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## **The Iraqi Academics Conference**

### **Preface:**

Scientific and academic institutions such as research centers and universities are considered to be one of the most important creative centers where the new ideas and minds are brought out into the light or adopted and supported until they fulfill their potential, and the academic mind is the driving force behind these centers.

As for Iraq, the academic community was put under heavy pressure by the needs of the political system which were in fact directed towards protecting that same regime through different stringent security policies that contributed in confiscating any right of expression or free thinking, the academic community was forced to live around these policies and to invent phrases and work policies that would indicate academic work yet that would come into the general policies of the regime. In addition to this the problem was deepened by the regime regarding any openness to the outside world as a threat to national security and therefore any means of communication with the outside world was prohibited which led to the regression and absolution of numerous universities, as these depended on old and outdated curriculums which were surpassed by the outside world. With these issues in mind, the national meeting of the Iraqi academics was held with the motto "the academic and scientific elites and the building of a new democratic Iraq", with 250 participants who were all university professors from different areas of Iraq specialized in many different fields and from the different ethnic and religious components of the Iraqi society whose views and ideas reflect the ideas and views of the components they belong to.

### **The Goals of the Conference**

We had to take into consideration the important role that the academic must take in the new era of reconstruction and the importance of rehabilitation for these minds after the years of intellectual block that they had been subjected to, which led some academics to become isolated and inflexible in their views. We believe that the academic mind should not be kept out of the new reconstruction effort of a new democratic Iraq.

This effort had an objective of extracting the intellectual mind from the university so as to have a pioneering role in the community itself



along side the academic teaching role. Another objective was to diagnose the obstacles that prevented the academic from taking his rightful place in community and completing his message of teaching and enlightening. Also on the agenda was to determine the causes that caused intellectual minds to flee the country and the means of encouraging them to return. The conference was also designed to be different from other conferences held in the past by depending on the method of open discussion and changing the theoretical and bureaucratic atmosphere of previous conferences and instead to promote free expression, discussion and acceptance of differing views and opinions .

## **Previous Conferences and Conventions**

As mentioned above, before the war, Iraqi universities were imprisoned inside their own walls, and academics were only allowed to take their traditional teaching roles, in addition to some having political ties with stiff views that surpassed all scientific and academic considerations. In this environment, conferences and discussions that were held had the following characteristics:

- All conferences were under the supervision of the ministry of higher education , all studies and reports had to be delivered to the ministry to be checked and analyzed for sound intellectual content , in other words that they did not in any way criticize the policies of the ruling party or its handling of universities or the education system or the role of the academic in developing society.
- All content in the conferences was directly linked one way or another to the thought of Saddam Hussein, any study or idea that did not derive from the thought of Saddam Hussein was not worth mentioning.
- All studies and reports or ideas were to link all the hardships that befell Iraq to the sanctions and to the evil Americans without asking why the sanctions were imposed in the first place and whether or not Americans were evil.
- There were an annual conferences for academics used to be held with the name "the annual conference for higher studies and scientific research " where the studies and reports were pre selected and read to the participants and where the conference would send a telegram of support and obedience of the academics to Saddam, this was more like a political propaganda rally for the regime than anything else.



Let us take as an example a conference that was held at end of July 2002, listed below are the studies that were presented to the conference;

**First:** The University is an impenetrable wall against the invasive theology of the enemy.

- World trade and American oppression.
- The contradictions of American foreign policy and the steadiness of Iraq foreign policy.

**Second :** Higher education strategy in Iraq

- The relationship between education and higher education in Iraq.
- Graduates and specialization.

**Third:** developing higher education:

- Psychological guidance and students attitudes.
- Developing the university through developing the curriculum.
- Developing university buildings.

**Fourth:** the philosophy of higher education:

- The role of the theology of our leader Saddam in development of higher education.
- Higher education and its role in confronting challenges.
- National principals and the opening up of higher education to the world.

