2011: a year in review

Dear friends, colleagues, partners,

On behalf of UNESCO Iraq office, I would like to wish you a happy new year, hoping that 2012 will hold new hopes and peace for the people of Iraq. As the government is facing new challenges of restoring stability and starting a new brighter phase for this people, UNESCO reconfirms its full engagement to join these efforts, and initiate its own endeavors to help achieve the desired goals in the fields of education, culture, science, freedom of expression and human rights.

Of the many accomplishments last year, one should recall the increasing political stability in the country, allowing greater efforts, initiatives, projects, and eventually, growth.

Nevertheless, 2011 also witnessed tragic events revealing serious gaps that threaten the decent life of Iraqi citizens. Human rights activists, journalists, and politicians remain a target for terrorism.

On the other hand, UNESCO handed over the restoration of the Al Askari shrine in Samarra to the government of Iraq. This project gave the best example for Iraq and the world on how to incorporate the concept of Culture for Peace.

In terms of education, the launching of the Education TV improved significantly access to education. Literacy was also a major pillar for 2011 with the adoption of the new Literacy law supported by UNESCO by the Iraqi parliament.

In Science, UNESCO Iraq completed in 2011 the Karez project, ensuring access to water in northern rural areas of Iraq, and helping around 800 families to avoid displacement due to drought. Through launching the phase I of the Hydrological survey, UNESCO also helped the Iraqi authorities and specialists to formulate comprehensive responses and solutions for the actual drought.

And as the only organization with the mandate to promote the right for information and freedom of expression, UNESCO endeavors in this field were very successful. Supporting the formation of the bloggers union, raising awareness, updating related curricula and upgrading journalists’ skills were major headlines in 2011.

Finally, knowing that all of this could not be possible without efficient partnerships and mutual trust, we would like to thank all our partners and donors for another year of exceptional backup and continuous support to UNESCO.

We share with you in this issue a number of our office’ memorable highlights, while we welcome together another year of special challenges and promising opportunities.
Culture at UNESCO Iraq

As the only UN agency with a mandate for culture, UNESCO has been keen on preserving and showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Iraq. The Office’s culture projects concentrate on safeguarding heritage and rehabilitating institutions. UNESCO also provides the Iraqi Government with technical expertise to fight against the looting of artifacts, protect intangible heritage, promote tourism and prepare Iraqi sites for nomination to the World Heritage List.

Conserving and Preserving Iraqi Heritage

In April 2011, the International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC) held its fifth plenary session in Iraq for the first time since the Committee’s creation in 2003. Opened by a speech from the First Lady of Iraq H.E. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, the meeting marked an important transition to full Iraqi ownership of this deliberative body.

This major event was attended by high level officials in the heritage and tourism fields, local and international experts from various related disciplines, in addition to UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture Francesco Bandarin and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) Christine McNab.

The meeting identified a set of key recommendations that included:

- Cooperation with international experts on the preparation of the Management Master Plan for the Marshlands with a view to preparing a World Heritage nomination file for the Marshlands as a mixed natural and cultural site;
- Expanding the Erbil Citadel maintenance Master Plan into a comprehensive management plan within the Citadel’s larger urban context;
- Developing a Master Plan for the Babylon Museum, to be located in the former presidential palace, which would be based on the holistic approach taken in the design of the Basra and Sulaymaniyah Museum projects.

Iraqi Maqam: Saving the intangible

Widely recognized as Iraq’s predominant classical music tradition, the Maqam encompasses a vast repertory of songs, accompanied by traditional instruments.

As a technique of improvisation that is unique to Arabic music, the maqam is a set of notes with traditions that define relationships between them, habitual patterns, and their melodic development.

Iraqi maqam was inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008. UNESCO has also worked with the Iraqi Maqam association to produce CDs of famous maqam performances. The CDs will be widely distributed to keep this ancient art form alive, and introduce it to younger generations of Iraqis.

Sulaymaniyah Museum: the Exemplary Modernization

2011 was a key year for the museum as it witnessed a substantial qualitative transformation in terms of management and organization, and the introduction of pioneering practices that are the first of their kind in Iraq.

In partnership with the Department of Antiquities in the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the generous funding of the Iraq Trust Fund and the governorate of Sulaymaniyah, the museum's management is in the process of opening the education department, which will add the essential educational component to the museum.

This big step will be complemented with the guidance of UNESCO Iraq by the preparation of programmes targeting students, and emphasizing the educational role of the museum, giving it a unique identity that is intended to go beyond museology. Furthermore, the museum's Collection inventory was also finalized in 2011.

