



Athraa Hasoon, left, a professor of biology at Baghdad University and Dr. Hayder Abdulkarin, both of Iraq, said things are getting better in their native country, now that Saddam Hussein has been deposed.

# Building bridges

## Iraq residents thankful for U.S. involvement

Jason Carmel Davis  
Staff Writer

Iraqi citizen Athraa Hasoon said that she lives a “typical family life” in her country, now that Saddam Hussein’s reign is coming to an end.

“Although there is bloodshed, it is not as violent as the TV images show,” Hasoon said. “I get up and walk my daughter to school, go to work, come home and cook just like anyone else.”

Hasoon, a professor of biology at Baghdad University, also said that there must be probable cause in order for the authorities to apprehend someone, whereas under the Ba’ath party, citizens of Iraq could be detained for

minuscule reasons, such as not having at least one photograph of former president Hussein in their home.

She and Dr. Hayder Abdulkarin, who volunteered with the Middle East Council of Churches in Iraq to provide humanitarian assistance during the war, spoke to members of the Plymouth Morning Rotary Club and their guests Tuesday on the pain and suffering the people of Iraq endured under the Ba’ath party. And he says with the help of Iraq’s new “partner,” his country will thrive in the years to come.

“Now we have hope,” he said. “Every time you have hope, there is always the opportunity

for new development, education, health services and security.”

The Iraq-America Freedom Alliance (IAFA) called in the two individuals, who are doing their part to build a bright future for the people of Iraq.

The alliance is a coalition of American and Iraqi organizations and individuals committed to fostering goodwill between our nations’ citizens and winning the war on terror.

Under Saddam Hussein, the two would have never had the opportunity to tell their story to anyone outside of Iraq.

“It’s difficult to find out what truth is,” Tim Phillips, Rotary

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Club vice-president, said. "These people have come here today to help us understand what that truth is."

Hasoon added that her salary has taken a huge climb since United States forces have began the liberation of the war-torn country. As a college professor, Hasoon's pay ballooned from about \$1.50 a month to around \$500 per month.

Hasoon went on to add that there we no new books or computers at her university. She then joked about going from an "old-

school" blackboard and chalk, to an up-to-date "whiteboard" and markers.

Hasoon's light tone stopped, though, when she began to talk about her children. Hasoon said this liberation will serve them more than it will her.

"My life is gone," she said. "I didn't travel. But now, I'm very happy for my children. They will travel. They will do everything they want to do. So if I die, I'll be fine because of my children."

Abdulkarin said that under Hussein, no one could travel outside of Iraq without the fear of being murdered. He also said that there were no human rights or women's rights under the Iraqi dictator. He added that the

health care situation was in shambles under the Ba'ath party, stating that there was no vaccination system for children, or hospital supplies.

After the two had the opportunity to speak, they fielded questions from the crowd, ranging from their thoughts on the upcoming elections in January, to the length of time U.S. forces should stay in Iraq.

Both speakers agree they want Iraq to govern itself, but they were quick to praise what the troops are doing.

"We don't want the U.S. to leave us because we don't have a strong enough front to protect us from our invaders," Hasoon said. "If we had a strong army and a

strong police force, then we wouldn't need them. But now we do need them."

Abdulkarin added that with Iraq's first-ever democratic election just two months away, he has hopes that more than 80 percent of the Iraqi people will exercise their right to vote.

However, Phillips said there were some Rotary members who were sensitive to the timing of the appearance.

"A couple of people thought this was going to be more of a political thing," he said. "They were more concerned about the timing as it relates to the election. But this wasn't political at all. This was a human interest story, and we were glad to have

them."

Hasoon and Abdulkarin were very busy this week. Following the Plymouth seminar, the two headed to Dearborn to speak to a class at Henry Ford Community College. They also traveled to Calvin College and Grand Rapids to speak at a high school and to the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce.

Both speakers said they have nothing but positive things to share when they return home. Hasoon said she hopes one day Iraq will look like the U.S. And Abdulkarin said he has hopes of one specific change to be made in his home country.

"We have a strong partner in the United States," he said.