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The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development: Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra Performs



The Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra Performing

By Randa Jamal

In partnership with the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq sponsored and organized a concert performance by the *Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra (INSO)*. This performance was held on the occasion of the *World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development*. The event, held on 21 May 2008, highlighted the significance of music in Iraq's multi-ethnic culture and, most importantly, the strong resistance of Iraqis to carry on with their talents.

Opening statements were delivered by Mr. Mufid Al Jazairi, the Head of Culture, Tourism and Antiques Committee, Mr. Hosheyar Zebari, Iraqi Foreign Minister, and by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative

of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Iraq.

This event makes Mr. Oliver Gilmour the first internationally renowned to lead the INSO in Iraq since March of 2003. Describing it as a heartfelt experience, Gilmour said, "I am honored to be the first to come since the war of 2003." Recounting his experience, he added, "What I find most fascinating is how friendly, delightful and charming the orchestral members are, given the circumstances they live under."

The Orchestra performance made up of two parts, western and eastern music, started off with the Iraqi national anthem. The first half of the event, which was conducted by Gilmour, included the Gioachino Rossini's *Overture Barber of Seville*; Anton Dvorak's *Cello Concerto*; Johann Strauss's *Radetzky March*, and Modest Mussorg-

sky's *Night on the Bald Mountain*.

Iraqi conductor, Mr. Karim Wasfi, also a world class cellist, conducted the second part of the performance included the Jamil Bashir: *Ayam Zaman – "Oud and Orchestra"*; Soloist Ahmed Salim; Mohammed Zaza, Kurdish dances; Abdullah Jamal's *Kurdish Folk Repertoire* and Hans Gunter Mommer, *Iraqi Traditional Tunes*.

The prominent Iraqi conductor expressed his enthusiasm for having the international prestige in orchestral music represented by Mr. Gilmour's participation. Describing his experience in light of the current situation in Iraq, he said "Music is an international language and we believe in music as a powerful venue that leads to unifying forces and overcoming problems". Mr. Wasfi said that Gilmour's presence is a rare opportunity, since it has proven difficult to bring artists to Iraq. "Having Gilmour here makes a huge difference," he added.

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During the invasion, the orchestra's equipment was looted and destroyed, but was replaced shortly after the war through international NGO donations. However, the situation makes it difficult for the orchestral team to travel and to gain from and contribute to a global experience. Nonetheless, they remain determined to continue their quest for a sustained musical effort.

Mr. Monther Hafith, a prominent Arab Iraqi composer and part of the orchestral team, says that before the war, they would rehearse four times per week. "Under the current circumstances, we try to meet three times a week", he said. But Hafith is an optimist even under the prevailing circumstances and is inspiring new talent.

For instance, Rania, a sixteen year-old guest player to the orchestral team, who plays the French horn, aspires to become a permanent member of INSO. As for the directions she would like to take in the future, she said "In addition to studying music, I also want to study medicine, and I want to stay in Iraq and study in Baghdad."

One of the audience members said this was his first concert attendance since March 2003. He summed up everyone's sentiment by saying, "I feel outside of this world in this event".

The Iraqi Orchestra's message was capturing: Iraq embodies a rich, diverse, culture, deeply rooted in a history that marks the beginning of all civilizations. Their performance portrayed the creativity that transcends, not only across the country, but also across the globe.

The event received wide coverage from national and international media.

Iraqi Parliament Committee on Women, Family and Childhood to Implement Legislation



Hope Despite Despair

By Randa Jamal

The Women, Family and Childhood Committee, chaired by Parliament Representative Member, Ms. Samira Al-Musawi, focuses on alleviating the pain endured by women and children in Iraq, and the lack of opportunities that limit their future.

Many families are scattered as refugees in neighboring countries or are internally displaced—as many as 4.5 million of Iraq's 27 million population. According to a *Special Iraq Edition of Forced Migration Review*, a publication issued by *Refugee Studies Center of Oxford University*, 90% of those who die violent deaths are men, leaving massive numbers of widows and orphans without support. As a result, statistics reveal that there are five million Iraqi orphans, according to *Voices of Iraq* (2007).

