

Summer of Peace™ Summit 2013

“Restorative Justice: From Baghdad - Love, Make World Go Round” with Stephan Said (Jun 27)

[0:00:00]

Philip:

Hello everyone and welcome back to the Summer of Peace, a celebration of our common humanity. This is Philip Hellmich, the director of peace for The Shift Network and it is a delight to welcome you to just an incredible session From Baghdad Love Make World Go Round. Before I introduce our special guest, I would like to invite you all to join us on social media for the Summer of Peace this year. So please like us on Facebook. Search for Summer of Peace and look for our logo or you can go straight to [Facebook.com/SummerOfPeaceShift](https://www.facebook.com/SummerOfPeaceShift), that's [Facebook.com/SummerOfPeaceShift](https://www.facebook.com/SummerOfPeaceShift). We welcome comments, shares and engagement and look forward to seeing you there. Then also please follow us on Twitter. You can search for [@PeaceSummit](https://twitter.com/PeaceSummit) or just look us up on [Twitter.com/PeaceSummit](https://twitter.com/PeaceSummit). We love retweets and your images of the weekly call to actions. This call will be played back later today at 5:30 Pacific Time and that will be a recording of this conversation and then also it is going to be available indefinitely for free online to listen also.

So now, I would like to introduce a special guest, Stephan Said previously also known as Stephan Smith. Stephan Said is an internationally acclaimed musician, writer, and activist who has been called “this generation’s Woody Guthrie” by Billboard Magazine and he’s favorably compared to Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Bob Marley in publications such as the New York Times, Billboard Magazine, BBC, NPR and so forth.

Stephan is an Iraqi-American with immediate family in Baghdad and Mosul and a diverse heritage that combines Christianity and Islam. He is a prominent voice for interfaith dialogue, peace, and global justice. His song “The Bell” was “the first major song against the war in Iraq” and hailed as “the antiwar anthem of this generation.” Stephan pioneered the use of the internet to distribute mp3’s and music videos for social causes on a mass scale, and his essays on music and global affairs have appeared in The San Francisco Chronicle, The Progressive Magazine, CounterPunch, Sing Out!, and on and on and on.

More importantly, Stephan in my experience in the conversations with Stephan over the last several months, he’s somebody who just really embodies the positive aspect of humanity and as activists and actively

seeks out the light of humanity in difficult situations. So Stephan, welcome to the Summer of Peace and thank you for being with us.

Stephan: Thanks for having me. I'm really happy to be here and thanks for the big introduction and bio.

Philip: Yeah.

Stephan: I'm really pleased to be here and speak with you.

Philip: Yay, wonderful, Stephan. Well let's just dive in, Stephan. Why, I mean there's a lot of background we can do but I just want to just jump in, what inspired you to go Baghdad and had you been there in the recent years? What inspired you to go?

Stephan: You know, I'm half-Iraqi as you said and I have immediate family there in Mosul. But before this I've never gone. This is finally my first time going despite having my entire life and career been largely driven or been very obviously driven by my identity as somebody who was caught between both sides of our generation's biggest conflict. So it was a very emotional trip but it's been a trip that I've dreamt of making for my entire life and certainly one with lots of people and new shows and so forth that even approached me about doing after The Bell became the anti-war song after 9/11.

So yeah, it was a long planned thing but when it happened, it happened very quickly. It was my suggestion. I had been working on developing a television show that would go like a reality TV show called Difrent after the website that I've launched a couple of years ago. We would go to a different city each episode and meet young change makers sort of the frontline everywhere we would go. One person was like wow, this is an amazing idea, let's start with you going someplace and if you're going to someplace it's you finally making your trip to Iraq, you know.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: So there it was. I was going and in less than one month time we recorded the single. I got numerous groups, unbelievable enthusiasm. I mean literally hundreds of people I met online in the course of two weeks before going. And landed there just been set to work with all these amazing, brilliant young people. Yeah.

[0:05:17]

Philip: So you've been planning this trip for a long time but then it just suddenly came about and I remember talking with you just a few days before the trip and we were having the obvious questions what about security risk and so forth. Could you reflect back what was going through your mind just before the trip in terms of this passion to go and also balancing if there's any security risk and then just what you were anticipating before you got there?

Stephan: Yeah. Obviously, going in any place that's a warzone like Baghdad or maybe Mogadishu with it like the most dangerous cities on the planet they say right now. I hate to even myself say that because I hate to typecast places. You know, there's a truck going by or a street cleaner so give me a second.

