


Advancing Women's Rights: Two Years in Iraq

The Compiled Projects of the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute
An Initiative of the Independent Women's Forum





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Introduction: The Future of Iraqi Women's Rights

Iraqi women arguably suffered the most under Saddam Hussein's rule as they witnessed their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons returned in coffins from his military atrocities. These women carried the responsibility of raising and supporting families in a traditionally male-dominated society. Many now lack the education and skills to acquire decent jobs to support their families. In order to support and ensure the future success of a democratic Iraq and to prevent extreme ideologies from unduly influencing this segment of the population and turning it against democratic principles, Iraqi women at all levels must be encouraged to seek progress on social, political, and economic levels.

Much animosity remains in Iraq after 35 years of Saddam's despotism. While the widespread ethnic violence seen in the past few years was held at bay through intimidation and fear under his regime, underlying religious and ethnic tensions did exist. The minority Sunni Ba'ath party systematically worked to subjugate the majority Shi'a. For years, this Shi'a majority, especially in the southern regions of Iraq, lived with crumbling infrastructure—without adequate electricity, access to clean water, or access to healthcare—in a society where they watched the ruling Sunni minority live well under the protection of Saddam Hussein. These tensions, which have been long in the making, will not be changed overnight.


After the ousting of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, surveys demonstrated that although the majority of Iraqis were enthusiastic about their newfound freedom and wanted democracy, they did not possess a working understanding of the core principles of democratic governance. Key aspects of an active democratic state, including the protection of minority rights, religious freedom, and the responsibility of the individual, were little known. Indeed, many Iraqi political leaders promoted the idea that democracy merely means majority rule.

The handover of sovereign power to the Iraqis in June 2004 coincided with the growth of extremist groups such as Ba'ath party loyalists, al-Qaeda terrorists, and radical Islamist parties (collectively herein as the insurgency). This growth in the insurgency has been paralleled in recent years by a growth in sectarian violence that pits Sunni and Shi'a religious sects against one another.

As the insurgency and bitter infighting have threatened Iraq's transition to democracy, it has become more important than ever to ensure that Iraqi citizens have the tools and resources needed to make informed decisions about, and participate in, the political and economic future of their nation, especially working to ensure that minority voices—particularly those of women who make up roughly half of the population of 27 million—are represented and not suppressed or ignored.

While in some ways already educated and integrated into professional and academic roles, women in Iraq traditionally have been excluded from leadership roles, consigning them to secondary status and leaving few women with the practical knowledge and political power to actively participate in the political process. Social and political barriers facing women in Iraq remain today and in many ways are exacerbated by the ongoing conflict surrounding them. Traditional ideas about the role of women in society predominate. An ongoing struggle remains as religious extremists attempt to curtail women's roles and rights in society.

In sum, at the time of the publishing of this report, despite their representation in government, Iraqi women still face considerable challenges, and their status as equal citizens in Iraq is seriously threatened by harsh realities. Political instability, the lack of security, and ultra-traditional social and religious morays continue to prevent women from being full participants in the political process. Women's rights are still very much unsure in Iraq.



Iraqi women's organizations represent one of the "few indigenous barriers to theocracy."

With stricter limitations on where and when and how women are able to move about in Iraqi society, women's ability to improve conditions for themselves and not rely solely on the actions of men is also hampered. Women, as well as men, are fearful of being kidnapped on the streets. This fear has also limited their mobility and opportunity. Unlike most men, these women face the deeper fear and threat of sexual assault. This limited mobility also impacts daily activities such as pursuing work outside the home, school attendance, and even simple tasks such as shopping or seeking medical care. Said one Iraqi woman, "...it's just like being in jail."¹

Over the year 2006, numerous reports from various organizations working in Iraq established that the general rise in sectarian violence had a negative impact on women, restricting their mobility and opportunities, including educational and economic opportunities: the very things needed to move Iraq forward. And, as is common among all conflict-affected regions, incidences of rape and sexual assault have escalated. February 19, 2007, wire reports detailed an account in which "a 20-year old Sunni woman accused three Iraqi policemen of raping her after she was detained during a search of her house in western Baghdad." While the report in itself is disturbing, it is also remarkable that an Iraqi woman in a conservative Muslim society would come forward. The reporting of a rape is a giant leap forward. The fact remains that there is still much cultural progress that needs to be made in Iraq in regard to issues such as those concerning victims of rape and sexual assault. These women are just that: victims. They are entitled to justice, not scorn. They should be seen as violated, not as women or girls of lost honor.²

Honor killings in Iraq remain a troubling issue and have gained world-wide attention. A May 2007 United Nations report tallied 40 honor killings during the months of January and February 2007 of women in Iraq who had been guilty of alleged "immoral conduct." The range

for “immorality” in these cases ran from “sitting in a car with a man who is not a relative to having an adulterous relationship.”³ Also in May of 2007, a 17-year-old Iraqi girl, Duaa Khalil Aswad, was murdered by her uncle and cousins for falling in love with a boy of the “wrong” religion. Aswad’s case reached a level of unprecedented prominence because her murder happened to be recorded by an onlooker’s cell phone camera in the form of a short video that was posted on the Internet. The video strikingly and horribly called attention to the practice of honor killing and provoked outrage in the international community.

However, Iraqis remain divided on the issue. Hana Edwar, director of the Baghdad-based non-governmental organization (NGO), Al-Amal Organization for Women, likened the act to “...a new Taliban controlling the lives of women in Iraq.” On the other hand, some claim that Aswad’s situation and others like it are being used to divide the country along religious and ethnic lines. To quote one Kurdish woman, “It was just an ordinary problem, but it was made use of and was fabricated into a political cause.”⁴

But even among these divided opinions, women are working to change attitudes and provide safe havens for women who may become the target of honor killings. Yanar Mohammed, president of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, established the Iraqi Underground Railroad to protect women under threat of honor killings. For her work, Mohammed has received numerous death threats, and many of her colleagues have fled the country in fear. Yet, she has persevered and succeeded in setting up a number of women’s shelters to shield women from punishment under *Shari’ah* as well as outright violence or domestic abuse.⁵

But stigma and the threat of violence are not reserved for only those who are perceived to have damaged family honor. Many times, the mere act of speaking out on women’s issues and fighting for women’s rights makes women targets. In the summer of 2006, women from Iraq and members of the international community lobbied for crimes against women to be prosecuted under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi High Tribunal, the entity created to try war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Saddam Hussein’s regime. A testament to women’s fear of harassment and violence in Iraq is that one of the leading figures in the movement refused to be named or have the name of her organization mentioned in the press for fear of violent reciprocity. In her stead, an international voice, that of Janet Benshoof, director of the Global Justice Center, said, “If we can get the prosecutors to make indictments for the Ba’athist crimes and the judges to recognize sexual violence, it is going to open a door that can change the local laws on rape and on honor killings. Once that door is open, it cannot shut.”⁶

In addition to social ostracism and honor killings, which may be carried out under what could be termed informal tribal, family, or sect oversight, reports also cite cases in which women have been denied due process and ultimately were found guilty and sentenced to death in the formal courts.

International demonstrations have been held to protest the pending executions of three young Iraqi women, all of whom lacked representation and were convicted at trials that lacked transparency.⁷

Also, some practices—previously rare in Iraqi society—have emerged, such as the segregation between males and females in public institutions and spaces. In some cases, women have also found it difficult to so much as leave the house unaccompanied by a male guardian due to the wide control by religious sectarian forces. And when women do go out, codes of dress have become more formal and restrictive as differing interpretations of *hijab*, or modesty of dress, are enforced on the streets of Iraq. A former accountant and mother of four noted in 2006: “I resisted for a long time, but last year I started wearing *hijab*, after I was threatened by several Islamist militants in front of my house. They are terrorizing the whole neighborhood, behaving as if they were in charge. And they are actually controlling the area. No one dares to challenge them. A few months ago, they distributed leaflets around the area warning people to obey them and demanding that women should stay at home.”⁸

The progress that women have carved out of a difficult situation in Iraq has not come without a price. Especially in southern Iraq, but in greater part all across the country, Iraqi political parties dominate and smother independent entities. As a result, the growth of a diverse and vocal civil society has been sluggish. Independent activist women's NGOs continue to be threatened and harassed. Numerous women reformers and leaders have been threatened or killed since 2003. Women taking leadership roles in Iraq, whether in the workforce, NGOs, or the political arena, have become targets for assassination.⁹ In October of 2006, Iraqi women's rights champion, Halima Ahmed al-Juburi, was shot at home in front of her children.¹⁰ In November 2006, Lama Riyad and Fadia Tai, two Iraqi female journalists, were assassinated.¹¹ These are just a few examples.

In March of 2007, Houzan Mahmoud, a representative based in London for the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, reported that her activism—even outside the borders of Iraq—to promote women's rights resulted in the jihadist group Ansar al-Islam placing a *fatwah* on her head, calling for her death. On the ground in Iraq, many women similar to Mahmoud are eager to express their passion for women's rights but also fear for their safety in the face of death threats and the deaths of their friends and colleagues.¹²

Iraqi women who have the courage to speak out are at times silenced in less violent ways. The Iraqi women's movement supported Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's June 2006 National Reconciliation Plan but was later marginalized and was not invited by the government and other political factions to take part in mobilizing support for this plan. The Islamic Dawa Party's newspaper *Al-Bayan* reported that a large conference of NGOs met in Basra to promote al-Maliki's plan. The participants—who included many high-ranking officials, clerics, poets, and political leaders—underlined the importance of making the plan a success. Civil society groups,

including the women's NGOs, were very active in Basra, educating the public about the plan and its role in spreading peace and security around the countryside. However, women were effectively absent from decision-making positions regarding this effort.

The participation of women in the present government was also reduced from six ministers under Ibrahim Jaafari's government to four under al-Maliki. The number of women parliamentarians was reduced by 17 compared to the previous number in the National Assembly. Women report continuing to feel that they are being held back from taking a substantial role in the legislative process and also that their opportunities for promotion are limited.¹³

There has been an increase in sectarian and discriminatory actions toward women at all levels of government and civil society. In many places, especially in rural areas, the enforcement of the rule of law has been usurped by religious or tribal leaders or ultra-conservative government officials. Edicts have ranged from requiring that women wear the veil to prohibiting women from wearing trousers and driving cars. These incidents only strengthen the urgent need for secular jurisdiction in family law (formerly Personal Law No. 188) to be codified in the current rule of law in Iraq.*

As late as March of 2007, a continuing lack of essential services has plagued Iraqis. A doctor at a Baghdad teaching hospital was quoted as saying, "We only have electricity for three to a maximum of five hours a day. There is not enough clean drinking water. Lack of sanitation is a big problem and continues to be one of the main causes of malnutrition, dysentery, and death amongst young children."¹⁴

And lack of electricity and sanitation is not the only challenge that faces the medical community and, to a greater extent, the community as a whole. As of 2006, more than 32,000 doctors have left Iraq, a medical-brain drain. Those physicians left in Iraq deal with casualties of the daily violence and a lack of medicine and supplies. Though state salaries for doctors were increased and delivered in a timely manner after the fall of Hussein's regime, recently payments have been intermittent and sometimes nonexistent. Doctors have also become targets of terrorists and have faced the retaliation of families whose relatives may have succumbed to complications during intricate procedures.¹⁵ Anecdotally, it is estimated that attended births even in urban areas, where numbers have traditionally been higher, have declined due to the ongoing conflict. Because of mobility restrictions, women find it harder to reach a hospital to give birth.

Troubling trends such as trafficking in persons and prostitution are also on the rise in Iraq and among Iraqi refugee populations.¹⁶ Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime on April 9, 2003,

* Please see page 8 of this document for more details regarding the fight to maintain the tenets of Personal Status Law No. 188 and its history as a statute in Iraq.

it is reported that 2,000 women have been reported abducted and sold as commodities inside and outside Iraq.¹⁷ On the reverse of this issue, women have disturbingly become party to acts of violence, particularly as suicide bombers. Five such incidences have been reported, the most deadly occurring in March of 2007 when a female suicide bomber killed more than 40 people at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad's Sadr City.¹⁸

Despite an increasingly violent security situation and reduced outside funding for such projects, Iraqi women's NGOs continue to work to provide outlets for those who desire positive change within the country. Operating since 2006, the Essen Foundation promotes Iraqi women in media in an effort to develop a new wave of respect for women and freedom. The foundation also reaches out to young people through various artistic outlets, so that they can have a channel of expression designed to deter them from joining violent sectarian forces.¹⁹ During the summer of 2007, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq organized a *Freedom Space* forum for young Iraqi poets and musicians to give voice to their art form and in so doing express their desire for peace and freedom, especially in terms of human rights. The gatherings have been banned by extremists, and so have been taking place in secret.²⁰

Iraqi women are also pushing to be an integral part of the reconstruction process as they advocate for government contracts. Women have compiled a list of 350 women-owned eligible businesses that they distribute to contracting officials. March 2006 marked the group's first major victory as 500 contracts were awarded by the Iraqi government to Iraqi women-owned businesses.²¹ This news was followed by news in March 2007 that women are organizing to fill the gaps where government services fall short—health care, housing, and social services. “Women have also pooled their resources to help address the need for education and training, such as computer classes, as well as income-generating projects.”²²

In June of 2007, women's civil society organizations based in Iraq, including the Iraq Women's Movement and the Al-Amal Association, sent an open letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the highest-ranking woman in U.S. government, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to support their efforts to ensure that Article 41 (assigning jurisdiction of family law/personal status law to religious, not secular, courts) of the draft constitution does not become law. Passage of Article 41 would negatively impact the rights of women in areas such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. These activists also warn that Article 41 could also serve to deepen sectarian divides among Iraqis.²³ Hanaa Edwar, the director of Al-Amal Association, was quoted saying, “We feel that this is not a women's demand, it is a national demand. This is important for national security.”²⁴

While independent and driven women like these and numerous international NGOs have undertaken projects to strengthen the role of Iraqi women leaders in the development of a dem-

ocratic Iraq, relatively little attention has been paid over the course of reconstruction to those Iraqi women who are less educated and unskilled. In addition, by 2006, only a small amount of U.S. assistance had specifically targeted women in economic and political empowerment or human rights through the development of independent, Iraq-based NGOs that are not supported by Islamist organizations or political parties.²⁵ Though this work has begun to help Iraqi women to build their capacity in the political, social, and economic sectors, much remains to be done to support existing NGOs and encourage and nourish new ones. Iraqi women's organizations have been cited as representing one of the "few indigenous barriers to theocracy."²⁶

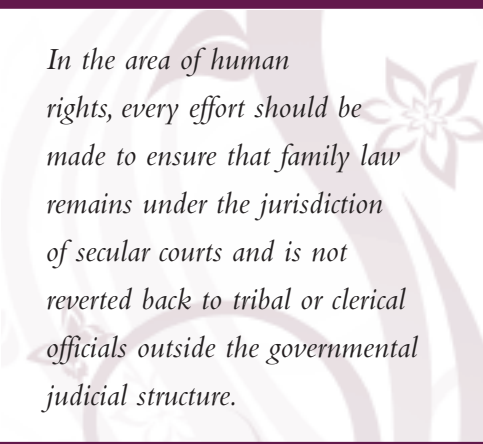
Reasons for Hope

Given this somewhat mixed picture of progress and challenges in Iraq over the past few years, particularly as it regards Iraqi women, the question arises: is there hope? While none of these actions will be accomplished easily or quickly, efforts must be made toward reconciliation and, ultimately, security in Iraq. However, reconciliation and security should not be gained at the expense or at the exclusion of women's basic human rights.

Work integrating human rights, economic growth, and education should be funded and strengthened as essential to the overall strategy to bring lasting peace and stability to Iraq. All these sectors feed the ultimate goal of reconciliation and security. Women should be closely integrated into these efforts at all levels. Iraqis—men and women—must work with the current elected government and with their neighbors of all backgrounds to reconcile and heal the wounds of the past. As outreach among differing stakeholder groups progresses in this challenging environment, attention must be paid to the inclusion of women.

For far too long, insurgent efforts and the insecurity they have bred have kept women in their homes, dampened economic activity, and hamstrung progress on important infrastructure projects. Iraqis must take up the mantle of their own security and work with local leadership, coalition forces, and the government to root out those who seek to keep the men and women of Iraq captive in their homes for fear of violence on the streets. Trust and compromise among all actors must be regarded as highly prized commodities in this process that will not be acquired easily.

In the area of human rights, every effort should be made to ensure that family law remains under the jurisdiction of secular courts and is not reverted back to tribal or clerical officials outside the government judicial structure. Support should be lent through more than just token inclusion of women in the Iraqi governing structure in the parliament, ministry management, the judicial system, and those committees working to draft a constitution.



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Diplomatically, outside nations need to relay to Iraqi officials that even as a sovereign nation a judicial system that subjugates women in particular to religious courts will not be tolerated. Grassroots internal support for those women who have been fighting to gain and retain their basic human rights for decades should be continued and even expanded in the form of capacity-building and monetary support. Support should also be focused on efforts to de-stigmatize

THE FIGHT TO MAINTAIN THE TENETS OF PERSONAL STATUS LAW NO. 188

In February of 2004, women successfully secured a retraction of the Iraqi Governing Council's Resolution 137—the resolution would have transferred civil actions in regard to family and personal law including marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters, to the jurisdiction of clerics and Shari'ah, or Islamic law. However, Iraqi women continue to battle against repeated efforts to dismantle the legal tenets that established civil precedence in Iraqi family law in 1959. The most recent attack on women's rights in these matters is enshrined in Article 41 of the Iraqi constitution. Article 41 is in essence a repackaging of Resolution 137. Many see Article 41 and its call for family law to be governed by various interpretations of Shari'ah determined by sect or tribe as a direct contradiction of Article 14 of the same document, which states that "all Iraqis are equal before the law." Analysts claim these differing interpretations could in some communities lead to the legal marriage of girls as young as nine.

Those working to maintain secular family law, many brave women who are putting their lives on the line to do so, are fighting against heavy odds. Consider that the Committee for Constitutional Amendments, also known as the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC), is almost entirely made up of men. Of the 72 members, only two are women—a paltry 3% (and that is rounding up). Compare that to Iraqi society, where women make up more than 60% of the population.

More is at stake here than just women's rights. One report issued in June of 2007 by the human rights group Article 19 sees the retention of Article 41 in the Iraqi constitution as a driver that "will threaten the fabric of Iraqi civil society and may fuel and increase sectarianism within the country as it increases the sense of communalism as opposed to unified citizenship."

The groups fighting to preserve the rights of women in Iraq are not only opposing the tenets they disagree with—the tenets of Article 41—but they are proposing recommendations to help ensure that indeed all Iraqis are treated equally regardless of gender and sectarian distinctions. Chief among their recommendations is the following request:

The Iraqi legislators to remove all articles, items, and phrases with sectarian trends and reference, from all the text of the constitution, including article 41, to avoid dedicating sectarianism and breeding terror, hate, and sectarian violence, which will lead for Iraqi society components to drift away in the near and the long run, referring to the alarming and dangerous situation that the country is going through....²⁹

The grassroots organizing behind the campaign to retain these long-standing rights are models of the purposeful and peaceful exercise of personal freedoms at the heart of any democracy.

victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, as steps in this direction are desperately needed to protect women from future violence such as honor killings.

Economic activities should go hand in hand with efforts to encourage reconciliation and promote security and an end to violence. Iraqis need support in capacity-building programs that include not only empowerment but also job skills training and economic and commerce training for all sectors of the population, especially women. Women over the age of 15 in Iraq make up only 13% of the labor force. This employment rate is one of the lowest in the region. If properly backed by capital and resources, harnessing this latent workforce could very well prove an economic boon for the country in the future.²⁷

In order to harness this talent, women need to be educated. The worry arises in the current security environment that some students, particularly women, will leave school and never return. These departures will domino into a possible trend where attendance rates for young girls and women dramatically decrease, and the education of women is no longer a priority. This trend must not be allowed to happen. School attendance is highly predicated on three things: security, infrastructure, and a culture open to learning and success for all its people. Students, male and female, from grade school through university and medical school, must be allowed to continue their studies, for it is through education that Iraq will help ensure its future prosperity. Those working in Iraq—and those funding reconstruction efforts in Iraq—must look for innovative ways to continue the education of young people during this turbulent time. Much like the examples raised above where groups have joined together to provide a venue for arts and poetry, even informal education must be supported and encouraged as a building block toward peace.

Iraq is nothing without the full integration and participation of half of its society, its women. Women, doctors and pharmacists, teachers and scholars, housekeepers and seamstresses, have struggled through the wars and strife of the past 40 years and have worked to raise children and support families through numerous hardships. Denying them their rightful place in a democratic Iraq would be a catastrophe.

The determination and bravery of the Iraqi women that the Independent Women's Forum worked with through the *Iraqi Women's Education Initiative (IWEI)* is one of the most encouraging signs about the future of the country. These women are determined to build better lives for themselves and their families. And IWEI participants are by no means an anomaly among the women of Iraq. These women, their actions, and their commitment remind all of us of the kind of country and society the vast majority of Iraqis want to live in: they want to live in peace, in a safe, stable society where they can provide a better life for their families under a democratic government that ensures the equality of all of its citizens, including equal opportunity for all

regardless of their religion or gender. Despite Iraqi women's achievements and setbacks in the public and private arenas over the past four years, IWEI's firsthand experience with the courageous participants makes us firmly believe that Iraqi women will continue to fight for their rights in all sectors of society and, thus, will continue to play an integral role in the decision-making processes that will ultimately determine Iraq's future.

Conclusion

It is essential that Iraqi women continue to play a vital role in their emerging democracy. Through their active participation in their government and civil society, they must work to maintain their human right to be governed by civil—not religious—courts and statutes in matters of family law such as divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

Given the current environment, all areas of Iraq continue to need practical programs that can deliver tangible results to improve daily life and encourage the growth of democracy. Democracy is unlikely to succeed without economic empowerment. Average Iraqis do not see the benefit of a democratic society when they have no electricity or water and they struggle to feed their family.

Now more than ever, programs focusing on tolerance and understanding will be critical to the success of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the separation of religion and state. Women traditionally play the facilitator and mediator in family disputes, and this role can be expanded to the tribal, ethnic, religious, local, provincial, and political arenas. Programs that train Iraqi women in tolerance and understanding, mediation, and conflict resolution should be harnessed to counteract the ethnic and religious divisions increasingly and successfully agitated and inflamed by al-Qaeda and sectarian divisions. These efforts will help stabilize Iraqi society as it struggles to establish a secure and democratic Iraq.

Two Years in Iraq: The Iraqi Women's Educational Institute

In 2004, the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), the American Islamic Congress (AIC), and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) joined together to create the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute (IWEI) to help address the need for education and to support women's participation in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. Through a variety of forums, technical assistance, and media campaigns in the United States and the region, IWEI has helped pro-democracy women better understand the principles and foundations of democracy and worked to increase Iraqi women's political influence by providing them with specialized training and venues for coalition-building. IWEI also provided grants and capacity-building for women's NGOs in Iraq that continue to play a vital role in promoting women's economic, political, and social participation in this burgeoning democracy, even within the current security environment.



All of IWEI's work from 2004 to 2007 centered on promoting women's participation in Iraqi society. Activities centered on entrepreneurship, elections, the drafting of the constitution, and the building of civil society institutions.

It is essential that Iraqi women continue to play a vital role in their newly formed government. Despite ongoing violence and intimidation, Iraqi women immediately became active in civil society and the political process after Saddam's fall. Women successfully secured a retraction of the Iraqi Governing Council's Resolution 137—the resolution would have transferred civil actions in regard to family and personal law, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters, to the jurisdiction of clerics and *Shari'ah*, or Islamic law—in February of 2004; however, they continue to battle against continual efforts to repeal Personal Status Law No. 188, most recently enshrined in Article 41 of the Iraqi constitution.

Before drafting of this new constitution, women leaders also petitioned to include a target for women's representation and gender equality language in the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL), which served as a de facto constitution and rule of law until the ratification of the new Iraqi constitution following national elections in 2005.

Women voted in record numbers in these elections and participated in the ratification of the permanent constitution of Iraq. Following these elections, women made up 31% (87) of the 275 parliamentary seats. Many challenges still lie ahead for Iraqi women; however, these are positive signs that they can actively participate in helping build a democratic Iraq. IWEI is proud to have played a role in this process. This publication sets forth in detail all of IWEI's activities from October 2004 to February 2007. IWEI hopes that a stable government in Iraq will continue to emerge, and the partner organizations look forward to continuing to work with Iraqi women and to support their efforts to build not only a better Iraq but a better world.

Background

To understand the purpose of the Iraqi Women's Educational Initiative, it's important to understand the critical role that NGOs play in civil society and the lack of such infrastructure under Saddam Hussein's regime.

Iraq's vibrant civil society, active since the 1920s, was crushed in 1963 when the Ba'ath Party took control of the government and began dismantling independent civil society groups in Iraq. Under the presidency of Saddam Hussein (1979–2003), all civil institutions, from media outlets to the only legally sanctioned women's organization, the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW),³⁰ were severely controlled and restricted.³¹ Hence, the very idea of an Iraqi “civil society” that existed independent from the government or political party control had been obsolete for decades in Iraq.

