### Contents

**EDUCATION**
- TVET: Investing the Youth Potential 2
- Launch of the National Education Strategy 2
- Educating the Citizen: Promoting Peace 2
- Planning Educational Reform 2
- Modernizing the 1000 Year Old Higher Education System in Iraq 3
- Eradicating Illiteracy 3
- UNESCO Presents the Findings of Textbook Evaluations 3
- Quality Trainers for Quality Education 3

**CULTURE**
- Al-Hadba Minaret: UNESCO to Help Protect Conserve the Icon of Mosul 4
- Marshlands: Protecting a Natural and Cultural Treasure 4
- Tourism: Strategizing for Sustainability 4
- Sulaymaniyah Museum: An Exemplary Modernization 4
- Erbil: 2 Years Achievement 5
- Preserving and Promoting the Cultural Heritage of the Holy City of Najaf 5
- Improving Cultural Awareness through Media Reporting 5
- Encyclopedia of Sulaymaniyah 5

**COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION**
- ...and the Human Rights Defenders Federation is Born 6
- Safety Training to Protect Journalists 6
- Iraqi Bloggers Request UNESCO Support to Create Unions & CSOs 6
- 700 Journalists Trained on Electoral Coverage 6
- Cherishing Freedom of Expression through Prudent Legislation 6

**SCIENCE**
- Taking Water Management to another Level 7
- Science, Technology & Innovation: Restoring the Prominence 7
- World Water Day 7

**CONTACT US**

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**2012: Towards Quality Intervention**

On behalf of UNESCO Iraq Office, I would like to wish you all a happy new year, hoping that 2013 will bring more prosperity and peace for the people of Iraq. Considerable results were achieved in all of our programmes throughout 2012; UNESCO’s close partnership with the Iraqi government has proven to be a key factor in achieving main goals in Education, Sciences, Culture, and Communication and Information.

However, amid the many recorded breakthroughs, 2012 also witnessed several setbacks. In addition to separate security incidents that took the life of hundreds of Iraqi citizens, innocent students paid the price of the on-going conflict as educational institutions were targeted again. Professors and journalists were murdered, and Iraq's indicators in freedom of expression remain at alarming levels. However, these painful crimes make us even more determined in our mission; schools and universities will be safe havens for Iraqi children and youth, and the new generations will enjoy greater freedom of expression.

2012 was another pioneering year in Education. The launch of the National Education Strategy supported by UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF, following the approval of the National Literacy Law and the completion of the National Literacy Strategy in 2011 was a major milestone of our work, and it was followed by the launch, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, of a National Literacy Campaign targeting 2.5 million illiterates by 2018. Additionally, UNESCO established 120 Community Learning Centres which enrol more than 8000 vulnerable illiterates and inaugurated Avicenna Learning Centres in Baghdad University and Salahaddin University in Erbil.

In Culture, we continued our efforts to safeguard the Iraqi heritage, with the development of the Erbil Citadel Management Plan and Institutional Framework; and protecting the natural and cultural treasure by starting in collaboration with UNEP and Ministry of Environment the process for the World Heritage Inscription of the Iraqi Marshland. With the support of the First Lady of Iraq – Hero Ibtiham Ahmed, UNESCO developed the capacities of Iraqi Journalists in raising awareness on cultural heritage. We also completed the first phase of the "Sulaymaniyah Museum’s Modernization" project and the museum hosted its first sets of students with classes visiting its various departments. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Ministry of Culture to build local capacity to conserve major heritage assets in Najaf, restore the Al-Hadba Minaret in Mosul with the Governor of Mosul; and a project agreement with the first lady of Iraq to develop the Suly Encyclopedia.

In Science we intensified our efforts in drought mitigation and management; and in collaboration with UNDP we are in the process of developing a long-term drought management strategy that includes measures to account for and mitigate the risk of drought.

