KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMME CIVIL SOCIETY IN WEST ASIA

POLICY PAPER 4

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY
Promoting Pluralism and Intercultural Citizenship in Iraq

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Recommendations to the European Union on the Promotion of Minority Rights and Active Citizenship in Iraq

This paper, entitled "Unity in Diversity", provides an academic background on the protection of diversity in both the international (UN experience) and regional (European, US and African) frameworks, and then assesses national, religious and linguistic diversity in Iraq, offering an overview of the national framework for diversity in Iraq.

The paper aims to provide an academic approach to the protection of diversity among instructors in Iraqi universities and for students and researchers studying human rights. It also targets human rights trainers, particularly those concerned with minority rights, as well as local and national decision-makers.

The paper has put forward a plan for the protection of diversity in Iraq, by reflecting on the needed tools and mechanisms to that end and promoting minority rights while ensuring the establishment of intercultural citizenship.

The study reaches the following conclusions:

1- The approach calling for the acknowledgement of pluralism in the 2005 constitution has entailed a pro forma acknowledgement of minority rights, without tangible effect on the ground, while discrimination continued in administrative structures and state institutions by means of a sectarian quota policy and the distribution of power and wealth among the political elites of major groups.

2- The sectarian quota policy is in essence nothing short of an institutionalization of discrimination at the level of the state as a whole, and is one of the direct outputs of the "component-based state" model.

3- After 2003, the philosophy underpinning the "component-based state" model has stripped rights stipulated in the 2005 constitution of any practical value. Individual basic rights were confiscated under the banner of component rights; an intellectual construct that is politically exploited by elites employing sectarianism as a mobilization strategy against the Other.

4- The "component-based state" model is built on a tripartite power-sharing deal among major sects (Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds), with marginal representation of minorities. As a result, the model did not lead to a genuine acknowledgement of diversity, and has failed to establish a system for managing diversity.

5- The paper suggests intercultural citizenship as an alternative model, and defined new measures to be undertaken in order to lay its foundations (a roadmap for the promotion of diversity and citizenship in Iraq). It is now important to assert the importance of acknowledging diversity on the basis of citizenship rights and to adopt a comprehensive approach on the subject. The individual is the holder of basic rights, and social trust cannot be restored unless a sense of citizenship is promoted. No matter how different we are as groups, we should all ultimately be equal as individuals.

The paper makes the following recommendations to the European Union:

At the Level of Legislative Policies

The importance of diversity for preserving the unity of countries in the Middle East has now become evident, as has the fact that the migration of minorities leads to the destruction of whole societies, which creates separate ethnically homogenous groups, in other terms, mere "groups" that do not make up a "society". Hence, a package of legislation is needed to preserve diversity as well as the identity and cultures of minorities. In addition, the pluralist identity of society should be safeguarded, or else it would become easier to divide Iraq into various regions according to ethno-sectarian geography. Likewise, it is essential to issue legislation that would address discrimination and ensure equality. Legislation is a decisive mechanism that accelerates change and steers the culture of society towards fighting all forms of discrimination in addition to social, political and economic exclusion.

The paper proposes that the EU support work towards two pieces of legislation at the current time:

1 - Issuing independent legislation for fighting discrimination, based on an effective strategy aiming to change the culture of discrimination in society. This strategy draws on a number of key elements which should be determined and clarified as a prelude to a successful comprehensive solution:

a- Defining the concept of discrimination.
b- Identifying the forms of discrimination.
c- Defining categories included in protection (formally recognized minorities: Christians, Mandaeans, Yazidis) and minorities that are not formally recognized (Bahá'ís, Kakais, Iraqis of African origin).

2- Issuing legislation for the protection of diversity. The paper suggests 2 plans regarding this legislation:

"Plan A" Inserting the protection of diversity in a set of laws or legislation issued by the state, so that some of this legislation would be dedicated to the protection of diversity.