Nevertheless, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraqi women immediately began creating civil society organizations that advocated for women's rights and promoted educational initiatives.³² As of 2004, an estimated 500 women's groups had been created across Iraq.³³ Women's NGOs effectively organized media campaigns, conferences, petitions, and advocacy for efforts to help ensure their voices continue to be heard in the electoral and constitutional drafting process.³⁴ They also are involved in activities such as assisting widows and orphans, building capacity for women's empowerment, and broadcasting radio shows targeted at women.³⁵

Kurdish women's civil society movements were at the forefront of the revitalization of civil society. For instance, in 2003, they were among the first Iraqi women to create an umbrella network for 20 women's organizations that played an active role in the early stages of Iraq's path toward elections.³⁶ In June 2005, the Kurdish city of Halabja (where the civilian population had been massacred by Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons in the 1980s) became the site of Iraq's first independent radio station devoted to women's programming.³⁷

During the early stages following the 2003 invasion, the United States and Coalition partners worked to help build civil society organizations, including the creation of women's centers and educational and training programs for women leaders in Iraq. By October 2004, the United States had helped finance 22 women's centers—nine centers in Baghdad and 11 in Hillah, Qut, Aqrah, Biara, Diwaniyah, Halabja, Mosul, Najaf, Sulaymaniah, and Tawel—where Iraqi women were trained in entrepreneurship, democracy education, political organization, constitutional provisions, and leadership skills.³⁸ Additionally, numerous NGOs based in the United States—the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the United States Institute for Peace (USIP),³⁹ the Iraq Foundation,⁴⁰ Women for Women International—in addition to IWEI helped inform and develop Iraqi civil society.⁴¹

All of these organizations recognized the critical role that women must play in the construction of the Iraqi state and the benefits of having women actively involved in all aspects of public and private life. Promoting the development of a network of independent, domestic NGOs that further the economic and political empowerment of Iraqi women and women's human rights achieves two fundamental goals in the establishment of a free and democratic Iraq. First, training and educating Iraqi women about their rights under the current Iraqi system empowers them to change their system from within—directly addressing issues critical to Iraqi women. Secondly, assisting Iraqi women in implementing their own agendas gives the movement for women's rights legitimacy. For example, advocating changing laws that have a discriminatory effect on women is more credible when that advocacy is engaged in by indigenous Iraqi women's NGOs.

Project Summary

The Iraqi Women's Educational Institute began in 2004 as a joint project of AIC, FDD, and IWF designed to educate Iraqi women and the general public on the principles and practice of democracy. The two-year project worked to increase the political influence of women in Iraq by providing them with leadership training and accessible venues for coalition building.

The Institute's first project encompassed two independent but complementary programs—a women's leadership program and a democracy information center.

The *Women Leaders Program* trained and supported women activists through a five-day training seminar and four national follow-up meetings for 150 women leaders, the creation of an online forum for sharing information, and the hiring of a coordinator who facilitated networking among women's groups and acted as a liaison with experts abroad to help the Iraqi women develop a common political agenda.

The *Democracy Information Center* developed and distributed educational materials on democracy and elections and maintained a website with translations of core democratic texts and writings by Islamic scholars and Arab democracy activists. These materials were also distributed to the participants of the Women Leaders Program, municipal women's and democracy centers, universities, and educational centers across Iraq.

The Institute's second project, *The Iraqi Women's Small Grant and NGO Capacity-building Initiative*, implemented by IWF and AIC from March 2006 to February 2007, shifted its focus to strengthening women-led NGOs in south and south-central Iraq. The program worked to assist, support, and train Iraqi women in the development of sustainable and independent Iraqi women's NGOs, advance and support Iraqi women's economic empowerment through skills training and job creation, and support and advance Iraqi women's ability to advocate for human rights.

IWEI's Women Leaders Program

The *Women Leaders Program* was a 12-month program that trained and supported 150 pro-democracy women leaders and activists from all regions in Iraq to help them assume influential roles in the new Iraq, as well as undertake local and national activities to promote democracy. Additionally, this program provided a forum for the participants to continue an ongoing dialogue through regional follow-up meetings in cities throughout Iraq, including Basra, Sulaymaniah, and Doka.



CHART 1: Regional follow-up meetings of the Women Leaders Program were held in the Iraqi cities of Basra, Sulaymaniah, and Doka.

The *Women Leaders Program* achieved the following:

- Deepened program participants' knowledge and understanding of democracy and helped them leverage their positions publicly and privately to support democracy in Iraq
- Ensured that women in public office were qualified and committed to the values of democracy, women's rights, and religious freedom
- Created forums for Iraqi women to network and build common political agendas, including securing women's rights and other basic individual freedoms in Iraqi constitutional law
- Facilitated access to organizations and experts abroad to provide technical expertise and support

While recruiting participants, IWEI enlisted participants from various sources; for instance, IWEI used networks created by AIC of women activists, NGOs, political leaders, members of the gov-

ernment, and professionals within Iraq. IWEI also consulted with the Iraqi ministries, the U.S. mission, civil affairs officers attached to coalition forces as well as professional and personal referrals.

Applications were distributed in person and via email to these sources. The applications included a description of the program, the benefits of the program, and a questionnaire asking each candidate to detail her qualifications and activism record. Upon receipt of the completed application, each applicant was evaluated based on her level of activism; professional accomplishments locally, provincially, and nationally; and commitment to civil society initiatives and the democratization process. Professional and personal references and recommendations were considered as part of the evaluation process. Additionally, the facilitators sought to achieve a broad balance among all of Iraq's provinces to ensure an inclusive representation of different political, tribal, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Those selected to participate in the program expressed an interest in taking leadership roles and displayed the requisite qualities, skills, and intellectual beliefs to become leaders and advocates for women's rights and democracy in Iraq.

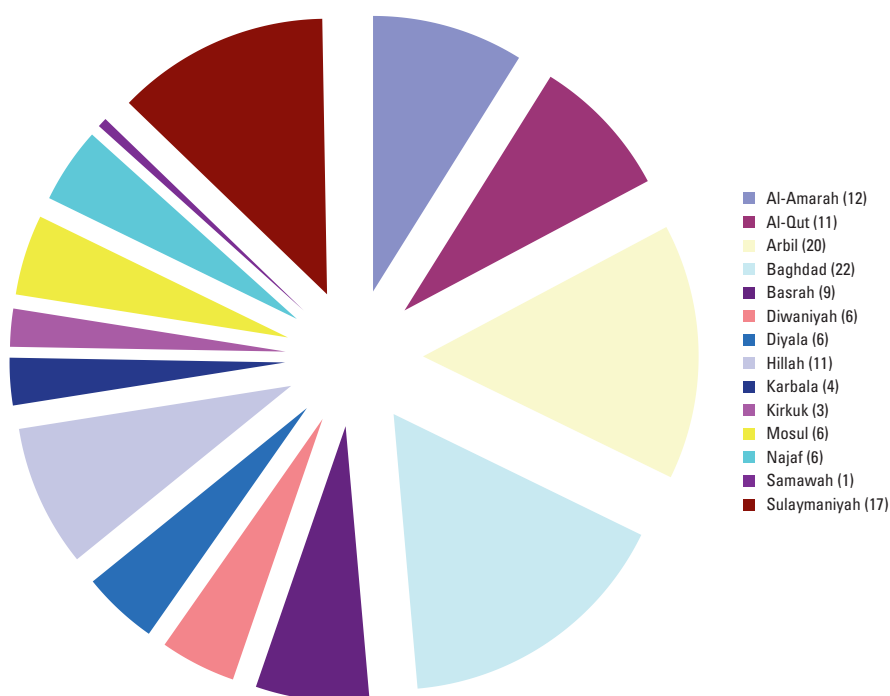
IWEI Iraqi Women Leaders Conference

The Principals and Practice of Democracy, Dead Sea, Jordan, April 9-13, 2005

The Iraqi Women Leaders Conference, "The Principles and Practice of Democracy," held April 9-13, 2005, was part of two independent but complementary programs of the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute funded by the U.S.

Department of State's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative.

A vast majority of the participants were members of local, regional, and national organizations advocating for and representing a range of issues such as human rights, women's rights, professional organizations and unions, and family issues, such as abuse and abandonment, care for orphans, and support for widows. Some participants were members of local and regional governments elected in the January 2005 elections and thus were active members of various political parties.



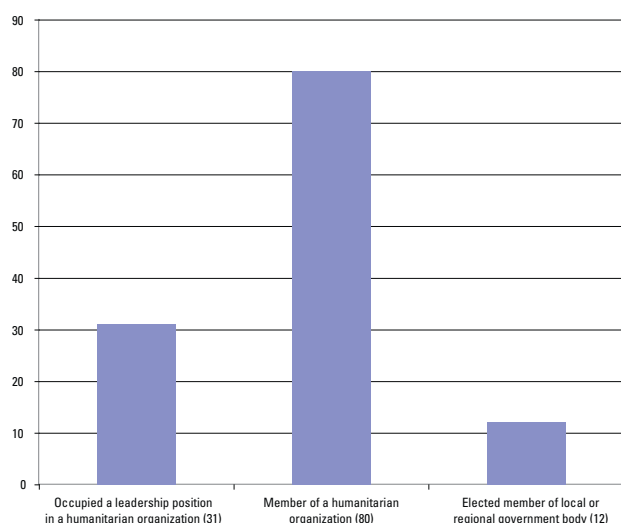


TABLE 2: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference participants by organizational affiliation

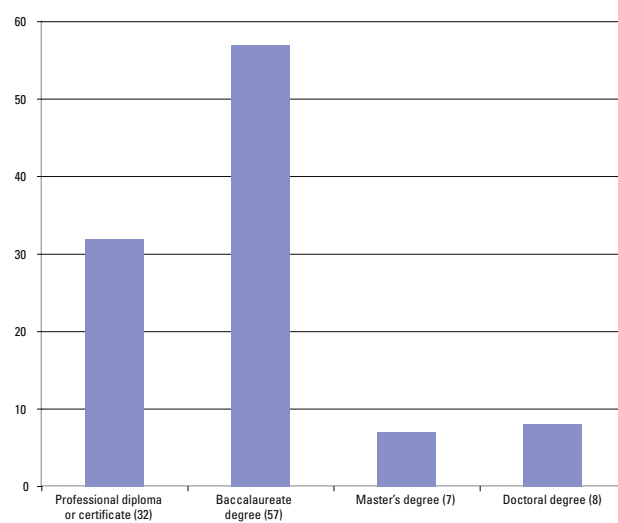


TABLE 3: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference participants by education level

The plenary session of the conference was designed to introduce the participants to the principles and foundations of democracy. A highlight of this portion was remarks delivered by Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra, the founding president of the American University of Kuwait. His entire remarks in English and Arabic follow as an appendix to this publication. The series of lectures that followed aimed more specifically at deepening the participants' understanding of the core principles of democracy and rule of law.



FIGURE 1: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference participants gather at a table during a break in proceedings at the Dead Sea in Jordan. More than 130 women from Iraq attended the conference centered on the principals and practice of democracy.



FIGURE 2: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference participants prepare to return to Iraq after attending the conference. Attendees would travel back to cities and rural areas across Iraq to put into practice the principles they explored during the five-day conference in April of 2005.

Principles of Democracy

Goals for the New Iraq

IWF opened the conference with a session titled *Goals for the New Iraq*. The objective of this session was to help participants visualize their aspirations for a new Iraq by prioritizing their needs and wants. In this activity, the participants first listed what they wanted to see in a new Iraq and then decided what their government had to provide to make this vision a reality. They considered the government's limited resources and various problems that needed to be addressed. Recognizing that the government would not have the money to provide all the things listed, they set priorities for desired government actions.



FIGURE 3: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference presenters (l-r) Zainab Al-Suwaij of the American Islamic Congress, Narmin Othman, Iraq's former minister of women's affairs, Baroness Emma Nicholson, member of British Parliament; and Kay Granger, member, U.S. House of Representatives.

The following session was led by **Mary Larkin**, who is the director of international programs at Street Law, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Maryland. Ms. Larkin has years of experience in program management and development of civic, democracy, and public legal education programs in national and international venues. In this capacity, Ms. Larkin was well-qualified to lead the discussion titled *Building the New Iraq*, which reviewed the wish list of the previous activity described above and addressed the role Iraq's citizens must play in making their vision for a new future in Iraq into a reality.

The participants listed the following three main achievements they wanted to see in the future of Iraq:

- A change in the leadership of the country (president and prime minister)
- Better security
- More social, political, and economic freedoms

What Is Democracy?

After setting forth their goals, the participants defined the principles of democracy during a session titled *What Is Democracy?*, led by **Tom G. Palmer**. Mr. Palmer is a senior fellow at the Cato

"When Mary spoke, she touched us, and she did not seem like a stranger to us."

"They were simple and easy-to-understand sessions, even to those who did not speak english; she taught me how to express my thoughts."

Institute and director of Cato University in Washington, DC. He teaches and lectures about topics such as federalism, political economy, constitutional theory, and law and rights at numerous universities in Europe, North and South America, Iraq, and many other countries.

Mr. Palmer's discussion set forth four major principles of democracy that defined the conference:

No ruler is absolute or above the law, and all are equal before the law.

The law is the same for everyone, and all citizens have the same basic rights:

- No group of citizens can violate the rights of other citizens.
- There can be no differences in the laws governing people based on their race, religion, ethnic group, or gender.

The authority of the government derives from the people who delegate some powers to the government.

- The people do not serve the government; the government serves the people.
- Political rulers are the representatives of the people, who are chosen to make decisions on their behalf.

Elected representatives must listen to the people and be accountable to them.

The powers of government are divided between separate and independent branches.

To prevent the abuse of power, the same branch of government cannot make laws, administer laws, and judge laws:

- The legislature is responsible for making laws and is made up of elected representatives.
- The executive (a prime minister or a president or both, and the cabinet) can propose laws to the legislature, but only the legislature can pass those laws, and the executive must enforce all the laws passed by the legislature. The executive authority is not supreme above the other branches.
- The judiciary is independent and respected, and the only earthly legal authority that can decide the guilt of someone charged with a crime. The judiciary can review legislation to determine whether it is consistent with the constitution.

Everyone has rights that the state may not take away and that are guaranteed by the constitution.

Basic rights that are recognized by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that are protected in democracies include the following (but are not limited to):

- The right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and from torture
- The right to a fair trial
- The right to freedom of movement and of exit
- The right to freedom of assembly—everyone has the right to form associations, and the right to assemble and protest government actions

The lecture was followed by an activity designed to demonstrate how democracy supports one's vision of a new Iraq. Participants reviewed the principles of democracy in relation to the “wish list” they had previously prepared. After listing the most difficult obstacles facing Iraq, participants worked with Mr. Palmer to identify and consider what Iraqi citizens could do to help overcome these obstacles.

Ms. Larkin and **Mr. Palmer** extended the aforementioned discussion on the principles of democracy. In this session, the speakers gave the participants ample time to discuss their personal definition of “democracy.”

Participants then divided into small groups to attend breakout discussions on the following topics:

- What Is Democracy?
- Constitutionalism and Federalism
- Democracy in Action
- Economics and Freedom
- Free Media and Democracy
- Fighting Corruption
- Women and Leadership
- Elections, Parties, and Women

Constitutionalism and Federalism

The session emphasized how the constitution is not a “wish list” of benefits from the government but an agreement among the people to establish a government and grant it certain powers in order to govern. In this session, participants were divided into four groups. The first group was led by **Munther al-Fadhal**, who talked about constitutionalism, and **Faleh Abdul Jabar**, who discussed federalism.

Dr. al-Fadhal was a member of the Iraq National Assembly and is a constitutional expert. Dr. al-Fadhal outlined the key factors that make an effective constitution, including establishing clarity about what constitutes a constitutional violation and mechanisms that allow branches of government to enforce the constitution. He explained that the constitution must detail the circumstances in which the government may exercise its powers. Finally, the speakers emphasized that an effective constitution must be simple and clear enough that any citizen can understand its principles.

The second part of this session focused on the principles of federalism. Mr. Jabar, a research fellow at Birbeck College at the University of London, discussed the federalist option as a democratic means of encouraging power-sharing and preventing the return of any dictatorial powers. Together, the lecturers delivered information to the participants on the pros and cons of a federalist system for Iraq. Mr. Jabar also provided different examples of federalism. In terms of Iraq's future, the experts argued that federalism should be encouraged as an appropriate check on the



FIGURE 4: Mary Larkin (r) led a discussion on the principles of democracy.

national government. They also explained how power-sharing provisions, protected under a constitutional federal state, would best serve the interests of Iraqis.

Practice of Democracy

The goal of this session was to provide the participants with a vision of how they can play a role in the democratization process in Iraq and build the country long-term through civil society.



FIGURE 5: (l-r) Zainab Al-Suwaij, Steve Steiner, Rep. Mark Udall with a conference participant.

Democracy in Action

One of the most common ways citizens attempt to influence public policy in a democracy is through advocating for the policies they believe in and would like the government to adopt. The first session, *Democracy in Action*, allowed the participants to get firsthand experience on how to advocate their policy needs to policymakers. To implement the key principles of role-playing, the participants were divided into various interest groups to learn about the mechanisms of advocacy.

These interest groups included a women's coalition, a political party that advocated the return to conservative Islamic values, a group of families organized by teachers, the police chiefs of the province, building contractors, and a doctor's association. These groups were asked to advocate for or against the construction of a women's shelter. The women acted out their roles as citizens in one of the above groups trying to convince the lawmakers to vote in their favor. The session was facilitated by Representatives Kay Granger (R-TX) and Tom Osborne (R-NE), two of the three co-chairs of the Iraqi Women's Caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives, and members of Congress Susan Davis (D-CA), Judy Biggert (R-IL), Lincoln Davis (D-TN), Randy Neugebauer (R-TX), Bob Beauprez (R-CO), Mark Udall (D-CO), and Jeb Bradley (R-NH).

The members of the congressional delegation helped each group structure their arguments on how to successfully advocate for or against the shelter. Then each group presented their arguments as well as listened to their counterparts present their cases to the "provincial council" made up of different participants. For instance, the members of the women's coalition wanted the shelter to be built and believed it would facilitate activities, such as the fight against domestic violence, yet the families organized by teachers argued against the shelter as they were worried that it threatened security. Moreover, building contractors and a doctor's association advocated in support of the shelter due to increased business and care for the residents in the area. In sum, the breakout session allowed for the congressional delegation to relay their firsthand experience in policy advocacy to the participants and offered them an opportunity for interaction through role-playing simulations.

Economics and Freedom

Through a series of exercises, this session allowed participants to apply the principles of democracy to Iraq's economy. First, they discussed their economic goals as they related to the women's

wish list for the new Iraq. In the second exercise, the women discussed the role of individuals, markets, and government in wealth creation. They considered how jobs are created in a market economy and how Iraq's oil resources and revenues should be spent. Participants also discussed what individual citizens should and can do to create jobs and a better economy. In the final exercise, the participants discussed economic rights and responsibilities in the new Iraq. This discussion focused on how Iraqi people can protect themselves from government abuse through economic power. In particular, the central role of the right to buy and sell private property in protecting economic freedoms was emphasized.

Free Media and Democracy

This session focused on the role of the media in a functioning democracy. Participants were led by **Marguerite Hoxie Sullivan**, executive director of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO and author of "A Responsible Press Office: An Insider's Guide," and instructed on how in a democracy, "the press should operate free from government control."

Ms. Sullivan spoke about how the free press informs the public, holds leaders accountable, and provides a forum for debate of local, national and international issues. She discussed how the freedoms of the press should be protected by law. She also gave women constructive guidelines for how to maximize their media opportunities. For example, she discussed in what situations print interviews or television interviews are more useful. Many participants commented that the media in Iraq are still not free, as many outlets are still linked to a political party or ideology. They were concerned about the lack of independent media outlets and the implications for Iraq's future.

"Iraqi media will someday get to the level Marguerite was talking about, insh Allah."

Fighting Corruption

This session focused on the need to fight corruption and hold government officials accountable in building a successful government. The lecture was led by **Carole Basri**, a member of the U.S. Department of State's Future of Iraq Project and a member of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) working with the Iraqi Reconstruction Development Council (IRDC) for Ambassador Paul Bremer in Baghdad.

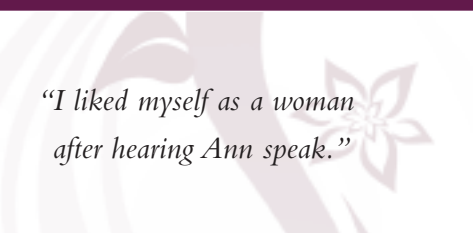
Ms. Basri began by defining corruption, and then discussed a six-step process to create an anti-corruption program, which included creating standards and procedures that are applicable to all members of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Ms. Basri also led a debate on how the community can fight corruption together.

The participants were particularly interested in this topic, and given their concerns regarding corruption, they asked many questions on how to best tackle corruption in their respective local governments. Their questions focused on administrative accountability and how to establish a

system in which whistle-blowers will not be reprimanded. The participants also gave many specific examples of how they have encountered administrative corruption in their daily lives.

Women and Leadership

The session on women and leadership was led by **Ann E. W. Stone**, who is the founder of The Stone Group, Inc. and currently serves on the boards of the *National Women's History Museum*, *The Washington Center (Women as Leaders)*, *Campaigns and Elections Magazine*, and *Influence Magazine*. Ms. Stone gave the participants a personality test, which included multiple choice questions that determined each participant's personality type under pressure. The results of the test are useful in informing that individual about her interests and the career path that is most likely to make the most of her unique attributes. The personality test was received with great enthusiasm, and the participants were eager to find out the results of their choices.



*"I liked myself as a woman
after hearing Ann speak."*

Ms. Stone also lectured on the essential role of women in politics and congratulated the participants for making the decision to step forward and participate in the conference. She then focused on five reasons women must be involved in public life.

Ms. Stone argued that women, who comprise half of the population, are generally more ethical than men. Second, women's involvement in writing laws ensures balanced legislation. Third, women ought to help determine how government money is allocated. Fourth, they need to be involved with businesses in order to determine the allocation of private resources in a way that reflects their interests. Fifth, women are critical in their roles in politics and the government as they are more successful as peacemakers in all sorts of conflict situations. She told the participants that even if women do not want to run for office, they need to form alliances to keep the pressure on the elected officials. Women need to issue reports on government activities to voters and the media. This is an essential check on a democracy and serves to keep the voters connected and informed.

Elections, Parties, and Women

The session that followed, led by **Dr. Richard Matland**, echoed Ann Stone's points. This discussion focused on how different institutions can affect women's access to positions of political power. Mr. Matland is a professor of political science at the University of Houston, and his work includes articles on the effect of electoral systems on women's representation in legislatures in various countries. Mr. Matland used a PowerPoint presentation to show various graphs on the logistics of women's participation in various electoral systems and the need for their participation in national politics. Mr. Matland described the three steps that are involved in the legislative recruitment process: selecting oneself as a potential political leader, being selected by the political party, and being elected by the voters.

Mr. Matland's lecture was followed by a breakout session in which the participants were divided into four smaller groups. During the exercise, they applied the legislative recruitment model to the Iraqi case, allowing them to engage in an in-depth and integrated discussion. The participants analyzed how ambition and resources influence which person can and cannot decide to participate in elections and how women are likely to have less political opportunity than men in Iraq. Finally, the women discussed what advantages female representatives have over men, and which issues they are able to articulate better than their male counterparts.

Building Democracy in Iraq

After discussing the principles and practices of democracy, conference participants focused on the reality and challenges of democracy-building in Iraq. This portion of the conference was designed to lead the participants to explore and discuss the challenges of democratization in Iraq, including the relationship between religion and democracy.

Challenges of Democratization

The first lecture, led by Tom Palmer, discussed the challenges of democratization. Mr. Palmer discussed the difficulties that Iraqis can expect to face as they develop their government and answered participants' questions.

Political Systems in Iraq and Democracy

A panel of four Iraqi experts led the discussion on political systems in Iraq and democracy. The panel included **Faleh Jabar**, **Munther al-Fadhal**, **Hashim al-Jazairy**, and **Ala Talabani**. This allowed the participants to direct their questions to Iraqi experts, establishing a comfortable dialogue that opened extensive interaction between the experts and participants.

America's Role in Rebuilding Iraq

The next session discussed America's role and how the United States can help build democracy in Iraq. The series of questions and answers was directed by **Michael Rubin** in an open forum manner, allowing the participants to take control of the discussion. Mr. Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*. In a lively debate, Mr. Rubin discussed how the U.S. presence in Iraq can be more constructive, and to what degree Iraqis and NGOs influence America's role in Iraq.

The participants actively took part in the discussion and expressed their frustrations as Mr. Rubin asked them questions such as their opinion of the United States' responsibilities in Iraq. He established a balanced debate by asking whether these American responsibilities aid in establishing Iraqi sovereignty or whether such assistance infringed on Iraqi sovereignty. While some of the participants took the opportunity to express their frustrations over America's presence in



FIGURE 6: Iraqi Women Leaders Conference presenter Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra (l) with two conference participants.

Iraq, most participants focused on the issue of how Iraqi citizens and non-governmental organizations influence America's role in Iraq.