Women and Iraqi children also suffer tremendously in the absence of proper educational facilities, access to water, and health facilities. According to *Save the Children*, since 1990,

infant mortality have sharply increased by 150 per cent and since the invasion in 2003, infant mortality has risen by 37 per cent. The Iraqi Ministry of Education, estimates that only 30 per cent of the country's 3.5 million elementary school children attended classes in 2007, a sharp decline from 75 percent in 2006. And a World Health Organization study revealed that 30 percent of school children surveyed suffer from a post-traumatic stress disorder.

Consequently, *the Women, Family and Childhood Committee* promotes the rights of children and women and explores avenues to better integrate them into a war torn society, in particular through legislation.

Al Musawi's day begins early with stalks of files to review, parliamentary sessions to attend and/or committee members to meet. "I plan my meetings and then follow up on the draft laws that our committee submitted", she explains. The process of approving law takes time and is

a complex process, but legislation is crucial for the future of children and women in Iraq. There are currently four main legislative proposals under review:

I- Draft Law on Sponsoring Women without Support: The first and second reading are complete and await expenditure allocations from the Ministry of Finance. Following this step, the draft law will be ready for voting.

II- Draft law on creating a Network for Social Protection: The first reading is complete and the draft law is scheduled for a second reading. The social protection network will target vulnerable groups including those who are jobless, handicapped, widows, women with absent or missing husbands, and orphans.

III- Draft Law on creating a Childhood Care Commission: The *Al Shura Council* and the Ministry of Finance have been consulted and this draft law is up for a second reading prior to voting.

IV- Draft Law on creating an Orphan Care Fund: This draft law has been approved and will be submitted for a first reading.



Among the Rubble Iraqi Children Eking out a Living

Following the steps that will lead to a second reading, the draft law will be up for voting.

NGOs work closely with the *Parliament's Women, Family and Childhood Committee*, and their recommendations are often incorporated into draft laws for submission and approval. For instance, at a conference held on Iraqi women in *Hilla*, NGOs proposed childcare centers in government units and hospitals to improve working mothers' access to child care. The committee on Women, Family and Child-

hood submitted this suggestion, which has been approved and its implementation is underway. Another proposal dealt with eradicating taxes solicited from women's salaries, especially those who support their families.

In Iraq's current rebuilding phase, civil society is an indispensable ally in forging the country's infrastructure and direction. Al Mussawi explained the significance of UN-joint workshops in capacity building. The Chair said that such workshops should include both women and men so that women's participation is seen as a societal issue rather than only pertaining to women. The workshops have focused on several themes: resolving conflicts, capacity building, legislative matters, and on new approaches for educating women to take on an equal partner role in the family.

Al Musawi also emphasized the importance of the United Nations, and its role in pushing forward the social File on women, family and childhood. "UNAMI's support and assistance is most needed", she concluded.



Iraqi Children's Playground

Interview with Mr. Mohamed Djelid, Director and UNESCO Representative to Iraq



Mr. Mohamed Djelid

UNAMI Focus: Can you provide us with a synopsis on UNESCO's role in the reconstruction process of Holy Shrines? When did it begin?

MD: The United Nations reacted on the day of the bombing (22 February 2006) and on 28 February 2006 UNESCO confirmed publicly its support for the Iraqi initiative to rebuild the Shrine of Imam Ali Al-Hadi as well as other damaged religious sites in Iraq. The reconstruction should be viewed as a foundation for national reconciliation and a framework for tolerance, stability and recovery within the Samara area including generating employment opportunities for local residents. UNESCO is in charge of implementing Phase I of the project which consists of preparing the site (cleaning and classifying materials), which will be complete by the end of May 2008; undertaking urgent preventive works (reinforcing the building to avoid further structural collapses); undertaking assessment survey and laboratory tests; and preparing the restoration drawings for implementing Phase II (the actual restoration of the Shrine).

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Government of Iraq (GoI) was signed on 24 June 2007 and the field work began on 6 February 2008.

UNAMI Focus: Who are your partners in this undertaking and what is their role?

