



Iraq Foundation  
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## **Human Rights Defenders Network July 24, 2006-April 30, 2008**

### **Final Report**

**Grant # S-LMAQM-06-GR-124**

In July 2006, the Iraq Foundation started the Human Rights Defenders Network (HRDN) project, aimed at creating a network of organizations committed to defending human rights in Iraq.

The goal of the project was to develop Iraqi human rights monitoring and advocacy organizations that are equipped to defend human rights using common and internationally recognized standards and criteria, and to link these organizations through a national network. To achieve this goal, IF undertook several activities including two trainings on monitoring, documentation and advocacy for a group of 14 NGOs in Amman-Jordan and in Istanbul-Turkey. Also, in March 2007, HRDN started producing a monthly newsletter compiling the reports of HRDN members on human rights violations in nine different governorates. Throughout the project, IF, in partnership with Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) and Association Libanaise pour l'Education et la Formation (ALEF) continued building the capacities of the HRDN through evaluating their monthly reports and IF's electronic newsletter. Furthermore, and in order to strengthen the network and monitor its activities, IF held several meetings for HRDN members and carried out numerous field trips to NGO centers to oversee the networks' performance. In addition, IF worked on building the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) capacity through inviting MOHR representatives to the trainings and engaging the ministry to become a supporter of the HRDN.

Finally, under the supervision and with the assistance of ALEF, IF produced an annual report on Human Rights in Iraq from Feb.07 to Feb.08 with a special report on "The Human Rights Repercussions of Illegal Marriage" in Iraq. At the end of the project, HRDN members held several press meetings to raise awareness about human rights issues and publicize the project's activities.

**Project's Goal:** The goal of the HRDN project was to develop Iraqi human rights monitoring and advocacy organizations that are equipped to defend human rights using common and internationally recognized standards and criteria, and to link these organizations through a national network.



## I. Activities

### 1. Objective 1: Train 15 Iraqi NGOs for Monitoring, Documentation and Advocacy

#### ➤ Amman Training

In early September, IF's HRDN team selected 40 NGOs from a pool of hundreds of local NGOs already working on human rights issues in Iraq. Using its self-developed assessment form, IF evaluated the NGOs and chose 15 to participate in the HRDN project. The selection process was based on a number of criteria developed by the Foundation. The criteria included the organization's past human rights training, current activities, areas of interests, and future professional objectives, among other things.

As soon as IF-DC received the project award, the foundation contacted HRWF and jointly started planning for a training that aimed to help the pre-selected NGOs monitor and document human rights abuses in their respective governorates, defend human rights, and advocate for justice on behalf of the victims and witnesses who approach them.

The training was held from December 12 to 17 2006, in Amman-Jordan. The selected NGOs included organizations that had mandates that included the protection of the rights of women, children, and religious and ethnic minorities. The NGOs came from different Iraqi areas, including Baghdad, Wasit, Najaf, Nasriya, Basra, Anbar, Diyalaa, Salah el Din, and Kirkuk, among others. A representative from the Ministry of Human Rights also participated in the training. IF invited MOHR to the training with the intention of increasing the capabilities of the ministry and its effectiveness as a defender of human rights in Iraq.

The training focused on developing and strengthening the monitoring, reporting, networking, and advocacy skills of the organizations, equipping them with international tools and methods, and connecting them together and with international and regional organizations. The training included simulation exercises designed to strengthen the capacities of the network's members and build their experience in interviewing victims, documenting cases of abuse, collecting information, and verifying the claims. Additionally, the training discussed reports that were prepared by a number of human rights organizations that were participating and identified ways in which they could be improved.

#### Participating Institutions and NGOs:

1. The Ministry of Human rights
2. The Iraqi Committee for Human Rights, Kut
3. Dar el-Salam Institution, Baghdad
4. The Society of Education for all, Baghdad
5. The Kurdish Center for Youth, Baghdad



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6. The future of children organization, Diyala
7. The Human Rights Organization, Sammawa
8. The Truth Organization for Democracy and Rights Education, Kirkuk
9. The Muslim Women Society, Basra
10. Al-Safa Society for Development and Friendship, Anbar
11. The Iraqi Youth Coalition, Baghdad
12. The Women of the Future for Development, Al-Nasiriyya
13. The Rasid Center for Human Rights, Najaf
14. The Monitoring of Human Rights in Iraq Network, Baghdad
15. The Larsa center for Legal Studies, programming and Human Rights, Baghdad

➤ Istanbul Training

From September 8 - 10, the Iraq Foundation held a meeting for 12 members of the Human Rights Defenders Network in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting brought together HRDN members, IF staff, and regional experts to discuss the Network's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and agree on a long term strategic plan and a short term working plan. The second part of the meeting focused on reporting and documentation training.

