

Concept paper:
International Consortium for Research on Violence (ICRoV) –
Concept and 3-Years Action Plan

Introduction

On 10 December 2010, international Human Rights day, the first conference bringing together civil society and academics took place in Kirkuk/Iraq under the title “Ethnic Victimization in Kirkuk”. The aim was to discuss the situation in the city and the various human rights violations that different ethnic communities face on different levels. The conference brought together civil society representatives of all different ethnic and religious groups that live in the city as well as academics from different backgrounds. These academics, from the college of law and specialized in human rights issues, contributed to the discussion in a critical and analytical manner, which included the recommendation to civil society to work better together across community boundaries in order to better support the local population at large. This was the starting point for an extended cooperation, which include in the meantime different universities and organization in Iraq, in Germany and worldwide.

The Felsberg Institute for Education and Academic Research (FIBW) is one of the founders of this initiative and has been working in Iraq already since 2008. In 2010, FIBW established its own offices in Erbil and Bagdad. In this same year, FIBW started a joint conference program in cooperation with the University of Kirkuk dealing with various aspects of violence in Iraq, and aimed to bring together representatives of the Iraqi civil society with the academic world in order to create a forum for dialogue between the various societal groups.

Since 2012 these conferences obtain an international character: in April 2012, the „First International Conference On Violence“ in Iraq took place in Kirkuk. In February 2013, a “Second International Workshop-Conference on Violence” was held in Germany, and in December 2013, the “Third International Conference on Iraq: 10 Years on – Stocktaking and Perspectives“ will take place in Erbil, this time co-organized by the University of Kirkuk, Salahuddin University of Erbil, the Center for Iraq Studies (CIS) at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, and FIBW.

Meanwhile, these conferences have become an established factor in Iraq, and the scientific discussion that we incented has finally become a part of the inner Iraqi discourse on the topic of „Violence“.

For this reason, we are planning to expand, intensify and consolidate our work. One important step into this direction is the establishment of an “International Consortium for Research on Violence (ICRoV)”, which will be officially founded during the Erbil conference in December 2013.

Problem statement & strategy

With nearly daily explosions, people being kidnapped and police officers killed in action, Kirkuk is a city in turmoil. It is hard to find another place, where violence is so imminent. Home to Kurds, Arabs, Turcomans and Christians, Kirkuk is hotly contested by both the regional Kurdish government in the North and the national federal government in Baghdad. It will not take much to cause the situation in Kirkuk to escalate. The trigger can be a seemingly unimportant event on micro level, which fuels the perception of constant threat and dissatisfaction among the different parties. There are numerous potential triggers for an escalation of the conflict in Kirkuk.

A great number of civil society organizations have been established in Kirkuk but fragmentation exists along political and sectarian lines. Accusations of corruption are rife, and mistrust of NGOs amongst the local population is a big problem. There is a lack of structured and inclusive societal debate in the city on human rights violations and violence in general, which goes beyond terrorism and military violence and includes topics such as violence against women and political and religious violence, and analyses root causes that links all these different forms of violence together. This is the case for the whole of Iraq in fact. But Kirkuk is a unique example for what is going on in the entire country and can also be transferred and studied on an international level.

Public debate can benefit greatly from input from Iraqi academics and researchers, who often have much to offer in terms of analysis. They are able to put matters into context and share insights based on comparative research, which can produce argumentation that is more scientific and less political or emotional. This approach is especially essential in the debate on human rights violations and violence in general in all aspects of life, which are emotional and political topics at the same time.

In implementing an International Consortium for Research on Violence, the Iraqi scientists could in turn benefit greatly from exchange on an international level. Being potential targets themselves when they are too involved in activist work or too vocal concerning issues of Human Rights and protection, a network of international contacts can create lifelines in pressing situations. For academics in Kirkuk and all over Iraq to be able to speak out on Human Rights issues, international solidarity and support in the form of such a network and exchange is very important.

Partners

During a 12-months preparatory phase, the representatives of the involved institutions have discussed the possible fields of work and the tasks of such an international working group. The results of this discussion are herewith presented as a draft concept.