MD: UNESCO's main partner is the Iraqi Government who contributed USD 3 million to Phase I of the project in addition to the contribution of USD 5.4 million made by the European Commission. The Iraqi Prime Minister's office is directly involved in the project; it established a High Committee to follow up on the implementation and coordination with UNESCO. UNESCO is also in contact with the Sunni and Shiite *Waqfs* in addition to the local authorities of the Samara City. While UNESCO is providing expertise and management for the project, the bulk of the work will be done by Iraqis themselves.

UNAMI Focus: When do you envision the reconstruction of Holy Shrine will be complete?

MD: As mentioned earlier, UNESCO is now implementing Phase I in preparation for the actual restoration. As soon as the studies and surveys are complete, we will be able to provide a time estimate for the completion of the restoration.

UNAMI Focus: What type of support have you provided thus far?

MD: In consultation with its partners, UNESCO has prepared the work plan and provided it to the experts and workers to begin the preparation of the site. UNESCO has placed an expert on the ground to oversee the entire process and to report progress made. UNESCO also organized in October/November 2007 training on restoration for five Iraqi architects/engineers who are now working on the site.

UNAMI Focus: How many projects in total is UNESCO undertaking in Iraq? And how many staff members do you have on the ground?

MD: Focusing earlier on material interventions (i.e. In 2006, UNESCO delivered 9 million textbooks), the Organization has broadened its support and currently is implementing fourteen

projects in Iraq in the areas of education (Literacy and Life Skills Development, Information and Communication Technology, Teacher-Training, fellowships for Iraqi students and academics, etc.); Culture (Safeguarding Iraqi cultural heritage, Combating the illicit trafficking of cultural property, etc.); Media (Promotion of Freedom of Expression and Human Rights and Support for fair, safe & professional media elections coverage) and Science (Capacity-building for Iraqi water institutions). In 2006, UNESCO delivered 9 million textbooks.

UNESCO works closely with Iraqi authorities and NGOs, maintaining national and international staff in Baghdad, Erbil and Amman.

UNAMI Focus: How did UNESCO become involved in the restoration of Erbil Citadel and who are your counterparts?

MD: UNESCO was approached by the Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG) and the Governorate of Erbil to revive the Citadel, the oldest continually-inhabited site in the world. KRG is funding the project, which was signed in September 2007 for an initial value of USD 650,000. Funding increased to USD 1.475 million, following a revision in early May 2008 to the MoU between UNESCO and the KRG-High Committee for the Erbil Citadel Revitalization.

UNAMI Focus: As the head of the Iraq UNESCO Office, what do you hope to achieve by the end of this year?

MD: Specifically for Samara and Erbil, to complete all the preparatory work listed under Phase I so the main renovation could begin. Generally, UNESCO's activities aim to promote and strengthen national reconciliation and to assist our Iraqi partners in all our areas of competence to restore their capacity to manage their own affairs and to reach their own objectives. This would help Iraqis develop and promote their vision for their country to regain its rightful place and proper status among nations.

Assistant Secretary-General, Ms. Lute, Visits Iraq

Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Field Support, who oversees all logistical matters related to the UN peace operation missions, recently visited Baghdad for two days. The purpose of her visit is to observe the activities of UNAMI and gauge impending matters. In her townhall address to all staff of the *United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq* (UNAMI), she emphasized the mission's significant role acknowledging the difficult circumstances under which staff members operate.

Ms. Holl Lute particularly cited the role of the Iraqi national staff members calling them the "back bone of the mission," without whose support, accomplishing the Mission's goals would be difficult to attain. She said, "You are the ears and eyes of our mission and we need you as you represent the inspirations that we hope to achieve; you



ASG Lute Addressing UNAMI's Staff Members

can do the things that we cannot do."

Additionally, she thanked the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his leadership and his team's work. She also highlighted staff well-being and the status of their salaries, in light of current market volatility. The Assistant Secretary-General then responded to questions from UNAMI's staff members, most of which dealt with contracts, surveys, improving transportation, and staff assess-

ments. Holl Lute emphasized that although no system could satisfy everyone, her unit seeks to achieve broad harmonization.

In her concluding remarks, Holl Lute said that she came to Baghdad to hear directly from UNAMI staff about the challenges they face. This strategy will allow the ASG's unit to be UNAMI's effective advocates at Head Quarters. Holl Lute concluded, "We came with a sincere commitment to achieve what we could and thank you."

UNAMI Focus

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