

### Briefing by ICSSI staff (Ismaeel Dawood)

#### South Asian Social Forum (SASF) and meeting of the World Social Forum International Council in Dhaka, Bangladesh (18 – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011)

##### Session on Iraq, 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 2011

During the Social Forum, a session titled “**Towards the First Iraqi Social Forum**” was organized by Alternatives International and ICSSI with the participation of 7 Iraqi delegates. The following issues have been discussed:

- overview about the situation in Iraq and civil society efforts to build a new democratic state;
- the need to implement an Iraqi Social Forum (ISF). All members of the Iraqi delegation in Dhaka and Iraqi social movements who gathered in the recent ICSSI conference in Erbil think this is the moment for ISF since: (1) US direct occupation is ending by the end of 2011 and there is a need to join forces to build a new Iraq; (2) Iraqi civil society needs a space for articulating an economic, political and social alternative; (3) ISF will be implemented with a massive participation from international partners, fostering a strongly needed international solidarity from actors that contested the war on Iraq;
- importance of Iraqis' participation in this social forum: the delegation realized that if Bangladeshi social movements could organize SASF, notwithstanding all financial and political challenges they are facing, then also Iraqis can do it.

Participation of Bangladeshi activists in this session was poor, hence some organizers of SASF decided to hold a meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November to favor real interaction between Iraqi/Arab delegates and important political and civil society actors in Bangladesh. Local media would be invited to this meeting.

##### Session on Maghreb-Mashreq, 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 2011

Another session organized by Alternatives International, titled “**Maghreb/Mashrek Revolutions and the WSF Process**”, was held with the participation of Arab and Iraqi delegates. The following issues have been discussed:

- overview about political developments in Tunisia, that can be divided in 3 phases: the first before the revolution, the second during the revolution and transition, and the third now with the constitutional council and elections. The revolution started because of economic and social reason but an alternative economic system is not emerging and now that the dictator is gone Tunisian people are divided. Without an agenda that deals with social problems, political change will not be achieved;
- the process of social forum in the Maghreb/Mashrek region started concretely by holding the Maghreb Social Forum in Morocco in 2008. Several preparatory meetings towards holding of Maghreb/Mashrek Forum have resulted in the decision to hold it in Tunis in March 2012. It will be crucial to involve Iraqi representatives. The next WSF-2013 will be held in the region as well;

- in the Maghreb-Mashreq social forum of Tunis, the agenda will include sessions on the Iraqi Social Forum, on the Palestinian issue, and there will be a thematic forum organized by women.

### **Session on the role of youth in building democracy, 21st of November 2011**

Iraqis attended an interesting session very participated by South Asian youth, discussing the North African model where youth are leading political change. New media and communication techniques managed by new generation have been crucial for the development of new social movements demanding social/economic/political/civil rights. ICSSI similarly values its social networking internet platform as a key tool for the coalition of Iraqi and international social movements.

### **Meeting of Iraqi and Arabs delegates with important political and civil society actors in Bangladesh, 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2011**

Seven among major Bangladeshi political parties – including the party now ruling the country, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party - sent their representatives to this meeting. Trade unions and student movements linked to these parties also participated. Achievements:

- concrete links have been built between Iraqi civil society and social-political actors in South Asia, independently from the Iraqi government!
- we made it clear that even if Iraq is going to be free from the US direct occupation at the end of this year we will have to face many challenges, like sectarian threats and corruption, and foreign influence will not end;
- we understood that support of local authorities, political parties and the University to SASF in Bangladesh was important and essential for the success of the forum.

A press release on this meeting was disseminated by ICSSI a few days later.

### **WSF International Council Meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> November, 2011**

For the first time a significant number of Iraqis participated in the International Council of the World Social Forum. Issues discussed:

- 1- **Internal matters** on commissions of the Council and the sustainability of the WSF Secretariat. Need to fund the WSF office and proposal to change location of the office every 3 years, each time in a new continent.
- 2- **Strategies and methodology** of WSF, need to work on attracting new movements to the process, and finalize for newcomers the document on how to organize a social forum.
- 3- **Expansion and future** of the forum:
  - In Italy there is an effort to organize events and re-launch the European Social Forum, a meeting will take place in Florence. A letter will be sent to Milan local authorities to host a regional forum.
  - In January 2012 there will be a thematic forum on Palestine in Brazil .

- The Maghreb-Mashreq social forum will be in Tunisia at end of March or beginning of April 2012. A preparatory meeting will be held in Morocco on November 9-10 to discuss the final steps for preparation of the Maghreb Mashreq forum.
- The Iraqi Social Forum was set to take place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2013, maybe in October. The Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative will support Iraqi social movements, NGOs and unions who are ready to work for the success of the forum, and guarantee the link with Maghreb-Mashreq Social Forum and the WSF IC.
- The venue of WSF 2013 is not yet decided, but it will be in Tunisia or Egypt. There is a need to wait till March 2012 to take a decision due to the unstable political situation in the two countries.

### Follow up points for the Iraqi delegation:

Iraqi delegates agreed to work on these tasks:

- mobilizing their contacts and fundraising to take part in the coming Maghreb-Mashreq social forum in Tunisia. They need info about what will be decided in the meeting of November in Morocco. ICSSI is invited to participate and will disseminate information.
- ICSSI together with Iraqis will work to organize a session in Tunisia on the Iraqi Social Forum.
- Iraqi organizations of Laonf will work with other partners to organize the Second Iraqi Nonviolence Forum in Basra, in October 2012, where ICSSI is invited to hold its next conference as a self-organized event in this forum. This will be seen as a step towards the coming Iraqi Social forum (ISF). Trade unions in Basra will work on the political and logistical preparation of this forum.
- Iraqis present in Dhaka will invite other Iraqi NGOs and social movements who share the WSF charter of principles to be part of preparation for the ISF. A basic document and call for the forum will be drafted with support of the ICSSI staff, as it was done for the 3<sup>rd</sup> ICSSI Conference in Erbil. Meetings will be held in Iraq to discuss and finalize this document.
- **All ICSSI partners are invited to write project proposals and fundraise to support one or more of these events:**
  1. **Participation of Iraqis in the coming Maghreb-Mashreq social forum that will take place in Tunisia at end of March or beginning of April 2012.**
  2. **Implementing the Laonf (Nonviolence) Forum and ICSSI Conference in Basra (Iraq), in October 2012.**
  3. **Establishing the Iraqi Social Forum in Baghdad, in October 2013.**

*Iraqi participation at SASF was supported by*