"Plan B" Issuing independent legislation for the protection of diversity, encompassing all necessary elements for the protection of minorities: protecting the identity and language of minorities, ensuring the right of minorities to access public media and their right to non-discrimination, etc.

At the Level of Educational Policy

Encourage the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to review the prevailing educational culture by examining, changing or adjusting school curricula, so that they would be compatible with a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-sectarian society. The paper suggests a plan consisting of 3 options:

"Plan A" Developing independent school curricula that enhance the knowledge of the Other, and set the stage for policies aiming to promote tolerance and the recognition of the various Others, most notably a curriculum to teach religions in Iraq, in partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education *in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.* These curricula should be drafted by researchers specialized in the sociology of religion, and taught by specialized teachers who undergo special training to be able to teach these curricula to young age groups in elementary or middle school.

"Plan B" In case it is difficult to implement Plan A, these curricula could be drafted and taught in selected schools, and if successful, transferred to other regions (a governorate in central or southern Iraq or in *the Kurdistan region*) and subsequently broadened to other provinces.

"Plan C" In case it is difficult to implement plans A or B, a third option would be to draft these curricula and provide training on how to teach them in special workshops held by CSOs that are competent in the field. Two targeted categories are selected:
Teachers and instructors of the religious education curriculum for elementary schools, and students in middle and preparatory stages.

Dialogue at the Informal Level (Interfaith Dialogue)

The EU should promote the informal frameworks of interfaith dialogue between followers of different faiths, building on a comprehensive strategy that involves various types of dialogue, according to the paper's suggestions:

First- Promoting meetings between religious leaders: by supporting the informal frameworks for dialogue between Muslim clerics and those from religious minorities through:

1- Exchanging visits and participation in different religious events (Muslim, Christian, Yazidi, Mandaean, Bahá'í, etc), which would pave the way for overcoming stereotypes about the Other.
2- Increased seminars, workshops and trainings for clerics, in order to deepen their knowledge about the Other and introduce them to other clerics whether from a different sect or religion.
3- Encouraging clerics to take part in international conferences and global events on tolerance and dialogue, organized by the United Nations and other international organizations interested in dialogue. This would help them gain great experience by opening up to the Other, thus promoting the discourse on moderation and curbing radicalism and incitement against the Other from a different faith.

Second- Engaging youth in the informal frameworks of dialogue: Dialogue is not limited to bringing together clerics who represent various religious backgrounds, but also working with youth from different religions. Youth are the most important category to be targeted in interfaith dialogue, as they are the most willing to open up to the Other and build bridges between disputing groups. By conducting multiple activities, such as workshops and exchanged visits, it would be possible to successfully engage new generations that are freed from the shackles of the past and the constraints of fundamentalism.

Third- Engaging women in dialogue: Any dialogue would benefit greatly from the input of women who are marginalized in major occasions involving interfaith or intrafaith dialogue. Women are among the categories suffering the most from fundamentalism, and will remain the most affected category in any case of sectarian dispute.

Fourth- Engaging other targeted categories in dialogue: The exchange of opinions should also involve believers who are not biased towards their religions and the followers of polytheistic religions (there are minorities that follow non-monotheistic or non-Abrahamic religions in Iraq), as well as members of unrecognized religious minorities, non-believers and secularists.

Fifth- Engaging specialized CSOs in dialogue: Interfaith dialogue will take on a more vital dimension with the participation of CSOs and their involvement in initiatives that respond to the challenges posed by the ever-changing realities in Iraq. This would amount to a collective expression in favor of the establishment of frameworks for interfaith dialogue between clerics and civil leaders, as is the case with the "Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue".

Sixth- Institutionalizing and sustaining dialogue: Dialogue should be institutionalized and sustained, since the sustainability of an intermittent, spontaneous and short-lived dialogue cannot be guaranteed. To that end, informal dialogue programs could be designed for many years ahead. In another scenario, the EU could announce the following contract: **The 2015-2025 Contract for Informal Interfaith Dialogue for the Promotion of Intercultural Citizenship.** Dialogue is a cumulative process whose effectiveness often hinges on its sustainability.