Religion and Democracy

The afternoon session was led by **Ahmed al-Rahim** and **Hedieh Mirahmadi**, who discussed the role of religion and democracy. Mr. al-Rahim is an Iraqi-American who has taught Arabic and Islamic Studies at Yale University, New York University, and Harvard University. Ms. Mirahmadi is a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, where she directs a study on political Islam and global security. Each of the speakers discussed religion's compatibility within a democratic system and how tolerance within religion fosters greater economic success and growth for the future of Iraq. Ms. Mirahmadi raised the issue of *Shari'ah* and how its role should be mitigated within Iraq's new democracy to prevent the kinds of abuses and curtailment of women's rights that we have witnessed in other parts of the world. Emphasizing the main points of her paper, *Civilian and Democratic Dimensions of Governance in Islam*, she highlighted the fact that Islam advocates a limited government in which the individual enjoys considerable autonomy. She also pointed out that Islam does not advocate a totalitarian government as many aspects of civilian life remain outside the domain of law and government.



FIGURE 7: Conference participants are gathered into smaller discussion groups to foster more participation and allow for a greater exchange of ideas.

Following the lectures, the participants were organized into smaller discussion groups to foster more participation and allow for a greater exchange of ideas related to the relationship between religion and democracy. This exercise raised many key issues. The exercise was designed to explore how the teachings, values, and practices of religion relate to the essential principles of democracy; the participants were also able to learn from one another's religious values. The participants were first asked to list examples of how their religion *supports* democracy and contrast these points in a chart of examples with how their religion *contradicts* democracy. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants wanted a government that tolerated the peaceful co-existence of various religious groups in Iraqi society.

In the second exercise, Ms. Mirahmadi highlighted specific laws of *Shari'ah* and how Iraq would apply these in a new legal system if the country were to implement *Shari'ah*. For example, she asked the women how the unequal division of property rights between men and women would affect them and if this was the option they envisioned in a new Iraq.

In the final stages of the conference, discussions centered on how to plan the next steps to implement the goals and principles the participants had learned during the conference. Thus, the participants were divided into committees and provincial teams. In these smaller groups, the women identified activities that they will pursue to promote democracy in their communities and dis-

cussed resources that IWEI would provide to support them in working on the goals they had discussed during the conference.

Committees

Each of the participants in the *Women's Leadership Program* joined one of four committees (*see committee list below*). Committees were formed to engage the participants in activities that had the potential to develop a constituency for democracy in Iraq. Also, each participant was encouraged to work with women from other parts of Iraq as part of a coalition-building process. These committees were designed to have cross-regional participation to encourage country-wide debates and to strengthen the relationships between women across the country. Each committee was supported by experts in Iraq and abroad who were available to advise the members in person, via e-mail, or through the IWEI website.

Constitutional Review: The Constitutional Review Committee agreed to research constitutions from other countries to learn what makes a constitution effective and what key provisions are needed to protect democracy and women's rights. The participants outlined a plan in which they would highlight important laws that should be included in the new permanent constitution of Iraq. This committee also planned to educate other women in the program about the constitution and how to advocate for laws that secure women's human rights.

Media: The members of this committee agreed to put forth a six-month plan, where they would use the media as a tool to educate Iraqis, especially women, on the importance of political participation by every citizen. They agreed to use the information provided by the Constitutional Review Committee to provide concrete examples of what would help improve the lives of the public. The members also stated that they would use the media as a tool to expose corrupt practices in the government and to encourage greater transparency.

Democracy Education: This committee created two subgroups, the General Democracy Education subgroup and the Higher Education Democracy Education subgroup. The General Education Democracy Education subgroup agreed to propose ideas and plans for teaching people in their community about democracy. The Higher Education Democracy Education subgroup agreed to put forth a plan to add democracy education to the courses and curriculum taught at their respective universities.

Women's Legal Issues: During the conference, the members of this committee agreed to research and learn about laws that discriminated against or safeguarded women's rights. They stated they would investigate how women in other Muslim-majority countries have secured

their rights using strategies that are rooted in religious teachings. They also stated that they would share this information with their fellow participants in the program.

The participants then developed action plans to implement each of the committee's goals. They first reviewed the goals of the committee and discussed among themselves whether there were any goals they would like to add or change. Then they identified specific things they would like to accomplish as a committee. Finally, the women created a list of short-term objectives. Among the ideas suggested were to publish newspaper articles about democracy, create a list of criteria for evaluating the Iraqi constitution, create a list of Iraqi laws that need to be changed, and run a class about democracy for women in their community. Volunteers were assigned to do these tasks, and members of the committee reported to each other on their tasks at the IWEI regional meeting held after the conference.



FIGURE 8: (seated l-r) Michelle Bernard, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Zainab Al-Suwaij with conference participants.

Provincial Teams

Participants from the same province were grouped together to create provincial teams. Each team was responsible for the following:

- Monitoring developments relating to democracy and women's rights in their province and sharing the information with other provincial teams
- Raising awareness about democracy in their communities
- Distributing copies of the *Iraq Democracy Papers* to NGOs, universities, and the media

The participants then discussed how each of the provincial teams would perform their duties as described below:

Monitoring developments relating to democracy and women's rights: This step involved determining which groups, political parties, and individuals are supportive of democracy and women's rights in the province. The teams assessed the greatest obstacles to democracy and women's rights in the province. Finally, they decided how team members could monitor and inform the coordinator about what is happening in their neighborhoods and towns regarding democracy.

Raising awareness about democracy in their communities: In this step, teams designed activities that they would undertake to educate people in their communities about democracy. They decided which activities could be pursued without funding.

Distributing copies of the *Iraq Democracy Papers* to NGOs, universities, and the media: Each province received between 50 and 100 copies of the *Iraq Democracy Papers* in May, June, July, August, September, and October. Each team submitted a list of NGOs and individuals who should receive copies.

Observations by Participants and Conference Organizers

Group participants and speakers were asked to provide feedback and observations about the conference. Their comments were helpful in identifying the key strengths of the program and areas for improvement. In general, many commented that they gained a better understanding of democracy and have a more inclusive meaning of what a democracy entails. Participants appreciated that the speakers were from different parts of the world, including Iraq and not just the United States. One noted that she learned how to brainstorm and how to respect others' opinions even if she did not agree with them.

Although positive feedback was received from all of the participants, faculty, and guests, regarding the conference overall, some challenges that the conference faced were also identified, including the danger participants faced traveling to and from Jordan, participant arrival logistics, lack of electricity in Iraq, communication difficulties, and recruiting challenges.

Traveling and Security

The most pressing of these challenges pertained to transportation to and from Jordan. Upon arrival in Amman and the Dead Sea, many of the participants expressed extreme frustration with their journey to Jordan. Many were fatigued and overcome with hunger. The first thing many of them requested was something to eat and/or a place to rest. However, due to logistical challenges further described below, participants were not able to rest immediately. The participants faced long hours and problems at checkpoints and borders. Some were even shot at while traveling in their vehicles. When participants described this experience, they expressed their frustration with holding the conference in Jordan as opposed to Iraq. During the conclusion of the conference, concerns regarding traveling plans for the participants' journey back to Iraq were also raised. However, providing and confirming flights for the participants in a very short period of time proved impossible.

Electricity and Communication

Prior to the Women Leaders Conference, IWEI held two regional meetings in Iraq. The first regional meeting was held in Basra and the second in Sulaymaniah. The most consistent challenge in holding local meetings was the lack of electricity. It was difficult to predict when the electricity would work and for how long. Therefore, communication was a challenge nationally and internationally. Coordinating meetings and locating and contacting participants was also more difficult. Often, communication and transfer of information electronically between the three partners of IWEI were delayed and depended on a fully functioning supply of electricity. For example, on January 15, 2005, restrictions increased, which included no telephone service, no cell phone service, and no Internet service.



FIGURE 9: Speakers and participants gathered in a roundtable discussion to provide feedback and observations about the conference.

Recruiting

Security was a major challenge, particularly during the recruiting process for the Women Leaders Program. One of our main goals was to reach out to as many different provinces and regions in Iraq in order to have equal and full representation in the program. However, because of the safety concerns and various conditions in each city, outreach planning was often delayed or altered. Also, travel for the selected participants became very difficult during the regional meetings in Basra and Sulaymaniah. For instance, two of our participants were robbed on their way to Basra. To the extent that electricity was working, our field leaders provided the group with status updates, and the most frequent topic we heard most about were the obstacles with security in the region.

After the conference, we concluded that within the next 12 to 24 months, in addition to academic and programmatic support of the political process, Iraqis needed practical programs that delivered tangible results that improved their daily lives and encouraged the growth of democracy. Democracy is unlikely to succeed without economic empowerment. A free market economy will increase Iraqis' openness and willingness to accept new ideas, including democratic principles. As of now, the average Iraqi does not see the benefit of democracy when he or she has no electricity or water and struggles to feed his or her family. Iraqis need support in capacity-building programs that not only include empowerment but also job skills training and economic and commerce training for all sectors of the population, especially women.

Iraqi women arguably suffered the most under Saddam as they witnessed their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons return in coffins from Saddam's military atrocities. These women carried the responsibility of raising and supporting families in a traditionally male-dominated society. Many now lack the education and skills to acquire a decent job to support their families. To support and ensure the future success of a democratic Iraq and to prevent extreme ideologies from brainwashing this segment of the population and turning it against democratic principles, Iraqi women at all levels must be encouraged to seek progress on social, political, and economic levels.

In addition, Iraqis need to heal their differences after 35 years of Saddam's despotism in which he often forced one village against another, one tribe against another, one family against another, one brother against another, and encouraged the escalation of traditional ethnic and religious animosities. In order for Iraqis to move beyond Saddam's rule and go forward, they need to heal and partake in programs focusing on tolerance and understanding, which are critical to the success of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and separation of religion and state. In other words, tolerance is critical to the pillars of democracy and thus critical to the success of the new democratic Iraq.

Women traditionally play the facilitator and mediator in family disputes, and this role can be expanded to the tribal, ethnic, religious, local, provincial, and political arenas. Programs that train Iraqi women in tolerance and understanding, mediation, and conflict resolution serve to coun-

teract the ethnic and religious divisions increasingly and successfully agitated and inflamed by al-Qaeda and sectarian divisions and will overall help to stabilize Iraqi society as it struggles with establishing a democratic Iraq.

Regional Meetings

First Regional Meeting: Basra, Iraq

On December 30, 2004, IWEI held its first regional meeting in Basra, Iraq. Seventy female participants attended from the nine south-central and southern provinces, which included Omarah, Basra, Diwaniyah, Hillah (Babel), Karbala, Najaf, Nasiriyah (Thegar), Samawah (Muthena), and Wasit (Qut).

During this session, the participants received IWEI's program materials and demonstrated their active participation in the discussions. They set forth the following goals:

1. Introduce the program and discuss expectations
2. Assess levels of knowledge of democracy in preparation for the conference
3. Introduce women's expert panel and discuss topics of exchange
4. Begin brainstorming an action agenda for 2005 activities
5. Obtain ideas for the program's website

The participants often implored each other to set aside any regional, religious, cultural, and educational differences and unite in their effort to build the new democratic Iraq. They urged that women's participation in the elections process is a critical step in Iraqi women's empowerment and in building a new democratic Iraq.

One participant in particular used the analogy that democracy is a newborn infant, and they, as women of Iraq, the backbone and mothers of its society, must begin raising this infant so it grows and prospers into the new democratic Iraq. She further argued that, thus, women of Iraq should realize and accept this challenge.

Second Regional Meeting: Sulaymaniah, Kurdistan

IWEI held its second regional conference in Sulaymaniah, Kurdistan, on March 24, 2005. Iraq's former minister of women's affairs, Narmin Othman, attended the second regional meeting and was one of the participants in our *Women Leaders Program*. Minister Othman encouraged the women to participate and remain active in women's causes and human rights causes and, most importantly, to remain true to democratic values and continue the struggle to implement democratic principles in Iraq. She encouraged the participants to continue their struggle to remain active in Iraq's political process as it is the only way to ensure the continued representation in



FIGURE 10: (seated l-r) Narmin Othman, Baroness Nicholson, Rep. Kay Granger (standing l-r) Zainab Al-Suwaij, Michelle Bernard, Eleana Gordan.

the local and national councils as well as protection of the constitutional guarantee that 25% of parliamentary seats are reserved for women.

During this meeting, Zainab Al-Suwaij, executive director of the American Islamic Congress, described the IWEI program and its goals and gave an outline of the universal principles of democracy. We sought to introduce the participants in the north to the same material introduced at the first regional meeting to the participants in the south in order to maintain consistency and ensure a uniform informational and educational baseline before the Women Leaders Conference.

Two themes repeated by the Iraqi participants in all of the regional meetings were that Iraqi women are the mothers of Iraqi people and that women's NGOs and Iraqi women leaders have a duty to serve the future of Iraq and its people.

Two themes repeated by the Iraqi participants in all of the regional meetings were that Iraqi women are the mothers of the Iraqi people and that women's NGOs and Iraqi women leaders have a duty to serve the future of Iraq and its people.

During this meeting, a few of the participants indicated that within Iraq, many people don't fully understand the concept of an independent NGO because NGOs traditionally were and still are associated with political parties. As a result, NGOs feel compelled to follow the political ideology of the financing party, which inhibits the creation of independent NGOs. This lack of independent NGOs limits their creativity and effectiveness, and creates mistrust among the general public. By comparison, one of the participants believed that although Western NGOs might be funded by government grants, they are more independent politically, and therefore deserve more of the public's trust.

One participant stated that initially there was a large amount of U.S. government funding spent on women's programs. She complained that there is a lot of hunger and poverty, and therefore money first should be spent on improving and providing these basic necessities. Doing so would automatically improve the status and condition of Iraqi women. She felt it would be better to give the U.S. funding directly to Iraqi women so they can spend it on family necessities and living expenses, and at that point, the situation of Iraqi women would improve.

Third Regional Meeting: Basra, Iraq

IWEI held its third regional meeting in Basra, Iraq, on May 25, 2005, after the Women Leaders Conference on the *Principles and Practice of Democracy* held in Jordan. We invited the provincial coordinators and assistant coordinators to update them and the participants on the status of the Iraq Democracy Information Center website, www.iraqdemocracyinfo.org, which is further described later in this report, and to follow up with the provincial activities since the Women Leaders Conference. We also distributed materials that would benefit the participants in their leadership activities. AIC invited 28 coordinators and two assistant coordinators per province. Due to the security situation at that time, only 13 women attended the meeting.

The meeting was conducted in three parts. First, each province representative described the issues and challenges the citizens faced in their daily lives and provided an update on her work for IWEI. We asked and encouraged each province representative to email IWEI about her activities on a monthly basis and to publish these activities on the IWEI forum web board www.iwei.org.

In the second part, we distributed a resource pack, which included a CD and written materials. The information was selected based on the premise that women are critical to the success of peace processes but are often excluded from formal efforts to build and sustain peace. The resource pack contained primary research that demonstrates how women contribute to peace-building and outlines strategies for promoting women's inclusion. The material was made available in English and Arabic. We printed and distributed the Arabic materials, which were donated to our program by Women Waging Peace. In addition to distributing the resource pack, we discussed the contents in order to inspire and motivate the women to use the materials.

In the third part of the meeting, we instructed the women on the use of the Iraq Democracy Center website and assisted each participant in the registration process required to use the password-secured, private discussion forum. We encouraged the participants to use the forum to network with one another, to update each other, and to learn from each other's experiences. Speakers emphasized that the forum is also a medium for the women to ask IWEI and its experts panel for advice on questions or concerns they may have, and to read and study additional democracy and leadership materials.

Fourth Regional Meeting: Dokan, Iraq

IWEI held its fourth and final regional meeting in Dokan, Iraq, on September 1, 2005. Dokan is an hour north of Sulaymaniah; this location was chosen for two reasons. First, IWEI wanted to spread the regional meetings between the south and the north of Iraq. Although Sulaymaniah would have been the ideal location, due to unforeseen circumstances, IWEI settled on Dokan for the meeting. IWEI invited all of the conference participants, eight women members of the Iraqi National Parliament, and several distinguished Iraqi ministers and academics to speak at the meeting. Of the 150 participants, 70 attended the meeting. The eight parliamentarians, who initially indicated their desire and willingness to attend, could not do so due to the ongoing constitutional meetings in Baghdad at the time.

In her opening remarks, Zainab Al-Suwaij welcomed the participants and thanked them for their efforts and dedication to IWEI's program. Ms. Al-Suwaij spoke about the challenging times facing Iraq, particularly Iraqi women, citing the ongoing debate about the Iraqi constitution. She asked the participants what they believe is the best way for IWEI to help them and Iraqi women in general to avoid losing their rights under the new constitution. She further explained that

when we talk about the impact of implementing *Shari'ah*, or Islamic law, in the constitution, we don't mean it as a call against religion but rather for the protection of specific women's rights that would be lost under *Shari'ah* if the new constitution is implemented in its current state. For instance, under some interpretations of *Shari'ah*, the age of marriage for women is nine years old, child custody is with the father not the mother, women inherit half of what a man inherits, and women are denied specific professional opportunities such as being appointed to judge-ships. Ms. Al-Suwaij explained that we want every individual in Iraq to live under a democratic and fair system in which women will not be considered second-class citizens.



FIGURE 11: l-r) Rep. Judy Biggert, Michelle Bernard, Rep. Susan Davis, and Rep. Kay Granger together with a conference participant.

Our IWEI participants asked Ms. Al-Suwaij whether IWEI can provide more workshops in every province about the details of women's rights under *Shari'ah* and how it will affect their lives if Islamic law is implemented in the constitution.

Each provincial coordinator was asked to present to the group her province's activities since the conference in Jordan as well as any challenges they faced. A recurring theme was that the participants did not understand the constitution and the ramifications for their future and the future of women's rights in Iraq. They asked that the constitutional language be presented in simplified form and the future of women's rights be clarified and presented to them in simplified terms.

Dr. Hashim al-Jazairy, dean of the Basra School of Law, University of Basra, presented a constitutional comparative study in the Arabic and Islamic world. Specific focus was on the comparison of Iran's and Saudi Arabia's Islamic (*Shari'ah*-based) constitution versus the Lebanese secular constitution. This presentation was followed by a lively, hour-long question-and-answer session that often involved the role of religion and the separation of religion and state.

Women Leaders Program Experts Panel

One of IWEI's priorities was to facilitate a structured exchange between Iraqi women activists and a group of experts in women's political participation in emerging democracies who can help the Iraqi women identify specific and immediate measures to maximize their role in Iraq's emerging political institutions and help Iraqi women's groups coalesce around a common agenda.

The exchange began with the IWEI's Women Leaders Program coordinator in Iraq surveying women activists around the country about the challenges they face, the state of the Iraqi women's movement, their concerns as they look ahead to the political transition, and the questions they would like experts to answer. IWEI's Washington, DC-based team shared the survey with a group of experts in the United States, Europe, and the Arab world. The role of the experts was to address issues such as which electoral systems would benefit women, how Iraqi women

should advocate to be nominated in significant numbers in the new Iraqi government and party lists, how to ensure that the women who are nominated are committed to women's rights and democracy, and how to secure women's rights and basic individual freedoms in the permanent constitution of Iraq.

Members of the Women Experts' Panel included **Dr. Hashim al-Jazairi**, dean of the University of Basra School of Law (an expert on constitutionalism and women legal issues); **Ms. Amy Barrett**, assistant professor of law at Notre Dame Law School; **Carole Basri**, adjunct professor of corporate law, University of Pennsylvania School of Law; **Haleh Esfandiari**, director of the Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson Center; **Jo Kwong**, Atlas Economic Research Foundation; **Richard Matland**, professor of political science, University of Houston; **Anita Sharma**, Wilson Center Conflict Prevention Project; and **Ala Talabani**, Iraqi activist.



FIGURE 12: (l-r) Taghreed Jasim, Michelle Bernard, and Ala Talabani.

The Iraq Democracy Information Center

IWEI also created a Democracy Information Center to develop and distribute educational materials to Iraqi women. The materials were distributed not only to the participants in the *Women Leaders Program* but also through other venues such as the women's and democracy centers (established by the now-defunct Coalition Provisional Authority [CPA]), universities, and educational centers run by NGOs, such as the resource center of the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Women's Leadership Institute based in Baghdad.

The center, which is primarily Internet-based, maintains an educational website with translations of core texts on democracy and writings by Islamic scholars and Arab democracy activists. The Iraq Democracy Information website www.iraqdemocracypapers.org/en_index.html was launched in Arabic, English, and Kurdish. This site includes discussion forums and an Arabic blogging tool, which allows the editors to post current articles on democracy from the Arab press, thereby assembling fresh content of interest to democracy activists in Iraq.

The website also includes a "Teahouse" chat room created to foster free and open discussion on the future of Iraq and democracy. To encourage participants to participate in the dialogue, the participants were encouraged to submit essays on topics such as "How will Iraqis make sure that no future government can ever use its powers to violate the human rights of its citizens?" The essays were evaluated by the editorial team, and the winner received an award of \$250.

Iraq Democracy Papers

The website also prominently features the *Iraq Democracy Papers*, which was a series of collected writings on the ideas and practice of democracy published by IWEI in 2005. The series was

intended as a dialogue on democracy that draws from the literature of different eras and cultures (Arabic, Islamic, Western, and Asian) to discuss issues relevant to Iraq's democratic transformation. The essays in the *Iraq Democracy Papers* examine universal versus particular characteristics of democracy, and include case studies to illustrate how democratic principles have been implemented in other countries. The series also feature short commentaries by Iraqi scholars and writers on how the selected writings apply to the situation in Iraq.

The purpose of the series is to feed the debate among Iraqis involved in designing a new political system. The target readers are "influencers" who are open to the ideas of democracy and other cultures, but are still deepening their understanding of the interlocking pillars of liberal democracy. The writings are therefore intended to provide a strong foundation in the key concepts of democracy in clear language, and place them within the context of the issues facing Iraq as it transitions out of totalitarian rule. The *Iraq Democracy Papers* are also intended for educators of democracy, such as university professors and non-governmental organizations, which are encouraged to use the writings in their programs.

In addition to being available online, the series was printed and distributed by the American Islamic Congress to local and provincial NGOs. Many of the volumes in the series were distributed to appellate courts in six of the southern provinces, female members of the Iraqi National Parliament, and Iraqi media outlets. In total, 2,000 copies were distributed in 2005 throughout Iraq, to universities, women's groups, human rights groups, and student groups.

The *Iraq Democracy Papers* series' team included Eleana Gordon, editor-in-chief; Omran Salman, senior editor; and editors Akeel Al-Khakani, Tanya Gilly, Maneeza Hossain, and Munir Mawari. The consulting editor was Michael Ashkouri, and the editorial advisors were Zainab Al-Suwaij and Michelle D. Bernard. The international advisory board included a diverse group of experts, as follows:

Ammar Abdulhamid
Tharwa Project

Jo Kwong
Atlas Economic Research Foundation

Hayder Abdulkarim
World Conference for Religion and Peace

Mary Larkin
Street Law

Akbar S. Ahmed
American University, Washington, DC

Hassan Mneimneh
The Iraq Memory Foundation

Carole Basri
University of Pennsylvania

Khaleel Mohammed
San Diego State University

Larry Diamond
Journal of Democracy, Hoover Institute

Tom Palmer
Cato Institute

Munther al-Fadhal
Iraqi National Assembly

Walid Phares
Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Mohammad Fahdil
Friends of Democracy

Robert Rabil
Florida Atlantic University

Shafeeq Ghabra
American University of Kuwait

Lawrence Reed
Mackinac Center for Public Policy

Faleh Jaber
Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies

Naiem Sherbiny
Ibn Khaldun Center for Development

Hashim al-Jazairy
University of Basra College of Law

Bridget Wagner
Heritage Foundation

The *Iraq Democracy Papers* consisted of six volumes ranging from 30 to 40 pages each, which were produced in Arabic and Kurdish and included high-quality translations of core texts on democracy and constitutions, selected writings by Islamic scholars on liberty and democracy, and commissioned pieces by democracy reformers in the Arab world. Descriptions of these publications follow.

Volume 1: Protecting Freedom, Preventing Despotism

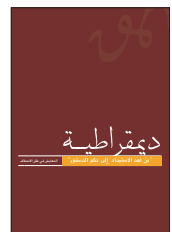
How can Iraqis prevent the return of tyranny and human rights violations? Writings by Al-Kawakibi, An-Naini, and Montesquieu discuss institutional mechanisms for preventing despotism, Haider Ibrahim looks at the roots of despotism in the Arab world, and case studies from Eastern Europe and South Africa examine the issues that constitutions should address.

Volume 2: Ethnic and Religious Co-existence

How can a new Iraq emerge in which its diversity is a source of strength, not division? How can group identities be recognized without undermining national cohesion? This volume examines issues such as individual rights, decentralization and federalism, and the relationship between religion and state in a democracy.

Volume 3: Accountability: Ensuring the Government Serves the People

How will Iraqis keep a check on their government? What are the responsibilities of citizens to ensure that their leaders do not abuse powers? This volume describes mechanisms and





institutions that the public can use to hold their leaders accountable, and includes case studies on how citizens in other countries have fought corruption.

Volume 4: Representation

The definition of “representation” is a dynamic one. People have many identities, including their ethnic, religious, and even their political or other interests. How can Iraqis make sure their government is one that reflects their diverse interests and identities without exacerbating differences between different groups and leading to sectarianism? The writings explore how political parties, different types of electoral systems, and the way parliamentary seats are allocated affect the government’s success in representing the Iraqi people.