After completing these two essential components, UNESCO Iraq will be completing this project with innovative steps scheduled to be finalized in 2012, and that will make the Sulaymaniyah museum an ideal museological prototype to follow.
Rising above the surrounding city and settling in its heart, the Erbil Citadel is considered as one of the longest continuously inhabited sites in the world. The present fabric of the Citadel holds great symbolic significance for the people of Kurdistan, and has been on the tentative World Heritage list since January 2010.

Within a two-phase project funded by the Kurdistan Regional Government and implemented in partnership with the High Commission for the Erbil Citadel Revitalization (HCECR), 2011 witnessed the conclusion of Phase I with the establishment of the Conservation and Rehabilitation Master Plan.

Additionally, UNESCO completed the “Urban Design Guidelines for the Buffer Zone of the Erbil Citadel” and its endorsement by the Governorate of Erbil, the Erbil Municipality Council and the other relevant stakeholders. The site will be undergoing major works in 2012 and will hopefully be one of Iraq most recognized touristic and cultural landmarks.

The Organization’s commitment to work with the Government of Iraq to protect and restore the historical, spiritual and cultural heritage of the Askari Shrine is a “cornerstone of the rebuilding of the country and a decisive step on the road towards national reconciliation”. 

Former Director-General of UNESCO

Of all UNESCO Iraq projects in the field of Culture, The restoration of Al Askari Shrine is considered to be the most significant and by far the most sensitive.

As the double bombing of this holy Shi’a site in 2006 - 2007 was seen by many to be the initial spark that drove Iraq to the edge of a Civil war, its restoration is considered a major contribution towards restoring peace and national reconciliation.

With the generous support of the European Union and the Iraqi government, UNESCO Iraq and UNDP answered the calls of the people of Samarra to intervene and lead the restoration process.

As the works began, UNESCO cleaned the site and performed all emergency interventions to secure the site, and protect the endangered buildings within it to prevent further destruction.

UNESCO presented in 2011 all the drawings necessary for this sophisticated restoration. It also transferred the essential knowledge tools to Iraqi professionals, allowing the national and local authorities to actually finalize the reconstruction phase.

During the phase I of the project, more than 600 employment opportunities were created, and with the gradual return of pilgrims, Samarra recovered its economic status.

Furthermore, on February 2009, UNESCO sponsored a visit of 500 intellectuals and religious leaders from Karbala, Najaf and Kazemyah – the most important Shi'a cities in Iraq - to Samarra, initiating the first steps towards true reconciliation in Iraq.

"National reconciliation started here when the people asked for help in rebuilding the Askari Shrine. What we have achieved here should be a clear example to other provinces in Iraq."

Mahmood Khalef Ahmad, Samarra’s Sunni mayor
Assess, plan, operate... Educate

Education at UNESCO Iraq

Since 2004, UNESCO Iraq Office has been working on rehabilitating the Education Sector in Iraq after the damage caused by the previous wars and the imposed economic sanctions.

The office aims, through all its initiatives and programmes, to provide technical assistance to the Iraqi government in order to enhance the sector by rehabilitating the educational institutions, building the human, institutional and administrative capacities at all levels, fighting illiteracy, and formulating plans and policies for better planning for the future of Education in Iraq.

Planning the future, leading the reform

In line with the Iraqi government's initiatives to support education on the medium and long term, UNESCO in partnership with UNICEF and The World Bank, and with the generous support of the European Union, presented in September 2011 the final draft of the "National Education Strategy for Iraq". This important document expected to be adopted by the Iraqi government after the national consultation in 2012 presents a comprehensive vision to upgrade the educational system in Iraq in the coming 8 years.

On the other hand, UN organizations (including UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UN-Habitat) launched the "Iraq Public Modernization Programme" (IPSM) funded by the Iraqi Trust Fund, UNDG, European Union,

As a co-leader of the education sector reform programme, UNESCO and UNICEF assisted the Iraqi authorities to conduct a functional review and establish a road map for reform to be implemented starting April 2012, and completed during the next 3 years.

Assessing needs for accurate responses

Throughout 2011 the team of experts lead by UNESCO and UNICEF succeeded in covering all different education levels in all of Iraqi governorates, making a considerable progress in the “Completion of a Comprehensive Assessment of Education Sector for Iraq”, a project launched in May 2010 and funded by the government of Germany.

