

URGENT SITUATION OF MINORITIES IN IRAQ

We will consider how the UN Declaration on Minority Rights can help Iraqi respond to challenges and achieve progress to protect the rights of minorities in practice including : -

- ✓ Protection for own-language education for children of all minorities on an equal basis
- ✓ How to reduce tensions and maximise the potential of public education as a tool to foster diversity.
- ✓ Addressing governance deficits, removing structural discrimination and cultures of impunity embedded in Iraqi institutions.
- ✓ Ensuring equal access to social provision across Iraq including in primary healthcare, housing, food, water,



FRIDAY 2ND DECEMBER

**PALAIS DES NATIONS
ROOM XV**

18:00 - 19:00

Side Event : Geneva International Centre for Justice and International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)

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SPEAKERS:

Ms. Lina Idwer HANNA

Al-Tahreer Association for Development
Mosul-Iraq

Mr. Essam Abdulazeez Hassn AL-ABASEY

Sustainable Peace Foundation
Mosul-Iraq

MODERATOR

Dr. Martin Browne

Geneva International Centre for Justice

The UN Forum on Minority Issues

2 December 2022

International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) and Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Side Event: Urgent Situation of Minorities - Focus on Iraq

Over the last tumultuous 30 years in Iraq, the rights of minorities have never been the dominant focus, as different factions fight over power and take retribution for perceived historic injustices. We will draw lessons from these missed opportunities to truly protect minority rights by mainstreaming implementation of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights (UNDM) in Iraq to share understanding of how minorities can be better protected in the face of destabilizing pressures.

We will bring together academics, NGOs from the country, and affected persons to review the role of the normative framework in protecting the rights of minorities in Iraq over the last 30 years, and to rethink and reform how states and civil society best engage with issues affecting minorities, to realize the benefits of the UNDM in practice.

Geneva International Centre for Justice presents this Side-Event along with the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD).

Speakers invited:

- 1. Lina Edwar HANNA - Al-Tahreer Association for Development/ Iraq
- 2. Essam Abdulazeez Hassan ALABASEY - Sustainable Peace Foundation

Moderator: Dr. Martin Browne (Geneva International Centre for Justice)

Topic under consideration

Sectarianism has been prevalent in Iraq throughout the last two decades. That position unfortunately remains the case today with battles for control of national and sub-national power structures contested between different religious groups, which stymies efforts to ensure equal participation of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other minorities in governance structures and undermines protection of minority rights in practice.

A core focus of our event will be: How can countries like Iraq rely on the UNDM to respond to current challenges and identify a way to achieve wider, tangible progress to protect the rights of minorities in practice?

Ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other minorities have been exposed to a sequence of displacements, targeted attacks, and ethnic cleansing by different state actors, militia, and terrorist groups such as ISIS, particularly since the 2003 U.S. invasion. This has led to waves of migration by minorities internally and overseas. Ongoing hostilities have fundamentally undermined the system that previously ensured equal provision of services. The promise of a 'liquid' democracy that was meant to accompany the 2003 intervention has proved illusory for Iraqi communities and destructive for methods of protecting the rights of minorities in practice. Unfortunately, as some political elites have benefitted from sectarianism it has also been in their interest to ignore the role of international norms such as the UNDM, a situation requiring review.

We want to rethink how the implementation of the UNDM through human rights bodies can help achieve the following achievable objectives:

1. Protection for own-language education for children of all minorities on an equal basis throughout the country in accordance with the UNDM and as is currently recognized in Article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution, yet missing in practice.

2. How to reduce tensions and misunderstandings, maximizing the potential of public education as a tool to foster diversity to build a more sustainable participatory society.
3. Addressing governance deficits, removing structural discrimination and cultures of impunity embedded in Iraqi institutions.
4. Ensuring equal access to social provisions across Iraq especially in regions outside the capital as the country rebuilds post-U.S. invasion and post-ISIS including in providing primary healthcare, housing, food, water, education at all levels from school buildings to modern inclusive curriculum and particularized language provision.
5. Ensuring access to gender-specific services, mental and physical healthcare following the U.S. and ISIS invasion and attacks by other armed groups.

One crucial step towards reform must be an open structured process of cross-community negotiations with all minority groups that is free from destabilizing outside influences. This way the interests that benefit all Iraqi people can underpin a new democratic society.

Second, we need to guarantee actual dissemination of the UNDM to all levels of regional and local governments and throughout public bodies in order to make sure the content of the rights of minorities is fully understood by those taking decisions that directly affect minority populations. Finally, wholesale reform of institutions may be difficult, but instilling human rights at the heart of public bodies' policies, decision-making processes, and practices is achievable. This is particularly important where public bodies interact with human rights defenders and civil society organizations who should be encouraged in their efforts to engage with UN mechanisms.

Through exploration of the above issues, this Side Event will draw conclusions based on lessons that are instructive for the wider region, particularly considering the specific context where many affected minority migrant populations are also resident in neighboring countries.

