



Press Kit

Iraqi Social Forum

26-28 September 2013, Baghdad

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1. Baghdad hosts the first Iraqi Social Forum

Iraqis have participated in the activities of the World Social Forum (WSF) since its founding in Brazil in 2001. Now Iraqi social justice groups wish to promote a deep democratic discussion about what is happening in Iraq today. They claim "Another Iraq is possible".

Iraqi civil society groups have therefore established the very first Iraqi Social Forum (ISF), which will take place from 26 September to 28 September in Baghdad. Each day more than 50 activities will be organized. More than 150 organizations and more than 1000 participants are expected to participate at this first edition. Through workshops, panels, tele-exchanges, participants will be able to exchange, discuss, and network.

Part of the ISF will be an extended forum: from abroad people will have the possibility to participate through skype and follow a live-streaming.

The ISF is a space managed by civil society and social movements to build another Iraq based on peace, respect for human rights and social justice, in partnership with all those who adhere to the principles and charter of the WSF, adopted in Porto Alegre in 2001.

2. Iraq does not surrender to violence

The loss of the lives of over one million people, the destruction of infrastructure, fatal and debilitating effects of depleted uranium and chemical weaponry used by the occupation forces cannot be forgotten, neither by the Iraqi people nor by the international movements who have been mobilizing against the war and the occupation.

The withdrawal of the US and occupation troops has opened the way to complete the struggle of Iraqi people for democracy and social justice. But heavy military spending by the State and the actual security policies are making Iraqi people more vulnerable rather than safer.

The Iraqi Social Forum is an expression of the desire of the Iraqi people for a civil, democratic society and State, based on respect for different cultures. This is the time to build partnerships, foster dialogue and cooperation, to find solutions to outstanding problems. This is time to end violence and terrorism for which the people of Iraq have paid, and continue to pay, a heavy price.



3. Preparation of the ISF

When they started preparations, local organizers of the Iraqi Social forum (ISF) were hoping to gather more than five thousand activists, between Iraqis and internationals in the center of Baghdad. Their vision was to bring back, through this event, the image of civic peace and activism in a city that once upon a time was known as Dar Al-Salam (City of Peace).

Many challenges have faced this group of activists. It has been very complicated to get official approval for an independent event such as the Iraqi social forum in the midst of political conflicts. It is even more complicated to organize it while the country is facing a new wave of violence that put Iraq on the headlines of international media again, with almost 5,000 civilians killed and 12,000 others injured from January to August this year, according to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq..

But Iraq is not only violence, this is what Baghdadis will tell you. In almost 3 months the organizers of the ISF succeeded to attract about 130 young Iraqi men and women, volunteering to build the coming forum. The ISF Secretariat organized several workshops to increase their skills, their knowledge of the World Social Forum process, and to organize them in small groups.



The ISF Preparatory Committee held training workshops for some of those volunteers in cooperation with the Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM) and was sponsored by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the Danish

International Media Support (IMS). Volunteers were trained on how to use and manage social networking tools.



An International Solidarity Committee for the ISF has been created by associations and NGOs from all over the world, coordinated by the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative. Their first initiative, in order to break the isolation of Iraqi activists among global social movements, aimed to empower young Iraqi interpreters who could volunteer for social movements.

The Preparatory Committee of the Iraqi Social Forum in cooperation with the International Solidarity Committee organized a training on interpretation techniques in Shaqlawa / Erbil from 24 to 29 of August. Nineteen Iraqi young trainees completed the course and volunteered to be translators during the events of the forum. The training included young people from different ages and backgrounds, and was supported by Karibu Foundation.

Preparations in Iraq included decentralized meetings in other Iraqi provinces and an ISF Bus that run through the streets of Baghdad, full of volunteers, to advertise the forum. Finally, on the 21st of September, to celebrate the World Peace Day, more than a thousand people reached a public park in Baghdad and spent the day together. Whole families with children and elderly people joined the activity.

4. Location of the forum

The ISF Preparatory Committee could convince the new Governor of Baghdad to give them authorization to use the space and buildings of Al-Qishla and Baghdadi Cultural Center, near the Tigris river in the center of Baghdad.





Al-Qishla was the Ottoman governor's headquarters, it's a recently restored building and its linked to Al Mutanabi Street, the main place where books are sold and where Baghdadi intellectuals meet. This unique place in Baghdad will host the open events in the second and third day of the forum. The first day will take place inside Baghdad University in Jaderia, since this day will be dedicated to Sports Against Violence (SAV) and to the opening event of the Iraqi Social Forum.

