



SUCCESS STORY

Constitution Includes Voice of the People

Human rights articles drafted by civil society were included in the constitution



Photo: USAID

Members of Iraqi civil society groups debate human rights issues to be included in the constitution.

A three-day national conference fostered debate about human rights issues. At the conclusion of the conference, participants issued recommendations for the constitution.

Incorporating the voice of the Iraqi people in the country's new constitution was critical to the constitution-writing process. To ensure that this voice was heard, USAID engaged members of Iraq's reemerging civil society through a national conference in April 2005. Organized by USAID, the conference brought together 80 participants representing all of Iraq's 18 provinces and most of its ethnic and religious backgrounds. Conference participants worked together to produce a recommendation for human rights issues that they agreed should be addressed in Iraq's constitution. They succeeded in their goal — 11 articles drafted at the conference were included in Iraq's constitution.

Over three days, participants discussed their vision for an Iraq in which human rights are protected and civil society can flourish. Specifically, they agreed that the constitution should guarantee due process, freedom of religion, gender equality, and the right to privacy. They also recommended that the constitution should incorporate international declarations protecting human rights, as well as children's and women's rights.

According to one of the conference organizers, the constitutional drafting committee accepted the articles resulting from this conference "because they represented the public needs."

The April conference was part of a larger effort by USAID to engage Iraqis at all levels in a national dialogue about the constitution. This effort included four regional conferences in Baghdad, Erbil, Hillah, and Basrah leading up to the April event, as well as training, consulting, and technical assistance services for civil society groups across the country. By collaborating with some 1100 civil society organizations, USAID is working every day to build a strong civil society and independent media in Iraq.

As part of its effort to promote civic education, USAID also helped design a weekly primetime TV program "Our Constitution" on al-Iraqiya TV, Iraq's public broadcasting service. The 90-minute discussion show offered experts and studio audiences a chance to debate controversial issues with drafters of the constitution. The program was praised by the United Nations as a successful example of cultivating social dialogue.