Reform and Dialogue Policy at the Formal Level

The EU should urge the Iraqi government to support a plan for dialogue based on three elements: supporting the frameworks of community-based dialogue, conducting reconciliation, implementing political reforms, as follows:

First- The EU should support the Iraqi government in developing an approach for a comprehensive community-based dialogue, instead of simply holding meetings between political elites in a framework of compromise while seeking to preserve the mutual interests of elites. This requires launching a community-based dialogue from the bottom up by: providing governmental support to projects that aim to build bridges of dialogue between youth sectors, promoting dialogue between Sunni and Shiite clerics on one hand, and Muslims and non-Muslims on the other, in order to counter extremist ideologies.

Second- National Reconciliation Project: A comprehensive community-based dialogue would facilitate the mobilization of civil forces in support of a national reconciliation project, or else extremist ideologies could not be delegitimized.

Third- Prompting the Iraqi government to launch a reform package that is necessary for reconciliation, such as:
1- Addressing corruption and releasing persons in arbitrary detention.
2- Promoting transparency and accountability, and conducting immediate investigations into human rights violations.
3- Abolishing legislations that contribute to discrimination or the persecution of minorities.
4- Joining the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and acknowledging its jurisdiction over the current dispute.
5- Recognizing minorities not included in the constitution.
6- Abolishing all legislation inherited from the Ba'ath era which contradict the rights stipulated in the constitution and violate minority rights.

Future of the Disputed Areas

In the face of violence that has eroded diversity in Iraq and countries across the region, military solutions constitute an unsuccessful investment in "hard power", as these countries face an enemy that is investing in oppression and marginalization against large parts of the population, and in the rampant corruption that has allowed it to easily gain influence and achieve staggering victories. Therefore, the EU should urge the Iraqi government to:

1- Regain the trust of resentful local communities so that they will share in the governance of their own affairs and trust the state's ability to protect them against violence, serve justice and pave the way for their fair participation in society.
2- Encourage refugees belonging to minorities to return to areas freed from ISIS control by rebuilding the basic infrastructure within the shortest time possible in order to facilitate their return, reforming the system of public services and engaging the population of the freed areas to govern themselves.
3- Support the EU to launch a negotiation process under European supervision regarding the disputed internal borders (minority areas in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains) which are areas of great diversity and are witnessing an Arab-Kurdish conflict that might drag the country into a potential civil war.

4- Implement Article 125 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution by turning it into legislation that guarantees self-governance for minorities in disputed areas while distancing them from the conflict between the political movements of major sects (Kurds, Shiites, Sunnis), and ensures their right to self-governance without this being construed as support to their aspirations to secession.

5- Prevent demographic change in these areas and restore their great diversity, while maintaining the presence of minorities in these mixed areas.

About the author

Saad Salloum is an Iraqi academic and journalist focusing on Iraqi minorities and human rights. He is the head of the Political Sciences Department at Mustansiriya University and is the president of the Masarat Institute for Cultural and Media Development. He is also one of the founding members of the Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue. In 2015 he authored a book on minorities in Iraq entitled: "Unity in Diversity: Pluralism and enhancing Citizenship to foster cultural diversity in Iraq" which was supported by Hivos.

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About Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia

Hivos and the University of Amsterdam, Department of Political Science, initiated the Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia in 2008. This academic activist initiative ended in 2011 and generated insights on the role of civil society actors and Western donors in democratisation processes in Syria and Iran. As of January 1, 2012 Hivos co-produces policy papers, policy briefs, briefing notes, working papers and special bulletins with think tanks, experts and activists mainly in the MENA region, but also in the United States and in Europe. Among others, these in-depth insights deal with dignity revolutions (the 'Arab Spring') and transition challenges and assess how Western donors can accompany transitions through insider knowledge.

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