IF partnered with the Association Libanaise Pour l'Education et la Formation (ALEF), a human rights organization based in Lebanon, to help build the capacities of the HRDN in the areas of reporting and documentation, and develop them to become in line with international UN standards. As part of the meeting, ALEF evaluated reports prepared by the HRDN and made recommendations on ways in which the reporting could be improved. The meeting was part of IF's continued efforts to support the network and build the capacity of its members. On the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup>, the HRDN held an internal meeting to finalize their strategy and working plan and discuss funding sources that could keep the network active, after current funding ends. The group agreed on the following issues:

1. Revising the internal code of conduct
2. Producing joint reports more frequently, to ensure geographic coverage of a specific issue.
3. Expanding the NGOs networking efforts inside their own governorates to ensure better sector and geographic coverage.

Participating HRDN members:

1. The Iraqi Committee for Human Rights, Kut
2. The Kurdish Center for Youth, Baghdad
3. The future of children organization, Diyala



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4. The Human Rights Organization, Sammawa
5. The Islamic organization for Human Rights, Mosul
6. Human Rights Organization, Balad
7. The Right Organization for Human Rights, Kirkuk
8. The Iraqi Organization for the Defense of Human Rights, Maysan
9. The Yalla Chabab Alliance, Baghdad
10. The Educated Student's Alliance, Baghdad
11. The Yazidi Solidarity and Fraternity Association, Mosul
12. The Rasid Center for Human Rights, Najaf

## 2. **Objective 2: Establish a Human Rights Defenders' Network**

The final day of the Amman training was dedicated to the creation of the Human Rights Defenders' Network and discussed the following issues:

1. Defining the mission of the network
2. Establishing a Code of Conduct
3. Reporting:
  - A. Methodology that will be used to gather information
  - B. Methodology of presentation of reports.
4. Verification criteria of complaints/abuses documented by the network
5. Methods of maintaining confidentiality of witnesses
6. HRDN networking procedures

IF partnered with the Brussels-based, HRWF to carry out this training and invited a group of distinguished regional and international human rights trainers to deliver the training, including Professor Mohamed Y. Mattar, Adjunct Professor of Law and Executive Director of The Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. IF also invited distinguished Jordanian lawyer and women's rights activist Asma Khader as a guest speaker at the training.

Following the training and upon return to Iraq, IF invited all 18 organizations to become part of the HRDN network and contribute to its future activities.

IF held several meetings for HRDN in order to strengthen the network and monitor their activities. Also, IF staff carried out numerous field trips to NGO centers in order to oversee the networks' performance. In addition, IF started establishing a database to document human rights violations in Iraq.

### ➤ **Suleimaniyya Meeting**

On March 26-27, 2007, IF held a meeting for members of the HRDN. Eleven members of the network from Kut, Baghdad, Sulimaniya, Sammawa, Kikuk, Basra,



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Anbar, Najaf, Mosul, and Salih el Din attended the meeting. The Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights also delegated a representative to attend the meeting.

IF organized this meeting as a follow-up to the Amman Training. The participants discussed the network's members' progress since January 2007, future strategies, activities, and challenges. IF and the HRDN members also discussed ways to make the network more effective and efficient and better inter-connected.

In March 2007, the network had released the first issue of the HRDN newsletter. This newsletter was the first of a series of twelve newsletters reporting on the human rights situation in at least 9 different governorates of Iraq each month. The two sides discussed the reports that were provided by the network members to IF and the first issue of the defender's newsletter that was produced by the NGOs and disseminated in March to IF's listserv in Iraq. IF and the network members brainstormed ways in which the newsletter could be improved in the future. This included revising the format of the reports that the NGOs are required to send to IF each month. IF and the NGOs agreed that the latter will send reports on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to the Foundation and the Foundation will review and edit the reports, compile and disseminate them in the form of an electronic newsletter on the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month.

Other issues that were revisited during the meeting included the contracts signed by the two sides before the Amman training was held, the duties of the network's members and that of IF as stipulated in the agreements, the Network's Mission Statement and the Code of Conduct, as well as some issues covered in Amman, including mechanisms that could be used to defend human rights and ensure the safety of plaintiffs or victims of human rights abuses.

The meeting concluded with a presentation by Dana Hassan Muhammad on ways in which the network members could strengthen their networking efforts among each other and with other organizations with similar mandates both outside and inside Iraq.

