

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative



Final Declaration of the Third Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI) Conference Another Iraq is Possible with Peace and Human Rights

About 150 Iraqi and 100 international representatives of civil society organizations met in Erbil from 8 to 9 October 2011 for an international conference titled 'Another Iraq is Possible with Peace and Human Rights'. At the meeting participants discussed the challenges that the Iraqi people are facing, the issues on which Iraqi civil society is now working, and the kinds of solidarity needed among Iraqi NGOs and international organizations to bring about democratic change, social justice, human rights, freedom and dignity for all Iraqis.

The day before the conference, the first Iraqi International Marathon for peace and human rights was run in Erbil. Over 1000 people, from all parts of Iraq and from 15 other nations participated in this inspiring event. The marathon demonstrated the power that sport has for creating friendships and international harmony. And so, we say that truly everyone who ran was a winner.

The ICSSI Conference takes place this year with the hope that it gives strong impetus to making those political and economic reforms that have been identified by Iraqi

The logo for the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI) is displayed in a red, stylized font against a yellow background with a faint, repeating pattern of the Iraqi flag's colors. The text reads "Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative".

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civil society organizations as having the greatest potential to lead to fundamental change through nonviolent means.

We recognize that:

1. After decades of tyranny and war that caused serious damage to the national infrastructure and environment, and disrupted social and economic life, Iraqis are struggling to enjoy a free and dignified existence.
2. As the end of the occupation draws near and Iraqis look forward to independence and true national sovereignty, Iraq faces regional challenges, including securing its borders, protecting its territory, and obtaining water.
3. Iraq is in the midst of a political crisis. Politicians and members of the government constantly engage in power disputes, rather than focusing on the dialogue, partnerships, and cooperation that could produce solutions to the nation's problems.
4. People are suffering from extreme unemployment and poverty, which is made worse by continuing waves of violence, and the growing problem of damaged infrastructure and lack of services, especially electricity, healthcare, and education.
5. While the size of the Iraqi budget continues to increase, there are few concrete achievements and little real development because resources are wasted through government corruption, nepotism, and sectarianism.
6. We appreciate any progress that has been made in security and services, even if it has been small; we think it is important to determine whether it has been achieved by local or central government and parliament, or by civil society groups and independent activists.
7. We are committed to seeing that Iraq fully respects the principles of justice and the rule of law, international standards concerning fair trials, and the importance of an independent judiciary.
8. We are fully aware of the magnitude of the challenges that Iraqi civil society faces, especially the attempts by some to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the rights of workers to organize trade unions.

We came together to reinforce our solidarity inside and outside of Iraq within the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI), to learn from one another about the current situation in Iraq, the challenges that citizens and civil society are facing, and to create campaigns that address a range of issues.

The logo for the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative is displayed in a red, stylized font against a yellow background with a faint, repeating pattern of the Arabic word 'Solidarity' (Tawadun).

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In solidarity, we declare that:

1. We were inspired by the Iraqi social movements since February 25, 2011 to see the uprising of youth and the energy and passion that will transform Iraq where politicians have failed.
2. The conference is deeply troubled that Iraqi trade unions are facing increasing attacks from the government, especially under Resolution Number 150 which was instituted under the former dictatorship in 1987 and remains in effect; workers must have the right to organize unions in the public sector and the private sector; we insist that the government must not interfere in the running of unions; we will work together in pressing the Iraqi parliament to urgently pass a labour law that guarantees workers' rights in accordance with international standards in all sectors of the economy, including the right to demonstrate and strike.
3. Iraqi civil society groups are encouraged to participate in social forums, especially in Arab countries, to hold meetings to discuss the World Social Forum Charter, and to report to the WSF secretariat on their discussions; international partners will meanwhile help facilitate events on Iraqi issues at social forums.
4. Iraqi journalists need extensive capacity building in order to reduce their bias and increase their independence from government and political parties; laws restricting freedom of the press must be abolished; civil society organizations should work to ensure better protection for journalists who are challenging the status quo.
5. The conference supports all efforts to foster Iraqi women's rights and their equality in the law, to combat domestic violence against women, to ensure equality of women in government representation and decision making, and guarantee equal opportunity for jobs and employment; we reject those traditions that violate women's rights; Iraqi civil society seeks the support of international women's organizations for continued progress on all these issues, and to ensure capacity building for women in all areas of social and economic participation.
6. We will join together to document the environmental damages caused by the war and the health effects that the Iraqi people have suffered as a result. We will work to obtain compensation for individuals; to demand that the land, air and water are cleaned up; and to raise awareness of the threats to Iraq's precious water resources, from pollution and because of dams built and other water use by Iraq's neighbors; we affirm the need for a

The logo for the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative is displayed in a red, stylized font against a yellow background with a subtle pattern of Arabic calligraphy. The text is arranged in two lines: "Iraqi Civil Society" on the top line and "Solidarity Initiative" on the bottom line.

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comprehensive plan for water use that is created with the full knowledge and participation of civil society organizations.

7. While youth in Iraq face many challenges, they can be one of the most important forces for change and social progress and the conference supports civil society and government efforts to develop the youth sector.

8. The conference was concerned that civil society and the Iraqi public have not been consulted or informed about moves to privatize Iraq's oil and other sectors of the economy, despite the major impacts on rights, economic development and corruption that these changes would have; we encourage Iraqi groups to demand consultation, and to publicise information themselves; international groups should share all relevant information with their Iraqi partners.

9. The conference recognized the crucially important work of the Iraqi nonviolence activists and is committed to increasing networking and communications among their organizations and with international nonviolence organizations; we will work to establish a culture of peace and nonviolence and to build solidarity with internationals; the conference extends its support to the annual week of nonviolence in December 2011.

10. Iraqi NGOs should develop stronger coordination in order to be part of the decision-making process at a national and international level; they need to develop innovative strategies in capacity building, fund-raising and partnership structures in order to face the challenges of a changing international framework.

Members of the ICSSI will work together to plan comprehensive solidarity campaigns to advance all these goals.

October 8-9, 2011 – Irbil, Iraq