

Human Rights Council
20th Session
18 June – 6 July 2012

Agenda item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.

Joint statement by:
The Union of Arab Jurists
The International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
(EAFORD)
International Educational Development, Inc.
The General Arab Women Federation

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

Mme President,

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur on Education for his report and reiterate our commitment to support his work.

According to the report, there is widespread concern with quality education and poor learning achievement. The Middle East and North Africa region is regarded as one of the most important and urgent challenges for the future.

In this regard we would like to bring to the attention of the Special Rapporteur the enormous deterioration in the education system in Iraq. Iraq's education system, once vaunted as the most advanced in the region, has suffered a patterned process of degradation and dismantling especially after the US-UK invasion and occupation of 2003.

According to UNESCO, Iraq is unlikely to achieve the education-for-all Millennium Development Goals by 2015.¹ Moreover, according to the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4 (MICS4) conducted by the Iraqi authorities with UNICEF, and among other findings, the primary school completion rate remains below what is necessary for the majority of children in Iraq to complete an effective basic education.²

A survey produced by the current authorities and UNESCO in September 2010 reported that at least 5 million of Iraq's almost 30 million people are illiterate. According to the same data, adult illiteracy in Iraq is now amongst the highest in the whole Arab region. Among these 5 million illiterate people, 14 percent – some 700'000 – are school-age children. In rural areas, almost 30% of the population is unable to read or write, while significant gender disparities also exist, with 40% of Iraqi women being illiterate.³ It represents a huge step back when compared with the achievement of the 80s, during which illiteracy had virtually been eradicated.

Your report stresses the fact that right-based, child-friendly schools require a healthy, hygienic and safe learning environment. Under the occupation, according to a report by the United Nations University International Leadership Institute in Jordan, some 84% of Iraq's institutions of higher education have been burned, looted, or destroyed. Between March 2003 and October 2008, 31,598 violent attacks against educational institutions were reported in Iraq, according to official data from

¹ MIDDLE EAST: Violence hits education, 3 March 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/92091/MIDDLE-EAST-Violence-hits-education>

² Initial findings of major survey on children and women in Iraq completed, 21 May 2012, <http://reliefweb.int/node/499753>

³ MIDDLE EAST: Violence hits education, *op.cit.*

the Ministry of Education.⁴ That poses a direct and critical threat to the whole education environment and system.

Iraq's universities are now among the worst in the world, Asia and even the Arab region according to the Ranking Web of World Universities which is published twice a year (January and July), covering more than 20,000 Higher Education Institutions worldwide. On the Arab level only 3 Iraqi universities are in the top 100 of Arab universities in the ranking of January 2011. On the global level only 8 Iraqi universities figure in the top 12.000. The showpiece of Iraq, Baghdad University, doesn't even figure in the top 12.000, while it was one of the best universities in the region during the 70s and 80s.

Unfortunately, the current authorities have done little to remedy this situation. Indeed, credible information and sources indicate that millions of dollars in international aid to build and repair Iraq's dilapidated schools have disappeared due to chaos and corruption. Rampant corruption on a massive scale at all levels is a well-known phenomenon in Iraq since the invasion and occupation of 2003. As a result, the future of Iraq's children is undermined and hampered by the lack of perspective to receive a quality-education.

Mr Special Rapporteur,

The normative framework for the teaching profession needs to ensure good working conditions for teachers and must be complemented by a greater protection by the State. On March 2011, an International Seminar on the Situation of Iraqi Academics has been held and hosted by the Ghent University in Belgium, with the support of the MENA Research Group and the Brussels Tribunal among other organisations. Iraqi academics took leading role in the proceedings of the conference. The aim of this seminar was to provide an up-to-date account of challenges facing the Iraqi academy and Iraqi education in general; to highlight and expand international efforts in support of Iraqi academics; and to generate ideas and practical responses that address key issues in the field of Iraqi academy, culture, and general education.⁵

Among other worrying trends, it was shown that more than 500 professionals from the education sector have been murdered in Iraq since 2003, in a well-organized way. We urge the Special Rapporteur to tackle this issue in his future reports

In this conference, Mr. Hans Christof von Sponeck, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, and former United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq said "Iraq's former pride, its education system, has collapsed. The international seminar in Ghent was a significant first step in determining whether the extrajudicial killings, abductions, forced displacement of Iraqi academics and other professionals, the destruction of the educational infrastructure, during the war and subsequent occupation, are indeed a case of pre-meditated elimination of Iraq's intellectual elite and education system, and could constitute "Eduicide". This word has yet to enter the international dictionary of crimes; it is a composite of education and genocide to refer to genocide of the educated segments of Iraqi society. It can only be hoped that both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court will pursue the question of possible educide in Iraq."⁶

We suggest that the Special Rapporteur take the above mentioned issues in consideration in his future work in order to report to the fullest extent to this Council the real catastrophic situation of the education sector in Iraq as a result of the invasion and subsequent occupation and to be able to take further action given the urgency of the current situation.

Thank you.

⁴ Education Under Attack : 2010-Iraq, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7aa9df5.html>

⁵ INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE SITUATION OF IRAQI ACADEMICS: Defending education in times of war and occupation, March 2011, Ghent University, Belgium, <http://www.educideiraq.org/BYONDEDUCIDE/index.asp?ID=200>

⁶ Also quoted in *Beyond Eduicide, Sanctions, Occupation and the Struggle for Higher Education in Iraq, Recommendations of the International Seminar on the Situation of Iraqi Academics*, Ghent, Academia Press, 2012, p.3