There were some meetings between academics set up by some political organizations which were begotten with the fear of the academics being used for the benefit of certain political parties. These meetings ( not conferences) did not exceed 2 hours and were without a specific timetable or agenda , the recommendations resulting from these meetings did not go further than to demand higher living standards for academics and to open up to the developed world but they did not mention how this was supposed to be achieved.

### **Conference Procedures:**

One of the essential principals of the forum was to adopt open discussion and for this purpose a new approach was used, an unconventional approach one which was until now unfamiliar to the Iraqi academic society. It was done by the random distribution of the participants into 8 discussion groups (workshops).



One of the primary goals of the forum was defining the role of the academic in the building of a new democratic Iraq and so we tried to employ every resource possible to serve this goal.

As mentioned above, the methods we used were new and unheard of to the average Iraqi academic because previously they would attend forums or conventions as passive listeners to one or two professors discussing their points of view on a certain subject with no real intervention, interaction, discussion or airing of contradictory thoughts, the aim of these past forums were to portray a pure political viewpoint or to justify the actions of the political authorities, and so there was no sincere discussion or serious participation, as for our forum, everything was new to the Iraqi academics who participated, from the subjects opened for discussion to the way they were discussed as follows;

- The participants were divided into 8 discussion groups (workshops), and they were divided randomly to mimic the ethnic, religious and geographical diversity that represents Iraq, this means that the resulting ideas and thoughts agreed upon in these groups represent this diversity.
- The forum covered 5 primary topics with each topic subdivided into several secondary points which were discussed during two hour sessions by the different discussion groups, which made it possible for all those present to participate in an open, democratic dialogue.
- Each group was headed by a professor who induced dialogue between the members of the group by the brainstorming technique.
- The female participants were encouraged to share, engage and even head the dialogue in the workshops; therefore there were 3 PhDs bearing female participants who headed discussion groups in an open dialogue with their male counterparts.



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## Topics of the conference

### **First: Democracy and social coexistence:**

We started the forum with this subject as an introduction to the other axis and to facilitate their discussion, this subject also set the guidelines for all the other discussions. This discussion topic included 4 main discussion points which are:

#### **A; democratic system and recognition and acceptance of the other;**

The dialogue within this point was directed towards the necessity of recognizing the "other" on the basis of a core rule of democracy which is the recognition and acceptance of others whatever the sex, ethnic background, color or religion.

The participants reached the result that recognition and acceptance is the main pillar of democratic restructuring and is an introduction to reconciliation.

Realization of this ideal necessitates the redirection of negative and vague tendencies and thoughts towards democracy to the consideration that respect for others is a part of respect for the self, and this would provide a solid basis for social security and stability. This aim could be achieved by several different methods and tools, namely:

- The use of the media in a planned and well programmed way that will help reform the thoughts and knowledge database of the average Iraqi citizen towards newer more democratic directions.
- The importance of utilizing the mass media (audio and visual and read) and issuing leaflets to promote multiplicity in opinions and views and to promote the culture of recognition of others.
- The participants agreed that the civil society organizations experiment should be generalized as a proficient tool in deepening social dialogue and understanding and voluntary social participation that lead to cooperation and acceptance
- Holding public conferences and open discussion groups in schools and universities and civil organizations with three main goals in mind; *First. Preparation of the minds of the people for open discussion with others and to promote democratic thinking*



and action second. The transfer of the principles of culture of acceptance of the other to the level of actual implementation Third. Changing the negative attitude towards democracy in new more open directions away from extremism and racism.

- The participants also agreed upon the fact that media campaigns and activities of the civil society organizations should include the importance of recognizing the other smaller cultures that promote multiplicity on the national level, with emphasis on the necessity of their respect.
- That the basis of dealing with others lies in the level of achievement and proficiency instead of favoritism and mutual origin to a certain sect.

