

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative

مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

Current as of 16th October 2008

Description

The Iraq Civil Society Solidarity Initiative is an effort to facilitate the process of building concrete and meaningful links of solidarity between the global movement against the occupation of Iraq and Iraqi civil society through practical projects that support the struggle against occupation, dictatorship, and sectarian divisions. Through these active and direct engagements, the initiative aims to mutually empower the global movement against the occupation and to strengthen Iraqi civil society. Through the relationships that will be built out of these engagements, the initiative seeks to integrate the Iraqi movement as part of the global justice movement and the global justice movement as part of the Iraqi movement.

Overall aim: Strengthening civil society's capacity to end the occupation and build an equitable and democratic society

This initiative has sprung from a loose collaboration of international NGOs and activists who are committed to support the Iraqi people's struggle for independence, democracy and justice. Through their engagement with and support to civil society groups from all different sectors in Iraq, they have been able to access information and resources which have culminated in this initiative (for more details on the organizing committee, please see below). A long consultation process with different Iraqi groups throughout the country has ensured that as many different sections of civil society are represented as possible, including women, youth, trade unions, ethnic minorities and media.

Form of the project:

The initiative will be undertaken in the following stages:

1. An initial **Iraq Civil Society Conference**, set for 25th to 31st **March 2009**, in Italy. This conference will aim to gather a broad group of Iraq civil society groups and social movements such as unions, human rights, women's, youth and student organizations, farmers' groups, NGOs, etc as well as counterparts from the global justice movement. Particular attention will be paid to geo-political and gender balance. The conference will provide an opportunity for sharing information and analysis on the situation in Iraq, for networking, and for discussing possible joint sectoral or cross-sectoral initiatives among Iraqis and non-Iraqis. The first three days will be for Iraqis only; to give them space to discuss their analysis of the situation, their priorities, and their expectations before meeting with the international participants. The next three days will have both Iraqis and non-Iraqi participants. See attached Agenda for details.
2. Reports, Follow-through, and Facilitation, April 2009 to 2010. The outcome of the conference will be disseminated widely through a report, possibly a website, database, film and audio archives, etc in order to ensure that others who were not able to attend may still find ways to get involved. Those participating groups that found common objectives and interests in the initial conference may choose to continue exploring possibilities for cooperation or begin undertaking joint projects. Through mechanisms and arrangements to be agreed upon during the initial conference, there may also be over-all efforts for continued coordination, communication, or collective action among the participants.

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative

مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي

3. A second Iraq Civil Society Conference, tentatively set for March 2010, venue to be discussed. To be held a year after the first, this second conference will provide an opportunity for participants to collectively touch base, get updated on the situation, report on joint projects, assess their progress, and to further explore areas and plan the next steps for cooperation.

Context

In March 2009 it will be six years since the US-led military invasion and occupation of Iraq. Today, Iraq is a humanitarian disaster; in a country of about 26 million, four million are displaced, up to eight million are in need of emergency assistance and 40% are living in absolute poverty. . As the years of occupation drag on, there are no signs that the disaster is ending.

In this context, Iraqi civil society is now in the process of (re)creating itself; following thirty years of dictatorship and oppression under Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party it now operates under extremely difficult conditions and in response to the daily challenges and hardships of occupation.

It has been almost six years since the invasion, and yet contacts between Iraqi civil society groups and the global movements remain very limited and segmented. Very little is known about the emerging civil society or family-based, tribal and religious associations, as well as communities, sectors and social groups: what are their concerns and their priorities? how are they engaging in the political debates?; is there a *civil* resistance to the occupation? and how can we build long-term relationships with Iraqi organisations which strengthen, but also go beyond, the immediate concerns of the anti-war movement? Understanding and building links with Iraqi civil society is critical because of the serious day-to-day challenges they face. Human rights violations at the hands of occupation and Iraqi forces are rampant. While ethnic and religious tensions are being fomented by the occupation forces, they are also fuelled by the internal struggle over power and resources, and the emergence of militia and authoritarian groups which threaten genuine democracy, human rights and social justice. These ongoing and increasing threats to realizing an independent, stable and fully democratic state make this initiative all the more urgent.