To be published in April 2012, the project already provided relevant stakeholders with the essential skills to undertake in-depth education assessments, surveys, and future analysis. Its outcomes, however, will offer the indispensable information for education planners and decision makers.

Upgrading tools... Overcoming distance

In a big country heavily centralized, distance and lack of educational institutions, in addition to security reasons, prevent a large portion of the young population from getting access to primary education.

The Education TV launched by UNESCO and Ministry of Education in March 2011, overcame these challenges and became a real learning platform with 624 programs covering all subjects of grades 6, 9, and 12, and 25 animated TV clips promoting peace, human rights, gender equality, and noble values.

Funded by the European Union, the project was also complemented by a curriculum-focused website offering electronic copies of textbooks, TV lessons, interactive lessons, games, and other Ministry of Education resources for its students.

Thanks to these interventions, Internally Displaced persons (IDPs), girls that were prevented from going to school, and Iraqi children in general had the chance to acquire a complete primary education.

Technical and Vocational Education: For the young economy

In partnership with UN-Habitat and ILO, and with the funding of the German government, UNESCO finalized in 2011 the Technical and Vocational Education and Training project (TVET) benefiting over 11,000 men and 3000 women in addition to 40,000 people from employment generation.

Under this project, UNESCO provided new equipments to different institutions, designed apprenticeship training programmes and implemented it in vocational schools all over Iraq.

2011 also witnessed the closure of the Local Area Development Programme. This joint UN agencies initiative funded by the EU through the ITF, focused on improving social and physical infrastructure of 3 designated areas (north, centre, and south), and stimulating local economic development and employment generation. UNESCO trained 100 teachers and senior schools staff, and provided equipments to educational institutions, enhancing the employment skills of 1500 local residents.
Assess, plan, operate... Educate

Educating the Spirit of the Citizen

Funded by the EU, the project of Promoting Civic Values and Life Skills Among Adolescents through Education in Iraq was launched in 2010 by UNESCO, UNFPA and ESCWA in partnership with the Ministry of Education.

Targeting mainly adolescents between 12 and 19 years old, 2011 witnessed the development of Core Modules have been developed in Arabic, Kurdish and English focusing on Citizenship, Political Literacy and Engagement, Peacebuilding, Employment and Employability and Sustainable Development. As 2012 unfolds, these Modules will be complemented by a range of teaching and learning materials including Trainer’s Handbooks and Activity Toolkits for education practitioners and youth peer-to-peer trainers.

UNESCO will conduct a pilot of the materials in Baghdad, Erbil, Salah Ed-Din and Dhi-Qar, training more than 500 education practitioners, 300 young people and 60 NGO workers.

Literacy: the LIFE project

Funded by the Office of Her Highness the Emir of Qatar Consort Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) project was another milestone in 2011.

UNESCO Iraq office, Ministers and decision makers, NGOs and civil society organizations achieved a major breakthrough in the battle for literacy when in September 2011 the Iraqi parliament amended the new literacy law. UNESCO had advocated the new vote, and provided technical assistance to the Iraqi parliament and Ministry of Education in the formulation of the new law.

In the same framework, UNESCO has also established a National Literacy Coordination Network with various NGOs, launched the LIFE website, and complemented it with an e-Forum for 260 active partner NGOs allowing coordinated interventions and experience sharing.

This network expanded the space of intervention and its extent, as awareness and advocacy campaigns reached over 30,000 vulnerable youth and illiterates all over Iraq. Furthermore, UNESCO has assisted the Ministry of Education in developing literacy textbooks that were distributed to almost 40,000 students nation-wide, in addition to a Teachers’ Literacy Guidebook, and a special training for 12 technical staff in the Ministry on literacy curricula development.

In order to support local literacy initiatives and civil society participation, UNESCO also launched in June 2011 the NGO Grant Program for the establishment of 100 Community Learning Centers in partnership with national NGOs and Ministry of Education targeting 7000 illiterates.

Finally, this project will contribute substantially to achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of accomplishing a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015.

Soaring year In Higher Education

2011 witnessed a major qualitative boost in terms of higher education. The Higher Education project, supported by the Office of Her Highness the Emir of Qatar Consort Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, championed Higher Education Quality Assurance (QA) through a series of workshops and trainings dedicated to Iraqi professionals.

To further support the process, and disseminate QA ideas into the Iraqi system, a quality assurance website and e-forum were developed to facilitate the dynamic dialogue raised between the 12 pilot universities. The project has also focused heavily this year on enhancing research function, leading to the successful development of a National Roadmap for Science, Technology and Innovation.