Volume 5: Women and Democracy

In Iraq today, and in many other Muslim countries, women’s groups, human rights groups, NGOs, political parties, the media, and concerned individuals are beginning to engage in a public debate on the role of religion in politics. As Iraq develops its democracy, the country will deal with issues such as the following: Is Islam compatible with democracy? Should Iraqis allow the state to legislate morality? How have women in other countries contributed to their economies? Can women participate in the political process, and what characteristics are important? How will Iraqi women deal with the new universal morality of democracy, human rights, women’s rights, and where is the woman’s place in a democratic Iraq?



Volume 6: Commentaries on the Iraqi Constitution

The final reader is a compilation of commentaries on the Iraqi constitution. Selections feature the works of various constitutional scholars such as Nathan Brown and Paul Marshall, and were chosen from the works of more than 50 wide-ranging community representatives, including secular Iraqis, Muslims, Christians, Mandeans, women, jurists, and economists. The issues addressed include the following: How has the constitution dealt with the issue of religion? How do we address the conflict between constitutional provisions of fundamental liberties and equality, and religious laws and policies that violate these provisions? Has the constitution treated the issue of women’s rights fairly? How can the constitution be amended in the future to address more needs?

The Foundation for the Defense of Democracies had primary responsibility for the Iraq Democracy Information Center and the *Iraq Democracy Papers*. Eleana Gordon was the editor-in-chief of the *Iraq Democracy Papers*. Zainab Al-Suwaij and Michelle D. Bernard served as editorial advisors on the papers.

IWEI Iraqi Women's Small Grant and NGO Capacity-building Initiative

IWEI's U.S. State Department Women's Democracy Initiative-funded *Iraqi Women's NGO Small Grant and Capacity-building Initiative* (2006–2007) worked directly on the capacity-building, sustainability, and economic empowerment of independent women's NGOs located in south-central and southern Iraq. Despite inherent security and logistical challenges of working with women's NGOs from this region, IWEI strongly believes that international and national organizations must continue to assist such women's NGOs in order to fully develop their capacity and leadership capabilities to enable them to be full political, social, and economic participants in all aspects of Iraqi society.

Program Overview

IWEI's Iraqi Women's Small Grant and NGO Capacity-building Initiative (NGO Initiative) is an extension of the political advocacy and democracy education work IWEI began in September 2004 under the auspices of the State Department's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative to further promote Iraqi women's participation in the democratization process. IWEI fostered self-sufficiency among independent Iraqi women's NGOs in southern Iraq through economic empowerment and technical assistance. This NGO Initiative provided small grants, resources, and capacity-building training to independent Iraqi women's NGOs that focus on skill-building, job placement, cottage industries, and women's human rights through economic empowerment and advocacy of women's rights.

This program reached out to Iraqi women's NGOs comprising all ethnic and religious groups in southern and south-central Iraq. Over the course of 2006, IWEI's NGO Initiative trained and supported capacity-building and gave institutional support to 15 independent Iraqi women's NGOs in southern and south-central Iraq by doing the following:

- Creating an international advisory board to render advice on “best practices” for NGO capacity-building
- Disbursing small grants of up to \$5,000 each to independent women's NGOs
- Providing reference and training materials on NGO capacity-building to Iraqi NGOs
- Holding three regional trainings for NGO grant recipients
- Establishing an NGO women's resource center in Basra
- Providing sub-grantee training of other NGOs
- Posting NGO capacity-building materials on the IWEI website
- Facilitating networking between the NGOs and experts abroad
- Placing university students as interns with NGO grantees

Over the long term, IWEI will continue to empower Iraqi women by making resources available on the IWEI website www.iwei.org and through the Women's Resource Center in Basra so that they have the skills necessary to support themselves and their families.

Selection Process

In March 2006, through the on-the-ground efforts of the American Islamic Congress, IWEI began the selection process by gathering information on women's NGOs that could be potential grantees under this NGO Initiative. In so doing, a two-prong strategy was carried out. First, AIC's Iraq-based employees attended provincial NGO meetings and activities to assess, network, engage, and recruit new NGOs for the NGO Initiative. Second, through the IWEI network of existing Iraqi NGOs, women activists, and women leaders, AIC gathered the names and contact information for 25 newly organized Iraqi women NGOs in the central and southern provinces.

More than 70 women's NGOs were screened by AIC throughout the selection process of potential small grant recipients. Of those 70, IWEI selected 50 NGOs to undertake a two-part written application.



FIGURE 13: Michelle Bernard with Iraqi women activists and leaders.

On the basis of this first application, IWEI narrowed the field down to select NGOs that were asked to submit a detailed project proposal for small grants funding. IWEI prepared a "Proposal Preparation Guide" to aid the applicants who were unfamiliar with the proposal-writing process and worked to make sure that each applicant included details about project objectives and activities, background information, evaluation plans, and a detailed budget.

In addition to the written proposal submission, IWEI orally interviewed the director of each respective NGO during the regional training workshop held on May 25-27, 2006, in Basra. IWEI then chose the final grant recipients.

AIC then recruited three additional qualified NGOs. In total, 14 women's NGOs from various regions in southern Iraq implemented projects. The NGOs, their directors, the provinces and the cities where they are located, and a brief summary of their work and the resources provided are outlined below.

IWEI Advisory Board

IWEI recruited an advisory board composed of entrepreneurs, academics, and international development leaders to help formulate strategies, recommend best practices regarding NGO management and capacity-building, and provided technical advice to NGOs participating in the program. Members of the advisory board include the following:

- **Asma Afsaruddin**, *Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Notre Dame University*
- **Isabelle M. Bleas**, *Senior Operations Officer, Gender Coordinator, World Bank Institute*
- **Roberta Cohen**, *Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies and Co-director, The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement*
- **Isobel Coleman**, *Senior Fellow on U.S. Foreign Policy, Council on Foreign Relations*
- **Pamela Coffey Curtin**, *Senior Technical Advisor, Development Alternatives Inc.*
- **Haleh Esfandiari**, *Director of Middle East Programs, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars*
- **Patty Friedman**, *Director of Women's Advocacy for Iraq and Gender Specialist, America's Development Foundation*
- **Mandana Hendessi**, *Director, UK Women's National Commission*
- **Fatima Kassam**, *Former Director, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*
- **Karen Kerrigan**, *President and CEO, Women Entrepreneurs, Inc.*
- **Marguerite Sullivan**, *Manager of Communications, National Endowment for Democracy*
- **Anne Trenolone**, *Senior Policy Advisor/Public Policy Manager, FINCA International⁴²*
- **Judy Van Rest**, *Vice President, International Republican Institute*

IWEI Experts Panel

In addition to the activities of the advisory board, the IWEI experts panel participated in a facilitated and structured exchange with Iraqi women NGOs. These experts advised the participating NGOs on capacity-building and sustainability, including management and fundraising, effective media and outreach activities, advocacy for women's rights and legal issues, and networking with national and international NGOs. IWF identified key experts in a variety of fields, including microfinance, international organizations and development, youth, gender issues, and engineering to sit on the experts panel:



FIGURE 14: Experts participated in a panel at the IWEI conference.

Pamela Coffey Curtin

Senior Technical Advisor, Development Alternatives Inc.

Expertise in women's human rights, international development, technical advice to NGOs, and youth training.

Isabelle M. Bleas

Senior Operations Officer, Gender Coordinator, World Bank Institute

Expertise in gender issues, international organizations, and development in Iraq.

Anne Trenolone

Senior Policy Advisor/Public Policy Manager, FINCA International

Expertise in microfinance and small business generation.

Neveen Abel-Jalil

Patent Examiner/Trainer-Database Technology, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Expertise in intellectual property, engineering systems, and database technology.

Patty Friedman

Director of Women's Advocacy for Iraq, America's Development Foundation

Expertise in women's human rights, international development, and NGO capacity-building.

IWEI had a full-time coordinator on the ground in Iraq responsible for helping Iraqi women leaders, as well as women's groups around Iraq, to network with one another. The coordinator communicated with the participants and the women's groups via e-mail, phone, site visits, and during the trainings to assess their needs, get updates on their activities, and identify common issues of interest. IWEI's coordinator began the exchange by surveying women's NGOs about the challenges they face, the state of the Iraqi women's movement, their concerns about economic empowerment, and questions they would like the experts to answer. IWEI compiled this information and the experts' panel provided answers to specific women's NGO questions on issues such as NGO capacity-building, women and Islam, NGO networking, women's rights advocacy, microfinance, and financial matters related to long-term sustainability. The NGO experts panel question-and-answer exchange can be found at www.iwei.org under "Resources."

IWEI NGO Capacity-building Reference Manual

IWEI created a series of reference materials that will enable NGOs in Iraq to gain a better understanding of the nature of the role and activities of NGOs, become effective and self-sufficient organizations, successfully advocate for change, and provide necessary services to their beneficiaries.

The complete NGO Capacity-building Reference Manual includes guides on eight different topics and is available in English and Arabic. Each reference guide is designed to be distributed as a stand-alone guide on a particular topic. The guides were used throughout the program for training purposes, and are also available for general educational purposes outside IWEI at www.iwei.org. The reference materials are summarized as follows:

1. What Is a Non-governmental Organization?

This guide outlines the general role and structure of NGOs. It describes the different categories of NGOs and outlines the strengths and weaknesses that characterize an NGO.

2. Basic NGO Skills: A Checklist

Women starting or expanding an NGO will benefit from this cogent summary of the essential skills that all NGOs must possess to be self-sustainable. This checklist helps existing NGOs identify their strengths and weaknesses and, thus, improve and expand their capacity. It also assists NGOs in creating organizational structures that address their administrative and programmatic needs.

3. Starting an NGO: Logistics

This guide builds on the previous materials and specifically outlines steps that must be taken in order to establish an NGO, including defining the vision, mission, and goals of the organization, establishing a structure composed of specialized staff and an involved board of directors, developing bylaws, and registering the organization with the proper authorities.

4. NGO Management: Strategic Planning

Once an NGO is established, effective management plays a key role in capacity-building. This guide presents strategic planning and project management as a symbiotic and interconnected process that gives an NGO direction and concrete goals for the future.

5. Project Development, Design, and Management

Project development, design, and management all require a focus on pre-planning preparation, multi-level analysis, flexibility, and collaboration. This guide emphasizes the need for effective project management to ensure the viability, not only of a specific project, but of the organization as a whole.

6. Financial Management: Grant-writing and Budgeting

Managing the finances of an organization seems like a daunting task to many individuals; however, this reference guide simplifies the complicated process and presents the steps in a clear and concise manner. It breaks down the components of a grant proposal and details the information that should be included. The discussion includes background information on basic accounting and budgeting practices, and provides an extensive sample budget.

7. Public Relations: Media and Advocacy

Effective use of the media can help NGOs achieve their goals and objectives. This guide describes the steps for developing a media outreach plan, including identifying the audience and the most suitable media outlets (e.g., newspapers, the Internet, and TV). It

emphasizes the need for a core message and offers specific guidelines for drafting a press release, preparing for an interview, and writing an opinion editorial.

8. Building Networks: Community and Government Relations

This guide focuses on how NGOs can build relationships with external networks that can help expand the scope of their work. NGOs face significant challenges in trying to build strong relationships with their beneficiaries, the wider community, and government agencies. Descriptions of these challenges along with suggestions for efforts to overcome them provide a fitting conclusion for this series of reference materials.



FIGURE 15: IWEI NGO capacity-building seminar participants in Iraq.

These and other reference materials in Arabic have been selected to be useful to IWEI affiliated NGOs but were also made available to women's resource centers. These materials include additional sources on NGO sustainability, job skills training, grant-writing and budgeting, entrepreneurship, and democracy and governance. For instance, IWF gained permission from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to use their grant-writing training materials for IWEI workshops and as general resource information. IWF also included Arabic-language materials developed by the Center for International Private Enterprise on basic small business skills.

IWEI NGO Capacity-building Training Seminars

IWEI held three seminars on NGO capacity-building designed to train women to create and lead these organizations:

1. Introduction to IWEI Initiatives and NGO Fundamentals

Basra, Iraq, May 25-27, 2006

IWEI's first seminar was held in Basra, Iraq, for 20 Iraqi women's NGOs. This was the first of three training seminars held in southern Iraq as a part of IWEI's NGO Initiative. Representatives from the 20 NGOs (hailing from the nine south-central and southern provinces) that had submitted applications for small grants funding under the NGO Initiative attended the training seminar.

During this seminar, the participants received IWEI's program materials and were told about the small grants funding and other aspects of the NGO Initiative. AIC began with an informal meeting in which the discussion focused on the NGO situation in Iraq, the progress and challenges of Iraqi civil society, and the foundations of a successful NGO. AIC then interviewed each NGO individually to discuss their respective applications for proposed projects and explained the grantee selection process for IWEI's small grants funding.

One of the NGO directors and an IWEI 2005 participant brought her family with her to the training. Her efforts optimized the NGO's dedication to the program. Given the death

threats they face daily, these women demonstrate an amazing amount of courage and dedication to women's empowerment.

2. NGO Management and Grant-writing

Karbala, Iraq, August 8-10, 2006

NGO representatives from the provinces of Basra, Omarah, Nasiriyah, Qut, Samawah, Najaf, Hillah, Diwaniyah, and Karbala attended this three-day workshop in Karbala, Iraq. Participants received training on topics such as the difference between NGOs and other types of organizations, how to manage and develop an NGO, how to write a project proposal and budget, and the role media and public relations can play in promoting an NGO's projects and objectives.

AIC extensively discussed the vocabulary and terms associated with NGOs (as well as the differences among independent NGOs, donor organized NGOs, government organized NGOs, and community based organizations (CBOs)). Also, AIC conducted a number of small exercises, which included a simulation in which each NGO representative was asked to identify her organization as either an operational or advocacy NGO, based on the reading materials provided. Participants were asked to distinguish between goals and objectives and mission and vision. The second half of the training focused on writing grants, managing finances, developing resources, writing a proposal, soliciting funds, and answering specific questions relative to an individual NGO's proposed project. During the training seminar, each NGO representative met individually with Zainab Al-Suwaij, executive director of AIC, who provided critical feedback on each NGO's proposed projects. All revised proposals were received by the end of August 2006.

3. Financial Management and the Role of the Media

Karbala, Iraq, November 29-December 1, 2006

IWEI's third seminar, which was held in Karbala, Iraq, covered numerous topics, including the basics of managing finances, organizing finances, creating small project budgets, hiring staff, soliciting funding, identifying donors, creating financial statements, estimating costs, planning media events, planning outreach projects, how to do an interview, how to write a press release, how to write letters to the editor, and managing general media relations. IWEI selected these topics in response to questions and requests for information from the NGOs which were obtained during the second seminar.

Zainab Al-Suwaij, executive director of AIC, led the training of the 16 women NGO representatives on these topics. Much of the first two days was devoted to financial management as this was the most complicated topic for the NGO participants. The participants did not have any previous experience in estimating costs, preparing budgets, or organizing finances. Ms. al-Suwaij covered NGO financial management from basic concepts (non-profit enterprises compared to for-profit enterprises) to rudimentary principles of financial

management (accountability, viability, transparency, and stewardship). Some of the small group exercises involved categorizing various types of expenses and preparing a sample chart of accounts for their respective organizations. The women devised sample budgets for small projects, using what they had learned about estimating costs. Using the workbooks devised by IWEI, the women spent more than two days covering the principles of financial management. On the afternoon of the third day, participants discussed the role of the media in furthering an NGO's policy objectives and learned to write press releases, develop a media checklist, and organize a media campaign.

Additional Training in Technical and Financial Reports for NGOs

Throughout the NGO Initiative, IWEI found that two challenges persisted for most NGOs: financial and technical reporting. Few, if any, of these women leaders have ever maintained financial reports or written technical reports for donors or funding agencies. Despite the rigorous and thorough training in the NGO workshops, and despite the plethora of written manuals and resource materials provided by IWEI, many of the women remain unsure about the details of financial reporting and the basic elements of a technical report.



FIGURE 16: Iraqi women activists listening to conference expert panelists.

Therefore, AIC field staff spent more than 100 hours during December 2006 explaining and tutoring the women leaders on the basic tenets of financial reporting. Although basic from a Western perspective, the written materials on financial management proved too sophisticated for most of the women leaders. The actual workshop adequately covered the rudimentary principles of financial management—accountability, viability, transparency, and stewardship—but the first three concepts are utterly foreign to this generation of Iraqis who have lived and worked in a statist dictatorship. Although they have a true entrepreneurial spirit and a strong work ethic, it is difficult for them to comprehend, for example, the concept of double-entry bookkeeping. A chart of accounts is completely foreign to them, although they did understand the concepts of income and expenses.

Through this process, the women began to appreciate the costs involved in running an NGO. When initially drafting project budgets, the women overlooked smaller expenses such as pens, markers, and signs. The post-workshop financial accounting reports that AIC required the organizations to produce allowed them to refine their process of budgeting.

Technical reporting is another area where the women have no experience. Although they understand the necessity of keeping donors and funding agencies informed about activities, few have had much experience in narrative writing. This is a skill that is difficult to teach; however, we are confident that, with practice, many of them will develop their written skills.



Implementation of Iraqi Women's NGOs Small Grants Projects

This NGO Initiative's success stories outlined below demonstrate that Iraqi women are determined to advocate for their rights and economically empower themselves through trainings and workshops despite the daily security nightmare, political threats, and infrastructure challenges.

From October 2006 through January 2007, the NGOs chosen by IWEI to receive small grants began implementing their projects and holding their own trainings. AIC monitored, evaluated, and extensively trained these NGOs on the ground in Iraq.

Locations across Iraq were as follows: Najaf 2, Hillah 4, Qut, Basra 2, Diwaniyah 3, Samawah, and Nasiriyah.

Al-Khansaa Center for Women's Culture; Najaf

Al-Khansaa is the name of a respected, long-standing family in Najaf, in southern Iraq. This name lends a certain degree of credibility to the al-Khansaa Center for Women's Culture (al-Khansaa Center) that educates women on women's issues, women's rights, and women's activism. Grant recipient Laila al-Robai, of Najaf, conducted workshops that served to inform rural and refugee Iraqi women of their rights under Iraqi and international law.

On October 19, 2006, the al-Khansaa Center took a poll to assess rural women's attitudes regarding women's rights and the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of



FIGURE 17: Women in the Najaf province attend workshops on human rights provided by the Al-Khansaa Center for Women's Culture. The workshop was held over a three-day period in October 2006.



FIGURE 18: Executive Director of the Hamzah Association of Women's Charities for Widows and Orphans, Bashaer Fadel leads a discussion in Hilla. The organization's 12 workshops addressed human rights and also included practical training in sewing and embroidery.

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Al-Khansaa Center representatives also went to a nearby village that has a large refugee population to assess opinions and interest in attending a workshop on women's rights.

The following day, 20 women attended a workshop held in Kufa at the home of Muna Jarr-Allah. The al-Khansaa Center transported women from the refugee camps to the workshop site. A female attorney, Nidhal Fadil Mahdi, lectured on women's rights and CEDAW. The discussion that resulted between the attorney and the participants was productive and informative. Many of the women brought their young children, as day care or child care is virtually unheard of in Iraq. Often times, a neighbor or family member watches younger children when a woman works outside the home or has an appointment. In this case, so many women attended the conference that there were very few women left behind to care for the children.

The workshop continued the next day, and Ms. Mahdi taught the participants about women's rights, the importance of citizenship, raising children who are sensitive to women's and children's rights, and the importance of women's empowerment in Iraq.

On the third day, five additional women joined the first 20, who continued to learn about women's rights under the Iraqi constitution and the importance of patience and prayer for women, especially those who have lost husbands, children, and loved ones during Saddam's era and in the continuing violence.

Al-Youser Association for the Assistance and Rehabilitation of Women; Hillah

The al-Youser Association for the Assistance and Rehabilitation of Women, based in Hillah, held three weeks of workshops in December 2006, all of which focused on developing sewing and embroidery skills. Five women trainers taught more than 30 women sewing skills, from basic machine stitching, designing dress patterns, and children's clothes to machine embroidery. The organization bought four additional sewing machines to accommodate the popular classes that rapidly filled up.

Democratic Iraqi Women's Organization; Qut

Zena Fadel of the Democratic Iraqi Women's Organization taught women in a few villages in Qut how to sew. The Democratic Iraqi Women's Organization is also providing training in women's economic and political rights and family law.

Hamzah Association of Women's Charities for Widows and Orphans; Hillah

The Hamzah Association of Women's Charities for Widows and Orphans conducted 12 workshops in December 2006, all of which addressed human rights, special treaties on women's rights, and developments regarding the new Iraqi constitution. Six of the work-

shops incorporated practical training in sewing and embroidery. Executive Director Bashaer Fadel led the discussions on women's rights, which were of particular interest to widows in Iraq.

Al-Mustaqbal Association for Iraqi Women (aka The Future Association for Iraqi Women, aka Association for the Future of Iraqi Women); Basra

Al-Mustaqbal (translated into English as “the Future”) Association for Iraqi Women held their first workshops in October 2006. Al-Mustaqbal focuses on building skills training and rights awareness among rural Iraqi women. An Iraqi-led study showed that 75% of rural-based women in the province of Basra no longer engage in handicrafts production because they have no access to markets or means by which to promote products. Most of these women have not taught their daughters these skills, leaving a generation of young Iraqi women without basic skills for earning wages. Al-Mustaqbal seeks to revive handicrafts as an art and as a unique cultural product, and to train rural women in marketing and selling handmade items. Through three cycles of 10 workshops each, from October 2006 through January 2007, al-Mustaqbal identified 50 women from villages in the al-Kramaa area as candidates for their program. By the end of October 2006, they had signed up as many participants needed to begin the first phase of training and bought the necessary equipment to bring to the workshops.

Zainab Sadiq, the director of al-Mustaqbal, implemented the second workshop in their series on handicraft training in November 2006. Her skills-building classes were accompanied by lectures on basic health care, hygiene, and education about legal rights. Sixteen women from surrounding rural villages returned for additional skills and educational training.

Representatives from al-Latif, al-Mahlaw, Albu Shaw, al-Dawway, and Qaryah al-Kheet were divided into two groups: one group began basket-weaving training, and the other attended a lecture on health, hygiene, and legal rights education. On the previous day, all of the women learned how to select the best palm fronds for weaving baskets and painted them. Basket-weaving is a productive skill for young women to learn because the start-up costs are quite inexpensive in comparison to carpet-weaving. The women were taught how to cut palm fronds and other raw materials for weaving. Then one group continued with basket-weaving lessons while the second group listened to Mr. Aqeel, a representative of the Cultural Institute for Iraqi Women, discuss women's rights under the new Iraqi constitution.

Mr. Aqeel stressed the importance of financial independence for women and explained the benefits of multiple income streams for households. He invoked the Arab adage, “he who owns his strength (or is the source of his own strength) owns his decision.” Mr. Aqeel also emphasized the economic, social, and political benefits of earning one's own living.



FIGURE 19: Women in Basra province learn traditional basket-weaving techniques at a skills workshop. The training was followed by a discussion of women's rights in Iraq under the new constitution and the relationship between economic independence and political power.

The basket-weaving classes continued throughout the day as women learned different weaving techniques; trainers critiqued the participants' finished products while this first group of women then met with Mr. Aqeel for their legal rights awareness training.

All of the women engaged in a discussion about early marriage consisting of brides aged 12 to 15 and its effect on their daughters' social, educational, and economic future. Moderators encouraged the women to discuss what were seen as possible benefits of women marrying early and then explained how early marriage adversely affects not only the bride's economic, educational, and social status but also her children's. These discussions ended with an exposition of women's rights in Iraqi society under the new constitution and the relationship between economic independence and political power.

Al-Mustaqbal held several workshops during December 2006 in the village of Latif in Basra province. Trainees came from surrounding villages, including al-Mahloh, al-Doaid, and al-Kheet. Forty women continued their basketry classes that began in late October and early November. Most of these women are exceedingly poor and are interested in forming a cooperative to market their products. During one class, the discussion centered on their eagerness to economically provide for their families. One widow's monthly income is less than US\$50.00—the proceeds from her deceased husband's pension—and she has eight children at home to feed. These women recognize that removing their children from school and having them work—selling cigarettes or fruit on the streets—simply continues the cycle of poverty, but they feel helpless to avoid it given the economic realities of Iraq.

Each workshop also included discussions and lectures about women's rights under the new Iraqi constitution and under international conventions to which Iraq is a signatory. The conversation turned to individual situations, and one elderly divorced woman explained that she had two grown sons who refused to support her. Under Iraqi law, she has the right to appear before a personal status court (family court) and request that they force these sons to provide financial support. Until she was informed of this law, she had been unaware of this right and did not know that she could bring a case before the courts without a male guardian—her husband, father, brother, or grown son. Zainab Sadik, the director of al-Mustaqbal, promised to put the woman in touch with women's groups that would assist her in filing her case.

The New Dawn Association for Iraqi Women; Samawah

The New Dawn Association for Iraqi Women (New Dawn) was one of the first small grant recipients under the NGO Initiative and was one of the most successful. New Dawn is teaching women how to sew and become hairdressers—two occupations that are socially and culturally acceptable in the increasingly conservative Iraqi south. In the village of al-Khodor, this is the first project of its kind. On October 14, 2006, New Dawn held its first skills-building workshop

for arts and handicraft production, another session on sewing and dressmaking, and a third workshop to train women in basic cosmetology.

