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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 intends to bridge children across the world in an expression of good will and common hopes for peace.

A humanitarian initiative meant to transcend individual political and religious beliefs, the project was conceived by award winning composer Ruth Mendelson. Mendelson spent most of 2006 traveling around the U.S., 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 recently 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, UN Messenger of Peace and founder of the Jane Goodall Institute. Goodall is endorsing the "Well Wishes and Blessings" CD project, calling it "a fantastic program that is building bridges between our world's youth."

A package of the CDs was recently 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 bravely distributed them to her family, friends, and students. According to Bruce Wallace, who runs 121 Contact, reaction to the CD was "complicated."

"Most were simply pleased to come to understand that 'not all Americans hate us'," said Wallace. "Others were warmed by the gentle supportive words and the buoyant music. Some were confused to find that the 'enemy' should be bothering to speak to them at all. There were, predictably, some who thought it a 'trick of the invaders'. Perhaps the most important reaction was not to the meaning of the words but simply to the hearing of children's voices and music reaching out to them from far away. One of the most devastating effects of living in a war zone is the pervasive sense of isolation that works to

break the spirit. 'Well Wishes and Blessings' has broken through this wall and brought smiles and hope to people who badly need both.'"

David Potorti, the director of the Peaceful Tomorrows 9/11 families group finds the Well Wishes CD to be "...the perfect vehicle for spreading the message of peace and reconciliation." Twice nominated for a Nobel prize, Peaceful Tomorrows is currently featuring the CD as the premier gift for their annual fund raising drive. The organization is delivering copies of the CD to kids in Iraq in donors' names. "Ruth's project couldn't be more timely or more needed by this war-torn world," said Potorti. "We're so glad to be able to share it."

"Love has unfathomable power," said Mendelson. "The expression of which can change the course of a child's life forever. Words can create and words can destroy. Through openhearted communication, a youth can transform hatred into love, terrorism into positive leadership. We need to listen to what these kids have to say."

"Well Wishes and Blessings" is the premiere initiative 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."