Philip: Sure. Sure.

Stephan: But yeah, so I obviously had security concerns but I didn't allow them to really overpower any of my thought .I was so busy with such little time to make the plans and meeting so many wonderful people that I didn't really have time to think about it.

But of course one thing though that I did know and practically speaking is that I chose to and knew that I had to work with an all-Iraqi team. I didn't take a single person with me from the States. Obviously there's lots of filmmakers or journalists that would love to go on a trip like that but I knew that to get the story, I was going to tell the story of Iraqis, not the story of people outside of the region and their opinions of what many think was the biggest foreign policy **[0:07:06] [Indiscernible] in US history, you know?**

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: That's the story the whole world has been hearing for ten years and I was there obviously just after and over the 10th anniversary of the invasion when all the international press was recapping the destruction. I was going in to tell their story and to do that I had to work with them and that brought security to go with it. I was never without local Baghdadis. My cameramen were Baghdadis, my driver, my organizers, everybody. So it meant that I was really inside the community. I was working with them as opposed to reporting on them. Time and again, they would tell me like wow, nobody has ever done this because they're always coming here to report on us not to tell our story, not to work with us. So I think that helped with the enthusiasm as well as an ability to get inside the

community and do something amazing with them and as well as obviously my security.

Philip: Right, right, right.

Stephan: So.

Philip: Yeah. So tell me a little bit about those moments when the plane is landing and then the doors opening. Tell us what your experience was at that time.

Stephan: I mean I was so excited, I can't tell you. Of course, I was worried because I knew there were several checkpoints just to get into the city but mostly I was just – you know, my whole family is there. I have seen their photographs, spoken to my aunts and everybody on the phone, gotten packages with dates grown in my aunt's backyard, you know. I think the emotional value of just like wow, I'm going home finally after of all of this was palpable, right. There's no way that wasn't just – I was over brimming with a positive kind of excitement that was much more powerful than any fear or something I can have.

Philip: Beautiful.

Stephan: I think yeah, so and other than that, look I had two weeks there and a week in Baghdad to do something that was monstrous in its ambition. I had so much on my mind. You know, I left the airport and there was a meeting not in a one hour after, I arrived already at the Palestine hotel with a dozen young people that I had never met who were signed on to help from several peace groups, cultural groups in Iraq already one hour after I arrived so there was no time for reflection. My mind was preoccupied.

Philip: Tell me about some of the people you met and just your impressions and your experience of working with some of your friends and colleagues.

[0:10:03]

Stephan: Well look I don't know what to say except for that I don't think I've ever met such resilient people. You know, we often think of the image of like the phoenix rising from the ashes, but it really couldn't be more true. You see this also and I often in my writings in advance of the Egyptian revolution Arab Spring when I was releasing songs and writing to help with that making the comparison to the civil rights movement and why it had to begin in the south. And why I believe that this nascent global

nonviolent movement for equality and peace that's growing through all this individually manifest protest movements we see from Rio to Taksim in Turkey to **[0:10:54] [Indiscernible]** Square. Why it's been borne out of and must be borne out of in a sense Middle East and North Africa and why I thought Iraq more than any place would be the place I wanted to create this kind of a call and this music video with people on the ground. Because this is the place where the people have been bombed to maintain the social and economic order right now that we know is no longer tenable.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: This is ground zero and these people who've been through this are fully aware of this **[0:11:29] [Indiscernible]** and it's not a desire. It's a desperate need for them to create a more peaceful and equal world and that creates sort of an innate positivism, optimism out of desperation in many ways that you almost can't find anywhere else. I mean I got there and people that met me for the first time face to face were signed on to setting up and facilitating interviews across the city with numerous young change makers, organization heads, artists using their voices for peace and change, and committing to within two days' time having a flash mob video shoot for global unity happen in a public park in maybe the most dangerous city in the world. Imagine that. We're going to try to make something like that happen in two days' time. Meeting each other right now only just meeting on the internet but previously over the last couple of weeks, that's an amazing commitment.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: It speaks of better than I could I think just the facts of it that kind of enthusiasm how if we were to enable these kind of voices around the world and elevate their voices just what kind of change we could achieve so.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: Yeah.

Philip: I mean I've seen the video and we're distributing it. It's on the Summer of Peace Facebook page right now. I mean it's such a powerfully moving video. I mean you show the smiles in the faces of just some beautiful people there in Baghdad. I mean tell me just a little bit more about that process when you're making that video and people's responses,

interactions and what was going through your heart and mind during the making of the video.