These places are relatively safer than other locations in Baghdad, and normal life flows there every day. The event and the hotels of internationals will not be inside the Green Zone, where the Iraqi government and foreign embassies are located, the symbol of political power.

5. Issues at the ISF

Iraqi civil society organizations will raise the following issues within the ISF:

- Building a civic, democratic country
- International solidarity campaigns, including the Freedom of Speech campaign, the Save the Tigris and the Iraqi Marshes campaign, and campaigns to control Private Military Companies
- Challenges faced by minorities
- Equitable distribution of wealth and social justice
- Labor unions, trade unions and peasant associations
- The rights of women, youth and children
- Economic, social, and cultural issues
- Nonviolence as a way of social, cultural, and economical change in Iraq





6. Regional and global context

The WSF process is now well anchored in the region. Since 2008 we have witnessed successful regional social fora in the Maghreb/Mashreq, a World Education Forum in Palestine and the World Social Forum in Tunis earlier in 2013. These collective experiences provide a fertile ground for the Iraqi civil society to build the first Iraqi Social Forum as an open space for exchange of experiences and ideas, and to build a movement against neo-liberalism, for human rights and social change. The ISF was officially launched at the WSF in Tunis.

The ISF goes forward to establish a direct relationship with the social movements in the rest of the world. To the end, the World Social Forum is a needed political space to end the isolation of social movements and civil society in Iraq.

7. Central program of the ISF

26 September 2013:

Sports Against Violence (SAV) and Official opening ceremony of the Iraqi Social Forum (ISF)

(9:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m. Baghdad University)

27 September 2013:

ISF activities
(9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Baghdad Cultural Center and Al-Qishla)

28 September 2013:

ISF activities
(9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Baghdad Cultural Center and Al-Qishla)

Closing Ceremony
(2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Open Space)



8. Sports Against Violence

Within the Iraqi Social Forum a sport event will take place in Baghdad before the opening of the ISF on 26 September, in cooperation with the civil society of Iraq. The Sports Against Violence (SAV) event will support the ISF and Iraqi civil society, showing that Iraq is not only violence.

SAV will be an introductory moment for the Iraqi Social Forum, combining sport and culture. The idea of spreading sport in Iraq, as a means to stimulate networking, cooperation and peaceful coexistence among different people, has evolved during the past years, with the final dream to run a marathon in Baghdad in 2014.

Associating sport events and activities on peace and human rights is a successful idea in Iraq, which has already been implemented at the conferences of the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative in Erbil in 2011 and Basra in 2012. Sport creates another space where people can dialogue and grow together in order to build a sensitive and committed civil conscience and to share the pleasure of conviviality.

9. Baghdad extended

It is possible to participate from abroad in the ISF, to work on another Iraq! In Baghdad, a group of about 20 internationals will be present to participate in the local activities. Next to that, internationals will be able to tele-participate in the ISF through internet as part of the extended ISF. The aim is to globally spread awareness of the Iraqi situation and the ISF.

From abroad internationals can:

- Organize an activity in solidarity with Iraq. This can be done before, during and even after the forum, with the help of an internet connection. An example has been an activity held by the Participatory Development Action Program in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 17 September. In an exchange with Iraqi activists, both sides touched upon subjects such as violence against women and global solidarity.





- Tele-participate during the ISF and have an exchange with activists at the ISF through video-conference via internet, during the Forum. **To connect with Iraqi activists at the Iraqi Social Forum through Skype please contact: isf.extensionteam**
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- Share the live-stream of the ISF. Several activities will be visible by internet streaming. From abroad you can watch these, project them publically or you can even try to make an intervention via Skype in an activity in Baghdad. **Look for the streaming window on <http://iraqsf.org>**

The support team will let you know just before each session which activities in ISF intend to be enlarged by streaming and get you in contact with organizers, especially if you intend to make a short speech that would be heard/watched in Baghdad.

The following international organizations participate in the Extended ISF:

Peace Heart Foundation (Pakistan)
Participatory Development Action Program (Bangladesh)
Un Ponte Per... (Italy)
Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (Palestine)
Alternative Information Center (Palestine)
Salam (Italy)
The Italian Platform for the World Social Forum (Italy)
Initiative Vers un Forum Social Mondial 2015 au Québec (Canada)
Ya Basta Association (Italy)
Karibu Foundation (Norway)
Progetto Rebeldia (Italy)
Amnesty International (United Kingdom)

10. International supporters of the ISF

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI)
International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT)
Un Ponte Per... (UPP)
Babels Network of Interpreters
Sports Against Violence (SASV)
The Council of Barcelona – Barcelona Solidaria



Karibu Foundation
Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Fondation Assistance Internationale

11. Media contacts

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