

## Community

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by Allan Slater

A long white ribbon has been stretched from lamppost to lamppost blocking off streets leading to the city centre here in Suleimaniya. All along the ribbon stand people in white sashes facing into the square where thousands have gathered to speak publicly to their Kurdish Regional Government. The ribbon and the people along it make up what one might call “the great white wall of peace,” white being the colour that symbolizes peace in this culture.

The wall has created a space of calm between the protestors and the military further back on the streets. These people of the wall started to form their own community as they spent days together. They established property values along the wall with much discussion. The highest valued properties were at the lampposts against which one could lean. The lowest ones were in the middle of the street where most people tried to sneak past. The smokers all shared their cigarettes and lights. We shared impromptu lessons in Kurdish and English as we strove to communicate with each other. Chairs appeared so people could have a break from standing on hard pavement. Parents brought their children to hand out sweets to the people along the wall. Participants consistently shared tea, juice, water and snacks with each other. Often the food vendors who were providing these treats would not take any money. On one cold wet day, one man left the protest but handed us his umbrella before he ran off.



During one particularly memorable bus ride home after a cold, rainy day we sat next to two young women who had been part of the protest. When they saw our bedraggled sashes identifying us as part of the white wall, they immediately offered us tissues to clean our smeared glasses. After a few words of conversation, they gave us fresh strawberries and a squirt of perfume on our necks. We arrived home that evening with cold bodies but warm feelings for the community of the white wall.