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**P.O.V.'s "My Country, My Country" Examines U.S. Project to Implement
Democracy in Iraq, Through the Eyes of a Sunni Doctor
Wednesday, Oct. 25 on PBS**

Award-winning Filmmaker Gains Unprecedented Access to Sunni Community and U.S. Military
In Lead-Up to Iraqi Elections

A Co-Production of Praxis Films, Inc. and ITVS, in Association with American Documentary | P.O.V.

"Poitras exposes the emotional toll of occupation on Iraqis and American soldiers alike."

– Jeannette Catsoulis, The New York Times

"Laura Poitras has seen deeper into the tragedy of Iraq than any other filmmaker. She has created an epic story of ordinary life in extraordinary times. It is hard to imagine there will be a better film about this war." – George Packer, The New Yorker

"... the definitive non-fiction film about the U.S. occupation of Iraq. . . . it is indispensable, heartbreaking, and ferociously wise. . . . the most valuable piece of film to emerge about the war in all of its three years." – Michael Atkinson, The Village Voice

Is it possible to conduct democratic elections in a war zone? Can a foreign military force bring Western-style democracy to the Muslim world? For U.S. military and diplomatic planners in Iraq, the answer to both questions has been a resolute "yes." For Iraqis, these contradictions have led to tragic consequences as political uncertainty and mounting violence dominate daily life more than three years after the U.S. invasion.

The state of democracy, both Iraq's and the United States,' is the focus of Laura Poitras' new documentary, **My Country, My Country**, an unforgettable journey into the heart of war-ravaged Iraq in the months leading up to the January 2005 elections. Symbolized by fingers marked with purple ink, the 2005 elections posed challenges to all sides of the debate about the war. Despite death threats from terrorists, voter turnout in Iraq was higher than in the U.S., and in spite of claims that the elections were an Iraqi process, U.S. military planners oversaw most aspects of the elections.

My Country, My Country has its national broadcast premiere **Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2006** at a special time of 9 p.m. on PBS, concluding the 19th season of public television's groundbreaking P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Working and traveling alone in Iraq during a time when few Western journalists ventured from their compounds and bodyguards, filmmaker Laura Poitras captures the war and the elections from the inside. Her protagonist is Dr. Riyadh (last name withheld for security reasons), an Iraqi doctor,

father of six, devout Sunni Muslim, and political candidate in Iraq's largest Sunni political party, the Iraqi Islamic Party. An outspoken critic of the U.S. occupation, he is equally passionate about building democracy in Iraq.

Poitras, whose Peabody Award-winning **Flag Wars** (made with Linda Goode Bryant) kicked off the 2003 season of P.O.V., spent eight months in Iraq, from June 2004 to February 2005, filming **My Country, My Country**. (The title comes from the Iraqi National Anthem.) Inspired by a *New Yorker* article written by George Packer about the first months of the war ("War After the War"), she set out to make a documentary that would capture the war from the perspective of the people whose lives were on the line.

With no contacts in Iraq, Poitras sent an email to the U.S. military requesting access to film the military's national-building efforts in Iraq. After reviewing **Flag Wars**, a two-star general from the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs Command gave permission to Poitras. The military allowed her unusual rein to film inside the heavily fortified "Green Zone," the brains of the U.S. occupation.

Once in Iraq, Poitras broadened her scope. She met Dr. Riyadh at Abu Ghraib prison while he was conducting an inspection two months after the abuse photographs were made public. "When I met Dr. Riyadh, I knew immediately he would take me on a journey that would reveal the complexities and emotional toll of the war," she says. "Filming him as he spoke with detainees—children, old men, many held for over a year without charge—and negotiated on their behalf with U.S. soldiers, was heartbreaking."

Dr. Riyadh practices medicine at a free clinic in the volatile anti-American Sunni neighborhood of Adhamiya in Baghdad. Born and raised in Adhamiya, he is a respected leader there. In a country ruled by tribal bonds and loyalties, local residents turn to him for help in all areas of their lives. He not only ministers to their physical illnesses but tries to intercede on their behalf. He leads an inspection of Abu Ghraib, where Adhamiya residents have been taken; he negotiates with American military officers over the fate of Fallujah refugees, and he helps a relative arrange ransom for a kidnapped son.

Dr. Riyadh firmly believes in democracy, but one founded in Islamic beliefs. He argues that secular democracies have not achieved justice. Imprisoned by Saddam Hussein for his criticism of the Baathist Party, Dr. Riyadh is a member of the largest Sunni religious political party, the Iraqi Islamic Party. Determined to help his people, he decides to be a candidate on the party's ticket for Baghdad Provincial Council.