Aims of the project

This initiative is not exhaustive; the needs of the Iraqi population are great, and we do not expect to address all of them in the limited scope and resources of this initiative. Nor do we claim to be able to represent Iraqi civil society in its entirety. The project is not about legitimizing one set of groups to the detriment of others. We are building on already established relationships of trust with groups which we know are not involved or associated with the occupation, government or past regime and which are working towards an immediate end to the occupation and resisting civil war. We recognise that this is a work in progress and very much a pilot initiative; what we will learn through the undertaking of the project will be as important as the project's outcomes.

It is hoped that the initial conference in March 2009 will form part of a longer process of exchange of information, research and dissemination and network building between Iraqi civil society groups, and between these groups and the wider global movement. The organising committee's role will be one of facilitating this process, not of directing or implementing it. Ultimately it will be the responsibility of the participants to take up the opportunities opened up at the conference.

Aims and objectives relate to expectations for the initial conference in Italy in March 2009, and more long-term aspirations for the entire initiative. They do not assume that agreement or unity is to be reached

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative

مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي

on issues that are raised and discussed in the conference; as such the aims and objectives are fluid and subject to change according to the priorities of the participants.

Overall aim: Strengthening civil society's capacity to end the occupation and build an equitable and democratic society

General objectives:

1. Build relationships with and strengthen Iraqi civil society organizations and social movements struggling for an end to the occupation, dictatorship and sectarian violence and working for justice and equality.
2. Strengthen the global movement against the occupation

Specific objectives

Short-term:

1. Identify and make contact with groups and organisations engaged in building local and regional responses to the effects of the occupation and the civil war and those who are part of the civil resistance independent of the occupation forces; to include farmers and students organisations, trade unions, medical organisations, women's groups, lawyers and journalists
2. Informed by the testimonies and stated needs and priorities of these groups, get an independent and direct overview of the situation in Iraq and the evolution of Iraqi civil society post-invasion; to include an analysis of the impact of the war on different sectors including human rights and the law, health, education, agriculture, women, children, youth, students, environment, transport, water and sanitation, energy, housing, employment
3. Bring together civil society networks and organisations from inside Iraq and outside Iraq, with a particular effort to engage civil society from the Arab countries, with a view to connecting well-developed and experienced national and international networks and organisations with their Iraqi counterparts, and with the aim of fostering long-term relationships.
4. Provide a space for free discussions that is not negatively influenced by forces that seek to divide and incite conflict among people.

Long-term:

5. Develop relationships that go beyond the anti-war movement, and which can be sustained and strengthened over the long term with a view to Iraqi civil society becoming a more active participant in the regional and global justice movements
6. Through the information and relationships that will be generated through the project, contribute to strengthening the anti-war and global justice movements by providing more accurate understanding of Iraq's domestic political dynamics, by bringing Iraqi perspectives into the political discourse outside Iraq, by undermining the media's distorted coverage of the situation, and by countering the so-called "clash of civilizations" being purveyed to divide peoples.

Important Considerations:

This initiative is informed by the concerns, considerations and insights of Iraqi groups that we have strong links with, and by NGOs with a long history of working in Iraq. Through these discussions the organizing committee and the groups have reached agreement on the following principles to guide this initiative:

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative

مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي

- ü The conference and the initiative in general is not an opportunity for anti-war groups to debate the war
- ü Whilst armed resistance groups are perceived by many to have a role to play in ending occupation in Iraq, this initiative is focused on the needs of civil society and fostering relationships between non-violent resistance groups and the wider global movement against the occupation.
- ü Political parties will not be invited although it is recognized that some of the organizations to be invited are linked with them.
- ü *Clarification of the Role of the Organisers and Organisational Process:* the conference aims to bring together Iraqi and non-Iraqi organizations to discuss ways by which they can mutually support each other's struggle against the occupation through concrete collaborative projects. The role of the organizers is to ensure that the conference is organized in such a way that maximizes the possibilities for these projects to be identified and adopted, i.e., by identifying and inviting the right mix of organizations, by designing the program in ways that will facilitate collaboration, etc. But it will not be up to the organizers to implement the projects that are identified during the conference. Iraqis play a central role in this process. The design of the programme has been informed by the long term relationships held between the organizers and various Iraqi contacts. The success of the conference will depend on the participation of the broadest range of Iraqi organizations that have constituencies and that are doing actual work in the country. To ensure this, the project must not be seen as being the initiative of a selected group of Iraqis. Hence, it was recommended that the international organizing committee or working group be composed only of non-Iraqi organizations.

