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IRAQI CHILDREN RECEIVE MESSAGES OF GOODWILL FROM KIDS IN U.S.

Words and music of children carry hope for world peace

BOSTON, MA—A CD collection of words, songs, and raps created for Iraqi children by kids and teens in the U.S. has reached children in Baghdad despite the escalating violence and deteriorating conditions in the country. Titled "Well Wishes and Blessings: Kids in America to Iraq," the grassroots project is successfully connecting children across the world in an expression of good will and common hopes for peace.

A humanitarian initiative intended to transcend individual political and religious beliefs, the project was conceived by award winning composer Ruth Mendelson. Mendelson traveled across the U.S. in 2006, interviewing kids ages 3 to 19 to record their well wishes for the people in Iraq as well as their thoughts about peace and life in general.

The "Well Wishes and Blessings: Kids in America to Iraq" CD interweaves kids' spoken words together with their onsite musical contributions, from traditional Sanskrit chant and African-American gospel to rap music offered by teens and original songs created by five-year-olds. Produced and edited by Mendelson, the CD was Grammy listed for Best Spoken Word Album for Children (2007).

Communicating the kindness and words of wisdom from American kids of diverse ethnic backgrounds is "an important tool for developing understanding and therefore lasting peace," says Dr. Jane Goodall, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute. Goodall, an avid supporter of the "Well Wishes and Blessings" CD project, calls it "a fantastic program that is building bridges between our world's youth."

Provided in both English and Arabic, the CD has been listed as one of the "Top 100 Products in K-12 2007" in District Administration Magazine, a periodical for K-12 education leaders.

Last November, CD's were shipped to a teacher in Baghdad by the 121 Contact project, which connects students and teachers in Iraq and the U.S. by e-mail. The teacher distributed them to family, friends, and students. Since then, youth in Baghdad have been e-mailing their responses and requesting more CD's on a weekly basis. Over one thousand copies have been circulated within the US and Iraq. Distribution has expanded to reach youth in Lebanon, Syria, Nigeria, Kenya, Israel and Palestine.

"The messages we're receiving from Iraq are incredibly moving," notes Mendelson.

In one e-mail, a youth leader in Baghdad wrote: "We listened to the Well Wishes CD and it touches our hearts directly and we do not know how to express our feelings by using words, it has a great impact on us as Iraqis and it will have the

same effect on our children because it is full of honest feelings coming from the Americans towards the Iraqis and it shows that they do care for us."

Enthusiasm about the CD has resulted in a pen pal system that is now flourishing between teens in the US and Baghdad. Original artwork from kids across the US is being included in each package of CD's sent abroad.

As Mendelson concludes in the CD's liner notes, "These kids have much to teach us. In truth, this CD is for all generations... May the children of Iraq, and in all countries, know they are loved. And may we, as adults, take every opportunity to express compassion."

"Well Wishes and Blessings" is the premiere project of Eagle Vision Initiatives, a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to support the arts as a means to uplift, educate, empower, connect, and nourish people of all ages and walks of life."

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