**B; Democracy as a way to build the culture of reconciliation:**

In the field of the relationship between democracy and the culture of reconciliation, the matter has to be dealt with on the official and public levels together;

- Through the adopting of the local administrations and civil societies of the reconciliation culture, on the basis of rule of law and human rights which all helps found a coherent peaceful society?
- Holding conventions and forums for national reconciliation and understanding with participants from all components of Iraqi society with open adoption of their recommendations and results to further develop the concept of democracy and understanding.
- The support of the culture of reconciliation and understanding in the distribution of roles from the base of a futuristic vision of the nation and the emphasis on principles of creativity and achievement And to assure follow through of this aspect , the educational curricula from the very primary to the higher levels must be embedded with the principles and human values within the spirit of reconciliation and understanding against hatred and violence.
- Giving religious establishments and components of society an active role in the spreading of this culture as an integral part of religious behavior.
- The activation of the roles of ministries and new institutions such as the ministry for human rights in publishing and deepening the culture of reconciliation and understanding.



- All the aforementioned points agreed upon by the participants form the future outlines for the culture of reconciliation and understanding and coexistence between different components because it can be considered as a reference for overcoming the residues of past policies in the previous regime and for building democracy in the new Iraq.

**C;** *The educational system and building a democratic psyche;*

The participants of the conference analyzed the topics concerning education and the ways that they could utilize the educational system to achieve the democratic perspectives starting from the restructuring of the educational system.

Based on the principals of democracy far from violence and social and ethnic bigotry. With democracy as a reference for the new proposed educational system using the concept of democracy as a construct for the interaction between the different parties involved in the educational process. And as an extension to the vision seen by the participants of the relationship between the educational system and the democratic psyche, the following points were emphasized;

- The importance of establishing independent professional organizations for all aspects of the educational process (for teachers and students).
- The rehabilitation of the different levels of educational staff on the basis of democratic thinking and implementation. Then the utilization of the educational system as a starting point for rebuilding the personality of the student and his creativity along with his positive attitude towards others in the rebuilding of society.
- The importance of benefiting from the different experiences of nations that went through circumstances similar to Iraq (exchange student programs etc).

**D;** *The role of the academic elite in strengthening the links of social coexistence:*

The participating intellectuals agreed that the academic elite represent an intellectual and behavioral reference that can be followed by others to strengthen the links of social coexistence through the following;



- The activation of the roles of the academic elite in supporting social coexistence through their scientific and cultural output in addition to their role in holding conventions and conferences that promote the principals of coexistence.
- There is a need for emphasizing the role of research centers and scientific institutions in social life through diagnosing social problems and negative attitudes that present obstacles in the way of peaceful coexistence and that promote social unrest and discord.
- Giving an appropriate role to the academic elite in the civil society organizations to support them in building the correct social foundations for social coexistence.
- In order for the academic elite to perform all these actions and roles they have to be given their rights and be given the means to a suitable lifestyle so as perform they tasks unhindered

## **Second: the role of technocrat's in the management of the new Iraqi state;**

In this, the second man topic of the conference, the participants discussed their role in restructuring national and local administration through 4 main subtopics;

### **A: The participation of technocrats and academics in the administration of the state;**

Modern administration depends on scientific input that is integrated with planning and coordination that makes way for decision making. Therefore, the participants stress the following;

- The importance of facilitating the acquiring of new data and technology by the academics , so as to help them in conducting confirmative studies for the activities and programs of local administrations. In addition to preparing the necessary mechanisms, methods, material and human resources for such studies.
- The necessity of giving academic research centers a participating role in the activities of local administrations and their development.
- Taking advantage of the experience of the academics to develop administrative and technical abilities in local administrations



in addition to emphasizing the role of the local administrations in development. It is here that academics can facilitate in placing administrative protocols that ensure optimal functionality.

