



Meeting the Civil Society Challenge in Iraq

For more information:

<http://iraq.alterinter.org>
www.alternatives.ca
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Alternatives International: Supporting Civil Society in Iraq

In Iraq the emergence of an autonomous civil society is one of the few positive features of the current situation. While the challenges are enormous, NGOs, civic associations, independent and responsible media as well as other civil society organizations (CSOs) have already proved their ability to play a positive role in the stabilization of the country. They have engaged with issues of Human Rights, poverty, marginalization and discrimination, by promoting universal and multi-ethnic values as the core of an Iraqi civic nationalism, and by consolidating the governance of the country by bringing citizens, their elected representatives and civil servants together to find practical solutions to concrete problems.

Since 2003, Alternatives Canada, member of Alternatives International, has been supporting many civil society organizations in Iraq. This led to the creation of the main national network called the Iraqi Democratic Future Network (IDFN). Activities of the IDFN are geared towards building and strengthening capacities of organizations active on issues of Human Rights, in particular minority and gender rights.

The overarching goal of the program is to work towards achieving a more stable and democratic Iraq based on a dynamic civil society constructively engaged with elected representatives, civil servants, traditional and religious leaders and the private sector, in order to promote Human Rights, gender equality, underpinned by a pluralist and responsible media.

More specifically, the program "Meeting the Civil Society Challenge: 2009-2010" is a joint initiative bringing together Iraqi, Canadian and European organizations under the Alternatives International Federation. Thanks to this international approach, the joint program provides the IDFN members with the skills and resources needed to address a wide range of Human Rights issues and obtain tangible benefits. It also provides them an opportunity of networking visits in Europe and North America in order to highlight civil society's role in stabilizing and developing Iraq.



The Project Partners

In Iraq: IDFN

IDFN is a network of democratic, non-sectarian and secular civil society organizations, working for the peaceful coexistence of all Iraqi people and for the socio-economic development of Iraq. Today, the IDFN Network represents more than 500 000 people with 100 000 active members from all over the country. The founding members of the network are:

Unions

- The Iraqi Centre of Workers Culture
- The General Union of Students in Iraq

Networks

- The Iraqi Kurdistan NGO Network (IKNN)

Culture / Minorities rights

- The Nenurta Group for the Arts
- Sabia Mandian Culture Society
- Assur Banipal

Medias

- Al Nass Rights for Culture and Media

Human Rights

- The National Association for Defending Human Rights in Iraq
- Iraqi Assembly for Supporting the Families of Martyrs and the Disappeared
- The Tammuz Organization for Social Development

Women's rights

- The Iraqi Women's League
- The Iraqi Rising Women



Youth

- Iraqi Organization for Athletic Development
- The Iraqi Democratic Youth federation

For more details on the members please visit the IDFN website at: <http://idfnetwork.com>

International Partners : Alternatives International

Alternatives International is a federation present in 9 countries, building solidarity between social movements at the local, national and international level. Three Alternatives International members are part of the project and all of them have a long track record of working on issues of Human Rights especially social and economic rights, gender equality and protection of minorities:

- Alternatives (Canada)
- Amorces (France - Member of IPAM)
- European Citizen's Assembly, AEC (France - Member of IPAM)

For more information on Alternatives International, please visit its website: <http://www.alterinter.org>

Networking

Through this project the IDFN has the opportunity to enhance and strengthen relationships with national, regional and international organizations through internships and education tours in Europe and North America:

- **Internship Program:** Through this program, the participants share experiences and learn from organizations in Europe and in the Middle East. It is an opportunity for the Network members to develop relationships with its counterparts and to promote cooperation between Iraq, Europe and Canada, with a special focus on youth-led initiatives.
- **Conferences:** During the entire program, the Network and its partners participate in several conferences in countries in the region, Europe and North America. These meetings with CSOs from all over the world (including Iraqi organizations), WSF International Council or with international institutions are as many occasions to spread awareness on the Human Rights issues in Iraq and to develop new partnerships.



In Iraq, Alternatives International aims to work towards:

- Improving the overall Human Rights conditions of Iraqis, specifically those of children, women, youth and minorities through greater public awareness and by building capacities of Iraqi civil society organizations and networks engaged in promoting a holistic approach to Human Rights that embodies a pluralist and non-discriminatory view of the society.
- Developing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to Human Rights in Iraq through enhanced international cooperation.
- Consolidating a free, responsible and independent media.



Advocacy for Human Rights

With the support of Alternatives International the Network leads several national campaigns aiming to enhance the respect for Human Rights and fundamental freedoms in the following areas:

- **Access to education for all Iraqis:** IDFN raises public awareness on the right of education for all Iraqis, while focusing on the importance of women's and girl's education and on the State's role in addressing the education challenges in Iraq today.
- **Ending domestic violence:** Through interactive training sessions IDFN develops awareness on the reality of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, stressing the role that Civil Society and Iraqi State can play in addressing this issue.
- **Widows' rights:** In 2005-2007, IDFN managed to get a new law enforced that allows widows access to State pensions. Its work permitted widows under the age of 50 or without children to have access to pensions and they can now benefit from a pension, even if one member of their family works. Confident of this success, the Network is now working to attain an increase in the wages.

This program is also a space to develop innovative activities:

- **Small Project Funds:** These small funds serve as a kick-start resource to member organizations, jointly or collectively, to support their work on Human Rights issues in urban and rural Iraq.
- **Tools of Communication:** In order to develop awareness at the national and international level on the Human Rights issues in Iraq, IDFN produces education material in form of publications, videos and by using other communication tools such as the Internet.
- **Responsible Media:** The project brings together media institutions, journalists and members of the civil society organizations in order to bridge the gap between media and civil society initiatives to promote an independent, informed and responsible journalism.



Capacity Building and Resource Centres

Through the planned capacity building seminars and training sessions Alternatives International aims to build on the experience and improve skills and resources of the network, its member organizations and Iraqi people in general to better handle the wide range of Human Rights issues:

- **Capacity Building seminars:** To improve more specifically skills of member organizations and to build the leadership of IDFN, several capacity building seminars, provided in a train-the-trainers approach are organized. To increase the impact of the project, these workshops are to be replicated with other Iraqi CSOs in the constituencies of IDFN's members.
- **Baghdad and Regional Centres:** Present all over Iraq, the network has three Documentation and Information Centres established in Baghdad, Nashriah and Babel. The Baghdad Centre includes a library, a multi-terminal Internet Café for utilization by civil society leaders and activists. The regional centres are hubs for the Network and they offer a meeting place for women, youth and men of the regions and contribute in breaking the isolation of people living in remote rural areas. The project contributes in sustaining and upgrading the facilities.