My Country, My Country finds the pulse of a country thrown violently into chaos. On the streets and roads of Iraq, a constant background noise of helicopters, explosions, gunfire, TV reports of suicide bombings and fractious opinions fill daily life. From ebullient Kurdish Peshmerga militia who celebrate their new autonomy—foreshadowing civil war—to workers at voter-registration sites who seem as fearful as hopeful, to the tumultuous headquarters of the Sunni-dominated Iraqi Islamic Party, Poitras discovers a far more precarious and tragic situation than imagined in debates about the war. On the ground, the stakes are life and death. U.S. military trainers brief American soldiers about the growing anti-American sentiment. And many Iraqis, for all their differences, clearly share one common reality: they are as afraid of U.S. soldiers as they are of suicide bombers.

For Dr. Riyadh the dangers come from all sides. As a moderate who supports civil—not armed—resistance, he is at risk from terrorists who want the political process to fail. As a vocal critic of the U.S. occupation—what he calls "civil resistance"—he is on the C.I.A.'s watch list as "anti-American." Dr. Riyadh's situation and the bleak prospects of a unified Iraq are captured in **My Country, My Country's** intimate, haunting portrait of Riyadh's family life. His wife and grown children take delight

in teasing him about his political activities, all the while discussing with gallows humor whether or not they will vote.

With **My Country, My Country**, director/cinematographer Laura Poitras creates what several scholars and critics have called the definitive documentary about the war in Iraq. “Although the film focuses on the January 2005 elections, it is a broader story about U.S. foreign policy post-9/11,” she says. “The use of pre-emptive military force and the goal of implementing democracy in the Middle East mark a radical shift in U.S. policy and world politics. I felt compelled to document this war and its consequences.”

“Since completing **My Country, My Country**, I’ve been placed on the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) watch list,” explains Poitras. “Returning to the U.S. in August 2006 after a screening in Europe, I was detained at two airports. In Vienna, I was escorted out of the terminal to a police inspection area and was notified by security that my ‘threat rating’ was the highest the Department of Homeland Security assigns,” she says. “Upon arrival at JFK airport, I was yet again escorted by security to a holding area until the DHS authorized my entrance into the United States.”

Musical Soundtrack:

My Country, My Country features an original music score by world-renowned Iraqi singer/composer Kadhum Al Sahir, the top-selling singer in the Arab world today. Exiled from Iraq since the 1990’s—first by Saddam Hussein, now by the security situation—Al Sahir composed “Oh My Country” for the film after Poitras approached him backstage at a rare concert appearance in Detroit.

Funding for **My Country, My Country** was provided ITVS, the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund, P.O.V. | American Documentary, Inc., the Wellspring Foundation, the Robert and Joyce Menschel Family Foundation, and the Appleman Foundation.

About the filmmakers:

Laura Poitras

Director/Producer/Cinematographer/Editor

Laura Poitras received a Peabody Award for her last documentary, **Flag Wars** (2003), which she co-directed, produced, and shot. **Flag Wars**, a documentary about gentrification in Columbus, Ohio, received numerous other awards, including Best Documentary at the 2003 South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival and Seattle Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and the Filmmaker Award at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. **Flag Wars** launched the 2003 P.O.V. series on PBS and was nominated for both a 2004 Independent Spirit Award and a 2004 Emmy Award.

Poitras' other films include **Oh say can you see...** (2003) and **Exact Fantasy** (1995). She resides in New York City.

Jocelyn Glatzer

Producer

Jocelyn Glatzer has directed, produced and edited numerous documentary films including **The Flute Player**, about a survivor of Cambodia's genocide, which had its national broadcast premiere on P.O.V. in 2003, and won numerous awards including an Audience Award for Documentary First Feature at SXSW (2003) and a CINE Golden Eagle Award. It was also an Emmy Award nominee for outstanding achievement in Arts and Cultural Programming. She directed / produced **ART2000**, about Hillary Rodham Clinton's most successful senatorial-race fundraiser, has worked at Maysles Films and on two Emmy-nominated dance programs for PBS's **Great Performances** series. A former New Yorker, she now resides in Boston.

Erez Laufer
Editor

Erez Laufer has worked on numerous projects with renowned documentary filmmakers Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker, including the Oscar-nominated **The War Room**, and **Startup.com**. He directed **Mike Brant - Laisse moi t'aime**, which premiered at the Cannes International Film Festival and won the 2002 Israeli Academy Award for Best Documentary. He recently completed his new documentary, **The Darien Dilemma**, which premiered at DocAviv in Israel in 2006.

Credits:

Director/Cinematographer: Laura Poitras
Producers: Laura Poitras, Jocelyn Glatzer
Music: Kadhum Al Sahir
Editors: Erez Laufer, Laura Poitras
Co-Producer: Aliza Kaplan
Associate Producer: Rosie Bsheer
Executive Producer for ITVS: Sally Jo Fifer
Executive Producer for P.O.V.: Cara Mertes

Running Time: 86:46

Festivals:

- Berlin International Film Festival – World Premiere, February 2006
- South by Southwest (SxSW) Film Festival, Austin – U.S. Premiere, March 2006
- New Directors/New Films, New York, April 2006
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, April 2006

Co-Producers:



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the PBS series Independent Lens. ITVS was established by an historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped to revitalize the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 230 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

Media Sponsor:



TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