Stephan:

Well I was blown away to be honest with you because I was seeing –you know, the whole video just so you know, is all the interactions that you see with other people, it is a documentary of a change happening in real time. None of it is staged, right. It's not a music video in the sense that we had a million dollars, we went over there, we hired people to make signs for unity and we had a budget for it. No.

I was invited to all these organizations to be with youth that we were out in the Abu Nawas Park on the Tigris River. I had numerous volunteers and we just told people hey, the world needs a great call for unity and there could be no better place for it to rise from than from here and people were board. So was just on that one-liner description the idea that we are the world for the global generation would rise from the streets of our biggest war, I was at that point other than just putting out as much energy as I could on the spot to engage people, I was just witnessing it catch fire.

So after the first ten, fifteen people had made their signs and stood up with them like you see in a semi-circle at one point in the video, all the other people were people who just saw it happening and flocked towards us and said I want to be a part of this and started making their signs. Children surrounding me, the children dancing with me and doing the hand motions with me, that was an unplanned spontaneous combustion. They were a gang of boys that saw the cameras, saw me, saw everybody writing the signs, ran up and they'd heard my name and they're like Mr. Stephan, Mr. Stephan will you sing for us, will you sing for us and I was like you guys want to be in a music video for global unity and they were like yes. They lined up and it was shot. It was done ten minutes later. It was that kind of amazing combustion.

[0:15:37]

So I was blown away and a couple of times in tears, you know?

Philip:

Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan:

Seeing some of the things that they wrote. Like one of the musicians in the youth orchestra a violinist, he holds the sign that says freedom tastes so expensive. You can imagine I'm sitting there and this is Good Friday no less and four bombs are going off across Baghdad while we're filming this. Like the most people died in Baghdad I think in three years on the day that most of this was shot. You can imagine you see some 18-year-

old boy write such a profound statement, it's just amazing. Yeah. Amazing people.

Philip: Yeah. Yeah. Wow and while you're there with these beautiful, could you hear the bombs going off and still this celebration is going on or was it too far --

Stephan: You know, you can hear things but you don't know necessarily what it is in the distance. But it's also just it's part of the daily life and the fabric of their existence. I mean life just goes on. I wrote a piece in the progressive that came out this past week when we put the video up describing it. And just how when we went from the youth orchestra, which is on one side of the river, on the east side of the river in Mosul then back over to shoot the flash mob style video with people outside in the park. Because of the bombs going off, the security at the checkpoints was increased. It took us two hours to go about four miles to get back into the other part of the city.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: Meaning that we were two hours late for our own video shoot where we had invited volunteers and people from organizations, right?

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: This was nothing to them. They're used to everything being two, three, four hours late, five hours late and still being there, still waiting, still every single day of their lives. Every appointment, every moment of their daily life is subject to potential drastic shift and they just deal with it every day. So they were still waiting. You know, we got there and I was like, oh my god, they're all going to be gone and there they were, you know, a dozen, somewhere between 17 and 28-year-old Iraqi youth who were parts of Peace One Day and World Peace Foundation and Iraqi Culture Day and TEDx Baghdad and numerous other groups like this. There they are waiting to try to do something that they hope will impact the world and have their voices be heard.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: Really awesome.

Philip: And tell me about how you felt like music, what was the role of music in this whole dynamic?

Stephan: I think you really see what an agent for change it can be when it's applied in this way because while I was there, the film people also all these young change makers interviewing them and seeing their work for this pilot television show for Difrent, it was the music video and that created a means for mass collaboration. It gave everybody something that everybody could be a part of and we're seeing this now because we're getting images from Maori children in New Zealand that just sent me images yesterday of where they had done a program with it. You know, letters from people in Rio who were just part of the protest saying wow, we want to do something with this and be a part. It creates a way that people can engage and come together culturally to amplify a movement.

So it's a powerful tool. I guess I could probably say in a number of ways not just in the way that it brought people together like oh, come on this day for this shoot and/or come and help us organize this, but everybody then got to be in the video and had their own statement. So you get to like hear – it enables individual voices and organizations voices to be heard but then it's perpetual. It doesn't disappear the next day like the actual event when we brought all these maybe hundreds of people came together to actually shoot the video. Now it's out there and it's created this global feedback loop, which is only growing as we speak in an organic way, right?