2012 was also a memorable year for all human rights activists, as the Iraqi Federation of Human Rights Defenders was born. Nevertheless, given the continuous risk faced by journalists, human rights defenders and academics working in Iraq, we conducted security trainings bringing together 240 academics, journalists and human rights defenders in Basra, Erbil and Baghdad. Several training programmes were also conducted in the field of elections reporting, and a new curriculum for journalism was developed.

Finally, 2012 was a special year for me on a personal level. After 7 years as Director of this Office, I leave Iraq with a lot of success stories to tell, and a valuable experience to share. Looking back on these past years, I can say that I was deeply affected by this vibrant and challenging environment. As I leave this Office in the very safe hands of our dedicated staff, I wish the best of luck to the new Director and I hope that today's Iraq will thrive again to represent the inspiring example that many countries are looking for.

Mohamed Djelid
UNESCO Iraq Office Director
Launch of the National Education Strategy

Prominent Iraqi officials, senior staff from public institutions, and representatives of international organizations met on 8 December 2012 in Baghdad to announce the official launch of Iraq's National Education Strategy. Considered to be the cornerstone in improving access to quality education, this strategy tackles a number of major challenges within the wide educational context in Iraq. "This strategy is unique for Iraq and for the region," said H.E. Dr. Mohamed Tamim, Iraq's Minister of Education, at the launch event. “It responds to the needs of over eight million students currently in school and an additional three million students in alternative education programmes.”

In addition to providing free and accessible education to children and youth from pre-school to higher education, H.E. Dr. Ali Al-Adeeb, Iraq’s Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research stated that “this strategy presents a serious and ambitious roadmap which will lead to a qualitative improvement in Iraq’s education sector.”

Dr. Al-Adeeb believes that “the investments that it sets out will improve the political, economic, social and technical structures in the country.” Key educational targets in the strategy include increasing Iraq's pre-school enrolment rate from the current rate of 7%, to 22% by 2020, as well as the primary school enrolment rate from today's 93% to 98% by the end of 2015. "With an emphasis on improving primary, secondary and post-secondary education, this strategy responds to Iraq’s basic needs in education in the short term, while stimulating a longer term competitive knowledge-centred economy," said Mohamed Djelid, Director of UNESCO Iraq Office.

The national education strategy was developed by a committee of education experts and advisors within the ministries of education and higher education in Baghdad and Erbil, with international technical expertise and guidance provided by UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank.

Planning Educational Reform

Building on the work conducted under the National Education Strategy and the Iraq Public Sector Modernization Project, UNESCO assisted the Iraqi government to finalise the Education Sector Road Map. This new road map provides guidelines and measures for the modernization of the administrative structure of the ministries of education and higher education in Baghdad and Erbil to strengthen education service delivery in Iraq in a broad spectrum of functional domains at central, regional, provincial, and district levels down to the school service delivery.

In the framework of the Needs Assessment project, UNESCO and UNICEF also organized 4 workshops in Erbil on statistical skills and planning. Between January and February 2012, 140 participant statistician, planner, educational ministries and directorates' officials, and representatives from universities and governors. Four practical trainings were also conducted for the staff of the ministries.

Educating the Citizen: Promoting Peace

As in the case of every country with a turbulent past, education is an essential pillar to restore peace, support inclusive development and achieve long term stability in Iraq.

Within the framework of the project "Promoting Civic Values and Life-Skills among Adolescents through Education" (CVLS), UNESCO is partnering with UNFPA and ESCWA to provide the Ministries of Education (MoEs) in Baghdad and Erbil, and the Iraqi civil society organizations with the capacity to develop relevant policies at the managerial and operational levels in order to design and implement civic values/life skills education.

In 2012, 43 educators were introduced to the core modules of this advanced Training Package: Citizenship, Political Participation, Work & Employment and Peace building, using participatory and activity-based teacher training methods. These education supervisors trained 486 teachers and facilitators, leading to the direct application of these modules in schools and Community Learning Centres.

TVET: Investing the Youth Potential

On 31 May 2012, UNESCO Iraq Office, in cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Embassy of Japan in Iraq, launched the project “Fighting Youth Unemployment through Education”. Funded by the government of Japan, this project tackles youth unemployment and poverty by providing 400 male and female TVET graduates with vocational education and training in Kurdistan region.”