Substantial progress was made this year in the development of the Avicenna Virtual Campus in Iraq. Five e-learning centers have been developed, and the equipping process is now underway (Bagdad, Basra, Salahaddin, Kufa and Al-Anbar), with a planned official launch during the first half of 2012.

Reason for not attending school (Women)

Source: IAU - September 2010
In partnership with the Government of Iraq, UNESCO launched in 2011 a project to develop a Master Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation in Iraq. Funded by the Government of Japan and the Iraqi Ministry of Science and Technology, this 2 year project aims to assist the government of Iraq to develop a medium term, needs-and-results-based plan that will serve to guide government, business, and public organizations' efforts towards intensive and comprehensive development of science, technology and innovation in Iraq.

UNESCO Iraq, in close cooperation with the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) organized a national conference to call for a new national vision for development in the Marshlands of Southern Iraq. Held in June 2011 in the city of Basrah, and gathering stakeholders from the government, academia, private sector and civil society, the Conference' outputs, summarized in what was known as the Basrah Declaration, defined a set of principles for the environmental, economic and cultural development of the area, and mark the first step towards a more prosperous, ecologically preserved Marshlands area.

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In 2011, UNESCO Iraq with the collaboration of IOM completed a project to repair twenty karez (traditional water aqueducts) that had fallen into disrepair. Through 4 years, and with a generous funding from the European Union, UNESCO and IOM employed its unique expertise to rehabilitate these 2000 year old canals and restore life to deserted villages. As water flowed back in the canals, 800 families have avoided displacement and benefitted from better agriculture, opportunities for employment, and access to water for household use. This project also aimed to develop national capacities in physical rehabilitation and maintenance of Karez. A "Restoration Manual" was developed after this project. The first operational manual or handbook of its kind provides karez practitioners and project managers of the steps needed to restore and sustain karez in Iraq, the region, and other similar systems all over the world. 2015 forecast for water Requirements (Billion m³)

- Agriculture: 49.5%
- Marshland maintenance: 11%
- Evaporation and other losses: 3.72%
- Civil use: 2.77%
- Industry: 0.4%
- power generation: 0.4%

Total requirements: 66, 85 billion cubic meters
For Human rights, Freedom of expression, and Iraq

Communication and Information at UNESCO Iraq

The UNESCO Office for Iraq has launched a series of projects based on a strategy focusing on the importance of good governance and constitution building, evolving democratic processes, and national reconciliation. A key focus has been granted to improving the flow of information during elections, both through professional elections reporting and through coordination between electoral and media institutions. As always, UNESCO has focused on promoting human rights awareness through these projects and emphasizing the importance of the safety of journalists, academics and human rights activists. UNESCO is the only United Nations agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom.

Empowered Journalists for a safe future

Within efforts to build the right foundations of the journalism sector in 2011, the ministries of education and higher education in Baghdad and Erbil adopted a new curriculum model developed with UNESCO’s expertise through a special project funded by the Spanish government through the ITF, and focusing on the major components of skills, knowledge, and political sensitivity.

The new modernized curricula will contribute significantly in boosting the careers of Iraqi reporters, and in the global surge of the country.

Protect the voice of tomorrow

UNESCO’s role is not restricted to reactions, nor condemnation of attacks against journalists and human rights activists. Through its proficient network partners including UN agencies, NGOs, civil society, experts and government officials, the organization has launched coordinated projects and programmes aiming to address the different aspects of this alarming emergency.

With two major breakthroughs, 2011 was definitely a turning year for Iraqi journalists, human rights activists, and UNESCO Iraq.

Last September, a number of human rights activists gathered in Erbil in a special conference organized by UNESCO, UNAMI HRO, and UNOPS, to take the first real steps towards creating a Federation of human rights activists.

The second major event of the year consists in the successful contribution to the amendment of the recently passed Journalist Protection Law to be in line with international standards.

UNESCO Iraq organized in December 2011 a conference at the Iraqi parliament headquarters in Baghdad. Entitled “Freedom of expression is a human right”, the event was jointly organized with the Iraqi parliamentary Human Rights Committee.

More than 150 delegates attended the event. They included Iraqi media and human rights professionals, members of parliament, representatives of civil society organizations, Iraq-based NGOs and foreign missions in Baghdad.