[0:20:37]

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: And then people back in Iraq are seeing that oh my gosh, you know, when Al Arabiya put a big article up about it two days ago on the front page of their culture section. Or that people back in Iraq or anywhere in the world see or take a photograph with me with the name of the song or children in New Zealand, Maori children. All of this is going back to the people in Iraq and to everybody that's already seen it going wow, this is giving me hope. This is something that's growing and it's reaffirming my belief that we actually could do something. My hope is that just grows. My hope is it grows and gets bigger and bigger until ideally thousands, tens of thousands of people have engaged.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum. Let's talk about the obvious here for a second, Stephan. The obvious is a part of your innate knowing or trust in just humanity and the celebration of humanity even whether it's Baghdad or places where I've been like Sierra Leone or elsewhere. Just talk about that in –because I mean you trusted your intuition that you were going to

go and be well received. I mean I'm assuming that. Talk about just this part of yourself.

Stephan: Well there's so many ways I could approach it, but I know from myself being raised both American and Iraqi. My mother's family is from Austria and she grew up during World War II and through the holocaust and seeing firsthand and just having dealt with this generations of refugees in my own family from war after war and particularly this being the most formative thing in my life. It was clear to me and I believe for many of us in our generation that the only way to stop war now is to actually make that shift to a more equal way for all of us living together with each other in our planet. That it's not simply a matter of peace, it's actually an entire philosophical and social organizational shift that's needed.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: We knew this. That was the reason I mean my entire life has been dedicated to building the global justice movement in Seattle, the global anti-war movement, what became the Arab Spring. But I see these all as being parts of what I believe now has to happen and that is that we shift from a politics of opposition to one of proposition to create this nonviolent movement for a more equitable society.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: I say that in terms of positivism because I know that that perspective from me was born out of the desperation of being an American in an era when my own country is bombing my family in the place where I'm from, you know?

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: And trying to stop it and realizing that this is a war of globalization. It was never about oil, it wasn't about dictatorships or anything. It is the defining war of the global era in which the unsustainability of the global economy was attempted to be maintained by resting control of an order that was falling that was inevitably out of relevance or validity.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: So, you know, for me the only way to approach that is to be positive. I can't go into a place in the world and you can look at the success or more of the failures of the recent movements if it's in Rio or Taksim or Tahrir

Square in Occupy and so forth. What's needed is to make that shift from let's say the busboy in the civil rights era to when it actually shifted to becoming hey, we're a movement demanding something that is innately human that all of us know should be our due right and we know that it's time for.

[0:25:07]

At that point in time, a movement and an idea becomes something that's inarguable. Nobody can say no to it because it is innately true and it is innately good. When I went to Iraq and I hope in going further in developing this reality TV show going through the front lines in cities around the world to meet and work with young people who are spreading hope amidst the most challenging circumstances. That is sort of my governing perspective is that we're going there with an idea that is so beautiful that nobody will say no to it. Indeed in Iraq that was the case. I mean if I had been trying to be anti-war as opposed to elevate this gorgeous message of global unity transcending all of these arguments, I would have never succeeded. It was because it was I believe an unabridged positivism that made it caught on. I don't think I could have entered society and have created what did happen would have happened had it been any other way.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: That's a long description but I hope that kind of gives the whole perspective on it.

Philip: Well it does. I mean there's a few things. I mean there's the personal and I think there's a trend that's kind of emerging. I want to stay with the personal and then go to like the global trend on this. I mean so just in a family having survived World War II and then your own country bombing your family in Iraq, I mean that inner alchemical process, I mean those are pretty powerful life experiences, Stephan. And to come out focused on the positive is... Tell me just a little bit more about your own process of like how you went from – I mean was there ever any temptation to go down the path of anger or was it just like an obvious thing or was it a process over a few years that you came to this focus?

Stephan: Some of it is my upbringing, but I've pretty much had that focus my whole life but my ability to be true to it or truer and truer to it and more and more focused on the light let's say has increased with age and with experience and maturity for sure without a doubt. But I did always resist sort of anger since I was young. Now we know that that particularly in the modern society that truth as I would call it because the light and truth

these are the same things on a philosophical level like we're speaking. It's not the sound bite and it's not what's usually invested in marketing terms or in pop culture terms. You know it'd be much easier to be dip toe some typical right wing or left wing message against the other to get funding.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: We see this all the time. I mean but I always shied away from that. I shied away from because I love many conservatives and liberals side by side almost. I know firsthand from my own family that they all want peace and they all believe in the dream of a world in which we live equally with each other. So I'm looking to communicate with people across all boundaries on that level. Yes, some of that does come very definitely from the personal anguish I think and desperation. It's been a very hard life and I've been censored for standing up for peace, you know.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: I've been blacklisted after 9/11 for putting out a song that was a beautiful song for peace and unable to get gigs even with progressive artists because they were afraid of the sales backlash against them if they were associated with me after 9/11.

