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Baghdad-Amman Declaration On Academic Freedom in Iraqi Universities



“Academic freedom is one of the pillars which consolidates the building of democracy.” Under this slogan, a conference on academic freedom in Iraqi universities was organized by the Iraqi Teachers' Union and Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS). The conference began in Baghdad in November 2005; complementary sessions of the conference were held later. The conference, which was attended by 80 academicians, discussed a total of 28 research and working papers dealing with the following focuses:

- 1- Academic freedom: concept and importance/ the Amman and Baghdad sessions.
- 2- Academic freedom in Arab universities/ the Amman session.
- 3- The nature and structure of academic freedom in Iraqi universities/ the Amman and Baghdad sessions.
- 4- Academic freedom in Iraqi universities—aspirations and horizons -- the Amman session.
- 5- The role of civil society organizations in strengthening academic freedom and in providing protection to the members of the academic community/ the Baghdad session.
- 6- The impact of religious, partisan and sectarian interventions on the performance of academic institutions/ the Baghdad session.

The conference on academic freedom in Iraqi universities reviewed the suffering of Iraqi scientists and academicians and the difficult and harsh conditions under which they have been living in the past and present. It also reviewed the attempts to impose the one vote system, dismissal of teaching staff from their jobs, and the international sanctions that were imposed on Iraq.

The conference also reviewed the aggravating sectarian and racist prejudices that were being practiced at the expense of the principle of full citizenry and full equality. This has reflected negatively on the academic community and made the universities, scientific research centers, museums, and libraries vulnerable to acts of looting, theft, and systematic subversion. This has left its negative impact on the educational and academic process.

Proceeding from the declarations of academic freedom that are enforced internationally, beginning with the Declaration on the Rights of the Professors of American Universities (1940), the Lima Declaration (1998), and ending with the Amman Declaration of Academic Freedom proclaimed in 2004, and after vital and serious discussions and debates, the conference issued a systematic document under the title of “Academic Freedom in Iraqi Universities.” The following is the text of the document:

