

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

FIRST IRAQI CULTURAL FORUM

UNESCO, 26-27 MAY 2004

APPEAL

We, the participants in the First Iraqi Cultural Forum, meeting in Paris on 26 and 27 May 2004 under the auspices of UNESCO,

Recognizing the importance of Iraq's contribution to world civilization over many thousands of years,

Considering the central role of Iraq, enriched by its openness to the world's cultures, in the vitality of Arab-Muslim culture,

Aware of the urgent need to reconstruct a free and sovereign Iraqi State, based, in particular, on the principles of global and sustainable human development and the flourishing of the capacities of individuals,

Acknowledging the plural ethnic and religious identity of Iraq,

Convinced of the need to observe the religious, linguistic and cultural rights guaranteed by the Constitution, so as to respect the distinctiveness of the different communities,

Noting the manifold and severe consequences of long years of authoritarian rule which have imbued institutions with a culture of censorship and alienation,

Reaffirming the undeniable role of culture in consolidating unity, civil peace and progress,

Concerned by the urgent need to lay the foundations of a cultural policy as a national project,

Are convinced that culture is a right and agree:

On the need to establish a system that preserves the rights of all elements of the Iraqi people, that reflects their opinions and aspirations, while reconciling the principles of national unity and cultural pluralism;

That dialogue and tolerance are key tools for the democratic process, in seeking to reconstruct Iraqi society;

On the need to preserve and take further achievements relating to teaching, education, women's rights and cultural infrastructure;

That the participation of women in public debate contributes to the construction of a society respectful of human rights;

That the Iraqi diaspora can contribute to the formulation of a cultural policy, and that efforts must be made to integrate Iraqi exiles;

That culture must be managed by means of a balance – yet to be reached – that is distanced from an authoritarian vision or a purely market-based approach. The State must play the role of impartial facilitator so as to lay the foundations of a democratic culture;

Further agree:

On the need to make substantial efforts to build bridges, using joint cultural institutions, by encouraging long-denied freedom of expression;

To preserve the achievements of information and communication liberalization so that they may enrich Iraqi culture by exchange and openness.

To that end, we **resolve** to make every effort to:

1. Preserve the cultural heritage of Iraq, its architectural, tangible and intangible heritage, and the contemporary cultural creations of the various sections of Iraqi society;
2. Respect and encourage the flourishing of all Iraq's languages and cultures through education, by making the most of literary products and by means of exchanges, in particular in the form of reciprocal translations;
3. Promote the creation of a new "public domain" by re-establishing trade unions and professional cultural associations that represent all sensibilities, reflect Iraqi plurality and create centres of excellence in every sector, with democratically elected leaders;
4. Engage in a far-reaching restructuring and reshaping of central and regional cultural institutions, reviewing the definition of their fields of competence, principally on the basis of the definition of the new functions of the Ministry of Culture and the institutions under its responsibility;
5. Create a multi-faceted system of assistance for creation, through joint bodies and structures, encourage sponsorship, international donations and foundations to provide support for artistic creativity, covering the various stages of intellectual production and distribution, by means of a regulatory system and a policy of openness;
6. Establish an emergency fund for culture under the Ministry of Culture, financed and jointly managed by the Ministry and by donors; allocate a sizeable budget to culture for the next ten years;
7. Call on international organizations, and in particular UNESCO, to provide support to the Iraqi State for institutions, training, dialogue and exchange, and also in the legal domain, in particular with regard to the implementation of international conventions and protection of intellectual property.

We recommend the following priority actions to the Competent Authorities:

A. Respecting cultural diversity

- Ensure that the Constitution enshrines the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of all elements of the Iraqi people, as well as freedom of expression and academic freedom;
- Preserve women's right to education, work and security and ensure that they participate in the various regional and central bodies, and in local authorities and voluntary organizations;

- Revise school curricula and develop pre-school education in the mother tongue;
- Encourage the teaching of foreign languages, which is indispensable for access to scientific knowledge, and encourage the translation of scientific and intellectual works from all over the world;
- Pave the way for the rewriting of ancient and contemporary history;
- Develop teaching and awareness of all forms of artistic expression in their diversity by cultivating a spirit of openness to other cultures, from early childhood;
- Rely on the use of new communication technology and develop training for use of the media;
- Promote knowledge of local cultural and craft traditions through the development of integrated tourism programmes, in particular through the organization of cultural festivals and travelling events;
- Establish a national Committee of Reflection to design a new common curriculum for the teaching of the values of cultural diversity in higher education;

B. Promoting creation and the participation of all in cultural life

- Develop the social status of creative artists and performers and encourage their professional associations, with the establishment of societies of authors to manage royalties;
- Promote the visual arts and literary creation; publishing, translation, production and reading; film and audiovisual production, the music industry and craftwork, as vectors of Iraqi culture and its democratization, and as sources of employment and wealth;
- Ensure the free flow of ideas by word and image, in particular by providing public access to major works created by Iraqis of the diaspora;
- Promote the training of professionals in Iraqi cultural industries;
- Restructure the audiovisual sector, in particular through the renewal of national television and the production of cultural programmes designed to educate and raise awareness about national cultural diversity, and encourage the establishment of local television stations in several languages so that they may become forums for the expression and flourishing of all forms of creativity;
- Adopt the principle of decentralizing cultural activities in a spirit of national cohesion;
- Promote wide public access to information by strengthening and renewing the network of built and mobile public libraries;
- Create institutes to conduct scholarly analysis and research on all forms of written and oral artistic expression;
- Make every effort to secure the physical and moral integrity of Iraqi intellectuals, who are exposed to threats, intimidation and even assassination;

- Create a body for the diaspora, under the Ministry of Culture, whose purpose would be to list intellectuals and artists and all of their creations or works;

C. Safeguarding the heritage

- Undertake the safeguarding of archaeological and historical sites, whether of symbolic significance for all humanity or the birthplace of different communities, by engaging, in particular, in international cooperation for emergency projects;
- Draw up an inventory of the architectural and urban heritage, reviving a modern and innovative architectural tradition. The inventory should lead to a debate on the fate of monuments constructed in cities by the former regime;
- Define responsibilities concerning crimes against cultural heritage and property, on the basis of appropriate legislation;
- Recover, classify and analyse the archives and traces of the dictatorship as a work of collective memory;
- Inform the public, especially young people, of the values of the heritage with a view to its assimilation as a common good, by means of a series of promotional activities;
- Encourage the implementation of the recommendations of the first plenary session of the International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of Iraqi Cultural Heritage, annexed hereto.

The potential and creativity of Iraqi intellectuals have resisted all the vicissitudes of history but, today, the best intentions and international assistance would be of no avail for the future of Iraq and the Middle East without the direct involvement and mobilization of all of Iraq's men and women of culture.

Done at Paris, 27 May 2004