Philip: Uh-hum. Okay.

Stephan: So I'm very intimate –you know, all of this while I'm thinking I'm just trying to stop an unnecessary war and lots of people in my family from going through this again. But I'm having trouble being heard even in the US because even progressives are afraid of being associated with it.

[0:30:03]

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: So it becomes a very highly personal struggle and one that I think on a daily basis I just learn to meditate and internalize in such a way as to transform it into energy for good as opposed to an oppositional response.

Philip: Right, okay, okay. This really gets to the heart quite a bit, Stephan, quite a bit to the heart of I mean first of all just thank you for sharing your personal story. It's something that it sounds like this essence that's expressing out for the positive, you said that that's what people respond to. That there's no way, that people could not say no to it.

Stephan: Yeah. Hello?

Philip: Yeah. Stephan, can you hear me? Stephan? Hello?

Stephan: Hello?

Philip: Hello? Can you hear me? Hello?

Stephan: Are you there? Yeah, I'm here.

Philip: Yeah. Stephan, can you hear me?

Stephan: Yes, I can.

Philip: Okay, great, okay excuse me. I just want to stay with this because this is such an important part. I mean I've seen this having lived and worked in Sierra Leone, lived there before the war and gone back after the war and just that the process of going through the heartbreak and then coming into a place of expressing the positive. Would you say in your experience it sounds like that's the positive of something that people do respond to in an organic way. I mean it sounds like the young people in Baghdad just naturally lit up around this positive energy. Do you see this as a trend that's growing around the world in terms of activism today being a different type of activism than maybe 30 years ago?

Stephan: I would hope that it is but I would almost caution against it. I most personally wouldn't focus on it because I would only want to focus on creating that and being as much that positive energy rather than to care whether or not the trend is happening or not and it's wise. The reason I say that I think is because in my lifetime, I have felt like it was time for this jump to this positive, very Gandhian sort of MLK, satyagraha kind of level of international nonviolent movement for equality my entire life. I've thought that and hoped that many of my even closest friends were of the same mind in helping to organize big global protests and local protests over the last 10, 15 years.

So you know, what I mean by that is I think I maybe thought that it was a trend five years ago and ten years ago and I do see where in the frustration of the lack of sustainability of even Rio was out of the newspapers again, right? It was everything four days ago or six days ago. Previously Taksim, before that Occupy and Syntagma and Tahrir. They're all out of the newspapers, which tells you well all these people many of

them I've worked with over the last several years organizing, there is a conversation constantly oh we need to but it doesn't happen unless we actually steward it and make it happen. We can't wait for or assume that some vision, or a beautiful vision that maybe as we all intuitively know needs to happen that it's somehow going to materialize.

I think going to Iraq made that clear to me than ever before and being back from Iraq even more so. I mean I know that what we did there and just seeing it grow organically is an amazing story. But at the same time I see how mainstream media maybe only ones to pay attention to something so powerful that's already having much more impact than many things in the news today. But simply because it's just not what they're used to focusing on.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: The trends that people focus on are what's getting a million hits, not what's having deep impact. A million hits doesn't mean anything is having impact. So great, YouTube video got seen 50 million times, how many people were moved to actually do something substantive to create a different world from that?

[0:35:22]

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: One? Maybe none? Whereas a YouTube video might get 1000 hits but have united physically tens of thousands of people, many of whom are going to remember this for the rest of their lives and be informed by a sense of hope and positivism, right?

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: So I say this about trends, you know, it's up to us to make it. I don't think that it will be a trend until it's already happened.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: So...

Philip: Talk about your own resilience in this because I mean you've been working for years and years and what feeds you to keep on keeping on and then what's next for you after the video?