Four trainees from al-Bureesha village attended the arts and handicraft workshop that focused on carpet weaving and production. This was the first in a series of four workshops that will teach these women several different handicrafts so that they may either form their own cottage businesses or work for others in a wage-earning environment.

A second workshop taught basic sewing skills to 13 trainees at the New Dawn headquarters in Samawah, the provincial capital of al-Muthanna. All 13 women had access to sewing machines and completed one day's training in practical sewing and embroidery skills.

The cosmetology-training workshop had 15 trainees, between the ages of 18 and 35, and covered hair-coloring basics.

New Dawn held its second series of skills-training workshops on October 21, 2006. However, because of the close proximity to the Eid al Fitr holiday celebrating the end of Ramadan, only six women returned for additional training. The students learned how to sew a dress. Their ages ranged from 30 to 45, and none had ever engaged in employment outside the home.

The cosmetology workshop was held concurrently with the sewing workshop on October 21, 2006, but at a different location. Ten trainees studied hair styling, which was highly popular given the timing with Eid festivities. The trainees practiced styling each other's hair for the evening's dinners and celebrations. One of the participants said that the training has given her confidence to work outside the home. The trainees asked to have training in computer literacy as well, so that they can eventually join the professional workforce. These trainees were younger—aged between 20 and 30—and most lived in the same village.

The follow-up training workshop in arts and handicrafts was also held on October 21, 2006. Trainees indicated an interest in learning skills that they could use at the village level, rather than the provincial level. As an example, the women wanted to learn how to make brooms and other items of practical use, as opposed to learning carpet-weaving and skills in other crafts for manufacturing and export.

Once again, because of the Eid holiday, a three-day event, the organization hosted only one follow-up workshop, on October 27, 2006, for the arts and handicraft training session—sewing—and cosmetology workshops were postponed until October 29, 2006. Thirteen women partici-



FIGURE 20: Workshop attendees learn basic sewing skills at a training session in Samawah lead by the New Dawn Association for Iraqi Women. New Dawn held additional skills-building workshops for handicraft production and cosmetology.

pated. Much of the workshop's discussion focused on Arab handicrafts made of wool and how to produce these for sale.

On October 29, 2006, the organization hosted three more workshops for the three different skill sets—arts and handicraft, sewing, and cosmetology. The cosmetology workshop had 12 trainees, who learned about makeup principles and color templates; participants performed practical applications on one another. The sewing workshop had 10 trainees, who learned different ways to design women's dresses by drafting dress patterns on paper. The arts and handicraft workshop had 13 trainees, who continued to learn about crafts in demand in Arab bazaars, including embroidery, knitting, and crochet. Afterwards, the participants attended a lecture about women's rights.



FIGURE 21: A group of Iraqi participants who took part in the NGO capacity-building seminars.

In December, Director Layla Habib oversaw three solid weeks of workshops. The women who were learning to sew had already mastered the “theoretical” aspects of the trade so the December workshops taught the women how to choose a sewing machine for purchase, how to repair and lubricate the machine, and how to clean the moving parts. This part of the training was designed to help women move past the relatively simple art of sewing garments and prepare them for beginning their own business. Ms. Habib found it essential that the women learn how to troubleshoot problems with a sewing machine to strive for sustainability and to cut future repair and maintenance costs.

The second series of workshops that New Dawn held in December continued to teach the women the art of weaving carpets and wall hangings. Each trainee made a prayer rug. Additionally, several worked on larger projects, such as woven decorative wall hangings and carpets. The results were, in the words of one of the participants, “masterly” and “professional.” Experts deemed the work to be of sufficient quality to market and sell commercially. The women displayed an intuitive eye for color and texture, balancing bold hues with more neutral ones to appeal to a wider range of tastes.

The third series of workshops in December taught computer skills to women in Samawah. These women had been introduced to more basic computer skills, such as understanding the concept of the Internet and how to access it, so these workshops taught the women how to use applications and software, particularly Microsoft Word. They learned to create and save files, about the importance of consistent naming conventions to identify files once they have been saved, how to re-name and copy files, and more advanced skills such as formatting, inserting pictures and text boxes in a file, and how to switch between Arabic and Western fonts.

Organization for Civil and Democratic Society in Iraq; Karbala

The Organization for Civil and Democratic Society in Iraq held a two week-long December 2006 workshops in Karbala. Director Hind al-Wash brought in area lawyers and human-rights

activists to discuss women's rights. This group of Shi'a were largely uneducated women and primarily concerned about the legal marriage age for women, the risk of having an unrecorded marriage ceremony (i.e., marrying in a religious ceremony only and not registering with the local courts), the phenomenon of "temporary" marriages (*mut'a* marriages), and the legal implications of husband abandonment. In Shi'a Islam, "temporary" marriages are unions in which a man and a woman agree to be married for a set period of time, i.e., four months or as little as one day. This legitimizes sexual intercourse and protects the progeny, if any, of such a union. Children of such a marriage are considered legitimate, and the husband must financially support them and the mother. With the widespread introduction of contraceptive practices in the early twentieth century, many women did not get pregnant from such arrangements. However, in post-Saddam Iraq, some Shi'a have revived this practice, especially in the rural areas. Husbands are required to provide a dowry, just as in a regular marriage, but the relationship and legal obligations end at a pre-determined time. *Mut'a* marriages are common in Iran and are considered illegal under Sunni Islamic law. Other questions revolved around issues regarding divorces and child custody disputes.

Organization Imam Al-Sadiq: Hillah (Babel)

In November 2006, the Organization Imam Al-Sadiq conducted two training workshops in the village of al-Attaij. Led by the organization's president, Nidal Sabri, one workshop taught sewing crafts and the other cosmetology skills. Although the organization is convinced of the importance of improving women's access to education—secular and religious—their work was hampered by the degenerating security situation in and around Hillah.

Organization of Women's and Children's Affairs (aka Organization for Women and Children (OWC); Diwaniyah

The Organization of Women's and Children's Affairs (OWC) in Diwaniyah hosted numerous lectures and workshops in October 2006 that focused on skills training and civic education for rural women. The first set of activities involved seamstress training for 28 women of various ages from Shameah. To promote the project, Executive Director Tanea Radee visited public places where women tend to congregate and talked to as many women as she could. She distributed flyers and posted notices and signs throughout the villages to alert women about the training workshop. She reported that handicrafts and sewing skills are very popular with rural women because many are not formally educated, and other skills-training programs such as computer and Internet training can be intimidating to those who are functionally illiterate. Another reason for their popularity is that these skills can be used in the home for personal use and not just in a wage-earning capacity.

OWC's classes taught all aspects of sewing techniques from choosing cloth to designing and producing women's garments. The instructor, Ms. Manal Toman, also demonstrated embroidery



FIGURE 22: Clothing items produced by attendees of workshops hosted by the Organization of Women's and Children's Affairs (OWC) hang on a wall in Diwaniyah. OWC's classes taught all aspects of sewing techniques from choosing cloth to designing and producing women's garments.

techniques, which the students practiced by hand as other students worked on sewing machines. During the seven classes, attendance ranged from 25 to 35 participants. Participant interviews indicated that they had experienced no resistance or discouragement from their husbands or families in either seeking training or desiring to work outside the home. At the end of the workshop, a survey was distributed to the women to assess the efficacy of their classes and practical training. Of those surveyed, 85% indicated that the sewing training was helpful in teaching them useful skills for working outside the home.



FIGURE 23: Women at a workshop familiarize themselves with sewing machines provided by the OWC in Diwaniyah. OWC has empowered more than 60 women with health education, skills training, and knowledge about their rights as women and as Iraqis.

The women were supplied with scissors, thread, and some fabric for practice and for making their first item of women's clothing. In addition to these supplies, the participants received for their developing cottage businesses hand tools for carding and combing wool.

The second component of the OWC's training was a seminar in civic education. The women received information on their legal rights under the new constitution and under Islamic law. The one-day seminar was intended to supplement job-skills training with an understanding of women's roles in the new Iraqi state. Using printed materials from IWEI programs, Mr. Malek Ebeid lectured on democratic principles with particular emphasis on the principle of equality. The class discussed strong women role models in local and Arab culture and history, as well as how women's rights had been usurped by different societies in history.

In November 2006, OWC invited 25 women to attend one of two skills-training workshops: one on hair coloring and one that focused on sewing men's *dishdashahs* (long robe-like garments worn by men). Ms. Hanna Jawad explained the steps used to color a woman's hair using henna to 18 of the women; the workshop lasted one full day. The second group of 17 participants learned about designing men's *dishdashahs*. Ms. Karimah Nassir Mohamed discussed tailoring and how to use a model to design the clothes.

In December 2006, OWC held seminars primarily focused on haircutting and coloring, which was of great interest to most of the women. Continuing sewing workshops included how to design a garment, produce a pattern and cut cloth, and produce finished garments. Without exception, the women chose to make dresses and children's clothes.

Ms. Radi also hosted two workshops on computer literacy for women in Diwaniyah. The classes were very basic, introducing the women to the computer, teaching them how to turn it on, what it can do, and how to access the Internet. This workshop was small and more intimate than the other classes, involving between six and eight women. Although it is clear that they will require additional classes, Ms. Radi was able to introduce them to basic computer skills for about \$135, a very small sum given the potential return on the investment.

Through the 10 workshops held during the month of December, Ms. Radi estimated that OWC has empowered more than 60 women with health education, skills training, and knowledge about their rights as women and as Iraqis.

Suda Al-Iraq; Hillah

The Suda Al-Iraq organization in Hillah focused on educating both men and women regarding differences and similarities that could serve to reduce gender conflicts and violence against women. The participants also learned the basic principles of women's rights and women's life issues.

Theqar Forum; Nasiriyah

The Theqar Forum's program taught women to make traditional Iraqi dresses and provided educational training on women's political and economic rights. Director Shatha Kader held classes in sewing and embroidery in December 2006. While the women were learning these skills using sewing machines, the organization also held informative meetings to discuss public and women's health issues. They discussed the importance of washing fruits and vegetables before consuming or cooking, to avoid eating or purchasing cooked food on the streets because of the potential health risks, and how to avoid illnesses by washing hands frequently, coughing into one's elbow instead of into one's hand, and other basic health concepts.

Center for Women and Child Rights, aka Women and Child Rights Center; Diwaniyah

Hakima al-Shiply of the Center for Women and Child Rights (the Center), located in Diwaniyah, held a workshop from September 30, 2006, to October 1, 2006, in which the group taught women sewing fundamentals, including how to troubleshoot mechanical problems with their sewing machines. Many of the women had no prior experience with sewing machines as all of their sewing, including dressmaking and tailoring, had been done by hand.

Topics covered in the workshop included designing clothing for men and women, and how to advocate for women's rights in the rural areas among tribal leaders. On October 4, 2006, this organization held a second training that instructed participants how to actually produce particular garments.

The Center has also established a *Department of Sewing* complete with machines and classrooms for instruction and a reference library for women interested in researching women's rights issues.

The Cultural Institute for Iraqi Women (aka Women's Cultural Center); Najaf

Kawkeb Muhammad of the Cultural Institute for Iraqi Women held a workshop on November 11, 2006, for 18 participants, all of whom expressed their deep gratitude for the opportunity to learn



FIGURE 24: Theqar Forum participants in Nasiriyah display handwork projects. While the women were learning these skills, the organization also held informative meetings to discuss public and women's health issues.



FIGURE 25: A local woman in Diwaniyah threads a sewing machine at the Center for Women and Child Rights. The Center has established a Department of Sewing complete with machines and classrooms for instruction and a reference library for women interested in researching women's rights issues.



FIGURE 26: Women in Najaf gather to learn sewing and entrepreneurial skills at work shops lead by The Cultural Institute for Iraqi Women. Participants expressed a desire to learn dual-purpose skills: skills that would allow them to create products as a source of income and for personal use, such as broom-making, sewing, basket-weaving, and carpet-weaving.

sewing and entrepreneurial skills. Using a blackboard, Ms. Muhammad talked to the women about the importance of diverse sources of revenue for their households and how economic empowerment led to political empowerment. Mr. Nidal assisted in teaching the women how to cut dress patterns using paper instead of canvas, which is the traditional material for dress pattern designs. Paper is a much less expensive resource, and even newspaper can be used to further cut costs.

Throughout the weekend, the Cultural Institute for Iraqi Women held additional skills-training workshops in the village of al-Hamid (Afak District), where 14 women from surrounding towns and villages continued their sewing classes. These classes focused on designing, cutting, and sewing children's clothes. Like other women, these participants had expressed a desire to learn dual-purpose skills: skills that allowed the women to create products as a source of income and for personal use, such as broom-making, sewing, basket-weaving, and carpet-weaving. The trainer, Umm Saif, spent a good deal of time teaching the importance of cutting cloth correctly so as to not waste any.

During the same weekend, the Cultural Institute continued cosmetology training, focusing on hair care and use of indigenous hair-care products such as olive oil, herbs for scent, and eggs.

Rana Saheb Yassen of the Women's Cultural Center in Najaf held second and third phases of workshops in December, all of which incorporated discussions about women's rights in Islam and in Iraq. The workshops also provided resources for legal and medical assistance. The primary focus of the Women's Cultural Center's workshops, however, was sewing. The participants had moved past the theoretical aspects of the craft to more business-related aspects, including designing clothes with a minimum of sewing motions to cut costs, choosing cloth, making patterns, and using a sewing machine—which few women had ever had access to before. During December, the women produced children's clothes and simple women's garments.

Women's Forum; Maysan (Omarah Province)

In September 2006, the Women's Forum convened a workshop on women's legal rights and health education in al Shaabah. More than 20 women discussed women's legal rights under the new constitution and family law and how tribal and religious laws can impact their lives. The second day of the workshop, the women were more comfortable with each other, which led to more active participation and discussion among the group.

Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned

The single most pressing challenge for the entire NGO Initiative was the escalating security situation. Through conversations with the women, two main themes emerged: all are deeply frightened and anxious about the violent and unstable environments in which they are forced to work,

and all are thoroughly committed to creating and sustaining viable non-governmental organizations for Iraqi women. They are acutely aware of the importance of success in building a functioning Iraqi civil society. During the implementation phase, representatives from the women's NGOs expressed concerns about the progress of their projects and the nature of obstacles they were encountering. This fear and the general instability reduced their ability to travel for conferences, to meet with potential donors, or to attend training classes offered by other international NGOs.

However, IWEI believes that the increasing pressure on NGOs to work with political parties makes IWEI's work with independent NGOs all the more necessary and important. Many independent domestic civil society organizations are increasingly feeling threatened and/or are sometimes directly threatened to either start working with political parties or cease working at all. Many of the NGOs took this as a direct threat—work with the Islamist parties or risk isolation, or even death. Yet, throughout this initiative, IWEI found many courageous women determined to work on an independent basis.

Like many in Iraq, those working for these NGOs and implementing these important programs faced personal loss. One director struggled to continue her work after her nephew was killed in a suicide bomb attack when a terrorist blew himself up near a bus carrying Iraqi National Guard volunteers. He was one of seven men killed. Although grief and fear adversely affected the pace of her program, she continued on.

Iraqi NGOs also faced infrastructure-related challenges. Frequent power outages meant that classes were often interrupted due to lack of lighting or power for sewing machines or computers. For those NGOs with access to a generator, obtaining sufficient fuel to run the generator was also sometimes difficult. Other challenges included securing safe transportation outside the NGOs' immediate surroundings and procuring proper equipment and furniture for their organizations.

Throughout the period of the initiative, there was (and continues to be) a severe fuel shortage in Iraq, making travel more expensive and difficult. Many times, those who seek mobility are forced to purchase gas on the black market at steep prices. The shortage is due to a number of factors, including insurgents and terrorists frequently interrupting the supply of fuel and oil either by committing terrorist attacks or by hijacking fuel trucks. The government's subsidy of fuel—making "official" prices extremely low—means that gas stations can choose to sell fuel at the official rate or hoard it and sell it for more on the black market or even ship barrels of fuel outside the country for a handsome profit.

For future small grants projects, to the extent that the budget and project term allow, it would be helpful to include training on marketing of products. This training would assist the NGOs in forming cooperatives to pool resources, provide technical support to design a web portal for sales, and introduce them to international organizations that market handmade items to retail

outlets in the United States and Western Europe. This step seems to be the most logical, given the extensive training and funding that the State Department has thus far provided.

Establishment of Women's Centers

At the outset of the project, AIC Director Zainab Al-Suwaij met with provincial officials at the governor's office in Karbala to discuss opening a resource center for women in the city. Although the officials initially agreed to the opening of the center, they said they first had to talk to the governor to get his approval. Two days later, they announced that the governor had refused to allow IWEI to open a women's resource center in Karbala.



FIGURE 27: IWEI staff worked with the Iraqi Ministry of Civil Society to establish the Iraqi Women's Resource Center in Basra.

In Basra, AIC faced a similar situation. However, while officials agreed to allow the establishment of the women's resource center in Basra, they stipulated that it be under the governorate's supervision. Zainab Al-Suwaij insisted that the center be independent from the governor's office, but the governor refused any measure of independence. Although field staff attempted to get permission through some back channels, the extreme Islamic voices in Basra would not allow an independent center to be established in the city without their control. Therefore, AIC worked with the Ministry of Civil Society to get the registration forms and obtained permission from the city to open the office.

The Iraqi Women's Resource Center in Basra began operations in September 2006. The governor of Karbala did not allow the presence of a second Women's Resource Center, as had been planned, and this segment of the grant was never fully realized.

Proposed Alliances with Established International and Middle Eastern NGOs

IWEI initially proposed creating alliances between international women's NGOs and Iraqi women's NGOs, which would provide Iraqi women with mentors to assist them in developing a sustainable organization.

This aspect of the project was not realized. The Iraqi women, though initially interested in the idea, were intimidated by the idea of communicating in English with "strangers." Even more importantly, the biggest obstacle to this aspect of the proposal is that electricity is a very precious commodity in Iraq and in short supply. Given the choice between communicating by e-mail and using precious fuel to run a generator to power the computer, the NGOs choose to dedicate these resources elsewhere. Although all of the women NGOs were offered the opportunity to form these alliances with other western NGOs, all declined for some of the reasons mentioned above. Even though these virtual linkages were not realized, IWEI did link successful indigenous NGOs to potential funders, including the United States Institute for Peace. Similarly, the program forwarded participant resumes for trainer employment opportunities. These ad hoc activities worked to enlarge the participants' network and provide them with funding opportunities in order to build hopefully long-standing domestic NGOs in Iraq, run by Iraqi women for Iraqi women.

IWEI Website

The website, www.iwei.org, represents a key component of IWEI's operations and is of vital importance for the success of its mission. The website is designed to do the following:

- Make educational materials about democracy and governance, and NGO capacity-building, available to Iraqi women and others who wish to learn more about enhancing their socio-political participation in Iraqi society. These materials are made available in English and Arabic in order to be accessible to as many Iraqi women as possible
- Create a forum for women to discuss with each other and experts the challenges they face and strategies for success
- Provide information about the IWEI program itself, including its mission statement, and descriptions of key programs, such as the Women Leaders Program, the Women Leaders Conference, and the NGO Capacity-building Program



The website's library includes documents on democracy, women and politics, and federalism. It also provides access to the extensive resource materials developed by IWF about NGO capacity-building and sustainability, including such subjects as NGO management and fundraising, use of the media, advocacy for women's rights and legal issues, and networking.

The IWEI website includes a password-secured discussion forum where participants in the Women Leaders Conference can maintain contact and offer each other advice and support. The website also facilitates an exchange between women and experts in fields such as law, engineering, and international organizations so that Iraqi women can garner specific advice or information about that particular field. Additionally, the website contains an extensive list of links to a variety of organizations, governmental and non-governmental, that work with Iraqi women.

IWF has been constantly updating and improving the website with new content and to make it more user-friendly. IWF added a "drop-down link" feature that organizes our resources in a consolidated manner, making it much easier for a visitor to locate the resources she needs. IWF is acutely aware of security issues and safety concerns, so we did not post images of specific individuals. Instead, we added graphics, including silhouettes of Iraqi women and stylized IWEI logos to add to the overall attractiveness of the website. IWF also added a substantial amount of Arabic and English language links to the IWEI website on a variety of issues ranging from women's entrepreneurship to women's rights.

Although few of the NGOs have regular access to electricity and to the website, it is our hope that the IWEI website will be used as an ongoing resource for all Iraqis, not just the grantees of



FIGURE 28: IWEI conference participants in Jordan.

this initiative. The website contains a rich library of resources on the principles of democracy and an in-depth resource manual covering all topics requisite for building long-term sustainability and capacity of NGOs. The website also holds a wide databank of web links to other sources that Iraqi women can access for further information on a variety of topics relevant to the realization of their social, political, and economic progress in Iraq's nascent democracy.

Other Activities by IWEI That Advanced Women's Rights in Iraq

In addition to IWEI's main programs, IWEI took part in other activities to advance women's rights in Iraq. For example, IWEI and numerous Iraqi and U.S.-based groups vociferously advocated for the inclusion and safeguarding of women's equality and human rights in the drafting process of the Iraqi Permanent Constitution. In Washington, DC, IWF joined forces with Iraqi NGOs and its partners, the American Islamic Congress and the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, to lead a *More Than One Source Campaign*.

This campaign pressured the Iraqi drafting committee and government not to make Islamic law the sole source of law in Iraq but to add other sources of law such as civil law and international law to ensure that women's rights are preserved under the constitution. As part of this campaign, IWF held seminars with the Iraqi minister of state for women's rights, and initiated a press and advocacy campaign. The following are press releases prepared as part of the *More Than One Source Campaign* that describe some of the events that took place and the efforts made to distribute our message through the media.

Protection and Implementation of Women's Rights in the New Iraqi Constitution Are Paramount

July 20, 2005

Discussion with a Delegation of Iraqi Women on the Iraqi Constitution and Women's Rights

WASHINGTON—IWF hosted a delegation of Iraqi women that included Iraq's Minister of State for Women's Affairs, Dr. Azhar Abdul Karim al-Shakly, members of Iraq's Constitutional Committee, Iraqi women legal experts, and women's rights advocates.

The discussion centered on women's rights and the Iraqi Constitution and was led by the IWF senior vice president, Michelle D. Bernard, and featured Zainab Al-Suwaij, executive director of the American Islamic Congress; Carole Basri, an adjunct professor of corporate law at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law; Lisa Davis, deputy director of programs and director of the RIGHTS program at Freedom House; and Mary Larkin, director of international programs at Street Law, Inc.

"As the August 15th deadline for the adoption of a draft constitution approaches, it is not only critical that the rights of women are protected in Iraq's new constitution, but that mechanisms are developed for implementing and enforcing those rights once a new constitution is approved," Bernard said.

“Iraqi women must not only resolve amongst themselves profound questions such as the role of women and religion in their constitution, the global community must support Iraqi women in their struggle to codify, implement, and enforce women’s human rights in their nation,” said Bernard. “In order for democratic institutions to succeed in Iraq and the Arab Middle East, women must have the constitutional right to fully participate in the political, economic, and social structures of their country,” added Bernard.

More Than One Source Campaign: Iraqi Women Fighting to Save Rights in Draft Constitution

August 4, 2005

National Press Club

WASHINGTON—Representatives of women’s groups fighting to preserve women’s rights, including IWEI, rallied to support the inclusion of women’s rights in Iraq’s new constitution, held an event at the National Press Club to announce their “More Than One Source Campaign” in Washington on August 4, 2005.

Zainab Al-Suwaij, executive director of the American Islamic Congress, and Basma Fakri, president of the Women’s Alliance for a Democratic Iraq, appeared at a “Newsmaker” event at the National Press Club in the Zenger Room. They are the U.S. representatives for the Iraq-based “More Than One Source” campaign and the Iraqi Women’s Network (al-Amal), respectively. After the press event, they will meet with government officials and NGOs.

Women in Iraq are protesting language in the draft constitution that makes Islam the sole source for Iraqi law, opening the way for the imposition of Islamic family law, or *Shari’ah*. Since the 1950s, family issues have been subject to civil law, but the new constitution, as currently drafted, would make it subject to clerical courts—a big step backwards for Iraqi women. Under *Shari’ah*, women can be denied custody rights of their children; they can be subjected to their families’ approval to pursue academic studies or work; a woman can be forced by her family to wear a headscarf or other clothing, and, most perilous for Iraq’s future democracy, women can be prohibited from holding positions of power.

The deadline for approving the constitution is August 15. Leaders of the campaign in Iraq include Rend al-Rahim, the former Iraqi representative to the U.S., and Safia al-Suhail, Iraq’s ambassador to Egypt and known to American audiences for her touching hug with a mother who lost her son in Iraq at the last State of the Union address.

The Iraqi Women’s Educational Institute (IWEI), a joint project of the American Islamic Congress, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and the Independent Women’s

Forum, supports efforts by Iraqi women leaders to establish equal rights for women in the new constitution, and participated in the Press Club event.

Iraqi Women's Rights Must Be Protected in Constitution

September 29, 2005

IWF Press Release

WASHINGTON—The Independent Women's Forum is disappointed by the lack of protection of women's rights in the constitution that Iraqi leaders submitted to their nation's parliament on Sunday. The constitution recognizes Islam as a primary source for Iraqi law, opening the door for interpretations of Islam that could have a negative impact on women's human rights in Iraq.

