

# **Iraqi Academic Conference Summary Report**

**Organized by the Cultural Office, Embassy of the Republic of Iraq**

**Hosted by The National Academies**

With support from the American Association for the Advancement of  
Science and the U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation

**March 14-15, 2009**

**Venue: The National Academies**

**Washington, D.C.**

## Executive Summary

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On March 14-15<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Iraqi-American academics and professionals convened for the first time in Washington, D.C. to share ideas on how to strengthen higher education in Iraq. The inaugural Iraqi Academic Conference (IAC) was a historic occasion attended by 290 participants. Cultural Attaché Dr. Hadi Al Khalili and the Cultural Office at the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq organized this event with the National Academies, and with the support of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation.

One clear outcome of the conference was a shared enthusiasm among the attendees to be engaged in building and strengthening the capacity of higher education institutions in Iraq. To articulate what they could offer to the higher education system in Iraq, participants submitted information on their areas of expertise and described what they could contribute directly as individuals, (such as hosting research scholars and students from Iraq or offering courses or workshops by distance learning or on-site). The Iraqi Cultural Office has taken the first step towards creating and identifying the Iraqi-American Academic and Professional Community (IAAPC), by convening this group of Iraqi-Americans, assembling a database of their expertise, and articulating how this expertise can be applied toward future initiatives in Iraqi higher education.

The conference proceedings (video, audio, and this report) have been archived and will be available on-line, [www.togetherforiraq.org](http://www.togetherforiraq.org), in due time. This is to serve as a resource not only for conference participants as they move forward on planning the next steps but also to share the thoughts of the IAAPC with those in the U.S. and Iraq who were unable to attend the conference but are interested in playing a role in the future.

While the conference generated a wealth of ideas and debate, it is clear that before specific initiatives are targeted and pursued, the IAAPC has several near-term goals:

- Obtain more information about the full range of expertise available within the IAAPC, including those who were unable to attend the conference;
- Identify ways to build and sustain the IAAPC;
- Work in *coordination* with the Iraqi government and academic professionals to understand the status, needs, and priorities in Iraq while also being sensitive and respectful when making suggestions as to what to do in Iraq

While the meeting represented a significant step towards the redevelopment of Iraqi higher education, participants and organizers acknowledge the necessity to sustain this momentum in order to achieve both short- and long-term goals. The growth and sustainability of the IAAPC can be achieved through:

1. The establishment of the website [www.togetherforiraq.org](http://www.togetherforiraq.org) as a clearinghouse for the U.S. and Iraqi communities to partner Iraqi-American expertise with needs in Iraq. The site will also include conference materials and announcements of upcoming activities;

2. Raising awareness in the U.S. and Iraq about the IAAPC and its mission;
3. Identifying partners in the U.S. and Iraq who can help and support IAAPC's mission including outreach to academic institutions and non-governmental organizations involved in research, higher education, and capacity building as well as other funding programs that sponsor such efforts.

The most immediate outcome of the IAC will be the formation of a committee comprised of leaders to represent disciplines within science, medicine, engineering, humanities, and the social sciences. The committee's role will be to advise the Iraqi Cultural Office how to address near-term goals and to decide what the next course of action will be based on the ideas presented at the IAC and outlined in this report. This committee will also oversee the development of sub-committees within the five disciplines that will enable Iraqi American academic and professionals to communicate directly with their counterparts in Iraq. It is envisioned that these linkages will form the basis for further cooperation at the college and university levels.

It should be noted that during the IAC, the idea to create a new, politically independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to assisting Iraqi higher education was conceived and met with much enthusiasm from the IAC attendees. It was envisioned that the NGO could organize a multidisciplinary fact-finding committee to travel to Iraq to meet with Iraqi government officials, faculty, administrators and students affiliated with higher education institutions in order to evaluate Iraqi academia's immediate and long term needs. Dr. Khalili lauded this vision, seeing it as a long-term goal. IAC participants are beginning a dialog about whether to pursue the NGO and how it can be accomplished. There was emphasis that all efforts to help Iraqi higher education should be conducted in a way that protects Iraqi heritage and culture.