Within the framework of the project “Improving quality of technical and vocational education and training in Kurdistan region” funded by the German Government through UNDG ITF, UNESCO and the KRG government achieved a major breakthrough in sponsoring partnership between TVET and the private sector. In a wide ranging workshop, attended by 24 companies, representatives from the European Technology and Training Centre and ICON institute, and officials from key Ministries and public authorities, UNESCO introduced a model “Agreement of Collaboration” to be endorsed by private companies and educational institutions. Additionally, UNESCO sponsored a cooperation agreement between three companies active in the field of car maintenance – Toyota, Audi - Porschess, and Skoda – and TVET centres, allowing enrolled students to benefit from an indispensable field expertise.
Modernizing the 1000 Year Higher Education System in Iraq

UNESCO Iraq Office and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) in Baghdad and KRG inaugurated the new Avicenna e-Learning Centres in Baghdad University (28 November), and in Salahaddin University in Erbil (3 December). This opening follows capacities building activities which prepared 100 trainers and 150 teachers in developing online courses, the production of advanced online modules, and the launch of the Avicenna Virtual Campus Portal and the Virtual Library.

In his opening speech during the ceremony at University of Baghdad, MOHESR Prime Advisor Dr. Abed Al Saheb Najem praised this achievement, urging other universities to join the network. He confirmed the Ministry's support to all UNESCO endeavours to develop the higher education system in Iraq. Dr. Ali Saeed, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Kurdistan Region described the project as "a significant contribution to the Ministry's strategy to improve higher education performance and achievements in the region", adding that "the results of the Avicenna project are in line with the ministry's ambitions to extended the use of information technology hence supporting progress in higher education in Kurdistan".

Mr. Mohamed Djelid, UNESCO Iraq Office Director, stated from his side, that "the main goal of this virtual campus is not to deliver academic degrees but to introduce combined learning (face-to-face and e-learning) to provide better quality education and to enhance learning opportunities". Mr. Djelid also praised the Office of Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bent Nasser, First Lady of Qatar and UNESCO special envoy for basic and higher education, for its special contribution to restore Iraq's prominence in Education, particularly in the field of higher education. Within its efforts to stimulate scientific research in Iraq, UNESCO has published the Roadmap Report entitled "Revitalizing Science, Technology and Innovation in Iraq". The report is the result of an intensive field investigation targeting 90 research institutions, jointly conducted by UNESCO experts, key Iraqi stakeholders and Iraqi scientists from the Diaspora. The roadmap is intended to guide a series of scientific and innovating activities to empower Iraq in the access to knowledge economy by the 2020. Additionally, UNESCO put together an ambitious capacity building programme dedicated to management and leadership and organised the first-training workshop on quality, change management and lean administration in Doha from 16 to 19 December 2012. The workshop targeted high-level managers of both Iraqi ministries of higher education to foster their capacities in governance and leadership. More training activities will follow throughout 2013.

UNESCO Presents the Findings of Textbook Evaluation to the Minister of Education

Upon request of the Ministry of Education, UNESCO Iraq Office has completed the assessment of math and science textbooks for grades 4, 8 and 11, according to the international standards and using content analysis approach. UNESCO experts met with H.E. the Minister of Education, Dr. Mohamed Tamim on 13 June 2012 at the Prime Minister Advisory Council in Baghdad, to present the findings of the evaluation.

Under the "Curriculum Development" project supported by the Office of Her Highness Sheikh Moza Bint Nasser, First Lady of Qatar, a team of eight Iraqi experts had worked together with six UNESCO international experts on finalizing the evaluation using eight sets of standards:
1) Textbook Description; 2) General structure; 3) Textbook Philosophy; 4) Content Analysis; 5) Textbook support to the learning process; 6) Assessment Students' Acquisition; 7) Strengthening and supporting the learning environment; and 8) Graphic design and production.