- The participants recommended that modern local administration techniques were implemented in study curricula according to their levels with the aim of deepening the knowledge of their importance in addition to the successful benefit from the experience of local administrations of other countries that are democratic in nature.
- All participants in the conference agreed on the necessity of directing primary and higher level studies towards the problems of local administration and the ways they function so as to best utilize them in the service of society. Also the necessity of eradicating any bureaucratic and bigotry thinking in local administrations.
- The importance of trading experience between local administrations in different geographical areas through the contribution of academics in the form of conventions and studies and workshops for those administrations.

**B; *Academics and the writing of the new permanent constitution:***

The participants came to a conclusion that a permanent constitution should be created democratic process, in stead of a temporary one, the academics see their role in this as follows;

- The academics can participate in writing the different clauses of the constitution, in a way that they are vivid and in no way vague or obscure with no contradictions, and that these clauses are based on multiplicity in the boundaries of national unity for Iraq and its people.
- The constitution should preserve the rights of all Iraqis without discrimination and bigotry with emphasis on the values of coexistence, reprieve and national reconciliation so as to place a foundation for correct democratic restructuring.
- The participants agreed that the constitution should include the formation of a constitutional court that specializes in defining and separating court authority from the state.



- The necessity of benefiting from the experience of other democratic nations as they consider it the principal document that assures democracy on the basis of sharing the national responsibility.
- One of the most controversial aspects of the constitution was the issue of the presidency , the participants concluded that the presidency should be elected and confined to two periods, each is no more than five years term of office, which ensures proper distribution of authority and respectively to the higher authorities of government.
- And to assure the democratic spirit of the constitution there has to be a clause that clearly state the non centralization of the local administrations , and that these administrations be given wide authorities to address the issues of the people.
- The constitution also has to state that there has to be a national referendum concerning all major issues.
- The clauses of the constitution have to be published and widely distributed among the populace using all the media so that it becomes a means of defining their lives and discussions , the constitution has to be based on respect for the law and relevant authorities and that all are equal and that Iraqi citizenship take precedence to any other ethnic or other belonging.
- In addition to what has been mentioned, the participants emphasized the assurances that the constitution writers should mindedly independent and don't take side.
- The constitution should ensure that social justice is upheld and that social security is prioritized along with protection from outside aggression and that there are relations of friendship and mutual benefit with other countries.

**C; Academics and the renovation of the educational system;**

This subject was one of the subtopics that were discussed in the conference, the main discussion points were:

- The importance of defining the philosophy of the educational system with the input of the academics.
- The reconstruction of the educational administration system which would ensure its liberation from any weaknesses in its regulations and rules , this entails the experience of academics in criticizing and rectifying previous educational techniques



and replacing them with ones that are more appropriate. This would ensure the achievement of the democratic goals of the new Iraq.

- Developing and updating the scientific and data aspects of the educational system. According to the results of extensive studies of the wasted aspects of the educational system and also cutting down the bureaucracy in the educational institutions.
- The utilization of academic experience in benefiting from the output of the educational system which would strengthen democratic inclinations in Iraq, considering that academics are a source of new information in the educational field.

**D; The role of academics in the elections;**

This subtopic included the role that academics could play in the electoral process. Especially in helping the people realize the importance of elections in the democratic process , setting standards and regulations for the process itself and persuading intellectuals to be nominated for election.

**Third: Civil Society Organizations(CSOs)and the New Iraqi State;**

The third main topic for the conference included discussions regarding the civil society organizations and the ways that they could support the new state through three main subtopics, the first concentrated on the civil society organizations and building strong foundations for democracy in Iraq the second concentrated on data presentation by these organizations and the third concentrated on the relationship between the organizations and the academics. The participants agreed on the following points;

**A; CSOs and building strong foundations for democracy;**

- Giving the civil society organizations a supervising authority of the democratic process in Iraq, through the rallying of the different factions present in the general populace and



employing them in the democratic rebuilding without discrimination.