The panels and breakout sessions of the IAC yielded a number of strategic ideas. One theme that transcended the panels was that any initiatives undertaken by the IAAPC to assist higher education in Iraq will require support from the U.S. and Iraqi governments to address barriers to academic cooperation and collaboration. Conference attendees encouraged the U.S. government to address, in particular, visa-processing delays that have hindered the ability for Iraqi scholars and students to visit their counterparts in the U.S. Another theme that transcended the panels was that investments in all areas of Iraqi higher education infrastructure, including internet connectivity, as well as incentives, particularly in the form of jobs, for Iraqis to live in or return to Iraq, are sorely needed.

The first panel focused on how the IAAPC could contribute to higher education in Iraq. Discussants stressed the importance of individual contributions such as hosting and mentoring Iraqi students, delivering hardcopy and electronic teaching materials, and participating in research collaborations with Iraqi faculty. Conference attendees agreed that the launch of the website, [www.togetherforiraq.org](http://www.togetherforiraq.org), will serve as an important resource and method of coordination. The second panel concentrated on specific reforms in curriculum and teaching methodologies. The discussion highlighted the importance of promoting faculty exchanges between the US and Iraq, having Iraqi faculty drive curricula reform, expanding the required general education curricula to include the social

sciences and humanities, and applying state-of-the-art teaching methodologies. The third panel addressed the current Iraqi government's plan for the allocation of 10,000 graduate fellowships. IAC participants stressed the need for pre-fellowship preparation including English language training, GRE preparation, and admissions training. The participants and panelists alike emphasized that the fellowships need to be awarded in a fair and transparent manner and that distinguished faculty members should provide input on the selection of topics.

This report will be of interest to those that are involved in higher education, capacity building, or reconstruction efforts in Iraq. This is expected to be a wide audience including academics and university administrators, government officials, education practitioners, science and policy professionals, humanitarian organizations, and institution building organizations both in the U.S. and Iraq.

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## Introduction

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There are an estimated four million members of the Iraqi diaspora worldwide. Among this group are artists, doctors, scientists, engineers, and other distinguished professionals who are currently residing in the United States. The size of the Iraqi-American academic community and their breadth of expertise have not been fully explored to date. The potential to harness this talent toward building and sustaining higher education in Iraq is as exciting as it is challenging.

Iraq's long tradition of intellectual accomplishment and academic excellence is the foundation for the advancement of the Iraqi people. Prior to the Gulf War, UNESCO ranked Iraq's higher education system among the best in the world and as a leader in the region<sup>1</sup>. Only in the last three decades has isolation and infrastructure loss, in addition to the tragic loss of faculty amid conflict, led to setbacks for Iraq's universities. Yet numerous highly-skilled faculty remain, and there is substantial untapped potential for Iraq's universities to regain their prominence and train the future leaders and innovators.

In March 2009, Iraqi-American academic and professionals from a multitude of disciplines convened in Washington, D.C. to meet one another, celebrate their accomplishments, and share ideas on how to improve higher education in Iraq. In addition, a number of officials from the U.S. State Department, policy experts, and eminent scholars attended and participated. This meeting, the first annual Iraqi Academic Conference (IAC), was organized by the Iraqi Cultural Office at the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq (Appendix A contains the conference program).

To bring this group together, the Iraqi Cultural Office spent three years identifying and reaching out to members of the Iraqi-American Academic and Professional Community (IAAPC). The 1 ½ day conference, hosted by The U.S. National Academies, was attended by 290 participants including the Minister of Higher Education from the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Dr. Idris Hadi Salih. In a letter read to the IAC (Appendices B and C), the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, Dr. Abid Theab Al-Aljili, who was not able to attend in person, expressed his support for the IAC and articulated how the participants could be most effective in serving the needs of higher education in Iraq.

The purposes of the first annual IAC were:

- To provide a venue for Iraqi academics and professionals in the U.S. to meet each other and recognize and celebrate distinguished Iraqi academicians and professionals;
- To support higher education in Iraq and help develop active cooperation with U.S. academic and educational institutions;

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2004) "Iraq Education in Transition; Needs and Challenges"

- To discuss methods to improve and sustain Iraqi higher education and educational systems;
- To acknowledge senior Iraqi academics and professionals;
- To honor Iraqis who have been distinguished at the national level in the U.S.;
- To build and sustain bridges between Iraqis in the United States and Iraq.