"It is unconscionable that while the world laments the anger of Sunnis over the Iraqi constitution agreed to on August 28, the global community has been virtually silent on the issue of women's human rights in Iraq," said Michelle D. Bernard, senior vice president of the Independent Women's Forum. "Although the constitution states that all Iraqis have equal protection under the law and its male and female citizens have the right to participate in the political process by voting and running for office, the imposition of various sects of *Shari'ah* could erode these rights."

"In its present form, the Iraqi charter clearly states that no law can be passed that contradicts Islam. What this means for women's rights, or even the authority of Iraq's constitutional court is extremely troubling," said Bernard.

One particular area of concern for women is family law. Since the 1950s, family issues have been subject to civil law. The constitution, which will be sent to voters for approval in October, would make issues such as marriage and inheritance subject to clerical courts—a big step backwards for Iraqi women. Under the clerical courts or *Shari'ah*, women can be denied custody of their children; they can be subjected to their families' approval to pursue academic studies or work; they can be forced by their families to wear a headscarf or other clothing; and, most perilous for Iraq's future democracy, women can be prohibited from holding positions of power.

"Democracy cannot survive in any nation that may legally oppress one half of its population," cautioned Bernard. "Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that changes will be made in the Iraqi constitution before the October 15 nationwide referendum."

Background on Iraqi Women's Political Participation

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has taken monumental steps toward democratization, namely holding free and fair elections and ratifying a permanent constitution.

Women, often the first sector of society to be negatively impacted by war, conflict, and economic upheaval, suffered tremendously under Saddam Hussein. Despite years of degradation under Saddam's regime, Iraqi women emerged as full participants in civil and public life as Iraq embarked on the path to democratization. Even at the expense of their personal security, Iraqi women actively engaged in the electoral process and advocacy efforts to shape national policy on a host of issues, including women's rights. Women joined political parties, voted, and ran for office in record numbers. As a result, Iraqi women are represented in the various echelons of government as ministers, parliamentarians, members of the Baghdad City Council, and district, local, and municipal councils throughout Iraq.⁴³

Women's Representation and Participation under the Coalition Provisional Authority, the Interim Governing Council, the Interim Iraqi Government, and the Interim National Assembly

Since April 2003, Iraqi women have played a vital role in the building of the new Iraq and its governance structures. In the initial post-war planning, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)—set up to govern Iraq in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom—did not focus on ensuring women's rights and representation.⁴⁴ In response to this oversight, Iraqi women concentrated their advocacy efforts under the CPA on three central issues: i) the inclusion of women in the electoral process; ii) the incorporation of a quota into relevant Iraqi laws that mandates a certain percentage of seats for women in the legislature; and iii) the preservation of the Code from attempts to replace it with *Shari'ah*.

In the initial stages of their advocacy efforts, hundreds of Iraqi women marched in the streets of Baghdad demanding the inclusion of women in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). In response, in July 2003, the CPA appointed three women to the 25-member Council: Songul Chapook, Raja Habib Khuzai, and Aquila al-Hashimi. No women were appointed to the nine-member rotating presidential council or the committee working on constitutional reform. The three female IGC members, however, paid dearly for their pioneering efforts in Iraqi politics. Just three months after her appointment, council member Dr. Aquila al-Hashimi was assassinated. She was replaced by Salama al-Khafaji, whose 17-year-old son was killed when insurgents attempted to murder her.⁴⁵ Dr. Raja Khuzai also received multiple death threats during her tenure.⁴⁶

The first direct political challenge to women's rights in Iraq came in December 2003, when IGC member Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, president of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), proposed Resolution 137 to the IGC. In effect, Resolution 137 replaced the Code, which governed issues such as inheritance, divorce, and marriage, with various interpretations of *Shari'ah* in accordance with the mandates of each sect. In so doing, Resolution 137 took the Code out of the jurisdiction of civil courts and placed it into religious courts, thereby giving Muslim clerics enormous power to determine the law that affects the everyday lives of men, women, and children.

Given the potential discriminatory impact this resolution could have had, thousands of Iraqi women petitioned CPA administrator Paul Bremer to veto the resolution.⁴⁷ Also, the opposition to Resolution 137 served as a uniting factor among religious and secular women of all ethnicities, including Sunni, Shiite, Kurd, Assyrian, and Turkomen.⁴⁸ As a result of the local and international outrage, the IGC withdrew Resolution 137 in February 2004.

Iraqi women leaders and civil society activists were also instrumental in petitioning the CPA for the inclusion of a quota for women's representation in the parliament and laws banning discrimination on the basis of gender. On March 8, 2004, the IGC, with the approval of the CPA, signed into law the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL),⁴⁹ otherwise referred to as Iraq's interim constitution. Article 12 of the TAL provides equal protection to all Iraqis without regard to gender, sect, opinion, belief, nationality, religion, or origin. Although Iraqi women campaigned vigorously to ensure a 40% quota for women's representation, Article 30(c) of the TAL recommended a compromise "target" of 25% representation of women in the National Assembly.⁵⁰ As one commentator points out, the inclusion of the target in the TAL "was the result of very persistent action by women in Iraq. It was not handed to them or even actively supported by the Coalition Provisional Authority or the Governing Council."⁵¹

Although quotas alone cannot guarantee that qualified female candidates will be elected who support the promotion of women's rights, Iraqi women felt that the political gains that would be achieved by the institution of the quota outweighed the inherent possibility that unqualified women would be elected to the legislature. The quota's "effectiveness as a preliminary step towards equality,"⁵² cannot be underestimated given the social, cultural, and religious impediments women face in Iraq.

Accordingly, subsequent Iraqi governments achieved the 25% minimum established under the TAL. Under the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), given full sovereignty by the CPA on June 28, 2004, women headed six of 30 ministries, which included agriculture, displacement and migration, environment, labor and social affairs, public works, and the minister of state for women. Twenty-five women also sat on the 100-member Interim National Council (INC), which was established at a National Conference held August 15-18, 2004, to replace the IGC and serve as the legislature under former Prime Minister Allawi until the January 2005 elections.

On January 30, 2005, nearly 8.5 million Iraqis went to the polls to vote. Following the January election, a transitional government was formed, the Iraq National Assembly (INA). Based on the 25% quota in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), every third candidate on each party's list was required to be a woman. As a result, 87 women parliamentarians were elected to the 275-member INA. In fact, the number of women voted into office, 31%, exceeded the amount



FIGURE 29: (l-r) Rep. Judy Biggert, Rep. Kay Granger, Tania Gilly, and Rep. Susan Davis

allocated by the TAL. In addition, six women ministers were appointed: (1) Jwan Maasom—Minister of Communications; (2) Narmin Othman—Minister of the Environment; (3) Suhaila Jaafar—Minister of Migration and Displacement; (4) Nesreen Berwari—Minister of Municipalities and Public Works; (5) Bassima Boutros—Minister of Science and Technology; and (6) Dr. Azhar Abdul Karim al-Shakly—Minister for Women's Affairs. The most formidable task presented to the INA was the task of drafting and ratifying Iraq's permanent constitution.

Iraqi Women's Participation and Representation in the December 15, 2005, Elections for the Permanent Iraqi Government

On December 15, 2005, a general election was held in Iraq to elect a permanent 275-member Iraqi Council of Representatives. Under a July 2005 election law designed to enhance Sunni representation in the parliament, each province constituted an election constituency and contributed a fixed number of seats to the new Council of Representatives—230 seats were allocated this way, and 45 seats were reserved for entities that did not win provincial seats but garnered votes nationwide.⁵³

In accordance with the Iraqi constitution (and as approved by popular referendum in October 2005) that set a goal of having women constitute no less than 25% of the parliament, when the Council of Representatives was called into session in March 2006, 66 of the 275⁵⁴ seats were held by women.⁵⁵ Turnout for the elections was high, estimated to be 70%, and relatively low levels of violence were reported. The coalition of Shi'a parties, the United Iraqi Alliance (UAI), won the most number of seats, followed by the Kurdistan Alliance and then the Iraqi National List. Combined, the UAI (128) and the Kurds (53) had 181 seats, only three seats short of the 184 needed to form the two thirds to name a presidency council.⁵⁶ President Jawad al-Maliki appointed four women ministers: (1) Bayan Dazee—Housing and Construction Minister; (2) Narmin Othman—Environment Minister; (3) Fatin Abdel-Rahman—Minister of State for Women's Affairs; and (4) Widjan Mikaeil—Human Rights Minister.

Biographies

Women Leaders Conference Faculty and Speakers

Munther al-Fadhal

Dr. al-Fadhal is a practicing lawyer in Baghdad and Kurdistan. He received a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate in private law from the University of Baghdad. He has taught at the College of Law at the University of Baghdad, the University of Annaba-Algeria, and the Judicial Institute in Baghdad and Jordan. Dr. al-Fadhal was an international consultant on law based in Stockholm, Sweden, and served as a visiting professor of Middle Eastern law at the International College of Law.

Hashim al-Jazairy

Dr. al-Jazairy was born in Basra, Iraq. In 2004, he became dean of the College of Law at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Dr. Al-Jazairy received his PhD from Glasgow University and his LL.M. from the College of Law at Baghdad University. His area of expertise is commercial and maritime law.

Ahmed al-Rahim

Dr. al-Rahim is an Iraqi-American who has taught Arabic and Islamic Studies at Yale University, New York University, and Harvard University. He has published on the history of Islamic philosophy, the question of Islam and democracy, and political transition in Iraq. In addition to being a frequent contributor to the Jim Lehrer Newshour and National Public Radio, his publications include *Before and After Avicenna* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), "A New Agenda for American Muslims" (*Boston Globe*, January 16, 2002), and "Martyrs and Individuals" (*Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2004). He is also the 2004 recipient of Anti-Defamation League's Tishler Confronting Anti-Semitism Award.

Carole Basri

Recently, Ms. Basri was a member of the U.S. Department of State's Future of Iraq Project. From 2003 through 2004, she was a member of the Coalition Provisional Authority working with the Iraqi Reconstruction Development Council (IRDC) for Ambassador Paul Bremer in Baghdad. She worked extensively on anti-corruption and transparency issues in Iraq. Ms. Basri is an adjunct professor of corporate law at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law.

Representative Bob Beauprez

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Bob Beauprez represents Colorado and is a member of the Congressional Iraqi Women's Caucus. In Congress, Representative Beauprez has worked to support the war on terrorism, lower taxes on Colorado families to stimulate the

economy and create jobs, address the transportation needs of the Denver area, and work with local, state, and federal leaders to improve the water resources and solutions for Colorado.

Representative Judy Biggert

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Judy Biggert combines a wealth of experience as a legislator, lawyer, community leader, and small business owner to serve Illinois's 13th Congressional District. Representative Biggert began her legislative career in 1992 when she was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives.

Representative Jeb Bradley

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Jeb Bradley represents the state of New Hampshire and is a member of the Iraqi Women's Caucus. Before becoming a member of Congress, Mr. Bradley served in the New Hampshire Legislature for 12 years, where he chaired the Science, Technology and Energy Committee, as well as the Joint Committee on Ethics.

Representative Lincoln Davis

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Lincoln Davis represents the state of Tennessee and is a member of the Iraqi Women's Congressional Caucus.

Representative Susan A. Davis

A member of the U.S. Congress and the Congressional Iraqi Women's Caucus, Representative Susan A. Davis represents California's 53rd Congressional District. Her interest in public affairs grew out of her experiences as a social worker, parent, youth mentor, and military spouse. Congresswoman Davis graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in sociology and earned a master's degree in social work from the University of North Carolina.

Shafeeq Ghabra

Dr. Ghabra is the founding president of the American University of Kuwait, established in 2003. Dr. Ghabra is considered an expert on Kuwait, Iraq, Arabian Gulf security and political issues, democratization in the Arab world, the Middle East peace process, Islamic affairs, Arab-Western relations, and the public opinions of Arabs and Americans vis-à-vis each other. Dr. Ghabra was awarded his doctorate in government by the University of Texas, received his master's degree in political science from Purdue University, and earned his bachelor's degree in political science from Georgetown University.

Representative Kay Granger

A member of the U.S. Congress, and co-chair of the Congressional Iraqi Women's Caucus, Representative Kay Granger is the Congresswoman for the 12th Congressional District of Texas. Long active in local, state, and national government as well as civic affairs, she is recognized for

her energetic and sensible leadership. Congresswoman Granger is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives' leadership, serving as a deputy majority whip.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Saad Eddin Ibrahim is a professor of political sociology at the American University in Cairo, secretary general of the Egyptian Independent Commission for Electoral Review (ICER), past-president of Cairo's Union of Social Professions, trustee of the Arab Thought Forum (Amman, Jordan), member of the Club of Rome (Paris), and chairman of the board of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, and has served on the World Bank's Advisory Council for Environmentally Sustainable Development (Washington, DC), the Board of Minority Rights Group (London), Middle East International Forum (Terra Media), and Transparency International's Council on Governance. In 2000, Dr. Ibrahim was tried by an Egyptian Security Court and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in two mock trials. Amnesty International described his trials as politically motivated to punish him for his human rights activism and advocacy of democratic reform in Egypt and the Arab world. On March 18, 2003, Egypt's High Court of Cassation declared his earlier trials improper and acquitted him and all 27 of his associates of all charges. In that landmark ruling, the Court rebuked the executive branch of the Egyptian state for having fabricated the case against the defendants and the Ibn Khaldun Center. They upheld Dr. Ibrahim's right to document and report on political and social issues in his society as one of the basic rights of citizenship.



FIGURE 30: Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim addressing conference participants.

Faleh Abdul Jabar

Dr. Jabar is a research fellow at the School of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, University of London. Since 1994, he has directed the Iraqi Cultural Forum Research Group at Birkbeck College. He is author of *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* and editor of other volumes on tribes and power in the Middle East and on social movements in Iraq. He has written and edited several books in Arabic, including *State and Civil Society in Iraq* and *The Impossible Democracy: The Case of Iraq*. Over the past decade, he has published articles on Iraq and regional issues in journals such as the *Middle East Research and Information Project* (MERIP), *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Financial Times*, and *The Times*. Dr. Jabar received his doctorate in sociology from Birkbeck College, University of London.

Mary Larkin

Ms. Larkin is the director of international programs at Street Law, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Silver Spring, Maryland, in the United States. Mrs. Larkin has more than 25 years' experience in program management and development of civic, democracy, and public legal education programs in national and international venues. She provides technical assistance to NGOs, women's groups, law enforcement agencies, legislators, lawyers and judges associations,

and government ministries to design and implement practical programs for the average citizen.

Richard Matland

Dr. Matland is a professor of political science at the University of Houston, focusing on how differing institutions can affect women's ability to gain access to positions of political power. His work includes articles looking at the effect of electoral systems on women's representation in legislatures in Canada, Costa Rica, Norway, and the United States. He received his bachelor's degree in political science, two master's degrees in economics and public policy from the University of Wisconsin, and a doctorate in political science from the University of Michigan.

Hedieh Mirahmadi

Ms. Mirahmadi is a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, where she directs a study on political Islam and global security. From 1995 to 2001, she was a scholar in residence at the As-Sunnah Foundation, where she received a degree in Islamic doctrine [Aqid'ah] and the science of tasawwuf [Sufism]. She travels extensively and assists struggling communities to create vibrant civil society infrastructures such as setting up community centers, interacting with free media, and negotiating international business transactions as part of a free market economy. She received her *juris doctor* degree from the University of Southern California Law Center in 1995 and wrote her doctoral thesis on the religious freedom rights of incarcerated Muslims.

Baroness Emma Nicholson, Member of Parliament

Baroness Emma Nicholson of Winterbourne represents the southeast region of England in the European Parliament, where she is vice chairman of its Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defense Policy. She is also currently the Parliament's rapporteur on Iraq and Romania and a member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities. She has served as vice chairman of the Save the Children Fund and is involved in more than 50 charities, including the AMAR International Charitable Foundation, which she chairs. Baroness Nicholson has been a member of the British House of Lords since 1997.

Representative Randy Neugebauer

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Randy Neugebauer represents the 19th Congressional District of Texas. Since taking office, he has received assignments to serve on the U.S. House of Representatives Committees on Agriculture and Financial Services. Before his election, Congressman Neugebauer served as the president and CEO of Lubbock Land Company, a residential and commercial land development company.

Representative Tom Osborne

A member of the U.S. Congress and co-chair of the Iraqi Women's Caucus, Representative Tom Osborne represented the state of Nebraska's 3rd Congressional District. Congressman Osborne

was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Committees on Agriculture, Education and the Workforce, and Transportation and Infrastructure.

Tom G. Palmer

Dr. Palmer is senior fellow at the Cato Institute and director of Cato University in Washington, DC. He teaches and lectures about such topics as federalism, political economy, constitutional theory, and law and rights at numerous universities in Europe, North and South America, as well as in Iraq and other countries. He received his bachelor's degree in liberal arts from St. Johns College in Annapolis, Maryland, his master's degree in philosophy from the Catholic University of America, and his doctorate in politics from Oxford University.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

A childhood refugee from Castro's communist regime, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen emerged as a powerful voice in her South Florida community and a major critic of the tyrannical regime. Her historic 1989 election to the U.S. House of Representatives made her the first Hispanic woman and the first Cuban-American elected to the U.S. Congress.

Michael Rubin

Dr. Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*. Between 2002 and 2004, Dr. Rubin worked as a staff advisor for Iran and Iraq in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Thereafter, he was seconded to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. In 2000-2001, he lectured at the Universities of Sulaymani, Salahuddin, and Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan. Dr. Rubin earned a doctorate in history from Yale University in 1999.

Ann Stone

Ms. Stone opened her first marketing agency, *Anne E. W. Stone and Associates*, in March 1982, and since then she has gone on to found three other companies, most notably *The Stone Group, Inc.* She currently serves on the Board of the *National Women's History Museum*, *The Washington Center* (Women as Leaders), *Campaigns and Elections Magazine*, and *Influence Magazine*, and recently agreed to serve as international chair of *Empowered Women International* and their pilot project, Women Immigrant Network.

Marguerite Hoxie Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan is the executive director of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. Upon the re-entry of the U.S. to UNESCO, she joined the U.S. Department of State to set up and manage the 100-person Commission and the Executive Secretariat staff of the Commission. She has extensive experience as a journalist, a public affairs and public relations practitioner, and an executive in government and international non-governmental organizations. She also has an extensive background

working in communications, education, cultural, women's, and democracy issues. Ms. Sullivan has a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in journalism from Stanford University.

Ala Talabani

Ms. Talabani is co-founder of Women for a Free Iraq and the Iraqi Women's High Council, which drafts policies that ensure women are fairly represented in the new Iraq. As a civil engineer, Ala Talabani faced dismissal from jobs because of her refusal to join the Ba'ath party during Saddam Hussein's regime. After joining the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, she was detained and interrogated by the Iraqi security service. In 1996, she went into exile in England and helped to organize the Kurdistan Women's Union. Ms. Talabani eventually returned to work in Kurdistan, opening training centers and visiting rural areas and urban neighborhoods to encourage women to develop their potential.

Representative Mark Udall

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Mark Udall made his entrance into politics in 1997 as a representative in the Colorado State House. He is serving his fourth term representing Colorado's 2nd Congressional District.

Representative Albert R. Wynn

A member of the U.S. Congress, Representative Albert R. Wynn represents the 4th Congressional District of Maryland. He defines his mission in Congress as helping to expand economic opportunity for all Americans.

Women's Experts' Panel: Women Leaders Program

Dr. Hashim al-Jazairy

Dean, University of Basra School of Law

Amy Barrett

Assistant Professor of Law, Notre Dame Law School

Carole Basri

Adjunct Professor of Corporate Law, University of Pennsylvania School of Law

Haleh Esfandiari

Director of Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson Center

Jo Kwong

Director of Institute Relations, Atlas Economic Research Foundation

Richard Matland

Professor of Political Science, University of Houston

Anita Sharma

Director, Wilson Center Conflict Prevention Project

Ala Talabani

Co-founder, Women for a Free Iraq and the Iraqi Women's High Council

Women's Experts Panel: Small Grant and NGO Capacity-building Initiative

Neveen Abel-Jalil

Patent Examiner/Trainer-Database Technology, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Isabelle M. Bleas

Senior Operations Officer, Gender Coordinator, World Bank Institute

Pamela Coffey Curtin

Senior Technical Advisor, Development Alternatives Inc.

Patty Friedman

Director of Women's Advocacy for Iraq, America's Development Foundation

Martha Hutto

Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Administration, Independent Women's Forum

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Ms. Gilly is director of democracy programs at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, where her projects include the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute. An Iraqi-Kurd from Kirkuk, Ms. Gilly was an active member of the Iraqi opposition to Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime for 12 years. After moving to Washington, DC, as an adult, Ms. Gilly worked for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan as an advisor for public diplomacy and Congressional affairs. Most recently, she was co-organizer of the Hillah Women's Conference held in October 2003 that was organized by the *Women for a Free Iraq*. She is a founder of the *Iraq-America Freedom Alliance* and the *Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq*.

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Ms. Karzai is IWF's associate director of foreign policy and international women's issues at the Independent Women's Forum. An Afghan-American, Halima has worked to increase awareness of democratic values in Afghanistan, primarily focusing on Afghan women's Islamic, constitutional, and international rights. She has worked on a project to provide guideline for international human rights resource material presented to the Iraqi Women's Ministry of Human Rights delegation that was hosted by IWF. A graduate of the University of Maryland, Halima studied Arabic at the American University in Cairo. She is fluent in Pashto and Dari/Farsi, Spanish, and Arabic.

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APPENDIX

Internal Roots of Democratic Change in the Arab World

Remarks by Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra at the IWEI Iraqi Women Leaders Conference

The Principles and Practice of Democracy, Dead Sea, Jordan, April 9-13, 2005

September 11 brought the issues, problems, cycles of crises, and politics of the Arab world to center stage. The event was and remains a watershed, a defining moment for the Middle East, the United States, and international politics. That day's events highlighted the Arab world at its worst: entrenched authoritarian governments, brain drain, single-party and family rule, economic stagnation, civil war, discrimination against minorities, corruption and repression of political majorities, restrictions on association, a lack of public space, and religious extremism. Looking inward, what dynamics contributed to this state of affairs and what are the domestic roots of change and democracy in the Arab world? In addressing these issues, I will look at four areas: (1) the region's potential, (2) the region's lost potential, (3) the reasons for Arab retreat, and (4) challenging the status quo.

The Potential

The territory of the Arab world is 40% larger than that of Europe; the Arab world is larger than China even. The Arab world together with non-Arab Iran holds 61% of the world's oil reserves and 21% of its natural gas. Arab investments worldwide total some \$700 billion.

The Middle East is rich in religions and in diversity; it is the birthplace of three major religions. In addition to its Arab population, there are Turks and Persians and Israelis. Together, all the region's people bring to it incredible riches in culture and tradition. Iran boasts an impressive ancient history and civilization. Turkey offers itself as a model of Islam coexisting with modernity; it is a member of NATO and a possible future member of the European Union. Iraq has within its borders Arabs and non-Arabs, Sunnis and Shi'a, Christians and Muslims, who all identify as Iraqi nationals. Among Lebanon's half-Christian, half-Muslim population are more than 22 sects and religious beliefs. Lebanon is an example of a country trying to work through differences while maintaining its diversity.

The Middle East has produced outstanding civilizations and given us, in addition to Arabic, the Armenian, Assyrian, Berber, Hebrew, Kurdish, Turkish, and Persian languages, among others. Today, the region has hundreds of thousands of trained entrepreneurs and many tens of thousands who have studied in some of the best universities in Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world.

Lost Potential

In the late 1980s, the Center for Arab Unity Studies published a report on the future of the Arab world. The report predicted a future without much hope, with civil wars in several countries, high unemployment, depressed economies, failed states, anger, and rebellion. It warned of continued political economic and cultural stagnation and called for change and democratization through open dialogue and development.

In the summer of 2002, the United Nations Development Program issued the *Arab Human Development Report* analyzing the Arab world's serious deficit in freedom, civil society, education, and therefore foundations of political, social, and cultural life. If the trends it documented continue, the 65% of our Arab children under the age of 25—the highest population in this age group in the world—will be unemployed and live in a world that does not welcome them. If these trends continue, several Arab states will suffer fragmentation. If these trends continue, the 21 Arab states will for the short- and long-term remain behind in freedoms, in democratic processes, and in human development, productivity, and investment in research.

A few statistics demonstrate the dire straits of the Arab condition: the 21 Arab economies combined do not exceed that of Brazil or Spain and are half that of Italy. Arab states' income is roughly \$600 billion. Average per capita income is \$2,200. One-third of Arabs make less than \$500 a year. The total Arab export of goods is more or less equivalent to that of Singapore, or 65% of that of the Netherlands. Some 72 million Arabs lack adequate sanitation, 34 million die before the age of 40, and 65 million are illiterate, most of them women. In fact, illiteracy among women has *risen* in the last two decades. A quick read of the UNDP's report testifies to the dire economic, social, and political state of the region.

How Did We Get Here?

No single answer covers all the dimensions of the current situation. Rather, a powerful set of conditions and dynamics led to multiple setbacks.

In the process of gaining independence after World War II, cadres of Arab military elites took power and abolished all semblance of pluralism in the region. Many of them chose to follow the Soviet model of governance. Authoritarianism gained the upper hand in the various Arab republics as well as in the family-controlled states. True to authoritarian ways, these rulers monopolized power across the spectrum and in the process undermined a way of life, a culture of productivity and entrepreneurship, negatively affecting Arab development and learning for decades to come.