IF's Director of Programs, Ali Assaf, stressed that in addition to the monitoring and documentation activities that the network members should be reporting on, on a monthly basis, the NGOs should also shed light on the situation of human rights in general in their respective areas and provide recommendations on how the situation could be improved. Assaf called on the NGOs to include such information in their monthly reports to serve as part of the network's advocacy efforts.

The Suleimaniya Meeting's recommendations included that NGOs working within close geographical proximity of one another would meet once a month to better coordinate and evaluate progress, needs, and challenges. Organizations based in Baghdad or close to the Capital would meet at IF's Baghdad office while those working in the Southern governorates would meet at IF's Basra branch office. The groups would send the minutes of these meetings to IF to circulate among the Network members.



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Meeting's Participants:

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13. The Iraqi Committee for Human Rights, Kut
14. The Society of Education for All, Baghdad
15. The Kurdish Center for Youth, Baghdad
16. The Society for the Future of Childhood, Sulimaniya
17. The Human Rights Organization, Sammawa
18. Al Haq (the truth) for Democracy and Rights Education, Kirkuk, represented at the meeting by Mohammed Jabouri
19. The Muslim Women Society/ The Iraqi Fardos Society, Basra
20. Al Safa Society for Development and Friendship, Anbar
21. The Rasid Institute for Human Rights, Najaf
22. The Islamic organization for Human Rights, Mosul
23. Human Rights Institute, Salh el Din
24. Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights, Baghdad
25. IF staff, Baghdad

#### ➤ **Baghdad Meeting**

IF hosted another meeting for HRDN organizations on May 30, 2007 at IF's office in Baghdad. The meeting was aimed at strengthening networking among the network members and discussing and assessing progress, challenges, and needs. The discussions of the meeting were made available to the HRDN network and announced in the June newsletter.

The meeting was attended by four organizations. The security situation made it difficult for other network members to attend. The following organizations were present at the meeting:

- Iraqi Committee of Human Rights
- The Society of Education of All
- The Kurdish Center for Youth
- The Rasid Institute for Human Rights

The meeting stressed the importance of the impartiality of the reports and adherence to the reporting guidelines that were agreed upon by the members of the HRDN in Suleimaniya during the March meeting. The meeting also addressed the importance of continued coordination between the network members and respect of due dates and deadlines. Among the challenges reported by the HRDN organizations were movement restrictions due to the bad security situation, preventing organizations in some cases from completing their reports and sending them to IF on time. IF requested that any organization that is unable to complete its report by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, informs the Foundation of this delay. IF also requested that the HRDN members provide constant



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feedback and make recommendations on the newsletter to help improve the product and build the network's reporting capacity.

### ➤ **Regional Meetings**

After the Istanbul meeting, IF hosted five regional meetings for HRDN member organizations:

- On October 24<sup>th</sup> 2007, HRDN members met in Erbil. The meeting was aimed at strengthening networking among the network members and discussing and assessing progress, challenges, and needs.
- On October 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, HRDN members met in Basra to evaluate the network's performance after the Istanbul meeting and discuss the newsletter's evaluation.
- On November 4<sup>th</sup> 2007, HRDN members met in Baghdad to discuss the reports and newsletter evaluations and assess the network's performance after the Istanbul meeting. The participants also agreed to present a joint report on "Illegal marriage in Iraq."
- On January 10 2008, IF's Iraq staff met with HRDN members in its Baghdad office. The participants discussed the network's performance and the two special reports to be drafted as addendums to the final report on the human rights situation in Iraq, the monthly reports' structure and the importance of the evaluation questionnaire.
- On February 7 2008, IF held another meeting with the HRDN in its Baghdad office to discuss the special reports as well as the networks' performance and challenges.

### 3. **Objective 3: Information-gathering, Dissemination and Advocacy**

#### ➤ **HRDN Newsletter**

On March 29 2007, IF released the first issue of the HRDN newsletter. IF produced 12 issues of the Newsletter over the course of the project. The newsletter compiled the reports of HRDN members and addressed various human rights violations in nine different governorates. To produce their reports, the organizations used the monitoring, documentation, and reporting skills that they were trained on during the Amman training in December.

After reviewing and editing the HRDN reports, IF produced the electronic newsletter and disseminated it to IF's LISTSERV in Iraq. The LISTSERV included contacts from Academic Institutions, including Baghdad University, al Mostansariya University, the Mohammed the Sixth University in Morocco, and University of Ahl el



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Bayt in Karbala. Other contacts belonged to Iraq's NGO community, political parties, and media organizations.

IF translated three issues of the monthly Newsletter. The three translated issues were sent to HRWF for evaluation.