From these objectives, three panel discussions took place to determine how the IAAPC could best support higher education in Iraq. These discussions were organized to answer three questions:

- 1) How can the IAAPC contribute to Iraqi academia?;
- 2) How can IAAPC help reform curriculum and teaching methodologies at Iraqi universities?;
- 3) What specialties should be emphasized for Iraq's 10,000 graduate fellowship awards?

To establish a baseline level of information for the IAC, in addition to setting the stage for discussion, each panel included brief presentations representing six perspectives from Iraqi-American and U.S. academic and professionals followed by comments from the audience (Appendix A includes a list of the panelists and their affiliation).

Each of the three questions was explored further in parallel breakout sessions. These breakout sessions were rich in conversation and filled with a spirited exchange of ideas. Attendees offered suggestions for improving Iraqi higher education and sharing lessons learned from engaging in higher education efforts in Iraq. Participants who recently returned from Iraq were able to offer valuable insight on the current conditions on the ground. The breakout session discussions emphasized the need to respect and protect Iraqi culture and heritage, underscored the importance of U.S-Iraq bilateral exchange and cooperation, and called for the need of an action plan for moving forward, including timelines and deliverables.

In addition to facilitating the exchange of ideas, moderators for each of the three panels challenged the participants to not only address what the IAAPC could do towards improving Iraqi higher education, but also how those ideas would be implemented, beginning with what each individual in the IAAPC could contribute towards the overall goal.

The moderators gathered and summarized these ideas, and then shared the findings with all participants of the IAC at the conclusion of the conference. Following this introduction are the major themes that emerged from each of the panel breakout sessions, followed by an overview of the cross-cutting issues that emerged from the three panels.

## **Panel Reports**

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### **Theme 1: How Can the Iraqi-American Academic and Professional Community Contribute to Iraqi Academia?**

The goal of this panel was to identify the most effective way that the Iraqi American Academic and Professional Community (IAAPC) can contribute to Iraqi academia. As experts in their fields, the panel sought to specifically illustrate the two-way bridge between the IAAPC and its counterparts in Iraq and to define the role and mission of the IAAPC.

In their discussion, participants expressed enthusiasm about being a part of this collaboration. Many members of the IAAPC already actively contribute to Iraqi higher education, and were able to draw on personal experiences to define individual roles that IAAPC members could take on. Some examples of individual participation include:

- Hosting a sabbatical year for Iraqi faculty to come to U.S. universities;
- Gathering and delivering teaching material to students and instructors in Iraq;
- Deploying online teaching materials from academic or professional applications;
- Creating a distance learning course using video lectures;
- Facilitating a relationship between a U.S. and Iraqi university;
- Participating in joint research with a counterpart in Iraq;
- Formally joining the network that the Office of the Iraqi Cultural Attaché is building to support Iraqi higher education offering expertise and professional input;
- Serving as a mentor for an Iraqi student;
- Teaching at Iraqi universities.
- Becoming involved in review and guidance of Iraqi research and scientific portfolio.

The importance of individual contributions cannot be overemphasized. However, in conducting the first annual IAC, the Office of the Iraqi Cultural Attaché brought these committed individuals together with the idea of exploring what the assembly of Iraqi-Americans could do for Iraqi higher education as a group. The conference initiated the process of building a database of the IAAPC as a resource that can be tapped in a unified pursuit of these objectives.

In the near term, a committee led by the Office of the Iraqi Cultural Attaché and derived from the IAC will oversee the mission of the IAAPC using the website “[www.togetherforiraq.org](http://www.togetherforiraq.org)” to coordinate their efforts. The site will serve as a resource that will show the full range of IAAPC capabilities and be a virtual forum for discussing ideas and policies regarding Iraqi higher education. It will also serve as an interface for IAAPC members who would like to submit an idea or proposal to the Iraqi government. As an established network, the site could support Iraqi students and faculty who are in the



U.S. to study and do research. The IAAPC website will help facilitate the individual efforts of IAAPC members, and will be a space for building and tracking IAAPC individual and group efforts in order to learn from successes and setbacks. The database will maintain information about organizations currently working on higher education in Iraq to explore what programs are working and leverage resources already in place.

In accordance with the conference conclusion that there is a profound lack of information about what is happening on the ground in Iraq, panel attendees suggested that multidisciplinary fact-finding committees be created. The findings of these committees would be shared and accessible to the IAAPC for discussion and development of an action plan.

