

# Healing for Peace

*Bringing Hope and Health to the Children of Iraq*



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**T**he children of Iraq need our help. I have seen first-hand the deplorable condition of Iraq's healthcare system and I have listened to the pleas for help from the country's healthcare professionals.

During the past two decades, the Iraqi health system has been in a state of neglect. Once a country that boasted a high-tech, world-class health care system, today Iraq's healthcare infrastructure is broken and in serious need of repair. The last hospital was built in 1978 and the country's 197 hospitals have been in a state of steady decline for more than 25 years. The deterioration of Iraq's healthcare infrastructure has left a devastating effect on the people... especially the children. Child mortality in southern Iraq has climbed to 150 out of 1,000 children dying before they reach the age of five. Most die before their first birthday. To make matters worse, childhood cancer rates in Iraq are eight to ten times higher than in the West.

Children under five account for nearly 56 percent of registered cancer cases.

An important solution to this dilemma is the Basrah Children's Hospital. Under the expert supervision of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the hospital will be a 94-bed, 160,000 square-foot facility, built on thirteen acres donated by the Iraqi Ministry of Health. The hospital will use the most modern treatment techniques to address the needs of Iraq's most seriously ill and injured children, with a special focus on children with cancer. Project Hope is focused on equipping

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the Basrah Children's Hospital and training the professionals who will staff the hospital when it opens its doors in the fall of 2008. In addition, with the help of Project Hope, the hospital will become a training facility to improve the skills of health professionals throughout the country.

When I shared this information with my friend, Rima Al-Sabah, wife of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States, she immediately offered to help. Our discussions, in part, led to a gala dinner on March 7, which will be hosted by Ambassador Salem Al-Sabah and Rima at their residence. The event, "Healing for Peace," will support Project Hope in its endeavor to assist in the development of

the Basrah Children's Hospital. The evening is sponsored by the Kuwait American Foundation, of which Rima is the Gala Chairwoman and which, in previous years, partnered with USA for UNHCR and UNICEF to help advance the cause of children. The Foundation has now raised over \$1.2 million for the hospital.

At the Healing for Peace gala dinner, Mrs. Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be the honored guests, country music superstar Randy Travis will provide entertainment, while PBS's Charlie Rose will serve as the master of ceremonies.



As we gather on March 7 at the Kuwaiti Residence, new hope is springing up in the southeastern city of Basrah – it's the Basrah Children's Hospital. Thanks to the support of partners such as the Kuwait America Foundation, Project HOPE will be able to make a difference in the lives of the children of Iraq. These children offer the hope and promise for the future of the country and we are giving them a chance to fulfill that promise. **WL**

*Above- Randy Travis will provide musical entertainment for the "Healing for Peace" gala*

*Left to right- Distinguished Guests, First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice / Gala Chairwoman Rima Al-Sabah*

