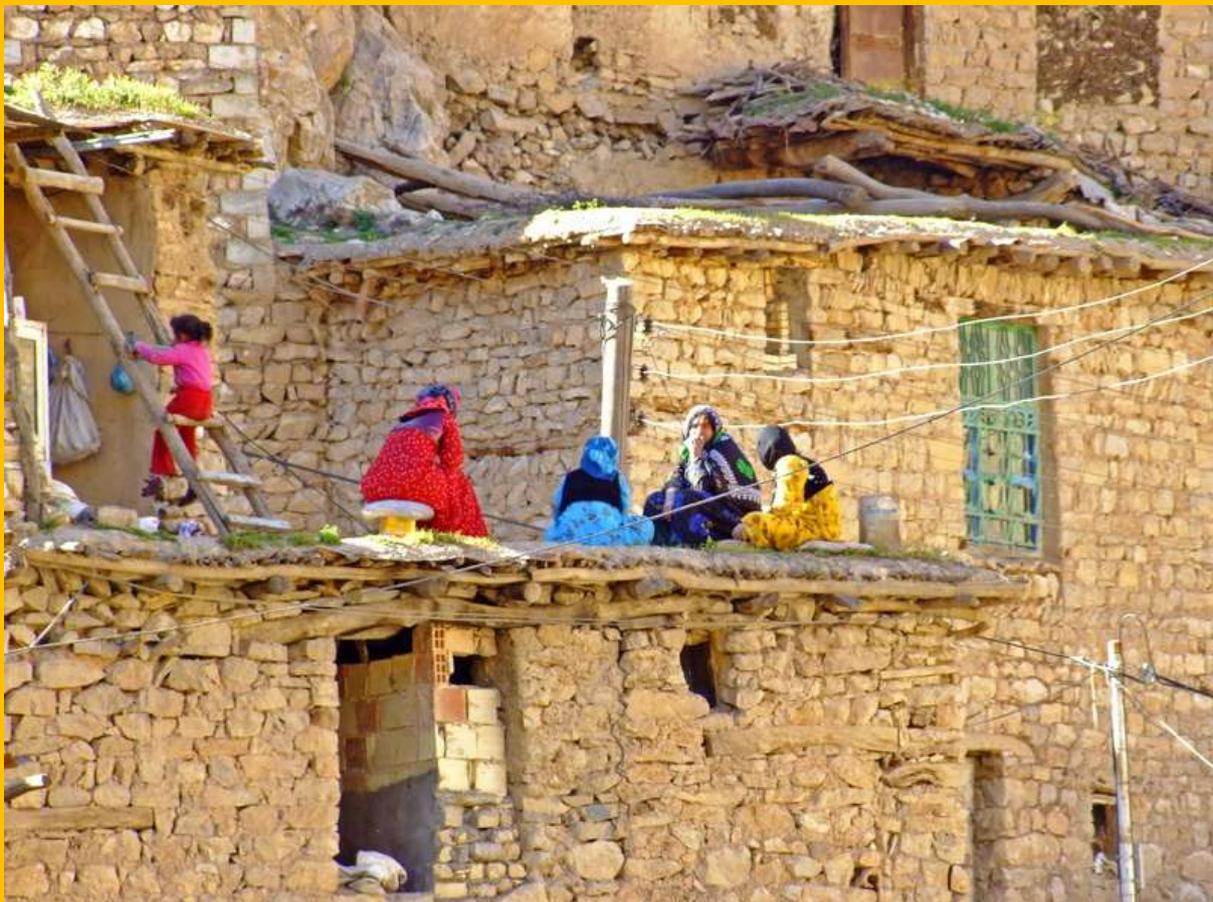
Mohammad Salah Mahdi came to Chicago from Suleimaniya in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to give a keynote address at the CPT Congress 13-16 October 2011. Besides working as the translator, advisor, and driver for the CPT Iraq team, Mahdi teaches English to sixth and seventh grade teachers at Seventh Azar Basic School in Suleimaniya. Before he left Suleimaniya, he asked his students to write letters to students in Chicago and videotaped them singing songs of greeting and friendship in English.

On 12 October, Mahdi visited CICS West Belden School on the west side of Chicago accompanied by CPT Iraq team reservist and Chicago area resident David Hovde. Military recruiters come to the school and Tim Doran, one of the teachers, feels the students may not think they have many alternatives to what the military offers them. Doran's class of mainly Latino students sat on the floor in the gym to view Hovde's slides of his time on the CPT Iraq team. Then Mahdi showed the video of his students singing. "The leaders of our countries talk to each other, but the common people don't. Making friendships between the common people of our countries is a way to make peace," Mahdi told the students.

One of the students asked what kind of music people liked in Kurdistan. Mahdi mentioned a popular Kurdish musician. A teacher immediately looked the musician up on the web and played a music video on YouTube for the class. While the music played, Hovde suggested that Mahdi teach them Kurdish dancing. Mahdi led a line of students and teachers holding hands and danced with them around the gym as he waved a colorful piece of fabric with his free hand. The demonstration ended with a showdown between Mahdi and one of the male students, with each showing new moves that the other tried to copy. The student won by moving himself along the floor with his hands like a caterpillar, which Mahdi did not try doing.

Mahdi then gave his students' letters to Doran, explaining to the class that since he is from a Muslim context, his female students wanted their letters to go to female students and his male students wanted their letters to go to male students. As Mahdi and Hovde left the school, the security guard, a veteran of the Iraq war, mentioned he was sorry he could not hear Mahdi's presentation.

On 19 October, Mahdi and Hovde returned to the school. This time Mahdi spoke to fifth, sixth and seventh graders, giving some of his students' letters to each class. Mahdi expressed his hopes to the classes that, besides letter writing, the students could also exchange artwork to put on display at the schools. Perhaps in time students could even visit each other's schools. When asked what his biggest accomplishment was, Mahdi said, "I'm doing it at this moment, building peace between our countries for the next generation."



Border village Iraq\_Iran