Stephan: Well I think again the personal is an endless, my personal heritage is an endless reserve of inspiration. I live with it every day. I live with the reality of my identity and what it means in terms of the last 30 years of history. But more than ever, I just have to say you know, I've gotten older and wiser. I have the support of an amazing companion wife who helps me on a daily basis. But more than ever I wake up in the morning and I meditate. I stay through it. I keep my energy focused on it and whereas I maybe use to be more easily affected by outside opinions or trends so to speak in terms of against the type of work that I'm trying to do. I'm not moved by them anymore. I've learned to just funnel energy more and more directly into the next thing necessary to take this vision, this message of peace and equality and systemic change globally for the next step.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: I think I've just gotten more mature and I've had the support to do it too. I've been lucky.

Philip: Tell us a little bit about some of your mentors and how they've played a role in your development?

Stephan: I lucked out on mentors, you know. I mean I came to New York City and was groomed to be a mega pop star. But I was singing about global unity in the mid late '90s and I have kind of taken under wing both by poet Allen Ginsberg who is pretty much the key person, the link for the Beat movement to even exist. Then likewise when Allen died Pete Seeger who inarguably was a link without whom many aspects of the civil rights movement and certainly the folk and rock and roll revolutions would not have happened.

Both of them being very close to me and advising me on a regular basis and getting to do events and shows and tours with them when I was in my early 20s. I just was given not only amazingly powerful support for my work and an understanding of its role in the global context because both Pete and Allen knew and know in the sense, case of Pete where the world is going. You know, this idea that one day we should live equally together, this is a vision that's been around for thousands of years and it's not new as you know and I know that this is where people know we need to go. It didn't just occur in the last 20 years. It's been occurring to people since Isaiah's time, right?

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: So they knew this and they understood and that and we're able to foster that in me. But moreover really give me an understanding of and this is why I'm developing this television show to go and empower young voices around the world and went to Iraq to make this. They understood the power of enabling other voices and they were able to do so in a way that created movement.

[0:40:17]

We haven't seen this in my generation. My generation has been so commercialized not just by their culture but now they themselves have become in many ways commercial in their desires. Look at much of the baby boomer culture of the '70s and '80s or '90s despite being millionaires, compared to Ginsberg or Seeger who were blacklisted for example, many of these young artists/activists have never created with all the money and influence and access that they have, movements in the way that these two people I was lucky to be mentored to by did. I realized that they taught me that there's a different way and that's just been a constant guiding force for me. I'm grateful. So I wouldn't be here honestly. After being blacklisted myself and the hardships that I went through, which I think are nothing compared to what people in Iraq or in Sierra Leone or really in the **[0:41:22] [Indiscernible]** go through on a daily basis. You know, their moral support really just helped me keep going and helped me believe in myself and the possibility.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum. So what's –

Stephan: So.

Philip: Go ahead, Stephan.

Stephan: That's it. It's really emotional. All these answers I'm trying to tell you as much as I can. On the other hand, there's a level at which talking about Iraq obviously it's highly emotional thing. It's something obviously I've shed millions of tears about.

Philip: Yeah. Tell us about meeting your family when you finally got to meet your family there.

Stephan: What can you say? I mean it's as though we've known each other our whole lives. I look just like them. You know, it's immediate family and our family features are very strong and pronounced. My aunts and I look more my uncle than his children do and they look more like my father than I do, you know? So it was just beautiful. Now I'm connected with

them and we stay connected all the time and hoping to go back as soon as possible to spend yet more time with them so.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: **[0:43:03] [Indiscernible]** together and... [Laughs] You know?

Philip: Uh-hum. It's beautiful and just out of curiosity, what language do you speak when you're with them?

Stephan: Really, I speak mostly English. I mean my Arabic is getting better but it's minimal and when I was there it was minimal. I'm a linguist. I speak numerous languages so I could follow conversations and I pick up very fast. But their English is better than my Arabic so I spoke largely in English with them and some bits of Arabic and then translating between us. You know, it varied and it would obviously depend on the subject matter.

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: But hopefully by the time I go back next, it will start to make the shift to being more Arabic than English.

Philip: And do you video Skype with them or just how do you keep in touch?

Stephan: We've done all of them. Video Skype happens. It's less easy than just phone calls, Vibering and things like that because the connections and the electricity are intermittent, you know?

Philip: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Stephan: The bandwidth is low in Iraq, you know? Cell phones are a much better way to reach people than landlines. Yeah. The power goes on and off and the internet's bandwidth is all taken up by everybody trying to get anything they can across in the little time that they've actually got it on.