While the need for information is acute, accessibility to that information is just as important in order for the IAAPC to contribute to Iraq's strategy for modernizing scientific research, updating facilities, and building human capacity in fields most relevant to Iraqi needs. As leaders in their fields in the U.S., IAAPC members have the access to state-of-the-art facilities and the latest teaching methodologies that make them invaluable partners in the process for helping to assess Iraq's higher education needs.

In the long-term, the participants of the Panel 1 breakout session foresee carrying out these objectives within the framework of a new, politically independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to Iraqi higher education. Dialogue about an NGO is underway and will continue in the context of long-term planning.

## **Theme 2: Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Reform**

Decades of relative isolation due to sanctions, wars, and political turmoil have led to the stagnation of higher education curricula in Iraq. Curriculum development has been further impeded though the loss of many of Iraq's top academic minds through both "brain drain" and post-2003 targeted assaults on faculty. Without dynamic curricula and teaching methodologies, Iraqi students may be missing opportunities to develop diverse and innovative ideas. Though not every discipline in Iraq is suffering the same degree of inertia, the IAAPC recognizes that broad curricula reform is an essential step in improving Iraq's system of higher education.

The need to re-integrate Iraqi professors back into the international academic community was identified as an important step in curricula reform. Faculty exchanges, a suggestion also supported by Ministers Abid Al-Ajili and Idris Hadi, would introduce new ideas, techniques, and curricula to Iraqi professors. Though it would be naïve to assume that U.S. or European curricula could be directly transplanted to Iraq, new knowledge and methodologies learned abroad or introduced by visiting professors could be integrated into existing curricula while taking into account the realities of Iraq's culture and current political situation. Similarly, having curriculum reform arise directly from faculty was another recurring idea over the course of the panel discussion. There was consensus that the most effective means of reform would not be through a top-down approach, but

instead through a collaborative process integrating input from academics and professionals in the field.

Another central topic of discussion was the integration of a broader variety of disciplines into required general education curricula. There was strong agreement that all Iraqi university students should be required to not only take courses in science, but also in history, geography, literature, and the humanities. Courses on humanitarian issues such as peace building, conflict resolution, community organizing, and the rights of women and minorities could also be required. Providing all students with such a comprehensive education would support interdisciplinary learning, encourage critical thinking, and help Iraq build a tolerant, open-minded society. Such broad course requirements are directly consistent with Minister Al-Ajili's statement (Appendix C) that the Ministry of Higher Education's mission is "to help build the foundation for the democracy and the acceptance of all." Reforming required curricula in this manner could be one step in achieving this goal.

However, subject matter revision is only one aspect of curricula reform. Conference attendees also suggested that within specific fields of instruction, state-of-the-art teaching methodologies be simultaneously introduced with updated curricula. New teaching approaches have already been introduced in Iraq in some fields. For example, Iraqi medical schools have introduced small group teaching, problem-based learning, and mandatory active student participation. Dynamic teaching methodologies such as these will encourage learning, engage students, and take into account different learning styles. Nevertheless, updated teaching methodologies require appropriate resources such as new textbooks, laboratory equipment, and information technologies. Examples of quality curriculum material available from prestigious higher education institutions and non-profit organizations were also discussed. It is vital that resource development be supported concurrently with method and curricula reforms.

Conference participants were keenly aware that curriculum and teaching methodologies reform would not be a simple or straightforward task. They also recognized that there were U.S. and international organizations that have already had successful experiences in implementing such educational reforms in other countries. Such organizations and the pool of talent and experience that can be found within the IAAPC could serve as resources to Iraqi universities and Ministries and could be called upon for advice and guidance in reform endeavors.

### **Theme 3: Addressing Iraq's Development Needs Through Higher Education - 10,000 Fellowships**

As a demonstration of Iraq's commitment to higher education, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Malaki previously announced that the government will be allocating government funds to send 10,000 students abroad to Britain, the United States, and elsewhere to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees.

The discussion surrounding the 10,000 fellowships included Iraqi-American leaders in medicine, engineering, humanities, applied science, and science policy. The aim of the session was to solicit experts' opinions on which specialties would be most applicable in addressing Iraq's development challenges. The Ministry of Higher Education could use the IAAPC as a resource for identifying and prioritizing specialties for these fellowships.