ALEF also regularly evaluated the HRDN reports. They reviewed two sets of ten reports prepared by the HRDN and made recommendations on ways in which the reporting could be improved.

As part of the ongoing support IF provided HRDN, IF also regularly sent its own assessment of the monthly reports to the NGOs, pointing out to areas where reports could be improved and areas of strengths and weakness.

*ALEF's Evaluation Criteria included the following questions:*

- 1) Description of context; Does the report describe the general environment and the political, economical, social cultural...contexts?
- 2) Description of legislation; Does the report describe the relevant legislation?
- 3) Description of policies; Does the report mention any related policy to the topic?
- 4) Description of practices; Does the report describe and differentiate between specific violations and practices/trends?
- 5) Coverage of rights; Does the report cover all categories of rights?
- 6) Ratification status; Does the report describe the ratification and reporting status of the relevant instrument?
- 7) Relation to articles/instruments; Does the report link the violations to the relevant article of the instrument?
- 8) Accuracy/Precision; Is the information accurate?
- 9) Impartiality; Does the report include the versions of both sides of violations?
- 10) Sources of information; Does the report state the sources of information and how it was triangulated?
- 11) Evidence & Proofs; Does the report mention any evidence collected by the organization on the violations?
- 12) Clarity; Is the report clear in general in bringing up the violations?
- 13) Action Oriented; Is the report action oriented? Is it a tool to be used for any possible action?
- 14) Organization/Structure; Is the structure (headings, subheadings....) reader friendly? Does it start by an executive summary?
- 15) Editing style; Is the style factual? Brief?
- 16) Layout; Has the layout of the report (design, font...) been worked out to contribute to make the report more friendly?
- 17) Audiovisual support; Are there photos, charts, schemes... in the report to support the text and make it more easy to understand?



*HRWF's evaluation Criteria included the following questions:*

- 1) Coherence between the contents, the goal and the target audience (Selection of the topics and the information with regard to the objective of the Newsletter, the expectations of the editor-in-chief and of the readers)
- 2) Structure and Graphic design of the Newsletter
  - Front page (outlook and contents)
  - Table of contents (technical link with the various texts)
  - Editorial
  - Reports on Human Rights violations
  - News about the internal dynamic of the HRDN
  - Services offered (i.e. Hotline for victims of violations, legal assistance, contact point for relations with media, etc.)
  - Call for specific human resources (volunteers)
- 3) Balance between the various parts of the Newsletter:
  - Comparing the length of each section, the length of each report, etc.
  - Logical sequence of the texts
  - Coherence between the various texts and inside each text
- 4) Nature and variety of the texts: reports, press releases, interviews, etc.
- 5) Literary analysis of each text (contents, style, spelling)
- 6) Accuracy of the reports (What happened? Where? When? Who was involved?). Do they meet the quality standards?
- 7) Feedback and interaction opportunities (address, phone, fax, email address, website, call for targeted financial and material support, bank account number, etc...)
- 8) Personalization of the relations between the readers and the HRDN (i.e. photo of the HRDs)

➤ **Annual Report**

In April 2008, IF produced an annual report of the human rights situation in Iraq from February 2007 to February 2008. IF also produced a special report on the human rights repercussions of illegal marriage in Iraq. Both reports were produced under the supervision, and with the assistance of ALEF.

➤ **Advocacy**

During the months of March and April, HRDN publicized the network's project activities through holding regional press meetings. The meetings were held by HRDN members in the following six governorates: Najaf, Samawa, Basra, Kut, Anbar and Diyala. During the meetings, HRDN organizations publicized the network's activities and



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responded to the press inquiries. They also distributed the latest issue of the monthly Newsletter. The events were widely covered by local TV and radio stations as well as newspapers. Participants included local government council members, tribal leaders, police officers, academics, lawyers, as well as NGO and media representatives.

#### **4. Objective 4: Build MOHR Capacity**

In order to build MOHR Capacity, IF invited MOHR to the Amman training with the intention of increasing the capabilities of the ministry and its effectiveness as a defender of human rights in Iraq. MOHR was also invited to attend the Suleimaniyya follow-up meeting from March 26 to 27, 2007. MOHR joined the participants to discuss the network's members' progress since January 2007, future strategies, activities, and challenges. The meeting also discussed ways to make the network more effective and efficient and better inter-connected.

IF also held several meeting with the Ministry of Human Rights to discuss its role in supporting the HRDN and ways to strengthen it.