Quality Trainers for Quality Education

UNESCO has been working to build the institutional capacity of relevant stakeholders in planning, managing and monitoring in-service teacher training while enhancing the capacity of teachers to up-grade their knowledge in their respective fields. UNESCO developed 12 teacher training packages in Math, Chemistry, Biology and Physics for grades 10, 11, and 12 together with a practical training guide for teacher. UNESCO trained 8000 teachers on the new packages. Moreover a draft teacher training strategy was developed. Finally the teacher training website has been upgraded and activated in November 2012.

Eradicating Illiteracy!

Following the approval of the National Literacy Law and the completion of the National Literacy Strategy in 2011, UNESCO Iraq Office with the Ministry of Education of Iraq launched in September 2012 a National Literacy Campaign targeting 2.5 million illiterates by 2015.

Additionally, UNESCO established 120 Community Learning Centres (CLCs) which now enrol more than 8000 vulnerable illiterates. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was also signed with the Ministry of Education in March 2012, ensuring the sustainability of the established centres. The MOU establishes cooperation with local authorities and selected organizations that are part of the NGO Literacy Network, a newly established group that brings together 230 non-governmental and civil society organizations. In addition, MOE established a National Literacy Agency, with 3000 employees.

Furthermore, the MOU establishes the Community Learning Centres as essential elements of the current non-formal education programmes of the Ministry of Education, stating their vital role in local development and in the improvement of the average citizen’s living standards.
Al-Hadba Minaret: UNESCO to Help Conserve the Icon of Mosul

The old city of Mosul, widely known for its manufacturing of muslin and its unique marble, is also home to many important Iraqi heritage sites and historical buildings. The Al-Hadba minaret is the most outstanding feature of the Great Nurid Mosque built in 1171. The minaret has been leaning 253 cm off the perpendicular axe for several years, suffering from serious structural weakness. It is feared that the minaret may soon collapse if preventive measures are not taken. On 20 September 2012, as part of UNESCO’s mandate to assist the Government of Iraq in safeguarding its cultural heritage, UNESCO Iraq Office Director Mohammed Djelid signed an agreement with the Governor of Ninewa Atheel Abdel Aziz Nujaifi under which UNESCO will help in conserving its regional icon with the funding from the governorate. Under the newly signed “Executive Cooperation Programme for the Study and Documentation for the Stability and Conservation of Al-Hadba Minaret”, UNESCO will undertake a 12-month comprehensive study of the minaret’s materials and geological bedding, together with a structural analysis of the building to identify the type of treatment that should be applied.

Marshlands: Protecting a Natural and Cultural Treasure

The Iraqi Marshlands represent a true environmental and cultural treasure which fostered the development of major Mesopotamian civilizations, such as the Sumerians, and, as a wetland ecosystem, they also are of great importance for region. With the aim of improving the protection of this very special area, UNESCO Iraq Office, in close collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and with the financial support of the Italian Government, launched the project “World Heritage inscription process as a tool to enhance the natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands.” The two agencies, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), organized the “First Drafting Workshop for the World Heritage Nomination File of the Iraqi Marshlands” on 18-19 February 2012 in Amman. Twenty participants from various Iraqi public institutions and one representative of the NGO Nature Iraq were introduced to the requirements for inscription on the World Heritage List. The workshop focused on the criteria which define the outstanding universal value, the authenticity and the integrity of a site, and on management and planning requirements. Subsequently, experts selected by UNESCO and UNEP supported the drafting team with the preparation of the nomination file and to identify the most suitable management framework for the Marshlands. Another drafting workshop, hosted by the Regional World Heritage Centre in Bahrain, followed on 6-7 December.