Organizers:

To date, the international organizing group is composed of the following:

- ü *Alternatives* – Michel Lambert and Catherine Pappas
- ü *Focus on the Global South* – Nicola Bullard / Herbert Docena
- ü *International Alliance of Inhabitants* – Cesare Ottolini
- ü *International Civilian Campaign for the Protection of Palestinians* – Thomas Sommer
- ü *People's Health Movement* – Hani Serag
- ü *Transnational Institute* – Wilbert van der Zeijden
- ü *Un Ponte Per* – Paola Gasparoli / Fabio Alberti
- ü *War on Want* – Gemma Houldey
- ü Ewa Jasiewicz

Coordinator of the project: Karim Metref

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Focus on the Global South is an international research and campaigning organization with offices in Manila, Bangkok, and Mumbai, working on the issues of corporate-globalization and militarization and actively involved in the movements against them. After the invasion, Focus, along with other groups, organized an international anti-war conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, from which emerged many initiatives against the occupation of Iraq. Herbert Docena is a researcher-campaigner with Focus who has followed and analyzed the economic policies designed for Iraq post-invasion and has been active in the global anti-war movement. Apart from Iraq, he's also doing research on US military intervention and self-determination struggles in Southeast Asia and linking up with movements in the region.

<http://www.focusweb.org/>

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative

مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي

Un Ponte per ... (A Bridge to ...) was founded in 1991 at the end of the Gulf War for the purpose of promoting initiatives to support the Iraqi population also affected by the ensuing embargo. In 15 years of activity we channeled aid and implemented co-operation projects in the field of health, education, drinking water, work assistance, women and human rights. In our activities, co-operation and solidarity are never detached from strong actions of denouncing the causes of the war, from the constant commitment to prevent new conflicts and stopping the ongoing wars, in particular the occupation in Iraq. Concerning Iraq we are running projects supporting the Iraqi civil society, safeguarding of human rights and reclaiming of cultural heritage. In all these actions, Un Ponte per.... identifies itself with the Italian peace movement and the global antiwar movement. Paola Gasparoli, UPP staff member, spent 9 months in Baghdad monitoring the violation of human rights under the occupation and, together with an Iraqi human rights activist, produced a report on civilian casualties 'Human Rights Violations and Claims Related to US Military Operations' presented to the press in Baghdad, January 10th, 2004.

<http://www.unponteper.it/>

CCIPPP (International Civilian Campaign for the Protection of Palestinians) is a French NGO campaigning for a just solution in Palestine and the end of occupation in Iraq. We call for the organising and sending of civil missions in Palestine. On their return, the internationals who have taken part in missions carry on with their action of Solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle. They join existing initiatives or invent other forms of solidarity. Also, after the invasion of Iraq, CCIPPP, along with other groups, organized an international anti-war conference in Jakarta, Indonesia from which emerged many initiatives against the occupation of Iraq. Thomas Sommer is a researcher campaigner with CCIPPP who has followed the evolution of the political landscape in Iraq post-invasion and mobilizes groups in France against the invasion and the occupation of Iraq.

<http://www.protection-palestine.org/spip.php?rubrique=2>

The Transnational Institute (TNI), founded in 1974 is an international network of activistscholars committed to critical analyses of the global problems of today and tomorrow, with a view to providing intellectual support to those movements concerned to steer the world in a democratic, equitable and environmentally sustainable direction. In the spirit of public scholarship, and aligned to no political party, TNI seeks to create and promote international co-operation in analysing and finding possible solutions to such global problems as militarism and conflict, poverty and marginalisation, social injustice and environmental degradation. Wilbert van der Zeijden is a researcher-campaigner with TNI and coordinator of TNI's "Militarism & Globalisation" project. The project analyses the changing global frameworks for military intervention and the spread of new security infrastructures. Its current focus includes work on defence industrial reorganisation and peoples security oriented UN reform. On behalf of TNI, Wilbert van der Zeijden is also an active campaigner in the Netherlands and internationally against the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and for the abolition of foreign military bases.