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup>, IF met with MOHR's representatives at the ministry and requested that the ministry supports HRDN through providing the network with reports and studies that could enhance the work of the network and provide it with statistics and facts on human rights issues around the country. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> IF met with Adl Kodayr, Manager of Public Relations at the Ministry while the May 7<sup>th</sup> meeting was held with Khalil Ibrahim, the MOHR officer who is in charge of coordination with the NGO community.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, IF met again with Khalil Ibrahim at IF's Baghdad offices to follow up on the ministry's role in supporting the HRDN. A follow up meeting was held at the ministry between Khalil Ibrahim and IF's Director of Programs. IF sent an official request to meet with the Minister of Human Rights to finalize pending issues between the two sides.

## **II. Project Impact**

The HRDN project was quickly recognized as shining example of the Civil Society's growing commitment to the defense of human rights in Iraq. Following the release of the first HRDN newsletter, IF received an endorsement from Shaza al Abousi, a member of the Iraqi Council of Representative and the Human Rights Parliamentary Committee congratulating IF's efforts for defending human rights in Iraq and expressing the Committee's desire and willingness to support IF's initiative. Abousi expressed interest in cooperating with the Foundation in future activities. Meanwhile, a number of Iraqi human rights NGOs expressed interest in joining the Network.



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Furthermore, in February 2008, the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights contacted the Iraq Foundation to congratulate IF for the high quality of its monthly newsletter and asked the foundation if HRDN could partner with the Ministry to write a joint report on “Street Children in Iraq” and issue common recommendations to submit to Parliament and other stakeholders. The Ministry offered to convene a meeting between HRDN member organizations and expand the relationship between the organizations and the Ministry.

Also during the month of February, the CPI human rights department representative, Mr. Mohammad Majid, paid a visit to IF to praise the excellence of the monthly newsletter. Mr. Majid offered to support IF’s efforts by printing five to six hundred copies of the newsletter and help disseminate it to the Parliament, ministries and various institutions. Mr. Majid also suggested expanding the collaboration between the CPI and IF to help IF reach out to a wider segment of the Iraqi population. IF informed Mr. Majid that the February Newsletter was the latest issue of the newsletters, and that IF would contact CPI to expand collaboration if the project receives further funding.

To evaluate the HRDN project’s success and impact on the promotion of human rights, IF prepared an NGOs’ Activities Questionnaire. Through this questionnaire, IF surveyed HRDN members over the course of twelve month (from March 2007 to March 2008). The survey showed that the network greatly relied on the skills acquired during the trainings to document, report, advocate and network for human rights in Iraq. It also showed that the network’s reporting activities had a great impact on government officials, the press and other stakeholders in Iraq, and contributed to helping and sometimes resolving human rights issue. In addition, IF’s newsletter appeared to have become a tool of reference for several Iraqi institutions and government officials. For example, a survey of 9 NGOs shows that from March to September 2007, 69 government officials consulted the newsletter on various occasions; 38 press officials consulted the newsletter to obtain information; 40 times, NGOs noticed that the newsletter’s information helped improve the human rights situation in Iraq; 119 reports prepared by HRDN member organizations were published or mentioned in the press; 89 human rights violations were identified by HRDN member organizations and documented in reports; 44 human rights violations were documented by HRDN members and reported to the Human Rights Committee in Parliament; 135 human rights violations were documented by HRDN members and reported to the Human Rights Ministry/ Regional human rights office; 40 human rights violations were documented by HRDN members and reported to the Ministry of Justice; HRDN members carried out 253 advocacy activities to defend a human rights violation (73 through the media, 86 through contacting government officials and 94 through non-official parties).

### **III. Challenges**

Throughout the project, IF faced many security, budget and logistical challenges. IF strived to provide a remedy for those challenges.



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Among the challenges reported by the HRDN organizations were movement restrictions due to the bad security situation, preventing organizations in some cases from completing their reports and sending them to IF on time. IF requested that any organization that is unable to complete its report by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, informs the Foundation of this delay.

Also, the September 2007 meeting was originally planned to take place in Jordan. Tight restrictions against Iraqis entering Jordan forced IF to re-locate the meeting to Istanbul, Turkey. IF found that lodging and meals costs in Turkey are much higher than those budgeted for Jordan. Despite this, IF worked within the approved budget. The fact that IF was not familiar with the hotels in Turkey also presented challenges for the Foundation when working on logistics.

On March 16 2008, IF's Iraq staff Ali Al-Raheem was scheduled to go to Amman-Jordan to receive a training/mentoring to write an annual report on the human rights situation in Iraq. Mr. Al-Raheem flew to Amman but was retained at the airport for several hours by the airport security before being sent back to Baghdad. Due to time constraints (the project was scheduled to end in April) IF agreed with ALEF to have the training/mentoring happen online and through SKYPE.