Sulaymaniyah Museum: An Exemplary Modernization

Supporting the Iraqi authorities in the rehabilitation of the country’s museum sector remains one of UNESCO’s key goals. The Sulaymaniyah Archaeological Museum, the second largest institution of its kind in Iraq, is the focus of a pilot project co-funded by the Iraq Trust Fund and the KRG to serve as a model to modernize museums in Iraq. In 2012, the first phase of the “project Modernizing Sulaymaniyah Museum” came to completion. Over the past year, several international experts in museology and museum management trained the museum staff on the job or during dedicated sessions. A Museum Master Plan was developed as a collaborative exercise between experts, museum staff, and the Directorate of Antiquities of Sulaymaniyah. International and Iraqi expertise was also mobilized to complete the cataloguing of the museum’s objects. An Education Department was created and a customized educational programme developed. Class visits by secondary school students and their teachers are now part of the museum’s regular activities, a substantial landmark in the project’s achievements.

Tourism: Strategizing for Sustainability

Tourism is one of Iraq’s key assets for economic development. The country is already the centre of a large trend of religious tourism that comprises the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. With several historical and archaeological sites of global importance, such as the iconic Babylon, there is also a yet untapped potential for the development of cultural tourism. In 2012, UNESCO completed its project “Assisting the Government of Iraq to Develop a National Tourism Strategy” funded by the European Union through UNDGITF. Working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and with input from the private sector, the team of international tourism experts mobilized by UNESCO prepared a National Strategic Framework for Tourism Development, and two area-specific Tourism Development Plans, one for the Governorate of Najaf, the other for the Governorate of Babylon. These planning documents will guide national and local authorities to develop and regulate the sector, improve human resources, and generate employment while ensuring adequate measures for the conservation of the country’s heritage assets, many of which are currently threatened by uncontrolled development.
Erbil: 2 Years of Achievements

Under the title "Erbil Citadel Revitalization Project – Two Years of Achievements (2010 – 2012)\"), the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization (HCECR) and UNESCO organized on 27 June 2012 a special event inside the historic citadel to celebrate the second anniversary of launching the second phase of the "Erbil Citadel Revitalization Project", and to present the accomplishments.

During the last two years, UNESCO and the HCECR completed conservation works on important buildings, finalized the citadel’s management plan, developed an institutional framework for the HCECR, and held a number of training workshops to build the technical and managerial capacities of local staff.

To the event participated the Minister of Culture and Youth, Mr. Kawa Mahmoud Shakir, the Minister of Housing and Reconstruction, Mr. Kamaran Ahmed Abdullah, Qa‘im Maqam of Erbil, Mr. Nihad Qoja, the Governor of Erbil Mr. Nawzad Hadi, Mr. Hakim Azad Mullafandi, the legal advisor of the KRG Prime Minister and head of the legal committee of the Council of Ministers, Mr. Dara Al-Yaqubi, Head of the HCECR, and Mr. Mohamed Djelid, Director of the UNESCO Iraq Office. Director Generals, diplomats and members of the Erbil community were also present at the event.

Preserving and Promoting the Cultural Heritage of the Holy City of Najaf

The city of Najaf, also known as Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf (Holy Najaf), is of high religious significance for all Muslims being the burial site of Imam Ali. In June 2012, with a view to preserving Najaf’s cultural heritage and promoting its international visibility, UNESCO launched a project funded by the Government of Iraq and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Culture. Local scholars and academic institutions will be involved in identifying and collecting documentation about Wadi Al-Salam cemetery, and will receive training to prepare a World Heritage nomination file for the site. To promote the city beyond Iraq and the Islamic world, UNESCO will produce of multilingual books and a documentary film illustrating the important religious and intellectual history of the city, as well as its cultural heritage and contemporary role. An international round-table will be organized at UNESCO’s Headquarters in Paris to explore the contribution of Imam Ali’s thought to a culture of peace and intercultural dialogue. Finally, UNESCO will provide training in preventive conservation for book and manuscript curators and will assist upgrading existing conservation equipment.

