



November 12, 2012

Dear Colleagues:

Having enjoyed a very productive visit to Iraq recently, I would like to share some reflections on recruiting Iraqi students. October 12-17, 2012, I participated in the Iraq fair, sponsored by the Higher Committee on Education Development in Iraq (HCED) under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister. Among the Iraqi government's hopes and solutions for the country's woes are to have highly educated citizens with international credentials and experience. The scholarship program is designed for such a purpose.

On this trip, each participating institution received 30 graduate students (a first for me to come from a fair with 30 applications in hand). Currently, over 1,000 Iraqi students have been awarded scholarships, and this number is going to increase to more than 2,000 when HCED combines efforts with the Ministry of Education for next year's placement. Further, more than 50 US institutions have already entered into conditional admission agreements with HCED and are training Iraqi students on their campuses.

Prior to departure for Iraq, security loomed large on my mind. Given the press reports, naturally I was hesitant and apprehensive about traveling to Iraq. Once there and because this program was under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office, I realized how carefully everything was planned and orchestrated. Proactive and protective of its guests, HCED received each participating institutional representative with extreme attention to his/her security by providing military escorts from the airport to the hotel in the Green Zone and back to the airport upon the conclusion of the fair. Having recruited students in dozens of countries over the past three decades, I have never felt as secure in a hotel or in a country anywhere in the world as I did on this trip. If you intend to participate in the Iraqi fair next year, I hope the issue of security will not deter you from participating.

I must also mention that the success of this fair is mainly due to the Head of HCED, Dr. Zuhair Humadi and his very able colleagues. Dr. completed his higher education in the U.S. and worked for several decades as an educational advisor and cultural attaché in Washington, D.C. before returning to Iraq. I have always referred to him as a "walking encyclopedia" on American higher education because of his close and personal experience with many institutions of higher education in the U.S. His very caring and qualified advisors and counselors with advanced degrees and international experience bring genuine commitment to the office, the process, and the success of the program. Having observed the placement process of well-known agencies in Washington, New York and Boston, I do not think any placement institution can match the alacrity, efficiency, forethought and knowledge of the HCED staff. I must also add that this has been the only educational fair in which I met the most highly educated, serious students with scholarships in hand, ready to be enrolled.

I hope this brief report gives you an overview of the HCED operation in case you are considering participating in next year's fair for highly qualified, motivated and excellent graduate students.

Sincerely,

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