We need to keep in mind the dynamics in the Arab world during colonial rule. Self-respect and a patriotism among Arabs sprang from popular resistance to colonial rule. We should also note

that the region was ripe for capitalist expansion and capital accumulation based on private initiative. Instead, the governments nationalized most major private enterprises. Cases in point are Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Even in the more economically liberal oil-producing countries, the state held the reins tight on private enterprise, limiting options and operations. These early models of governance encouraged a high level of corruption and lack of initiative, thus undermining the potential of agriculture, urban development, and culture. This created the first level of contemporary Arab stagnation.

Still, the ability to sustain a monopoly over power also required that the states employ other forms of authoritarianism. Regimes developed zero tolerance for opponents and intellectuals. Advocates and practitioners of free political and artistic expression and open debate on national and public issues could expect to be dealt with heavy-handedly. Slowly, slowly, authoritarianism produced conformity, in turn creating the second level of Arab stagnation.

Over time, it became taboo and dangerous to be an articulate, creative, or entrepreneurial Arab citizen. Breaking with the regime's party line or politics on nationalist issues or religious affairs only invited problems upon oneself. The public political space narrowed to the point that it prevented any valuable expression of opposition at any level. While political parties were fully banned, only underground political groups and organizations with so much anger stored in their experience stood up to the regimes. Such repression eventually led to brain drains and capital migration. It also caused entire populations to lose confidence in the future.

The third level of stagnation came with the rise of societal (and ultimately political) forces that considered the public space their domain, over which they should exert control and power. Thus, while the secular state controlled the political public space, in the 1980s increasingly popular Islamist movements became increasingly powerful. In other words, while governments destroyed our political public space, radical Islamist movements sought slowly and surely to occupy our public social space. Since the 1970s, the Arab individual has been socially and politically gagged and trapped.

The lack of a social public space and the ideology behind it greatly circumscribed interactions. The sexes could not mix in educational settings or while attending the theater, movies, or concerts in many places in the Arab world. Pressure on artistic expression resulted in the censorship of books, music, and performing arts. Personal freedom suffered setbacks.

This trend consolidated power in part through its control of public education. The system of education and the mosques became victims of neglectful governance and lack of leadership. In both cases, governments shirked major responsibilities, acquiescing to those forceful in the strict interpretation of Islam. This policy proved to be like playing with fire. The regimes

overconfidently thought they had the means to co-opt the Islamist movement and dissipate its power. They were oftentimes wrong.

The individual in the Arab world therefore had two masters: the authority of the secular state, with all its bureaucratic and security excesses, and the authority of orthodox religious interpretation, with its excess stridency. Both restricted freedom of expression, human rights, and access to information. Their control of public spaces deprived the Arab individual of the tools necessary to bring about advancement and change.

Worst of all, this entire process inflicted heavy damages over the cities of the region. Instead of the city developing and building the framework for the integration of the country and desert sides into modern structure and thinking, the opposite happened. While in the past, our cities had been glorious, respected places of learning and scholarship, only in the twentieth century and after independence they were then held captive, first by colonizers, then by rural military officers, and finally by invading desert and country side moral codes. In our cities, tribes, sects, and other groups came to fear each other, never becoming part of a developmental mission. By crushing the civility of the city and its free and creative individuals, the moral fiber of Arab development was also diluted.

Despite the abundance of development models to choose from, in the Arab world freedom of expression and the right to public and political spaces remain at stake. Without individual freedom (essential to the Arab personality), Arabs lose individually and as a group. A healthy Arab society consists of free individuals. A repressive Arab society is a society of crushed individuals. Fear in the Arab world became the primary factor governing our lives—fear of each other, fear of our neighbors, fear of the secret service, fear of the Islamic and nationalist groups. Our fear divided us: old and young, men and women, rich and poor, countryside and city, tribe and family, traditional and modern. A civilization based on fear is a society of betrayal, and one with little prospect for the future can never excel.

One can easily make the case that the Arab defeat in the 1967 war was more than a military defeat. It also marked the defeat of Arab nationalism and the creation of a vacuum that would be slowly but surely filled by the emerging Islamist movements. The movements had a strong and simple message: "Islam is the solution." Its pursuit was single-minded: application of the *Shari'ah* to rectify all that was wrong with society. And why should we go down this path? Because once we follow the word of God, God will help us defeat our enemies, who are also His enemies.

Such thinking came in a variety of versions, from that espoused by the moderate Muslim Brotherhood to the extremist Takfir and Hijrah in Egypt to al-Qaeda. The difference was simi-

lar to that between communists and socialists and the radical Left. Al-Qaeda became the Badr Meinhoff or Red Brigade of the Islamist movement, holding that the other Islamists had lost their way and that only violence taken to the extreme could bring about justice.

Thus, modern terrorism emanating from the Arab world can be seen as resulting from the complexity of Arab society. Some militant Islamists sought a quick victory that would allow them to control society as well as the state. To them, the secular state did not deserve to exist anymore. Why not eliminate the secular state by making it Islamic? Getting there fueled impatience among many who yearned for a pure Islam, whatever that meant to them. Thus, when a group of radical Muslims lost patience with the inability of various Islamist movements to consolidate power in the public and political spaces, they resorted to violence against the state and against society to achieve their goals.

Yet terrorism in the Arab world and as expressed in the events of September 11 represent the larger failure of Arab regimes to come to grips with modern ways of thinking and governing. The lack of egalitarianism, human rights, and respect for public and political spaces is all part of the process that produced a rigid and radical Islamist approach to the world.

The crisis facing the Arab world is one of societies squeezed between state authority and religious ideology taken to extremes. Such societies cannot sustain themselves. The roots of terrorism are planted firmly in this absence of freedom. Terrorism will therefore continue to sprout as an expression of the state of crisis in which the state, religion, society, and individual find themselves today in the Arab world. Civil strife and underdevelopment will continue, because such a state of affairs can only produce unrest. As the state weakens, Islamic militancy will repeatedly attempt to seize the moment to consolidate its own power.

The Arab-Israeli conflict adds another layer of complexity to this crisis, as it continues to be used to limit Arab civil society. Israel's military ability and victories and the pain and suffering they have inflicted upon the Arabs sustain Israel's image as the common danger and feed the conflict's legitimacy. Islamic militancy built its ideology on fighting the outsiders and bringing about nationalist victories. Dissent is rarely tolerated under conditions of war and extreme nationalism, and thus conflict serves to restrict the public space. Because of the closeness of the United States and Israel, and the problems their relationship has caused for U.S.-Arab relations, every thought, plan, or idea coming from the United States tends to be viewed in Arab eyes as nothing more than another conspiracy. This became another source of many missed opportunities and helped consolidate control over the Arab mind and the Arab world.

The political, ideological, and social underpinnings of the region have all contributed to an isolationist, anti-modern, and fundamentalist mentality. After all, utopian Puritanism results from

a failure to provide alternatives, such as debate and space for opposition and intellectual pursuit—driving forces of tolerance and development. People may acquiesce to the status quo, but even this is unsustainable. What appears to be a stagnant situation stoked by monopoly power, corruption, and repression is likely creating a critical mass.

Unless these complex issues are addressed, the future of the Arab world will be bleak. Fear, conformity, and cycles of crisis must be overcome. How this can be achieved during the coming two decades is the question.

Challenging the Status Quo

The aftershocks of September 11 continue to resonate in the region. The status quo is under attack. States must take action against terrorism, find a way to defuse extremist ideologies, and reexamine their approaches to governance. Arab radicals must reexamine their ideological basis. Islamists must reconsider their interpretations of Islam and attitudes toward tolerance. A confluence of altered circumstances, vocal younger generations, and international intervention is bringing change to our region, seemingly long frozen in time. Overcoming the patterns of the past is likely to be painful, long, and problematic.

What we are witnessing today is the slow but somewhat steady collapse of the Arab Berlin Wall. What is certain about the region's future? Continued change, confusion, uncertainty, and turbulence. The strong grip of today's governments will slowly loosen. For evidence, one need only look at the display of weaknesses of today's leaders. Their methods are no longer acceptable in our time. This is their challenge. And what would be an appropriate response for them? Telling the truth, respecting human rights, abolishing emergency regulations, solving differences without resorting to violence, and allowing citizens to speak freely and choose their representatives. In other words, the challenge is overwhelming. Their systems are under siege by powerful forces. The old ways will not survive the coming storms.

The most important dramatic event in the history of the Arab world since the death of President Nasir of Egypt is the assassination of Rafiq al Hariri. This single event touched a cord of positive energy, pride, and self-respect in Lebanon and the Arab world. It turned into a transformative episode that is changing the nature of Arab opposition. The message to Lebanese and Arabs: If Rafiq al Hariri with all his humanitarian work, political skill, financial strength, and contacts in the world is not safe, who is safe in the Arab world? When will the thugs and corrupt stop having the upper hand in determining the Arab destiny and conspiring against the Arab world? Lebanon became a spring of change of images, symbols based on young boys and girls carrying banners and flags, and shedding tears with pride. This made it possible for the world (Arab and Western) to feel the Lebanese pain and choose Lebanon over all others.

Predicting Syria's future is challenging, to say the least. It will leave Lebanon, which is very important for the future of both countries. Lebanon will regain itself and build a reformed political life. As a result, Syria will open up the search inward for change and reform. Lebanon for Syria was a corrupting status quo that only postponed Syria's ability to face the reality of change and development. The questions are many: Will the young Asad be able to truly transform his country, or is it too late to do so? How long will Syria's single-party system and emergency regulations survive? Syria's position has only worsened in the last few months. Whatever Asad's next step, it must be major. The potential for turbulence is great, and Syria cannot conduct its affairs as if nothing has changed.

Currently, the Palestinians are in the process of changing course and reconnecting with the older peace process after a long and painful militant intifada. The possibility of peace can create a positive framework for the future of Palestine and the region. With Palestine being at the center of conflict between East and West, peace in Palestine can only help the process of reform and integration in the region.

In Jordan, reform will require rebalancing the country's social fabric, with Palestinian Jordanians given greater freedom to contribute politically in meaningful ways. But Jordanian Palestinians will first have to make a conscious decision to accept Jordan as their home while east Jordanians will have to find ways to move beyond the public sector into actual partnership with the components of the country for development and change.

In Iraq, the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime put the spotlight on one of the most difficult dictatorships in the region. The event also put the spotlight as well on Shi'a-Sunni-Kurdish coexistence and differences. Reform there cannot ignore the divisions among these groups. The Shi'a are also having to deal with issues of their own. Is a Shi'a libertarian ideology possible in Iran and Iraq? Is it a possibility that an Iraq led by a Shi'a majority will play a major role in depoliticizing Islam, opposing wilayat al Faqih? Can Iraq become the democratic trendsetter in the region? With Iraq's current transformation, no one can claim to represent the people without the legitimacy of the ballot. There seems to be a real chance in Iraq for extraordinary change for the better in the realms of human rights, political participation, and development.

In the Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE exhibit the best chances at stable reform. I feel comfortable predicting for Kuwait a richer political life, the granting of more rights for women, and an incremental movement toward the acceptance of political reform. In Saudi Arabia, attempts at reform will continue to come from the palace. The country's religious laws and character, central to the regime's legitimacy, undermine liberal forces, and many Saudis fear that the pressures surrounding religious and political reform will lead to an explosion.

However, there is no guarantee that reform will be successful in Saudi Arabia given the difficulty of unlocking Islamic ideology with governance and society in Saudi Arabia. The tasks of change in Saudi Arabia are immense.

Once preeminent in the Arab world, Egypt's leadership role has eroded as influence shifted elsewhere in the region. In Cairo, without reform, the government risks being eclipsed by an emerging Iraq, a new Lebanon, and a reforming Gulf. Egypt can reclaim Arab leadership only if it guides the region in the quest for cultural renaissance, liberalism, democracy, educational reform, and economic development. The solution is to transform its politics as well as its economy. Allowing more than one candidate to run for the presidency is only the start of a long process. Egypt could fall into crisis if it fails to sufficiently open its political system and move toward democracy. The momentum for change, pluralism, is gaining in Egypt.

Iran is a big question. Its people are ready for reform, but the leadership is divided on domestic and foreign issues. There are no obvious or easy solutions involving the decisions they must make. Furthermore, the possibility of a U.S.-Iranian confrontation cannot be discounted. Iran is a major player in the saga of change. It was the first of the Islamic countries to go fundamentalist and will at one point move in a different direction. Furthermore, Turkey, with its reformed Islamists and changed politics and developmental economics, could be a model of change for many Islamists still operating on the basis of an older paradigm.

Being mistreated in airports and ports, being detained, and being treated as suspects the world over have not been easy for Arabs and Muslims. We feel uncomfortably isolated in time and place. To move forward from this situation, Arab debate must center on the ability to reconcile with ourselves as well as with the world. To do so, however, we need also to reconcile Islam with modernity, democracy, and human rights. Some members of the Islamist movement may recognize this same need and lead in the process while others will resist change.

The Islam I knew as a child was open; to us, politics and religion were not one and the same. Islam taught us manners, modesty, and respect for others. It provided us spirituality. Islam was comforting, as many of us feared the communist world of matter over spirit. The Prophet, a humble man, cared about life. Many Quranic verses speak of tolerance and respect for others. Christians and Jews have a special place in Islam; to take verses out of the context of the Prophet's time to further one's aim is dangerous, counterproductive, and disrespectful of Islam. This is like taking text out of context in any other religion, as all religions can be interpreted differently. The next fifteen years will be a fight for a humanistic, contemporary interpretation of Islam. It will be painful and difficult, but this is a must in order for civil society to emerge, terrorism to stop, and the Arab world to develop. In short, a return to civility in the Arab world requires that our societies evolve.

This fundamental reform is impossible without open, international cities, modernizing bureaucracies, participatory politics, and growing economies. Freedom is the cornerstone. The city as a melting pot of ideas, traditions, and innovation must be reconsidered. For Arab society to emerge, we need more experience with the constitutional democratic experiments and tolerance of differing opinions.

Our region is changing from end to end, top to bottom, colored by the history of each place and its people. Without a modernizing coalition of intelligentsia, entrepreneurs, business women and men, professionals, women, and the young in each Arab state, change might be aborted. Should this happen, we will find ourselves in anarchy and decay. The winds of change are still blowing for now, but we must be careful not to relent or repeat the cycles of the past. To succeed, we need good governance and leadership, open politics, a responsible political conscience and strategic (like the late Hariri) business community dedicated to change and growth, a citizenry with political and social spaces in which to express themselves freely and democratically, and an Islam attuned to the modern world.

الجدور الداخلية للتغيير الديمقراطي في العالم العربي

لقد دفعت أحداث 11 سبتمبر بالمسائل، المشكلات، دوائر الأزمات، والسياسات في العالم العربي الى الواجهة. فهذا الحدث كان ويبقى نقطة تحول ولحظة دقيقة في تاريخ منطقة الشرق الاوسط، الولايات المتحدة الاميركية والسياسات الدولية. فقد اظهرت تلك الأحداث العالم العربي في أسوأ صورة، وهي صورة الحكومات المتسلطة، استنزاف الأدمغة والعقول، حكم الاحزاب والعائلات الواحدة، الركود الاقتصادي، الحروب الاهلية، التمييز العنصري ضد الاقليات، الفساد والكبت الذي تمارسه الاكثريات الحاكمة، الحظر المفروض على الجمعيات، النقص في المساحة العامة وسواد التعصب الديني. وإذا نظرنا من الداخل، فإن علينا ان نتعرف على الديناميكيات المعتمدة والتي ساهمت في اوصول الوضع الى هذه الحالة، وكذلك على الجذور المحلية للتغيير والديمقراطية في العالم العربي. في معالجتنا لهذه المسائل، سأطرق إلى ثلاث نواح: (1) قدرات ومؤهلات وامكانيات المنطقة، (2) القدرات المفقودة للمنطقة، (3) اسباب التراجع العربي، بالاضافة الى ناحية رابعة وهي (4) تحدي الوضع القائم.

القدرات والمؤهلات والإمكانيات

إن المساحة الإجمالية للعالم العربي هي اكبر من المساحة الاجمالية لاوروبا بنحو 40 بالمئة، وهي تفوق حتى مساحة الصين. فالعالم العربي مجتمعاً إضافة إلى إيران غير العربية يحتوي على 61 بالمئة من احتياط النفط العالمي و 21 بالمئة من احتياط الغاز الطبيعي. كذلك فإن الاستثمارات العربية في انحاء العالم تبلغ نحو 700 مليار دولار اميركي.

فمنطقة الشرق الأوسط غنية بالطوائف والتعددية، وهي تعتبر مهد الديانات الثلاث الرئيسية في العالم. وبالإضافة الى الشعب العربي، يتواجد فيها الاتراك والفرس والإسرائيليون. سوياً، جلبت شعوب المنطقة اليها الغنى الكبير بالثقافات والتقاليد، اذ ان ايران تفتخر بحضارة وتاريخ مميزين، كما ان تركيا تطرح نفسها كمثال لتعايش الاسلام مع العصرية، وهي حالياً من الدول الاعضاء في حلف شمالي الاطلسي (ناتو) ومن المحتمل ان تنضم مستقبلاً الى الاتحاد الاوروبي. العراق ايضاً يجمع ضمن حدوده مواطنين عرباً وغير عرب، وهم من السنة والشيعة، ومن المسيحيين والمسلمين وجميعهم يتم التعريف عنهم بانهم مواطنين عراقيين. كذلك فإن الشعب اللبناني الذي يُعتبر نصفه من المسيحيين والنصف الاخر من المسلمين، يجمع

أكثر من 22 طائفة ومعتقد ديني، ولبنان يعتبر مثلاً لبلد يسعى لتخطي الصعوبات مع المحافظة على تعدديته.

لقد انتجت منطقة الشرق الأوسط حضارات بارزة، كما أعطتنا بالإضافة إلى اللغة العربية، لغات عدة ومنها الآرامية، الآشورية (وتعرف أيضاً بالسريانية)، البربرية، العبرية، الكردية، التركية والفارسية. وحالياً لدى المنطقة الآلاف من رجال وسيدات الأعمال أصحاب الخبرات، وعشرات الآلاف من الأشخاص الذين تلقوا دراستهم في أفضل الجامعات في أوروبا والولايات المتحدة الأميركية، وفي أنحاء أخرى من العالم.

القدرات المفقودة

في أواخر الثمانينيات من القرن العشرين، نشر مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية تقريراً حول مستقبل العالم العربي. وقد تنبأ التقرير بمستقبل من دون أمل كبير، في ظل وجود حروب أهلية في دول عدة، وتفشي البطالة، والاقتصادات المكتنبة، والدول الخائبة والفاشلة، وتنامي الشعور بالغضب واستعار نيران الثورات. وقد حذر التقرير من استمرار الركود السياسي والاقتصادي والثقافي ودعا إلى التغيير وإحلال الديمقراطية عبر إقامة حوار مفتوح وأجراء التنمية.

وفي صيف العام 2002، أصدر برنامج التنمية التابع للأمم المتحدة تقرير "تطوير الإنسان العربي" الذي تضمن تحليلاً حول عجز العالم العربي في مجالات الحرية، المجتمع المدني، التعليم، وتأسيس حياة سياسية واجتماعية وثقافية. وأضاف التقرير أنه إذا استمر هذا التوجه، فإن 65 بالمئة من أطفالنا وشبابنا العرب دون سن الـ 25 – وهذه الفئة في العالم العربي تشكل النسبة الأعلى من السكان مقارنة مع المناطق الأخرى من العالم – سيكونون عاطلين عن العمل ويعيشون في عالم لا يحظون فيه بالترحيب. وذكر التقرير أنه إذا استمر هذا التوجه، فإن دولاً عربية عدة ستعاني من التفكك، كما أن الدول العربية الـ 21 على المديين القصير والطويل، ستبقى متأخرة في مسألة الحريات، الممارسات الديمقراطية، التنمية الإنسانية، الانتاجية، والاستثمار في الأبحاث.

تظهر بعض الإحصائيات المأزق الشديد للوضع العربي، فاقتصاديات الدول العربية الـ 21 مجتمعة لا تتجاوز بحجمها اقتصاد البرازيل لوحدها أو إسبانيا لوحدها أيضاً وهو يبلغ في كل الأحوال نصف حجم الاقتصاد الإيطالي. كما يبلغ مدخول الدول العربية نحو 600 مليار دولار ومتوسط الدخل السنوي للفرد 2.200 دولار، حيث يبلغ دخل ثلث العرب أقل من 500 دولار سنوياً.

كذلك فإن مجموع الصادرات العربية يتساوى تقريباً ونسبة أقل أو أكثر بفارق طفيف مع حجم صادرات سنغافورة، ويبلغ نحو 65 بالمئة من صادرات هولندا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن نحو 72 مليون عربي يفتقرون إلى الشروط الصحية الكافية، فيما يتوفى 34 مليون منهم قبل سن الأربعين، ويبلغ عدد الأميين العرب 65 مليون نسمة، غالبيتهم من النساء، علماً أن نسبة الأمية لدى النساء زادت في العقدين الأخيرين. وتكفي القراءة السريعة لتقرير برنامج التنمية التابع للأمم المتحدة لنتكشف الأزمة الشديدة التي تتخبط فيها الأوضاع الاقتصادية، الاجتماعية، والسياسية في المنطقة.

كيف وصلنا إلى هنا؟

لا يوجد جواب واحد يمكن أن يختصر أبعاد الوضع الحالي، بل إن مجموعة من الظروف والديناميكيات هي التي أدت إلى حصول التغيرات المتعددة.

ففي إطار محاولات نيل الاستقلال بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، تسلمت بعض الكوادر العربية من النخب العسكرية مقاليد الحكم وألغت كل مظاهر التعددية في المنطقة. فقد اختار العديد منها اتباع النموذج السوفياتي في تولي الحكم مما أدى إلى سيطرة التسلط على الجمهوريات العربية المختلفة وكذلك على الدول التي تحكمها العائلات. ووفقاً لوسائل الحكم المتسلط، قام هؤلاء الحكام باحتكار السلطة عبر سلسلة من الإجراءات التي أدت إلى تضيق واضعاف وسائل العيش وثقافات الانتاجية ومجالات العمل، مما أثر سلباً على التنمية والتعليم في المنطقة العربية على مدى العقود الزمنية التي توالى.

نحتاج إلى أن نبقى في ذاكرتنا الديناميكيات التي اعتمدت في العالم العربي خلال حكم الاستعمار والانتداب، فاحترام الذات والشعور الوطني انتشر لدى العرب وتحول من المقاومة الشعبية إلى التخلص من المستعمر. علينا أن نسجل أيضاً أن المنطقة كانت في مرحلة نضوج لاستيعاب التوسع والتجمع الرأسمالي على أساس المبادرة الفردية، إلا أنه بدلاً من ذلك، قامت الحكومات الانقلابية بتأميم معظم الشركات والمؤسسات الخاصة، ومن الأمثلة الواضحة ما حصل في مصر والعراق وليبيا وسوريا واليمن والسودان والجزائر.

وحتى في الدول المنتجة للنفط والتي تتميز باقتصاد ليبرالي أكثر تحملاً، أبقت الحكومات هذا القطاع تحت إشرافها المباشر كما ضيق الخناق على المؤسسات الخاصة واعتمدت إجراءات مشددة على حركتها مما ساهم في الحد من خياراتها وعملياتها. هذه الأمثلة المبكرة من وسائل الحكم شجعت على حصول فساد بمستويات عالية وأدت إلى نقص في المبادرات. يتم عن ذلك إضعاف قدرات القطاع الزراعي،

وتنمية الارياف، والمجال الثقافي والتنموي. هذه الأمور خلقت المستوى الاول من الركود العربي الحالي.

كذلك فإن القدرة على استمرار احتكار السلطة تطلبت ايضاً من الدول اشكالا أخرى من التسلط، فلجأت الانظمة الى الغاء مبدأ التسامح حيال خصومها وتجاه المثقفين من مواطنيها، وكانت تواجه الناشطين والمؤيدين في مجال الحريات السياسية والتعبير الفني والثقافي عن الرأي والنقاشات المفتوحة حول المسائل الوطنية والعامّة بالقمع واستخدام العنف، ومع الوقت انتج التسلط نوعاً من الالتزام المفروض والذي بدوره خلق المستوى الثاني من الركود العربي.

مع مرور الوقت، بات من المحرم والخطر ان يكون المرء متكلماً وناطقاً، خلافاً، او مواطناً عربياً ناجحاً مهتماً بالشأن العام. كما أن الانحراف عن الخط المرسوم من قبل الحزب الحاكم او السلطة السياسية في التطرق الى المسائل الوطنية او الشؤون الدينية، كان يجلب المشاكل على الشخص المعني، حيث ضاقت مساحة التعبير ولم يعد يوجد المتنفس بحيث اصبح من الممنوع التعبير القيم عن اي رأي معارض او مناقض وعلى كل المستويات. ولأن تأسيس الاحزاب السياسية كان ممنوعاً بشكل تام، نشأت المجموعات والمنظمات السياسية السرية التي كانت تعمل في الخفاء والتي تكون لديها كما هائلاً من الغضب خلال ممارسة نشاطاتها في الوقوف بوجه الانظمة السياسية الحاكمة. هذا القمع والكبت أدباً حكماً الى استنزاف الادمغة والعقول والى حصول هجرة واسعة، كما تسبب ايضاً بفقدان الشعوب للثقة بالمستقبل.