Philip: Sure. It sounds like this has been deeply healing and transformative for you also. Just I mean tell me about that. I mean this must be such a powerful experience to meet your family and under these circumstances and I mean just tell me about that, what that feels like.

[0:45:16]

Stephan: I mean after the conversation you've led me through and my exhaustive answers?

Philip: Yeah.

Stephan: I'd have to say that that's the main point is it's been life changing. Even you know for me who's always had my – because of this identity had my focus on this and using my voice and music and so forth as an agent for change. Still this affirmed and reaffirmed and confirmed and empowered my will more than anything. I mean I feel calmer and more resolved and more patient than I've ever felt.

Philip: Uh-hum.

Stephan: Really having been there, I don't think that – I already know I'm never turning back, I'm changed for life and I know that. I think I'm going to be much more effective.

Philip: Wonderful.

Stephan: As a result of this.

Philip: Thank you, Stephan. Let's see if anyone who's listening to the call would like to share a comment or have a question just hit *2 on your phone. If you're in the webcast, please go ahead and type in something and we'll give people a minute here. Also, I just want to come back to one thing that when you mentioned that a lot of the young folks there in Baghdad were members of TEDx and Peace One Day and other initiatives. This is an aspect of the global interconnectedness. Can you touch upon that a little bit more? I mean just how they're participating in these different groups. Because this is a much different age now than it was prior to internet. So could you say a little bit more?

Stephan: Well certainly, I mean the ability to communicate and meet people and network with them we know has never been greater. Going there with this whole project was an applied study in a sense, right, at the same time of just how this works. I think I described it already having the song, having the mission to go and meet them and hear their voices were both so immediately appealing to them that one person introduced me to another introduced me to another and/or I wrote people that I didn't know that I found merely online and could see were involved in more than one group. You know, all just by networking and was able to reach out to them and got positive responses and now I'm friends probably for life with many of these people. I mean I hear from them on a practically daily basis online. It's phenomenal but I don't think that it would be

obviously without a vehicle, without a purpose. It's hard to make use of that, the technology to create community. But with on in this way yeah, it's phenomenal.

Philip: Nice. Nice. Actually, we don't have any questions yet. Just to remind people hit *2 if you like to – here we have one. We've got a couple now. Let's go to from Louisville, let's see, could you say your name please from Louisville, Kentucky?

Participant: Yes, [name withheld].

Philip: Hi, [Name withheld]. Please go ahead.

Participant: Thanks. Yeah. I have been watching Iraq situation for quite some time. I just heard that the UN Security Council voted to release Iraq from chapter 7. What do you think of the effect it will have for peace in Iraq with that development?

Stephan: I don't know enough about how it's going to – I mean I wasn't aware of that so I'm not sure. But my work there on the ground honestly was outside of the green zone amidst people day to day. You know, their perspective is as much as –you know, one of the people that I interviewed works with the UN there, my wife and I have done lots of work with groups there. You know, the day-to-day reality of the young people that I was working with, they're so focused on just what they have to do to make things better in an immediate way than much of the policy debate I think is far and beyond their daily concern.

[0:50:20]

I don't say this because I don't think it's going to be helpful. I think that anything is good. I mean I think if it's –you know, what can I say though? I mean the last two months while I was there, the most dangerous in Iraq in the last five years. It's the highest death count from civilians from bombings since 2008. I'm not sure what – it could be that this decision on chapter 7. Philip you should probably speak more on this because I'm not somebody that studies this law and chapter 7 and related things. But I just would imagine that it's – well Philip, maybe you want to speak to that. I just think I'm seeing much more on the day to day ground where the realities of a civil war are basically being on the brink or on the tip of everybody's tongue. So whether or not the status of it being **[0:51:34]** **[Indiscernible]** to peace breaches or so forth or aggression is upheld or not. It's internally without a question the country's probably in the worst shape it's been since long before 2003 and that was what everybody said to me.

Philip: Okay. All right. [Name withheld] thank you so much for that question. Yeah I don't have any insights on what the impact of the chapter 7 is either. I do know from experience that after there's been deadly violence usually from what I've seen in countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia just nobody wins. It rips apart infrastructures, opportunities for young people are schooled, introduced to a culture of violence and it's difficult to shift that. All right. [Name withheld] thank you so much for your question.

We have another one here and this is from I believe it's your friend, [name withheld]. [Name withheld], please go ahead.