Improving Cultural Awareness through Media Reporting

Improving media reporting on cultural heritage is expected to make the public and decision makers more aware of the social importance and economic potential of heritage. Improving media reporting on cultural heritage is necessary to raise the awareness of the general public, as well as of the decision makers, on the social importance and economic potential of heritage, of the threats bearing upon its integrity, and on the need for protection and conservation. With this objective in mind, UNESCO, with the support of the First Lady of Iraq – H.E. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed - organized a workshop for Iraqi journalists entitled Exploring Culture through Journalism. The workshop, held in the northern governorate of Sulaymaniyah from 16 to 23 September, was led by a French journalist and a Croatian photojournalist, both with extensive international experience. They guided the 26 participants through training modules tackling tangible and intangible heritage, namely: archaeology and architecture, classical/folk music, dance, fashion, language, food and other forms of cultural expressions. Participants worked on developing their journalistic and photojournalistic skills and achieved impressive results in their reporting assignments. During the workshop, the First Lady shared her own media experience, and talked about the difficulties she encountered as a former photojournalist.

First Lady of Iraq Launches Encyclopedia of Sulaymaniyyah

During an official ceremony that took place on 7 November 2012 at the historical building of the Saraya in Sulaymaniyyah, the Director of UNESCO Iraq Office, Mohamed Djelid, and the First Lady of Iraq, H.E. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, signed an agreement to initiate the work on an encyclopaedia of the Sulaymaniyyah Governorate to document and disseminate knowledge about the history and culture of this important region of Kurdistan.

Under this project, and for a period of three years, a committee including local and international scholars will gather information about the Sulaymaniyyah region from sources in Kurdish, Arabic and other languages, and write the encyclopaedia entries. The encyclopaedia will be published in Kurdish both in print and on-line through a Wiki version to ensure maximum dissemination.
In 2012, the National Day on 14th of July has gained further significance as a key milestone was achieved in the life of the Republic. UNESCO gathered with representatives of civil society organizations, media professionals, academics, government officials from the Ministry of Human Rights, and representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Parliament, to announce the creation of the Iraqi Federation of Human Rights Defenders.

This key achievement crowns years of hard work, and is the culmination of the tireless efforts of human rights activists and members of the Iraqi civil and academic societies to establish an official federation to monitor human rights, and to play the leading role through this crucial stage for the country.

Considered to be the first tangible step in the thousand mile trip, this Federation will help build an Iraqi society where human rights are respected, and contribute to the modernization of Iraq and the development of a tolerant and inclusive country. Implemented by UNESCO, UNOPS, and UNAMI and funded by the European Union through the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund, the project “Protection of media professionals, human rights defenders and members of the academic community in Iraq” proved to be another pioneering initiative that consolidates the core values and principles of the Republic. Through the last few years this project contributed significantly to the evolution of human rights thanks to its practical and theoretical approach.

UNESCO is keen to assist this newly formed Federation to perform its leading role in providing technical and moral support for human rights defenders, and inspire all Iraqis in making respect, protection, and practice of human rights collective priorities.

**Safety Training to Protect Journalists**

In response to the continuous risk faced by journalists, human rights defenders and academics working in Iraq, UNESCO Office in Iraq, under the project “Protection of media professionals, human rights defenders and members of the academic community in Iraq”, funded by the European Union through UNDG IFTF, conducted a series of security training seminars in collaboration with Hart Security Australia, UNOPS and UNAMI Human Rights Office, These training workshops held in Basra, Erbil and Baghdad from 24 April to 1 June 2012 brought together 240 academics, journalists and human rights defenders. Participants were taught how to cope with the daily risks encountered during the course of their work. Modules dealt with important topics including security, self-protection, risk management and trauma first-aid.

With the support of Hart Security, UNESCO developed a safety manual on basic knowledge and practical skills which were distributed along with first aid kits to participants throughout the training.

**Iraqi Bloggers Request UNESCO’s Support to Create Unions and CSOs**

UNESCO supports Iraqi bloggers as part of its strategy to foster the development of new media and citizen journalism and promote the best use of social media according to international standards of freedom of expression.

In February 2012, UNESCO participated in a follow-up conference for Iraqi bloggers in Sulaymaniyah.

The conference was dedicated to Iraqi and Arab bloggers as well as activists in the field of law and media. The recommendations of the conference were:

1. Building the capacity of bloggers through specialized trainings and workshops;
2. Raising bloggers’ legal awareness to protect their copyrights;
3. Granting Freedom of Expression to bloggers; and
4. Demanding UNESCO support in creating a Bloggers’ union and dedicated Civil Society Organizations.

