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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays June 15, 2004

Almost one year after the capture of Saddam Hussein, the hard lessons of liberation are coming into sharper relief. For many Iraqis, euphoria over the fall of the tyrant has decayed into disappointment over the pace of reconstruction. Eagerness to embrace long suppressed freedoms has become impatience over half-measures and interim organizations that look and act more Western than Iraqi. Welcomed liberators are now viewed in some quarters as resented occupiers. Why?

In the course of five visits to post-Saddam Iraq, we asked the same questions. Four portions those visits were sponsored by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), allowing us to travel outside the military umbrella that can shield Members of Congress from useful information not included in the official briefing slides. Across Iraq, we saw families and communities celebrating weddings, building schools and trying to weave the fabric of a civil society from disparate, often conflicting, ethnic, religious and political threads. We also saw a rigid, centralized Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) at times succumbing to hubris and condescension in dealing with the sovereign people it was created to serve. Many Iraqis noticed.

In that hostile terrain, our accomplishments wither quickly while our errors are grotesquely magnified. Conveying American good intentions through the cacophony of competing tribal, religious and factional voices requires patience and a cultural sensitivity that were apparently not part of the original war plan. So today we ask: What have we learned about how a newly sovereign Iraq will perceive U.S. words and actions? How do we reach the Iraqi people?

Our previous oversight of post-war humanitarian assistance and public diplomacy in Iraq pointed to the need for clarity, persistence and humility in that unforgiving, volatile part of the world. The perceived dissonance between American rhetoric and actions breeds mistrust at home and in Iraq about why we are there and how long we will stay. The same lack of strategic clarity causes others to doubt our will to see the mission through. And when we forget why we're there, when we forget it's their revolution not ours, we allow ourselves to be portrayed as arrogant agents of empire rather than as trustees of noble ideals.

Today we welcome three panels of distinguished witnesses who bring first-hand experience and invaluable expertise to our continuing oversight of U.S. efforts to reach the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. We asked for their insights and analyses of U.S. efforts to secure, stabilize, rebuild and foster civil discourse and democracy in post-Saddam Iraq.

We very much appreciate the participation of Ms. Rend al-Rahim Francke, the Iraqi Representative to the United States. She brings a unique perspective to these important issues. We look forward to her testimony and that of all our witnesses.