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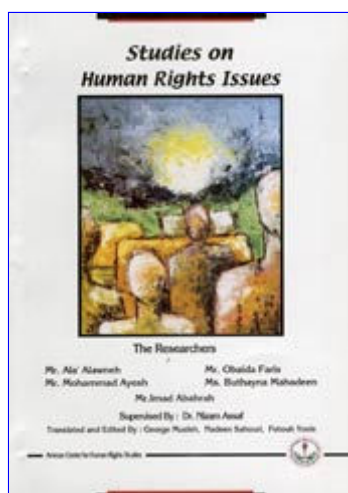
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- 1- Academic freedom is a fundamental and vital part of the freedom of expression and of basic human rights. Academic work cannot develop or prosper without this freedom.
- 2- Everyone has the right to Education. It should be provided to everyone without any exception, irrespective of religion, sect, sex, social strata, political beliefs, national origin, ideological orientation, or any other reason. The goals are to achieve justice, to provide for the equality of opportunity, to strengthen the values of citizenry and the love of the homeland, and to further national unity, peace, tolerance, and the respect of other cultures and civilizations.
- 3- Education in all its phases, particularly in higher education, should be integrated and should fulfill human needs for the development of the personality of individual and intellectual faculties. This should be done through stimulating a spirit searching for scientific truth on the one hand, and through the consolidation of social progress and human liberation, on the other. This in turn requires that the educational curricula should respond to the needs of society and to the sustainability of that society in a sound manner, particularly in all issues related to human rights, resistance against political repression, the consolidation of freedom of academic research, enhancement of the process of development, and the upgrading of societal capabilities.
- 4- Educational curricula, scientific research plans, and educational policies of universities and scientific research institutes should be strengthened and upgraded, and should seek to safeguard economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, in order to forestall the violation of these rights, and to bar from the use of science and technology for purposes that would harm these rights.
- 5- Independence is a principle, which the higher education institutes at all levels are aspiring to reach. This dictates on every university to exercise its role independently by drawing up, defining and exercising its own policies without any intervention or restrictions by any party outside the sphere of the university campus. The principle of independence also requires that universities and academic institutes exercise self-management, free from the interventions of the State, the official government or semi official bodies under any pretext. Self-management should not contradict the consolidation and upgrading of the role and instruments of universities in drawing up their policies, expanding their curricula, choosing the commission of their self-management, expanding the circle of participation and deepening the democratic option.
- 6- The principle of democratic elections in the choice of the presidents of universities, their assistants, deans and heads of departments should be reinforced on the basis of a clear electoral law. The electoral law should clearly define the duration of the mandate of the elected official and the duration of renewal. The academic commission at the university or the college shall be entrusted with the responsibility of control and accountability in a way that reinforces the method of self-management in universities and scientific research institutes and helps these institutes stay away from all forms of nepotism and narrow-minded considerations in academic work.
- 7- The State, as well as political, religious, and social parties and forces should respect the sovereignty of academic institutions, and should protect them from all forms of partisan, denominational and sectarian interventions so as to enhance its prestige and to consolidate its role and impact on social development. All symptoms of militarism should be kept banned from university campus. The carrying of arms and any kind of harassment should be prohibited. The importance of a peaceful civil academic community represented in the persons of the professors, students and the administration should be highlighted, and dialogue, cooperation and the right to differ should be respected.
- 8- Professors and students should be encouraged to form scientific societies and professional organizations and associations so as to revive the cultural and social life. Such associations should be a supportive means in protecting and defending academic interests rationally and systematically. Associations should further seek to reinforce vitality and activity in the free campus life through the encouragement of extracurricular activities in the areas of culture, arts, sports, tourism and others.
- 9- Legislations and laws regulating the academic work should be unified. The objective of unification is to define goals and methods and to indicate rights and duties. The purpose is to expand participation and alternation of holding offices free from any narrow-minded sectarian, ethnic or political considerations or any considerations other than the national belonging, academic qualification and the choice of the academic community. The principles contained in the Arbil Declaration of 2004, issued by the meeting of the presidents of Iraqi universities and institutes, should be translated into principles and legislative and organizational guide lines binding to the curricular and administrative activities.
- 10- The circle of solidarity among Iraqi academics should be expanded and strengthened in order to promote forms of protest against the assassination of scientists and academics, and to pressure the responsible parties to pursue the offenders and to refer them to justice. It is further required that attention is paid to publishing their work and products, to provide care for their families, and to seek the release of all the detainees against whom no charges are made. If these detainees are not released, they should be referred to the Iraqi judicial authorities as soon as possible in line with the provisions of the international conventions

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and Iraqi laws in force.

- 11- The duty of the State to provide for the necessary resources to expand the network of higher education and scientific research and to raise the level of its quality needs to be asserted. This is essential if the needs of society are to be served, and if the right of all citizens to the improvement of opportunities of their scientific and professional qualifications is to be guaranteed. Efforts should also be made to provide free-of-charge university education to all those willing to receive such an education. The official government authorities and other institutions of civil society should protect the rights of the academic community. The academic community has to fulfill basic scientific and ethical obligations. Foremost of these obligations are the compliance with scientific, humanitarian and national values, and the respect of students, treating them in accordance with the criteria of scientific and professional skills. Moreover, the members of the Academic Commission should place education and scientific research in the service of the goals of the Iraqi society. Academic freedom and the results of the scientific research should not be exploited for purposes that are harmful to their societies or that violate the principles of human rights or obstruct the achievement of the humanitarian goals and values.
- 12- Iraqi higher education and research institutes should promote relations of cooperation and partnership on the local, regional, Arab and international level. The aim is to build bridges, to fill existing informational and technological gaps, and to work against the monopolization of knowledge and its inherent benefits from the results of scientific research, and to prohibit the dissemination of these results by a small influential group of States or companies. In addition, the promotion of cooperation and partnerships aim at placing scientific knowledge in the service of the international community to further understanding and harmony among the human family, free from the imposition of any hegemony or tutelage.

Issued in Amman on 11 Muharram 1427 Hegira corresponding to 10 February 2006.

**[Signed]
The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies [ACHRS]**

**[Signed]
The Iraqi Teachers' Union**

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