**700 Journalists Trained on Electoral Coverage**

Because of its high sensitivity and importance, training on election coverage ranks high on UNESCO’s agenda. In September 2012 Iraq held regional Parliamentary Elections in Kurdistan, and successively started preparations for the 2013 national elections.

Upon embarking on the project “Training on Media Coverage during the Electoral Process”, UNESCO launched a set of activities aiming at building the capacities of 700 Iraqi journalists in addition to the staff of the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission, the authority mandated to regulate and develop the Communications and Media sectors in Iraq.

This extensive five-month training is a milestone on the road to a solid media sector as it strengthened the capacity of media professionals in the country. Additionally, these activities contributed to promoting democratic practices and civic consciousness among Iraqis.

**Cherishing Freedom of Expression through Prudent Legislation**

As part of its key role to support the Government of Iraq, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, and human rights activists in establishing a suitable environment to foster and protect freedom of expression, UNESCO is leading an advocacy and awareness campaign to help Iraqi legislators identifying flaws in the draft law on Freedom of Expression, before it is approved and adopted in the parliament.

After organizing a major conference entitled “Freedom of Expression is a Human Right” in December 2011 at the Iraqi Parliament, UNESCO held in collaboration with the Human Rights Office of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Iraqi parliamentary Human Rights Committee, more than 10 follow-up conferences were held throughout 2012 in different Iraqi provinces.

These conferences served to widen the discussions on the draft law on Freedom of Expression and to raise the awareness of those working in the media profession, as well as the Iraqi public at large, to the fact that Freedom of Expression is a fundamental human right. These regional meetings carried the theme of the main Baghdad event across Iraq; enlightening the Iraqi public of their rights as stipulated by the UN Human Rights Charter, where article 19 deals with freedom of expression and on how the pending legislation could restrict this right.

Furthermore the official launch of the UNESCO Journalism Curriculum was one of this year’s highlights in the Communication and Information sector. Launched on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day and commissioned by Dr. Ali al-Adeeb, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, this new curriculum is another academic pillar to achieve freedom of expression. Dr. Al-Adeeb praised the efforts and courage of Iraqi journalists and called for the Iraqi government and UNESCO to focus on “drafting the law of the right of access of information because it is the main pillar to support the press, media and freedom of expression”.

Members of the new Federation, KRG officials and UNESCO Iraq representatives during the official launching ceremony in Erbil.
As a leading agency in Science, UNESCO is conducting many initiatives to assist the government of Iraq in overcoming water shortage, which remains one of the country’s major challenges. Aggravated in recent years by drought and climatic variations, Iraq faces declining storage and irrigation capacities, while water scarcity has led to dryer, saltier and eroding soils, and as a consequence, the desertification of the arable lands which dramatically affect agricultural production. UNESCO in collaboration with UNDP has been contributing to the development of a long-term water management strategy that includes measures to account for and mitigate the risk of drought. The project is the first to be funded by the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Fund. In September 2012, UNESCO, the UN Assistant Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) held a technical workshop on drought. Discussions focused on enhancing the efficiency and relevance of future responses and resulted in a series of recommendations which included the development of a strategy and a work plan by the KRG to respond to drought and minimize its impacts in the Kurdistan region; the establishment of a qualified body to address drought and authorized to implement emergency procedures; developing an extensive database to support future planning and emergency responses; seeking Iraq’s membership to the International Drought Initiative (IDI) under UNESCO’s International Hydrological Programme; and raising public awareness on drought risks. Subsequently, in November, UNESCO organized a study tour for Iraqi experts to visit research centres, training institutions and governmental bodies specialized in drought monitoring and management in Kenya, one of the leading countries in this field. During the study tour the experts touched upon several drought related issues including climate risk management, forecast application and hydrological modelling and software mapping, as well as prediction and early warning systems.

