

إنقاذ نهر دجلة واجبك و واجبي
بهاناوهاتنى زى دجلة نهركي من و تويه

SAVE THE TIGRIS RIVER
YOUR RESPONSABILITY AND MINE

SAVE THE TIGRIS AND IRAQI MARSHES CAMPAIGN

#SAVE_TIGRIS

Al-Mesalla Organization for Human Resources Development and Un ponte per... with the participation of the Iraqi Social Forum and the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative, with financial support of Fondation Assistance Internationale and Karibu Foundation.



Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign

Training and Fact-Finding Report

Erbil/Sulaymaniyah, June 26-29, 2016

1. Introduction

More than 30 Iraqi young volunteers from Baghdad and Southern Iraq gathered in Erbil for a Save the Tigris Campaign training. The goal was to assembly a new group of campaign activists in Baghdad and Southern Iraq, who can support the campaign on the ground in Iraq. International activists from the UK, Turkey, Netherlands – all part of the campaign Steering Committee – travelled to Iraq to conduct the training together with the local campaign coordinator and the Iraqi partners of the Iraqi Social Forum. The workshop covered the global anti-dam movement, the impact of dams on Iraq's rivers, environmental campaigning and civil society activism in Iraq. Volunteers were able to get acquainted with fellow campaigners, international activists of the campaign as well as partners in the Kurdish region. The group discussed campaign activities to be organized in the next year in Iraq.

Earlier, in February 2016, members of the ISF [Iraqi Social Forum] an ICSSI [Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative] met in Istanbul for a joint strategy meeting during which they discussed the current situation in Iraq and analyzed the opportunities and challenges for activism. For the Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes campaign, the main goal that has been set for the coming year(s) is to build a strong activist network in Iraq to protect Iraqi rivers and Marshes. An action calendar was written for the coming period. In the past months, the Iraqi team in Baghdad built a network of activists, having organized a youth camp in the Marshes and awareness events in Baghdad. During these activities, a group of young volunteers was assembled, all of whom expressed to commit themselves to the campaign. This group in addition to newly registered volunteers received the two day-workshop in Erbil.

After the training was finished, the international activists of the campaign traveled to Sulaymaniyah to conduct fact-finding in order to assess the current state of the rivers in the region.

June 25: Arrival
June 26-27: Training in Erbil
June 28-29: Fact-finding in Sulaymaniyah region
June 30: Departure

2. Participants

- Ali Alkarkhi, Campaign Coordinator in Iraq
- Toon Bijnens, International Coordinator
- Ercan Ayboga, Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, Steering Committee member
- Nick Hildyard, Cornerhouse UK, Steering Committee member
- Ali Saheb, Iraqi Social Forum, partner
- Nabil Musa, Waterkeepers Iraq, partner
- Emtinan Aljaleel, Al Messala, partner
- Peshkawt Adham, Al Messala, partner
- Eleanora Gatto, Un Ponte Per, partner
- Humat Dijla, group of water activists in Southern Iraq
- Basem Alzobede, activist in Maysan Province
- Group of 30 young male and female activists from Baghdad region with various backgrounds (environmental engineering, NGOs, activism, ministries)

3. Program

Day 1: 26 June

9:00-10:00 Introduction of the Save the Tigris Campaign and impact of big dams on Iraq
10:00-11:00 General anti-dam movement, struggle against big dams
11:00-11:15 Coffee break
11:15-12:30 Impact of Ilisu Dam in Iraq, civil society campaigns against Dams in Turkey
12:30-14:00 Lunch
14:00-15:30 Context of water activism in Iraq
 Waterkeepers Iraq / Nabil Musa: introduction of this partner organization
 Al-Messala / Emtinan Aljaleel: anti-dam campaigns in Kurdistan region
 Un Ponte Per / Eleanora Gatto: water saving campaign in refugee camps
15:30-15:45 Coffee break
15:45-17:30 Campaigning and civil society in Iraq
 Iraqi Social Forum / Ali Saheb
 Humat Dijla / Salman Khairalla
 The Iraqi Marshes / Basem Alzobede
17:30-18:00 Concluding remarks