المستوى الثالث من الركود برز مع نشأة وتزايد القوى الاجتماعية (ذات الخلفيات السياسية بالطبع) التي اعتبرت ان معالجة الشؤون العامة هي ميادينها وانه يجب على هذا الاساس ممارسة السيطرة والرقابة عليها. وبينما كانت العلمانية القومية العربية تغطي على هذه القوى وعلى الساحة السياسية والاجتماعية في السابق، بدأت الحركات الاسلامية الشعبية تزداد قوة في الثمانينيات من القرن الماضي. وتعبير اخر، وفيما كانت الحكومات تدمر المساحات السياسية العامة المتاحة لنساء، سعت الحركات الاسلامية المتشددة ببطء ولكن بثقة لاستغلال الواقع واحتلال مكانة واسعة على ساحة الشؤون الاجتماعية. لقد عانى الإنسان العربي منذ السبعينيات من القرن الماضي في الكبت والقمع اجتماعياً وسياسياً وفكرياً.

لقد ساهم النقص في المساحات المتاحة للتعبير الاجتماعي والايولوجية الكامنة خلفها بشكل كبير في خلق تفاعلات مقيدة، فتم في اماكن عدة من العالم العربي منع الجنسين من الاختلاط داخل المؤسسات التربوية والتعليمية، وخلال الازدهار الذي المسارح ومشاهدة الافلام السينمائية او الحفلات الموسيقية. كما ان الضغوطات التي

مورست على التعبير الفني نتج عنها فرض الرقابة على الكتب، الموسيقى، والاعمال الفنية التمثيلية، وبالتالي عانت الحريات الشخصية من انتكاسات كبيرة.

هذا التوجه ساهم جزئيا في تدعيم سلطة القوى الدينية عبر السيطرة على قطاع التعليم العام. فنظم التعليم والمساجد باتت ضحايا لاهمال السلطات الحاكمة والقيادة الخاطئة، وفي كلا الحالتين، قصرت الحكومات في مسؤولياتها وتساهلت مع المتشددین في شرح الاسلام وساهمت في تقوية موقفهم. وقد اثبتت هذه السياسة انها تشبه اللعب بالنار، حيث اعتقدت الانظمة ان لديها المعطيات لاحتواء الحركات الاسلامية وتفريقها واضعافها، لكنها كانت في الغالب مخطئة.

من هنا بات المواطن العربي بين فكي كماشة وبات له حاكمان، اولهما السلطة العلمانية مع كل فظائعها البيروقراطية والامنية، وثانيهما سلطة المفهوم الديني المتشدد مع مغالاتها في الحدة والتعصب. والجانبان حظرا على المواطن حرية التعبير، وخرقا حقوق الانسان، ومنعاه من امكانية تلقي المعلومات، وادت سيطرتهم على المساحات العامة الى حرمان المواطن العربي من الادوات الاساسية المساعدة على التقدم والتغيير.

واسوأ من كل ذلك، الحقت هذه التصرفات اضرارا كبيرة بمدن المنطقة، فبدلاً من تطوير وتنمية المدن وبناء اطار عمل لتكامل الوطن والمناطق الصحراوية والريفية ضمن هيكلية حديثة وطريقة تفكير جديدة، حدث تماماً عكس ذلك. ففيما كانت مدنها في الماضي عظيمة وتمثل اماكن محترمة للتعليم والحصول على منح دراسية، تبدل الحال في زمن ليس ببعيد هو زمن القرن العشرين وبالتحديد بعد نيل الاستقلال فباتت هذه المدن اسيرة، اولا للمستعمر، ثم للضباط العسكريين الريفيين، وأخيرا للسيدات الدينية. ففي مدنها، هناك قبائل، وطوائف ومجموعات اخرى باتت تخشى بعضها البعض، ولم تعد قابلة للسير بالتنمية. فمن خلال القضاء على حضارة ومدن المدن واشخاصها الاحرار والخالقين، تراجعت أيضاً الشجاعة الادبية للقيام بالتنمية العربية.

بالرغم من كثرة نماذج التنمية وامكانية الاختيار من بينها، يبقى الخطر محدقاً بحرية التعبير عن الرأي والحقوق العامة والمساحات السياسية المتاحة في العالم العربي. فمن دون منح الحرية للأفراد (وهي ضرورية لشخصية العربي) سيخسر العرب على الصعيدين الفردي والجماعي. المجتمع العربي الصحي يتكون من اشخاص احرار، والمجتمع العربي المكبوت هو مجتمع يكون فيه الفرد محطماً. فالحرية في العالم العربي باتت اليوم العامل الاساسي الذي يحكم حياتنا - وخوفنا من بعضنا البعض، ومن جيراننا، ومن اجهزة الاستخبارات، وكذلك الخوف من

المجموعات الإسلامية والوطنية، خوفاً هذا يقسمنا ويفرقنا، كباراً وصغاراً، رجالاً ونساءً، أثرياء وفقراء، سكان القرى النائية وسكان المدن، قبائل وعائلات، مؤيدو التقاليد أو معاصرون. إن أي مجتمع مبني على الخوف أمله ضعيف جداً بأن يتمكن من تكوين أي مستقبل.

لا يختلف اثنان على أن الهزيمة العربية في حرب العام 1967 كانت أكثر من هزيمة عسكرية. فقد كان من الواضح أنها هزيمة للقومية العربية وهي خلقت نوعاً من الفراغ نجحت الحركات الإسلامية تدريجياً بسده من خلال رسالة بسيطة ادخلتها إلى العقول والنفوس وهي: "الإسلام هو الحل". وكانت متابعتها سهلة وبسيطة وتمثلت بترداد العبارات التالية: "تطبيق/الشريعة لتصحيح كل ما كان خاطئاً في المجتمع".

تم تقديم هذه الطريقة في التفكير بنسخات عدة، انطلاقاً من الاعتناق بالآخوة الإسلامية "إخوان المسلمين"، وصولاً إلى التكفير المتشدد، وتنظيم القاعدة. والفرق بين هذه النسخات كان مماثلاً للفرق بين الاشتراكيين والشيوعيين واليسار المتطرف. لقد أصبح تنظيم القاعدة أشبه بالأولية الحمراء اليسارية بالسبعينات وهو يسير بالمعتقد القائل "أن المسلمين الآخرين ضلوا الطريق وأن العنف المتطرف وحده بإمكانه تحقيق العدالة".

يمكن النظر إلى الإرهاب الحديث الخارج من العالم العربي على أساس أنه نتيجة لتعقيدات المجتمع العربي. فبعض المقاتلين الإسلاميين يبحثون عن نصر سريع يسمح لهم بالسيطرة على المجتمع وعلى الدولة أيضاً. وبالنسبة إليهم، لا تستحق الدولة العلمانية أن تتواجد بعد اليوم. ويجب العمل على إلغائها من خلال جعلها دولة إسلامية. إنهم يعملون على بث أفكارهم بين أولئك الذين تاقوا إلى دين إسلامي نقي ويعمدون إلى جعلهم يستنفدون صبرهم تجاه المجتمع والخارجين عن تصوراتهم، بغض النظر عما يعني هذا الأمر بالنسبة إليهم. ولكن عندما تفقد مجموعة من الإسلاميين المتطرفين صبرها إلى جانب عدم قدرة الحركات الإسلامية أخرى على احتكارها للسلطة داخل المساحات العامة والسياسية، فإنها تلجأ إلى العنف ضد الدولة أو ضد المجتمع من أجل تحقيق أهدافها.

مع كل ذلك، فإن الإرهاب في العالم العربي وكما تم التعبير عنه في أحداث 11 سبتمبر، يمثل الفشل الأكبر الناتج عن محاولة الأنظمة العربية التعامل بسلبية مع الطرق الحديثة للتفكير والحكم. فنقص المساواة وحقوق الإنسان، وعدم احترام أتاح المساحات العامة والسياسية للناس، كلها عوامل تمثل جزءاً من العملية التي أنتجت إلى العالم مفهوماً إسلامياً صارماً ومتشدداً.

إن الازمة التي تواجه العالم العربي تتمثل بوجود مجتمع عالق بين سلطة الدولة والعقيدة الدينية المتطرفة الى اقصى حد. هذا النوع من المجتمعات لا يمكنه البقاء والاستمرار، فجزور الارهاب مزروعة بإحكام في غياب الحرية، وسيواصل هذا الارهاب نثر براعمه كتعبير عن المأزق الفعلي الذي تتخبط فيه الدول العربية حالياً ويدور في فلك هذا المأزق ايضاً الدين والمجتمع والانسان في العالم العربي. إن النزاعات المدنية ستستمر وكذلك غياب التنمية، لان هذا الوضع لا يمكنه ان ينتج الاستقرار، فكلما ضعفت الدولة، كلما حاولت القوى الإسلامية المعبأة التي تعمل كمليشيات منتشرة، استغلال الفرص لتدعيم قوة سلطتها الخاصة.

يضيف الصراع العربي - الاسرائيلي مزيداً من التعقيد على هذه الازمة، حيث انه لا يزال يُستخدم من جانب السلطات للحد من حركة المجتمع المدني العربي. فالقدرات العسكرية الاسرائيلية والانتصارات التي حققتها في السابق والآلام والمعاناة التي حققتها بالعرب تُبقي صورتها على اساس انها خطر شائع ومستمر وتغذي شرعية النزاع معها. وبما ان الاسلام الميليشيوي بنى عقيدته وافكاره على محاربة الغرباء وتحقيق انتصارات قومية، وحيث ان من النادر ان تنتم مسامحة المعارضة في حالات الحرب والتأهب الوطني والقومي الشديد، لهذا فإن الصراع يخدم ويساهم في حظر المساحات العامة على الناس. وبسبب التقارب الموجود بين الولايات المتحدة الاميركية واسرائيل، والمشاكل التي اثارها هذا التقارب في العلاقة الاميركية - العربية، فإن كل فكرة او خطة تقترحها الولايات المتحدة ينظر اليها العرب وكأنها لا تعدى كونها مؤامرة جديدة. هذه النظرة باتت سبباً اضافياً في اضاعه العديد من الفرص وساهمت في تدعيم السيطرة على العقول العربية وعلى العالم العربي.

لقد ساهمت الأوضاع التي شرحناها في خلق عقلية انعزالية، غير عصرية ومتشددة. فبالرغم من كل شيء، يبدو ان التزمّت والتعنت المثاليين هما اساساً نتيجة الفشل في ايجاد البدائل، كالتقاشات والافساح في المجال لوجود معارضة وقوى مثقفة تدفع باتجاه التسامح والتنمية. فبالناس قد تقبل بالوضع القائم، الا ان هذا الامر غير مستقر، اذ ان ما يبدو وكأنه وضع يشوبه الركود في ظل الاحتكار والتسلط والفساد والقمع، قد يخلق في نهاية المطاف كتلة شعبية مناهضة.

وفي حال لم تعالج هذه المسائل البالغة التعقيد ويتم التغلب على دوائر الازمة، فإن مستقبل العالم العربي سيكون كئيباً وينتابه الخوف والتوافق المفروض. لكن السؤال المطروح حالياً هو كيف يمكن تحقيق ذلك خلال العقدين المقبلين.

تحدي الوضع القائم

لا تزال تتواصل في المنطقة اصداء المرحلة التي تلت صدمة احداث 11 سبتمبر، فالوضع القائم والاستقرار في الدول العربية يتعرض للهجوم، وعلى الدول ان تتخذ خطوات عملية ضد الارهاب، وايجاد طريقة للقضاء على الأفكار المتشددة، بالإضافة إلى مراجعة مفهومها لمنطق الحكم والسلطة. كذلك على العرب المتشددون ان يتفحصوا الاساسات التي يبنون عليها عقائدهم وعلى الاسلاميين ان يأخذوا بالاعتبار امكانية اعادة شرحهم وتفهمهم للاسلام وتصرفاتهم في اطار ثقافة التسامح. إن الظروف المتغيرة، ونشوء الجيل الشاب الصاخب، والتدخلات الخارجية، كلها عوامل تأتي برياح التغيير الى المنطقة التي كانت بحكم المتجمدة لفترة طويلة. لكن تجاوز الماضي سيكون على الأرجح مؤلماً وطويلاً وسيواجه صعوبات.

إن ما نشهده حالياً هو ما يمكننا وصفه بالتداعي البطيء لكن الثابت لجدار برلين العربي. فما هو مؤكد حول مستقبل المنطقة هو قدوم الكثير من التغيرات المتواصلة و الارتباك والشكوك والمطبات. إن القبضة القوية التي تمسك بها الحكومات الحالية بالسلطة ستضعف تدريجياً ولن يستطيع احد منع ذلك من الحصول. وللتأكيد على ذلك، علينا ملاحظة الاشارات حول ضعف قادة اليوم، فوسائلهم لم تعد مقبولة في ايامنا هذه، وهم يواجهون تحديات كبرى. فماذا الاختيار أمامهم سوى قول الحقيقة واحترام حقوق الإنسان وإلغاء حالات وقوانين الطوارئ وحل النزاعات من دون اللجوء الى العنف، والسماح للمواطنين بالتحدث بحرية واختيار ممثليهم بانفسهم. بعبارة اخرى، ان التحدي كبير جداً، والأنظمة باتت محاصرة بأوضاع محلية وعالمية تتمتع بتأثير كبير كما أن الوسائل القديمة لن تصمد في وجه العواصف الآتية.

إن أهم حدث دراماتيكي شهده تاريخ العالم العربي منذ وفاة الرئيس المصري جمال عبد الناصر هو من دون شك اغتيال رئيس الوزراء اللبناني السابق رفيق الحريري. فهذا الحدث الوحيد اشعل سهما من الطاقة الايجابية، وايقظ الكبرياء واحترام الذات في لبنان وفي العالم العربي على السواء. وهو ظهر كحدث تحولي بدأ يغير طبيعة المعارضة العربية. والرسالة الى اللبنانيين والعرب هي التالية: اذا كان رفيق الحريري مع كل عمله الانساني، ومؤهلاته ومهاراته السياسية، وقوته المالية واتصالاته وعلاقاته في كل انحاء العالم، اذا كان هذا الرجل غير آمن فمن هو الأمن في الوطن العربي؟ متى سنصل الى زمن لن يعود فيه المجرمون والفاقدون هم اصحاب اليد الطولى في تحديد القدر العربي والتأمر ضد العالم العربي؟ لقد تحول لبنان الى ربيع تغيير الصور والرموز، مستنداً الى شبان وشابات حملوا الشعارات والاعلام وذرفوا دموع الحزن بفخر وكبرياء. هذا التحرك جعل من الممكن للعالم العربي والغربي على السواء ان يشعر بالألم اللبناني وان يختار لبنان فوق الجميع.

وفي التنبؤ حول مستقبل سوريا، يمن القول على الأقل ان هذا المستقبل مليء بالتحديات. فهي ستغادر لبنان وهذا امر مهم لمستقبل كلا البلدين. لبنان سيستعيد ذاته ويعيد بناء واصلاح حياته السياسية. ونتيجة لذلك، ستنتفح سوريا على مبدأ التغيير والاصلاح الداخلي. لقد كان لبنان بالنسبة الى سوريا بمثابة وضع ساهم في تأجيل اقرارها بوجوب مواجهة حقيقة التغيير والتنمية واكتساب القدرة على ذلك. الاسئلة عديدة في هذا السياق: هل سيكون الرئيس بشار الأسد قادراً في الحقيقة على احداث التغيير في بلاده ام أنه تاخر وفوت الفرصة عليه؟ كم من الوقت سيتمكن نظام الحزب الواحد وقانون الطوارئ المعمول به حالياً من الاستمرار والعيش؟ لقد ساء وضع سوريا خلال الاشهر القليلة الماضية. يجب ان تكون الخطوة المقبلة التي سيتخذها الرئيس الأسد خطوة بارزة جداً واساسية. ان احتمال حصول خضات في سوريا أمر وارد ومحتمل، ولا يمكن لسوريا تسيير شؤونها وكأن شيئاً لم يتغير.

الفلسطينيون حالياً هم في طور اجراء التغيير المطلوب واعادة احياء عملية السلام بعد الانتفاضة المسلحة الطويلة والمؤلمة. ان احتمال التوصل الى سلام يمكن ان يخلق اطار عمل ايجابي لمستقبل فلسطين والمنطقة. وكون فلسطين تشكل محور الصراع بين الشرق والغرب، وحده السلام فيها يستطيع مساعدة عملية الاصلاح والتأقلم مع المنطقة.

وسيتطلب الإصلاح في الأردن إعادة التوازن إلى التكوين الاجتماعي، وذلك بمنح الفلسطينيين الاردنيين حرية اكبر لكي يساهموا بفعالية في الشؤون السياسية. لكن في المقابل على الاردنيين الفلسطينيين اولاً ان يتخذوا قراراً مدركاً وواعياً بقبول الاردن كموطن لهم، بينما على الأردنيين ان يتجاوزوا في تحركهم الاعتماد على القطاع العام بالتحول إلى شراكة حقيقية مع الآخرين في ذات الوطن وذلك للنجاح في التنمية والتغيير.

لقد القى اسقاط النظام البعثي في العراق الضوء على احدى اقصى واصعب الديكتاتوريات في المنطقة. كما القى الحدث الضوء ايضا على التعايش والفروقات بين الشيعة والسنة والاكرد. الاصلاح في العراق لا يمكنه تجاهل الانقسامات الحاصلة بين هذه المجموعات. على الشيعة ايضا التعامل مع مسائل تخصهم، فهل ان بروز أجواء تحررية في صفوف شيعة العراق أمر ممكن حصوله في العراق؟ وهل يمكن لعراق تقوده غالبية شيعية ان يلعب دوراً اساسياً في تجريد الاسلام من صفة المعالاه ، وبالتالي معارضة ولاية الفقيه؟ هل يمكن ان يتحول العراق الى بلد يصدر التوجه الديمقراطي الى بقية دول المنطقة؟ في ظل التحول الحالي الحاصل في العراق، لا يمكن لاحد ان يدعي تمثيل الشعب من دون شرعية صناديق الاقتراع. يبدو ان هناك

فرصة حقيقية في العراق لاحداث تغيير غير عادي نحو الافضل بما يضمن حقوق الإنسان، المشاركة السياسية، والتنمية.

وفي الخليج، البحرين، الكويت، عمان، قطر، والامارات العربية المتحدة تعرض افضل فرض الاصلاح المستقر. اشعر بارتياح لتنبؤي في الكويت بحياة سياسية اكثر غنى، ومنح المرأة الحقوق السياسية، وانتقال تدريجي وتراكمي نحو القبول بالاصلاح السياسي.

في المملكة العربية السعودية، ستتواصل محاولات القصر الملكي باجراء الاصلاحات، لكن القوانين والأيدولوجية الدينية في البلاد، والتي تعتبر اساسية في منح الشرعية للنظام، تضعف من موقف القوى الليبرالية المتحررة. العديد من السعوديين يخشون ان تؤدي الضغوطات المحيطة بالاصلاحات السياسية والدينية الى انفجار الوضع. على كل حال، ليس هناك اي ضمانات حول نجاح الاصلاحات في السعودية نظراً لصعوبة التخلي عن العقلية الاسلامية المتشددة التي تحكم المجتمع والسلطة هناك. ان مهمات اجراء تغييرات في السعودية هائلة فعلاً، وهي تعيش منعطف صعب بين آفاق النجاح من عدمه.

فيما كانت القيادة المصرية بارزة ومؤثرة في العالم العربي سابقاً، فإن الدور الذي لعبته قد تآكل في الفترة الاخيرة وبات الدور المؤثر في المنطقة بمكان آخر. فإذا لم تعتمد الحكومة المصرية الى اجراء اصلاحات، فانها تغامر بالسقوط حيث ان هناك احتمالاً لوصول رياح التغيير الاتية من العراق ولبنان والخليج اليها. لكن بإمكان مصر استعادة دورها الرائد في المنطقة العربية فقط اذا تمكنت من قيادة المنطقة في اطار عملية السعي الى النهضة الثقافية، التحرر، الديمقراطية، الاصلاحات التربوية، والتنمية الاقتصادية. إن السماح لأكثر من شخص واحد بالترشح لمنصب رئيس البلاد ليس سوى البداية لعملية طويلة. قد تقع مصر في أزمة اذا فشلت في ادخال الانفتاح والديمقراطية الى نظامها السياسي، وحالياً يبدو ان الدفع نحو التغيير والتعددية يتقدم في مصر.

وتشكل إيران سؤلاً كبيراً. فشعبها يبدو جاهزاً للاصلاحات، لكن القيادة منقسمة حول المسائل الداخلية والدولية. لا توجد حلول واضحة او سهلة للقرارات التي يجب ان تتخذ. كذلك لا يمكن استبعاد احتمال حصول مواجهة اميركية - إيرانية، إذ تعتبر إيران لاعباً أساسياً في موضوع الاصلاحات، فهي الدولة الاسلامية الاولى التي اتجهت نحو الأصولية ولكنها ستتحوّل في مرحلة معينة الى الاتجاه الآخر. كذلك، فإن تركيا مع اسلاميها الاصلاحيين وسياساتها المتغيرة واقتصاداتها التطويرية تصلح لان

تكون مثالا يحتذى به الكثير من الاسلاميين الذين لا يزالون حتى الان يتبعون النموذج الاقدم.

لم يتساهل العالم مع العرب والمسلمين منذ أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، فهم يتعرضون للاساءة بشكل شبه دائم في المطارات والمرافق والمرافق الحدودية، ويتم اعتقالهم واسرهم، ويعاملون كمشتبه بهم في كافة انحاء العالم. من هنا بنتنا نشعر وكأننا معزولون في المكان والزمان، ولكن للخروج من هذا الوضع، على المناقشات العربية ان تتطرق الى القدرة على اجراء المصالحة مع انفسنا ومع العالم والتركيز عليها. لكن للقيام بذلك، علينا اولاً ان نصالح الاسلام مع العصرنة والحداثة، ومع الديمقراطية، وحقوق الانسان. هناك البعض من اعضاء الحركات الاسلامية قد يقررون بهذه الحاجة، لا بل اكثر من ذلك قد يتولون قيادة عملية المصالحة، فيما سيلجأ آخرون الى مقاومة التغيير.

إن الإسلام الذي عرفناه في الستينات والسبعينات كان منفتحاً. بالنسبة إلينا، لم يكن الدين والسياسة واحداً متوافقاً. لقد علمنا الاسلام حسن التصرف والسلوك، التواضع، واحترام الآخرين. لقد زودنا الإسلام بالقيم الروحية، وكان الاسلام عنصر تنمية حضارية، خصوصاً وان بعضنا كان يخاف من العالم الشيوعي ومن كونه يشكل خطراً على حضارتنا. إن النبي محمد (صلى الله عليه وسلم) كان رجلاً متواضعاً واهتم جداً بالحياة. الكثير من الآيات والمقاطع القرآنية تتحدث عن التسامح واحترام الآخرين. وللمسيحيين واليهود مكانة خاصة في الاسلام.

إن الاستشهاد بمقاطع قرآنية وتفريغها من مضمونها الحقيقي دون أي اعتبار للمكان والزمان هو أمر خطير جداً، وغير منتج، ومسيء الى الاسلام. انه كتفريغ النص من مضمونه في اي دين آخر، حيث انه بالامكان اعطاء تفسيرات مختلفة لنصوص في كل الديانات.

إن السنوات الـ 15 المقبلة ستكون بمثابة كفاح من اجل التفسير المعاصر والانساني للاسلام. ستكون مرحلة مؤلمة وصعبة، ولكن يجب القيام بها من اجل تكوين مجتمع مدني، ووقف الارهاب، وتطوير وتنمية العالم العربي. باختصار، ان العودة الى الادبيات والتمدن في العالم العربي تتطلب مشاركة مجتمعاتنا كافة.

هذا الإصلاح الأساسي مستحيل من دون وجود مدن مفتوحة ومنفتحة ودولية، ومن دون تجديد البيروقراطيات، وايجاد سياسات المشاركة، والاقتصادات النامية. الحرية هي حجر الاساس في نهضة المجتمع العربي، ونحن بحاجة لمزيد من الخبرات في التجارب الديمقراطية والدستورية وثقافة التسامح والقبول بالآراء المختلفة.

ان منطقتنا ومن اقصاها الى اقصاها ومن الاعلى الى الاسفل هي في طور التغيير الذي يتخذ اللون الخاص بتاريخ كل مكان وشعبه. والتغيير لن ينجح من دون وجود تحالف متجدد يضم المثقفين، واصحاب الاعمال رجالا ونساء، والمتعهدين، والمحترفين والمهنيين والنساء، والشباب في كل بلد عربي. فاذا لم يحصل ذلك سنجد انفسنا متجهين نحو الفوضى والخراب.

إن رياح التغيير لا تزال تعصف بنا الآن، لكن يجب ان نكون حذرين وألا نعاود اخطاء الماضي، فلكي ننجح نحن بحاجة الى قيادة وحكم جيدين، والى سياسات منفتحة، والى ادراك سياسي ومجتمع اعمال استراتيجي يبذل نفسه للتغيير والنمو كما يبذل الرئيس الحريري للبنان واللبنانيون. وكذلك إلى مواطنين يحظون بمساحات سياسية واجتماعية واسعة يتمكنون فيها من التعبير عن آرائهم بحرية وديمقراطية، وأخيرا نريد إسلاماً متوافقاً مع العالم الحديث.

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