22 March of every year marks the occasion of the World Water Day. Leading this year’s celebrations, UNESCO Iraq Office, in partnership with Iraqi civil society organizations, held for five days a series of seminars and lectures all over the country under the year’s theme: “Water and Food Security”. Lectures entitled “Gender Mainstreaming in Water Management”, focused on several topics directly related to vulnerable communities, such as the optimal and safe use of natural water resources; involving women in development and water management projects; raising public awareness through schools, media and community centres, and dedicated workshops; combating desertification through the use of wastewater. The audience was very interactive during the sessions and voiced their appreciation for the seminars as the relevance of the discussed topics. Participants laid out a set of recommendations, including:

1. Adopting laws and international agreements on water with neighbouring countries;
2. Strengthening cooperation with United Nations organizations and specialized international agencies;
3. Fostering the role of media in raising awareness and disseminating environmental education;
4. Applying wastewater treatment;
5. Promoting conferences on water and environment;
6. Developing inclusive strategies on climate change adaptation;
7. Using water meters and enforcing laws to curb fresh water abuse and to control water contamination.
As the UN is steadily increasing its presence in Iraq, UNESCO will also increase the number of staff based in Baghdad and Erbil and will consider the pursuable options for relocating to Iraq.

In 2013, UNESCO will continue to support the education system specifically assisting the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education in the implementation of the National Education Strategy, and the Education Sector Road Map. We will be launching the Education needs assessment report, tackling the literacy challenge, reviewing curricula, training teachers and resume the efforts in the rehabilitation of the Higher Education. UNESCO will continue the fight against youth unemployment through TVET, and we will contribute to the FAO led project to set a National Agricultural Policy and an Investment Strategy for Iraq, finalising the Labour Survey and the Investment Climate Survey. Also, with the support of the Office of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the Government of Iraq and UNESCO will start the implementation of "Educate a Child". This new initiative, tackling the regions with the highest numbers of out-of-school children, will increase school enrolment rates and the average of students who accomplish their primary education.

The initiative will reach more than 150,000 children in 8 governorates, contributing significantly to the achievement of the Education for All goals by 2015. Additionally, UNESCO with the cooperation of UNHCR will implement the "Educational Support Programme Targeting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugee Communities in KRG, Mosul and Kirkuk". Within this new project, UNESCO and UNHCR will address the most urgent literacy needs of 1.5 million refugees and IDPs, through targeted interventions.

In the field of culture, in cooperation with the relevant ministries in Baghdad and Erbil, UNESCO will work on strengthening local capacities on archaeological site’s preservation and management, and on promoting Iraq as a prominent touristic destination. We will continue our restoration efforts extending them to important sites such as the Bashtabia Citadel in Mosul, provide further assistance for the modernisation of the Sulaymaniyah Museum and the development of the Sulaymaniyah Encyclopaedia and widen our support under the Media and Culture programme to raise awareness on the importance of cultural heritage. Additionally, UNESCO will dedicate special efforts to make 2013 a milestone in the fight against looting and illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts.

Conscious of our leading role in the promotion and protection of freedom of expression and the right to information, we will work on the capacities of journalists, media institutions, and bloggers and on strengthening the recently established Human Rights Defenders’ Federation.

Within its science programme, UNESCO will launch the second phase of the Hydrological Survey and proceed with the implementation of the Drought Risk Management project, while work will continue to finalize a national strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.

All of these important activities are made possible thanks to the support of our committed partners including the Prime Minister’s Office, line ministries in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government – in particular the Ministries of Culture and Antiquities, Science and Technology, and sister UN Agencies. UNESCO Iraq is grateful for all the important contributions received from its donors, including the European Union, the Office of Her Highness Sheikha Moza, the Governments of Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, USA, the Czech Republic, and the Governorates of Erbil, Mosul and Sulaymaniyah.

We enter 2013 aware of the hard work ahead of us, but also conscious of our ability. Things are changing in Iraq and we need to adjust our assistance to this evolution, responding to new needs and emerging priorities. With our professionalism and strong commitment we are confident we will achieve striving results.