Day 2: 27 June

9:00-11:15 SWOT analysis of the Save the Tigris Campaign + group discussion
11:15-11:30 Coffee Break
11:30-11:45 Creation of working groups
11:45-13:30 Working groups
13:30-15:00 Lunch

15:00-16:30 Presentations of each working group

16:30-17:30 Discussion of plans and strategy for the next months + concluding remarks

17:30-18:00 Ceremony

4. Discussion

During the training a SWOT analysis of the Save the Tigris Campaign was conducted by the volunteers. During the analysis, a discussion was held between the volunteers on the value of the campaign. The volunteers acknowledged that follow-up, long-term commitment and a long-term strategy is necessary. They would like to see Iraqi NGOs more involved in the issue of safeguarding Iraq's water resources, and reach out to Iraqi society via media as well as the government. The internationals pointed out that while they can work on local issues that are at play in Baghdad or Southern Iraq, they can make use of an all-national as well as international network. Within Iraq, the volunteers proposed to focus advocacy efforts towards local and provincial authorities, since they are more willing than the central government to work on the campaign issues. Some participants suggested to advocate with religious authorities. The campaign has an important role to play in the spread of information, as it has collected resources on water and dam issues, and is conducting new research.

5. Working groups

Volunteers were divided into 4 working groups with the task of coming up with campaign activities. These are the proposed activities, as presented by the groups, followed by a comments and recommendations from other activists and internationals.

Proposals

- Releasing campaign videos, for instance from ISF members, as well as awareness videos. These shown in universities or schools
- Conducting seminars at universities and in the Marshes
- To put campaign posters in cities, public transport
- Trip of university students to the Marshes
- Social media campaign
- Focus on a strong geographical spread of activities
- Cluster activities around annual or international events, such as the International Day of Action for Rivers
- Spread more information, send it to media and NGOs
- Look for new funding opportunities, especially with (local) authorities
- Press conference, scheduled around an important event
- Increased participation from the people of the Marshes.
- Youth camp in the Marshes
- Outreach activities towards local authorities
- Frequent meetings among activists in order to strengthen the network

Recommendations

- It is better to not pay too much attention to the international component of the campaign, but to focus on the ground in Iraq
- Work on very local issues, such as clean drinking water, in order to make people aware of the value of water.
- Focus on creating more awareness among people and civil society in Iraq is recommended
- More intensive use of social media. Perhaps a social media campaign
- More outreach towards young people through activities
- A good way to reach media is by sending reports, information. The research report on dams the campaign is currently preparing could be presented to the press. Press conferences could be organized around events.
- A youth camp is planned
- It is important to follow up after the training, and to meet regularly.

6. Planning

Concrete activities will be planned with the group in followup meetings, lead by coordinator Ali Alkarkhi.

Concrete activities:

- Social media campaign
- Seminars in schools and universities
- Youth camp in the Marshes
- Press conference to present the campaign research
- Events clustered around the calendar below, such as the Iraqi Social Forum

International calendar of the campaign:

- 10-20 July: UNESCO World Heritage Committee Session in Istanbul.
- August: World Social Forum in Montreal.
- August/September: Advocacy mission in Baghdad, another possible seminar.
- September: Iraqi Social Forum (ISF) in Baghdad.
- November: Youth Camp in South Iraq.
- 7-18 November 2016: COP Climate Change Conference in Marrakesh, Morocco
- End of 2016: Present the Save the Tigris research
- 14 March 2017: International Day of Action for Rivers
- May 2017: Mesopotamian Water Forum

7. Fact-finding

Erbil

- Meeting with a representative in Iraqi Kurdistan of the Kurdistan National Congress.
- Meeting with Kamal Chomani, the campaign researcher who is currently writing a report on the issue of dams in Iraqi Kurdistan. A first draft will be shared in July 2016.

Sulaymaniyah

2-Day fact-finding mission with Toon Bijnens of the Save the Tigris Campaign, Nabil Musa of Waterkeepers Iraq, Nick Hildyard of Cornerhouse UK and Ercan Ayboga of Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, in the Sulaymaniyah and Halabja governorates of Iraqi Kurdistan to view the current state of the rivers in the region.