The discussion generated concern about pre-award preparation, the selection process, and post-award opportunities. Iraqi students need preparation and training which will give them the fundamental tools necessary to succeed in universities abroad:

- English language training, especially for the TOEFL exam;
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE) preparation;
- Knowledge of the U.S. university admissions process including training on how to communicate with U.S. universities online;
- Access to Iraqi-American academics and professionals as a support network for Iraqi students and professionals living in the U.S.

The panel also agreed that the selection process associated with these fellowships must be transparent, competitive, and merit-based and include verification of Iraqi citizenship for applicants.

As Iraq seeks to mobilize its assets to overcome a shortage in the human resources necessary to rebuild scientific, health, and educational institutions, the IAAPC is able to provide expertise specific to each field in order to assist the Ministries. The IAAPC would contribute to identifying the most relevant specialties for apportioning the 10,000 fellowships, building education strategies, and evaluating infrastructure needs. However, while the IAAPC can help prioritize specialties given their field expertise, the recommendations must be grounded by Iraq's timeline for development and its immediate needs. Therefore, the IAAPC has proposed the use of fact-finding committees and collaboration with Iraqi counterparts in their fields to provide information on conditions in Iraq necessary for prioritizing the fields for the appropriate apportionment of the fellowships.

It is important that the Iraqi students pursue fields of study that are directly related to Iraq's societal needs; simultaneously, Iraq will need to build the infrastructure necessary to support these educational priorities. For example, a hospital needs janitors, nurses, administrators, and equipment so that it can support the practicing doctors. In building

this infrastructure, and to balance the 10,000 fellowships, Iraq could also host faculty, students, and administrators in the identified fields. When the students return from studying abroad, they will have opportunities to work in their field. In addition to creating opportunities for returning students, the infrastructure will create better facilities for educating students in Iraq.

During the discussion, the field of medicine<sup>2</sup> was used to illustrate how Iraqi needs should be taken into account in order to determine which specialties should be pursued with the fellowships:

- The IAAPC fact-finding committee results acquired from Iraqi hospitals, research institutes, universities, and the Iraqi government;
- A survey of Iraqi doctors on current needs;
- Input from doctors within and outside the IAAPC, given their familiarity with the latest equipment and research needs for their specialty.

With these results in hand, a metric should be devised and applied in order to systematically establish priorities within medicine for Iraq and concurrently determine the infrastructure that will be required to support the fellowships and education in these specialties within Iraq. A similar type of analysis should be conducted for each field, including sciences and the humanities, and should include a metric to systematically establish priorities of specialties and subspecialties.

Overall, the IAAPC could serve as an invaluable resource for the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education when the scholarship specialties are determined. The IAAPC is composed of academics and professionals who are at the top of their fields and have access to state-of-the-art facilities. They could partner with Iraqi counterparts in determining the list of priorities for their field and would be an asset in developing and building the infrastructure that will be required to support the specialties.

## **Cross-Cutting Themes**

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### **Acknowledging the Achievements of the IAAPC**

The inaugural IAC opened with a ceremony honoring Iraqis who have achieved academic and research excellence in the U.S. The “Mesopotamia Award” was presented to five nationally-distinguished Iraqis in the fields of medicine, engineering, science, humanities and culture. These five honorees were selected from among 45 applicants. Twenty three applicants were selected for an “Award of Distinction” for their accomplishments in those specialties as well. Iraqi-American academics and professionals 80 years and older received the “Lifelong Achievement Award.” This opening ceremony set a tone of unity,

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<sup>2</sup> Other disciplines would undertake a similar needs assessment by seeking input from practitioners in Iraq.

Iraqi national pride, collaboration, and inspiration for the discussion and working groups that followed (Appendix D).

### **Letter from Minister Al-Ajili**

In his letter to the conference participants (Appendices B and C), the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, Dr. Abid Theab Al-Ajili, expressed his vision of a greater bridge between the IAAPC and their counterparts in Iraq.

His letter indicates a commitment from the Iraqi government to help Iraqi universities fulfill their mission to serve society. It is the perspective of the IAAPC that the investment in human capacity through higher education as a part of Iraq's long-term development goals requires adherence to this commitment regardless of changes in leadership.