The following institutions will be involved in the International Consortium for Research on Violence:

- FIBW
- University of Kirkuk
- Center for Iraq Studies at the University of Erlangen (CIS)
- Universidad del Rosario in Bogotá/Colombia.
- Center for the Study of the Middle East / Indiana University Bloomington

Members of the following institutions are actively participating in the Consortium:

- Hamburg Institute for Social Research (HIS)
- Max Planck Foundation for International Peace and the Rule of Law

Associated members are:

- Dr. Magnus Treiber, University of Bayreuth
- Dr. Christoph Herzog, University of Bamberg
- Dr. Stéphane Valter, University of Le Havre

Objectives

The guiding principles of the International Consortium are comparative and interdisciplinary investigations of the research area „violence phenomena“. The examination and analysis of these violence phenomena will be embedded into the frame of the overarching concepts of „Human Security“ and „Human Rights“.

We understand „Human Security“ as the protection of the individual person from physical threat (war, terror, etc.) and psychological/mental threat (repression, etc.). We consider the realization of Human Security is a prerequisite for human development. Human Security shall be guaranteed through the „Rule of Law“ (préémination du droit, Rechtsstaatlichkeit) which on the one hand is based on the universal Human Rights, and which on the other hand has the task to protect and secure these universal Human Rights.

The International Working Group aims at elaborating possibilities for ways out of violence, and for ways leading towards the „Rule of Law“ in order to promote non-violence and certainty of justice. Deescalation strategies will also be studied.

The basic pillars of this „Rule of Law“ are Human Rights, Transitional Justice, Reconciliation and Economic Reconstruction.

Iraq and the Middle East

Iraq shall serve as the focal country case study for the coming three years 2014-2016.

Given the fact that these days Iraq's neighbor country Syria finds itself in a devastating process of disintegration, we consider the forthcoming investigation of the International Consortium as an opportunity to use the results of its work for an assessment of the situation in Syria at a later stadium. Equally, the activities of the International Consortium could be expanded on the entire Levante region in the Middle East.

Principles of research and analysis

The International Working Group is committed to the following principles:

- international and intercultural exchange of experiences
- assessment of violence phenomena through comparative and interdisciplinary research approaches
- analysis under the premise of „application in peace processes“
- elaboration of recommendations for further action

On a first level, the International Consortium puts emphasis on the scientific investigation of focal topics. These focal topics are: „Transitional Justice“, „Reconciliation“ and „Economic Reconstruction“. The focal topics set the frame for the respective annual focus and the annual symposiums. The analysis will be realized under the aspect of “obstacles and potentials” in order to elaborate on “ways out of violence”.

On a second level, the country case study of Iraq will be embedded into a regional and a global analysis. A profound investigation of the experiences from other world regions will set the scaffold which shall be elaborated in the annual Iraq conferences as well as in the biannual meetings of the steering committee.

On a third level, field studies on the respective focal topics will be conducted. These empirical studies will be implemented in the city of Kirkuk which can be regarded as a micro cosmos of Iraq. They will be realized under the central coordination of the University of Kirkuk, and with the participation of international researchers.

The Consortium aims at conceptualizing, organizing and realizing dialogue initiatives, workshops, conferences and training. The annual results will be documented and published.

3-years program

It is planned to work within a fixed annual structure during the period of 2014 to 2016. Each year will be given a focal topic which will be elaborated in various activities and various forms.

This structure implies:

- one annual conference in Iraq – ideally in changing locations each year, depending on the security situation
- one annual symposium in Germany, organized in turns by the partner institutions,
- one annual meeting of the steering committee in a chosen country which exemplarily offers research areas for the elaboration of the annual focal topic

- annually changing empirical research in Kirkuk

The provisional program is as follows:

Annual Focal Topic:	„Transitional Justice“	„Economic Recovery“	„Reconciliation“
Organising Institution of the Symposium in Germany	Max-Planck-Institut	CIS / University of Erlangen	FIBW and HIS (?)
Preferred Location for Iraq Conference	Bagdad (?)	Basra (?)	Mosul (?)
Country Case Study for the Annual Meeting of the Steering Committee	South Sudan (?) Somalia (?)	Iraq (Stocktaking)	Colombia and Nicaragua
Field Research	Conflict Mapping Kirkuk	Economic Survey Kirkuk	Interviews / empirical research on reconciliation potential in Kirkuk

Felsberg and Bagdad, in December 2013

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