Journalists murdered in 2011*

- Hadi al-Mahdi, freelance
  September 8, in Baghdad, Iraq
- Alwan al-Ghorabi, Afaq
  June 21, in Diwaniyya, Iraq
- Sabah al-Bazi, Al-Arabiya
  March 29, in Tikrit, Iraq
- Muammar Khadir Abdelwahad, Al-Ayn
  March 29, in Tikrit, Iraq
- Mohamed al-Hamdani, Al-Itijah
  February 24, in Ramadi, Iraq

Source: Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
* motive confirmed

Blogging for change

For the special occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2011, UNESCO responded to the wish of a group of Iraqi bloggers who decided to form an Iraqi Bloggers Union. Among this group, 30 bloggers and journalist from all Iraqi provinces were trained in digital media skills -including photography and video- and digital media integration from device to online publication. This young squad also pledged to work as Iraqi journalists to develop democracy and enhance a culture of human rights.

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© El Guernica – Pablo Picasso 1937

© Dhea Al Sarai

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Bloggers holding a sign denouncing violence and calling for peace © Dhea Al Sarai in Erbil – UNESCO Iraq 2011
DID YOU

Know?

Iraq, the Cradle of the Calendar

The calendar used in the world today has its roots in Mesopotamia. The Babylonian calendar was a lunisolar calendar with years consisting of 12 lunar months, each of 29-30 days, and beginning when a new crescent moon was first sighted low on the western horizon at sunset. The calendar dates back to the times of the third Dynasty of Ur (21st to 20th century BC).

Many of the same names for its months, such as Nisan, Iyyar, Tammuz, Ab, Elul, Tishri, and Adar, were later adapted to the Syrian calendar used in the Levant countries.

2012: Expanding, reaching, evolving

In 2012, UNESCO Iraq will presume its activities in Education, Culture, Science, and Media and communications, and launch other innovative initiatives that will reach a wider Iraqi audience.

In Culture: In addition to the Erbil Citadel revitalization and the Sulaymaniyah Museum full restoration, tourism will be an important milestone for UNESCO Iraq: A new National Tourism Strategy will be elaborated in cooperation with the Iraqi government, and UNESCO will participate actively with Najaf authorities to make the city a memorable experience for its visitors after it was selected to be the Islamic Capital for 2012. An electronic encyclopaedia dedicated mainly to the Kurdish speakers is also expected to be launched, and an interactive game to raise awareness on illicit trafficking among Iraqi teenagers is also underway.

In Education: 2012 will be the year of Quality Education with the launch of a programme that focuses on building statistical capacities, planning and policy formulating. In the same qualitative context, UNESCO will also focus on curriculum development through the establishment of the Iraqi National Curriculum Centre. Additionally, UNESCO will develop a National Teacher Training Plan, equipment and renewal of the Institute for Education Training and Development and Teacher Training Centres.

Following the completion of the phase I of the "Public Sector Modernization" project, UNESCO will launch the phase 2 of and proceed with the implementation of the "National Education Strategy" project, bringing new components to improve decision making formalities.

In order to respond to the youth employment challenge in 2012, UNESCO will focus on: 1) strengthening the partnership between the private and TVET sector to increase its relevance for the labour market; 2) enhancing the availability of entrepreneurship and employability learning tools and spreading these competences among youths; and 3) improving the quality of TVET teaching.

As for literacy, UNESCO will multiply its present efforts as 20 Community learning centres will open in different Iraqi governorates reaching more than 30,000 illiterates all over the country, taking a major step towards actually eradicating this human crisis.

On a higher level, UNESCO will give a considerable boost to higher education and help the Iraqi government in achieving the knowledge society it aspires. The networking will be enhanced through the official launching of the 3 Avicenna Virtual Campuses in Iraq, and through creating the proper platform for the high level interaction among local and international experts, scientists, academics, and officials.

In Science With water shortage rising as a serious threat, UNESCO will provide Iraq with new tools and vital equipments to win this battle through the launching of the phase 2 of the Hydro-geological survey, and finalizing a national policy on Science and Technology.

In Media and Communication: UNESCO will also continue its support to media through its ongoing activities and projects, and enhancing active partnerships with human rights group, civil society, and different components of the Iraqi private and public institutions.

Finally, with the relative political improvement, the wide set of ongoing and planned projects, and the key aim to increase its presence all over Iraq; mainly Baghdad, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Najaf; 2012 seems to be yet another challenging and exciting year for UNESCO Iraq, but also an important milestone for all Iraqis with the special and promising opportunities that it holds.