- The importance of civil society organizations in translating the democratic aspirations into a workable plan of action. with the activation of the aforementioned organizations in deepening the social consciousness towards maturing the democratic process in Iraqi society.
- That provision that these civil society organizations are independent in this process.
- Changing the name of the human rights ministry to the ministry of human rights and civil society, while taking into consideration that the role of the ministry is an organizing role that doesn't restrict the work of civil society organizations.

**B; *the Role of CSOs Widespread of Transparency;***

In the field of data provision, the dialogue centered on the importance of the role of civil society organizations in providing information about different aspects of the population that interact with it or participates in their programs. Hence the participants stressed the following;

- The call for establishing a national council for the civil society organizations chosen by the same organizations in a democratic manner.
- The publication of an annual national report covering the activities of the civil society organizations that specifies the main outlines of their goals and the obstacles that prevent their achievement.
- The strengthening of the role of the civil society organizations in detecting the negative aspects and practices. So that it can be an objective mediator between the source of the problem and the different authorities of the state.
- The establishment of a data network for the civil society organizations so as to keep abreast of their activities and facilitate the exchange of information about plans , projects and programs .with emphasis on the importance of coordinative frameworks for those that contain similar population categories (such as women and children ) and with similar goals.
- The academics emphasized the necessity for their participation in the conventions and conferences that are



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held by the civil society organizations so as to build relations between the people and these organizations.

- The necessity for including a new study course in current curricula about civil society and democracy.
- The call for academics to carry out studies and research about the activities of the civil society organizations which help strengthen the relationship between these organizations and the local populace.
- There must be some kind of supervising authority to keep the activities of the civil society organizations in check.
- Encouragement of voluntary membership to these organizations on the basis of social participation and the principals of freedom of thought and expression.

#### **Fourth: The Return of Immigrated Minds;**

This problem occupied a special place in the discussions of the participants, and although there were many views to the subject, the common elements were as follows;

- Giving immigrant minds the chance to help in the reconstruction of Iraq through making laws that preserve their rights and that provide appropriate environments. these minds should be considered as a national resource that should be utilized.
- The importance of establishing a specialized institution in the ministry of immigrants to deal with the subject of immigrant minds , and how to bring them back and to remind them of their national responsibilities.
- To carry out an extensive study to realize the reasons why previous attempts to bring them back have failed and to find the proper ways to do so.
- The importance of recording and benefiting from the research of these immigrant minds and permitting decision makers and administrators the chance to observe them also so that they may benefit from their suggestions and recommendations.
- The issuing of a national guide book with the names of all scientists academics researchers and theologizes categorized by their specialties and the countries they reside in , and introducing them to the current state of their homeland so that they may be encouraged to participate in its rebuilding.



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- The call for the ministry of higher education , the ministry of foreign affairs , the labor office and the ministry of planning and ministry of immigrants to organize their relationship with the immigrant minds through conventions which they would be invited to so as to keep them in touch with their homeland.
  - Providing opportunities for the immigrant minds to open commercial projects in partnership with the state, civil society organizations and the private sector.
  - Facilitating all bureaucratic and administrative procedures that would otherwise impair the academics return to the suitable institution.

### **Fifth: the role of academics in solving social problems**

This main topic contained numerous subtopics , the most important of which was the role of academics and the methods of dealing with social problems through supporting them in helping citizens realize the dangers of social problems and furthering their participation in making them part of their national duties , along with activating their roles in ministries and institutions that strive to find solutions to these problems and also the proper benefit from the results of studies carried out by these institutions in the implementation of plans and programs of social work on the voluntary and official levels and also solving economic problems. All this needs the making of new laws that utilize these findings and provide legal grounds for their solving. The points that the participants agreed on can be summarized in the following;

- The participation of universities in finding solutions to social problems , especially the social service , psychology and media departments , which needs the founding of specialized research centers within these departments.
- Encouraging higher education students to study social phenomena with, objective scientific methodology and the problems resulting from these phenomena.
- In order for the universities to perform these roles they must have support in treating the victims of these social problems and all those affected by them in addition to finding coordinative relationships between different ministries and institutions and also civil society organizations to help in the proper study and solving of these problems along with



ascertaining their geographical distribution. This can be achieved through participation contracts between the universities and these establishments as the university is the only real place that can provide and train the necessary staff.