Participant: Yes, hi Philip, hi, Stephan. I was going to bring that up. I've been listening all this morning to the live UN report of the lifting of the sanctions and people, the ambassadors and so on from Iraq stating, it seems to me that the importance of this is that they are now sovereign. That gives the people a certain inner wealth I think and at least hope for inner stability. That they have a stake in their own country now, you know, more so than before was what was being said and the commitment to peace that was stated this morning at the UN was phenomenal.

So at least I know that today many people around the world will be celebrating this sovereignty and freedom, possibility, stated internationally that this is their right, this is their status and they're now an international country in and of themselves. I can't help but think that that is going to spreading throughout the country as you can see now and the celebration of such that will ignite something that hasn't been there for a very long time. Certainly, that's my hope in following it for a long time. You know, we shall see, right. It's the shackles as they "said" had been lifted from the Iraqi people, which is just ecstatic. [Laughs] So I just wanted to say that and thanks to [name withheld] for bringing that as well.

Stephan, I wanted to say I love what you're saying about the trending. I see this as one of the most important shifts into this new, I don't know that we have words for it, this new wave that's crossing the planet that we no longer wait to see what the trend is and join in but we create that wave. We are the creators of that wave in our communities, within ourselves and even if just one person does that, it ignites so many things as you've seen in your work. It's creating that I don't even want to use the word trend but creating that wave that's so important that you're doing that everyone at The Shift Network is doing that we're all doing. So

I love your comment on that. It's no longer about quantity. Of course, it's always about quality. So thank you.

[0:55:36]

Stephan:

Thank you. I mean I'm reading up here on the chapter 7. I haven't that much about the immediate today. I mean I'm glad that that was brought up because I think in many ways it's also of the same spirit or the timing right. Like with the video coming out and being such a positive thing, I don't think it's an accident that it's happening shortly following the tenth anniversary of the invasion. I think that and I do think that at least it speaks to the same will for hope, right?

Participant:

Yes.

Stephan:

For the region. So I think inarguably it's a good thing and it's going to I'm sure give added hope to many people in the country. At the same time, I see that here they are in their weakest conditions almost ever internally and it's going to be a lot of work. But hopefully we can only hope that this adds to kind of the positive ground so.

Participant:

Well according to all the reports coming out previously, this was certainly today and as we all know it takes one speck of light to disperse the darkness.

Stephan:

Yup.

Participant:

Yeah, yeah. Thank you for your work.

Philip:

Yeah thank you [name withheld] and it's good to hear your voice and Stephan. We're at the top of the hour. Stephan, would you like to leave us with any words for our listeners and again people who are listening now or people who are going to listen to the recording later, any final words?

Stephan:

Well first thanks. I'm really happy, I wish that we could have more group conversation and maybe that's something we can do or keep going online either at The Shift Network or if people find me online or on Facebook or wherever. I mean I'm easy to find Stephan Said so. But I would just hope that in the last couple of days maybe **[0:57:52] [Indiscernible]** we've had since the video has been released there's been – we've been getting images of people all over the world that are responding and join to make a global expression of unity out of this. That's beautiful and wherever you

are if you want to or you want to and can take 15 seconds and make your own message and post it, send it to me.

Philip: Wait, is that on Facebook, Stephan?

Stephan: You can do it wherever you want. You can send me an email. You could post it on Facebook and tag me or tag Shift Network or the YouTube video itself and we'll find it.

Philip: Okay.

Stephan: So that'd be the main thing I would just say is engage and collaborate and hopefully we'll turn 1, 2, 3 sparks of light into thousands.

Philip: Wonderful. Well Stephan, I just want to thank you for first of all just who you are, how' you've responded to what life has brought you and your family and for bringing in this beautiful, beautiful song of global unity from Baghdad and connecting us with the people there. So thank you so much and thank you for being with us here on the Summer of Peace.

Stephan: Thanks. Right. It's an honor and I'm glad to speak with you and with everybody and thanks to [name withheld] and [name withheld] everybody that chimed in and I look forward to staying in touch.

Philip: Yes, wonderful. So for all people listening, thank you for being with us. We will continue our next call with Richard Miller tomorrow at the same time. He'll be talking about his work introducing yogic techniques of overcoming trauma to veterans and then also people homeless and bringing ancient wisdom to today. So wherever you are in the world, thank you for being with us. If it's morning, afternoon, evening or night have a peaceful rest of your time. All right. Thank you all. Bye-bye.

Stephan: Bye-bye.

[1:00:13] End of Audio

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