Visited:

- Taranjo lake, currently at very high levels due to water release from Iran.
- Sirwan river near the Iranian border in Halabja governorate, which will receive reduced flows once the Daryan dam in Iran is operation.
- Carwash spot that has been turned into a sitting area thanks to Waterkeepers Iraq.
- Massive waste oil spill in Taranjo dump and river in the city of Sulaymaniyah.
- River in Taranjo polluted by chemicals.
- Waste water and sewage box in Sulaymaniyah.
- Car wash spot in a river in Sulaymaniyah.
- Chaq Chaq dam: a failed dam which bursted in 2005 in the Sulaymaniyah region.
- Construction site of Basara dam.
- Interviews with shepherds and fishermen, as complete villages in the area will be displaced once the Basara dam goes into operation.
- Chapachnara waterfall.

8. Conclusion

Protecting the Tigris River of Iraq: this will be the main objective for a new group of committed youth activists from Baghdad and Southern Iraq as they developed plans to support of the Save the Tigris Campaign. During a training in Erbil from 26-27 June they discussed together with other Iraqi as well as international activists the urgency to protect Iraq's water resources and to spread awareness on this issue. Despite logistical obstacles (security, visa issues) and uncertainty over its location, over 30 motivated volunteers traveled from Baghdad to Erbil, where they gathered with international activists of the campaign and activists from the Kurdish region. This group of young volunteers will work in addition to the group of activists "Humat Dijla" that have been active in Southern Iraq since last year, next to our Iraqi Coordinator who has been in place since this year. Volunteers registered through an online form – more than 200 registrations were received! – and came from various backgrounds (ministries, environmental engineering, NGOs, activism). A notable share was already well immersed in the campaign, the issue of dams and protection of the Marshes. During the first day of the training, the aim was to familiarize the participants with the campaign, anti-dam movements and civil society in Iraq. International campaign members, water activists from the Kurdish region and activists from Southern Iraq gave talks about their experiences. Volunteers were able to interact with activists and put forward any questions. The second day was very much interactive. Engaged in a deep discussion with each other the volunteers gained a good insight in how they can collaborate together to protect the Tigris river and how to pursue a strong campaign in Iraq. This was followed by the creation of working groups, during which the volunteers created a list of possible campaign activities in Iraq. A discussion was held during which recommendations were put forth. Together with all other participants including the internationals and the Iraqi Coordinator, the proposals of the working groups were merged into a concrete list of possible activities to be organized by the volunteers in the next months. Many of them expressed strong commitment

and the necessity of continuation after the training. During the workshop, ties were strengthened with old and new partners of the campaign, such as Al-Messala and Waterkeepers Iraq. In turn, the young volunteers got to meet the campaign partners in the Kurdish region and get to know their work on water issues.

The training was followed by a 2-day fact-finding mission by the international activists of the Save the Tigris Campaign to the governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja. The mission was organized by Nabil Musa of Waterkeepers Iraq, who is now established as a partner of the campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since the Save the Tigris Campaign is increasingly looking into the issue of Iranian dams which will have a big impact on Iraq, the activists visited the Sirwan River, which will receive reduced water flows once Daryan Dam in Iran is in operation. Near Sulaymaniyah, a burst dam was visited. A very good example of the danger posed by large dams. It demonstrates that for instance in the case of Mosul Dam, a failed dam could very much be a reality. North of Sulaymaniyah, Basara Dam is currently under construction, even though it is currently at a stand-still due to financial constraints. The participants spoke to local shepherds and fishermen who will be displaced once the dam is in operation. No compensation is offered to them! Furthermore, other sites were visited, among which a big oil spill which was detected on the outskirts of Sulaymaniyah, affecting rivers and ground water. The participants strongly expressed the value of such a fact-finding mission, since they were able to see the reality on the ground and get a clear picture of the current state of the rivers in that part of Iraqi Kurdistan.