- To provide a clear picture, the subject of minorities and human rights has to be mentioned; the participants concluded that it is necessary to perform studies that decrease levels of social and cultural conflict and strengthening the basis of social peace.
- The academics emphasized their supervising role on the implementation of the human rights agreement that Iraq is a member of through reminding the population of its rights and of the democratic ways of defending them alongside helping the minorities of Iraq to participate in all national activities considering them components of a united people.
- The participants insisted on replacing the term minorities with components. This terminology is more humane and less likely to provoke ethnic or other discrimination. It underlines the role of academics in building trust between these different components.

## **Recommendations:**

The participants make the following recommendation:

- The importance of utilizing the mass media (audio and visual and read) and issuing leaflets to promote multiplicity in opinions and views and to promote the culture of recognition of others.
- The necessity of holding public discussion and work groups in schools and universities to achieve a common ground for open discussion with one another along with reconciliation to promote the idea of democracy.
- The need for interaction with others being on achievement and personal proficiency and creativity instead of personal benefits and favoritism.
- The importance of supporting the culture of reconciliation as a basis for social justice, by the clergy, ministries, and educational institutions.



- The necessity of rehabilitation of the different levels of the educational staff on the basis of democratic thinking and actions.
- The need for benefiting from different experiences of nations that went through circumstances similar to Iraq (exchange student programs etc).
- The importance of the participation of academics in the writing of the new constitution that should contain no vague or obscure paragraphs. The constitution should also include the founding of a constitutional court that specializes in separating authorities in the new state as well as making the constitution widely available to the people.
- The necessity of the presidency being elected and with two governing periods to ensure democratic distribution of government.
- Restructuring the educational administration, in a way that ensures liberation from all weaknesses including rules and regulations.
- Supporting the role of civil society organizations as a supervising authority for the democratic process in Iraq, with the rallying of the people in Iraq for democratic work without sectarian or other discrimination.
- The call for establishing a national council for the civil society organizations, to be elected by existing organizations in a democratic manner.
- The importance of the participation of academics in the conferences held by these organizations to strengthen the links between the populace and these organizations.
- The Iraqi immigrant minds (brain drain) should be given the chance to participate in the reconstruction of the state through solid laws that ensure their rights and secure the appropriate environment for their participation in addition to performing studies as to why previous attempts have failed to encourage them back to Iraq.
- The necessity of founding a law for services in the universities that considers changes and variations in living standards for university professors.
- The universities should be solidly taking part in the study of social problems especially those departments concerned with human and social manner such as psychology, sociology, social service and mass media departments.



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- The participants stressed on replacing the term of minorities with components, this terminology is more humane and less likely to provoke ethnic or other discrimination.
  - Modern administration depends on scientific input that is integrated with planning and coordination that makes way for decision making.
  - Facilitating the acquiring of new data and technology by the academics, so as to help them in conducting confirmative studies for the activities and programs of local administrations in addition to preparing the necessary mechanisms and methods, and material and human resources for such studies.
  - The necessity of giving academic research centers a participating role in the activities of local administrations and their development.
  - Taking advantage of the experience of the academics to develop administrative and technical abilities in local administrations in addition to emphasizing the role of the local administrations in development. It is here that academics can facilitate in placing administrative protocols that ensure optimal functionality.
  - The participants recommended that modern local administration techniques were implemented in study curricula according to their levels with the aim of deepening the knowledge of their importance in addition to the successful benefit from the experience of local administrations of other countries that are democratic in nature.