<http://www.tni.org>

War on Want is a UK charity which supports civil society and social movements in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. It also campaigns in the UK against multinational companies and Western governments that profit from, or turn a blind eye to, conflict and human rights violations in developing countries. In Iraq War on Want has been supporting trade union efforts to stop the privatisation of oil and strengthen workers' rights. It has also campaigned against the use of Private Military Security Companies in Iraq, and is part of the Hands off Iraqi Oil Coalition. Gemma Houldey is the Programme Officer responsible for Conflict Zones, supporting human rights organisations and social movements in Palestine, Iraq and Colombia that oppose occupation and defend the rights of marginalised communities to protect their land and livelihoods.

<http://www.waronwant.org>

Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative **مبادرة التضامن للمجتمع المدني العراقي**

People's Health Movement (PHM) is a global network which brings together grassroots health activists, civil society organizations and academic institutions from around the world particularly from developing countries. PHM works towards the revitalisation of primary health care, as described in the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978. PHM also works to address the social determinants of health, including in particular, the growing inequity within and between nations mostly due to the unfair global economic order which locks so many people into poverty and poor health. The Movement was launched in late 2000 at the end of the first People's Health Assembly (Bangladesh, December 2000) where around 1,500 participants from 90 countries gathered and reached a consensus on the People's Charter for Health. The PHM has bases in more than 50 countries around the world

<http://www.phmovement.org/cms/>

Alternatives International is a social and political movements struggling against neoliberalism, imperialism, social injustice and war. We are building solidarity between social movements at the local, national and international level. Our approach is both concrete (action-oriented) and intellectual (creating new paradigms). Neoliberalism is currently the dominant form of capitalism, against which several social movements have fought over the years under the banner of «socialism». However that banner has been partially destroyed with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and social movements all over the world are struggling to develop new alternatives.

<http://alternatives-international.net/?lang=en>

International Alliance Of Inhabitants Founded in September 12th 2003, by representatives of urban social associations and movements from various sides of the world met in Madrid to discuss on how jointly stand against the perverse effects of exclusion, poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation, violence, and problems related to transportation, housing and urban governance produced by the neo-liberal globalisation. the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI) is a network of representatives of the inhabitants' associations and social movements, communities, tenants, private house owners, homeless, people living in favelas and settlements, cooperatives, indigenous peoples and working class neighbourhoods of different world regions. Facing the permanent violations of the right to an adequate house and to a liveable city; In the context of a neo-liberal globalisation, which privatises public services **and human rights, increases social segregation, debases and merchandises human relationships;**

<http://www.habitants.org/article/frontpage/15/140>

HCA-France

The French branch of HCA, Assemblée Européenne des Citoyens (HCA-France), has been founded in 1990. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) has been founded 1990 in Prague by civic activists from Eastern and Western Europe, with the active support of President Vaclav Havel. It is a non profit civic movement, based on the involvement of individual activists from NGOs and social movements. It mainly focuses on democracy, peace and empowerment of civil society. The international HCA network has developed branches all over Europe from Scotland to Azerbaijan. Its activities have been mainly oriented during the 90s around peace issues and conflict resolution in the South East of Europe (former Yugoslavia, Caucasus, Moldova, etc.). Since its foundation, HCA has been chaired by MMs. Mary Kaldor (United kingdom), Sonia Licht (Serbia) and MMr Jaroslav Sabata, Martin Palous (Czech Republic), Mient Jan Faber (The Netherlands) , Murat Belge (Turkey). The co-chairs today are Ms Arzu Abdullayeva (Azerbaijan) and Bernard Dreano (France).

AEC (HCA-France) has a specific alterglobalist commitment. It is very active on immigration issues and civic education in France to international stakes.

http://www.reseau-ipam.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=57