

Final Days Here

March 25, 2011

This is Friday and we take it as a day of rest in keeping with religious traditions here. My time in Sulemaniya is quickly coming to a close so I hope to see many of you next week. Some of the rest of you I am hoping to see in June at the 50th reunion of our graduation from Guelph. I had expected to come here to a quiet corner of the turbulent Middle East to meet with farmers along the Turkish and Iranian borders but, as you know, much more exciting events began to unfold. It has been a great privilege to work with people who take great risks to bring about much needed reforms here.

Yesterday Michele and I along with a Human Rights Watch representative accompanied several of the protest organizers on a trip to Halabja where there had been some deaths and injuries during demonstrations two days before. The facts of the story were and are, still confusing. These people, including Nasik Kadir, the Canadian woman who is one of the organizers, were in danger of being arrested along the way by armed guards, Asaish, at check points on the road between Sulemaniya and Halabja. We made up an international presence to provide some protection and there were no problems.

The group met with protest organizers in Halabja in a back room of an independent radio station where the story of the death of police officer was discussed. It is still not clear who was responsible for his death by gun fire. Then we went to visit Ibrahim, a man who was injured by gun fire. Media reports suggested that this had happened during the protests, but we soon learned from him that the story was really quite different. The main media outlets are all party owned so people are well aware that true reporting of facts does not exist.

Ibrahim was at home lying in bed with a big bandage on his head. He was in remarkably good condition given he had received a gunshot wound to the head only two days before. He told us this story. I used to be a member of Talabani's Peshmerga militia, but I switched to supporting the Goran party for change in the 2009 elections. Since that time I have been receiving death threats. Even my children have been threatened with beheadings. Once the demonstrations started here in Halabja I helped by trying to keep them safe and peaceful. On the day I was shot the daily protest had not even started. I was just leaving the mosque from praying. A Peshmerga commander came up to me and shook my hand, and asked my name. I told him who I was and I knew at that moment that I was in serious trouble. Others around me tried to protect me but it was no use. Bullets came from several directions landing all around my feet. Finally a bullet hit me in the head and I fell with blood streaming from my head and lost consciousness. I was first transported by friends to the hospital in Halabja where the bleeding was stopped. Then I was taken by ambulance to a hospital in Sulemaniya where they operated to remove a bullet from my skull. I am still experiencing some numbness in parts of my body.

The representative from Human Rights Watch asked Ibrahim if had kept any of the death threats that had been texted to him. Ibrahim replied, "No, I did not want my wife to see them and become frightened so I deleted them all."☒☒

Love to all, see you soon, Allan Slater