The Minister identified some areas where the support of this community would be most beneficial: modernizing scientific research; strategic planning for education; Iraqi-U.S. university partnerships; and student and faculty exchanges. Overall, the Minister embraced the IAAPC community as key to the Iraqi government effort to equip Iraqi universities so that they can provide world-class education, conduct cutting-edge research, play a greater role in international science, and serve society.

### **Needs Assessment**

The need for a deeper appreciation of the current situation and priorities in Iraq was echoed across all panel discussions. Various approaches for obtaining this information were proposed including the formation of fact-finding committees that would travel to Iraq to assess the infrastructure (physical and human) on the ground. Dr. Salih, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research from Kurdistan, valued the suggestions from the IAAPC but also emphasized the need to be responsive to the realities on the ground, given the limited resources available. The Minister provided insight into the current condition of the Iraqi higher education system, particularly in the Kurdistan region and was an integral part of informing the audience on standing efforts in Iraqi higher education and opportunities for IAAPC support. Participants also acknowledged the importance of involving Iraqis in the process so that Iraqis would understand why and how the recommendations from the IAAPC are being made.

### **Survey and Analysis of Previous Efforts**

Many IAC participants shared their personal experiences helping with education and training efforts in Iraq. These discussions were helpful in identifying groups (e.g. teams of academics) and organizations (e.g. NGOs) that are already working on projects in Iraq. There was acknowledgement to not 'reinvent the wheel' but to build on past successes and learn from failed efforts.

### **Preservation of Iraq's Cultural Heritage**

Because of Iraq's cultural and historical significance, the preservation of Iraq's cultural heritage is imperative to the reconstruction process. With specific regard to higher education, Iraqi history and culture should be included in curricula. Infrastructure to

support the preservation of Iraq's cultural heritage includes libraries, museums, and fine arts institutions, along with historical and cultural sites. In the same right, a number of fellowships from the Prime Minister's office should go toward the fields of archeology, tourism, and the humanities in general. With anticipated support from the Iraqi government, and the international community, the participants expressed the overarching need to preserve Iraq's cultural heritage and history.

## **Conclusions**

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### **Overview**

One moderator characterized the occasion of the IAC to bring Iraqi-American academics and professionals together in support of Iraqi higher education by saying, “the time is right.” The U.S. has committed to building human capacity in Iraq by funding multiple programs to promote higher education in Iraq. The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education has also made a solid commitment to rebuilding Iraqi higher education through the “10,000 fellowships” program. Finally, in their passionate discourse over the issues posed at the IAC, the IAAPC is ready to plan and work together to truly make an impact on the furthering of Iraq’s higher education goals.

### **The Committee to Advise the Office of the Iraqi Cultural Attaché**

The advisory committee to be derived from the IAAPC will be multidisciplinary and strive to encompass all relevant fields. The committee’s role is to advise the Office of the Iraqi Cultural Attaché; it will be responsible for facilitating IAAPC contributions toward Iraq’s higher education objectives. By understanding and representing the capabilities of the IAAPC, soliciting and synthesizing ideas from the IAAPC members, and sustaining and building the community over the long-term, this committee will be an asset to the Iraqi higher education system both immediately and for years to come.

### **“Together for Iraq”**

When launched, the website “[www.togetherforiraq.org](http://www.togetherforiraq.org)” will serve as a tool for the IAAPC committee and the IAAPC as a whole to carry out the conclusions from this conference and to facilitate further discussion and actions to support Iraqi higher education. It will serve as a clearinghouse for information on what is happening on the ground, what has been done, and future events. With the input of the IAAPC and other site beneficiaries, the committee will continue to explore additional capabilities for this site beyond those proposed in this report.

### **The Next Step**

The advisory committee shall oversee multiple sub-committees within the five disciplines of medicine, science, engineering, humanities, and the social sciences, which will be established among the IAAPC and Iraqi academics in Iraq. This shall enable the Iraqi American academic and professionals to communicate directly with their counterparts in Iraq. These interactions will be aimed at facilitating partnerships to promote collaboration and assistance with identifying and prioritizing the needs for higher education in Iraq. The Iraqi Academic Conference will become an annual event where Iraqi-Americans who have achieved national recognition will be acknowledged and senior Iraqis will be honored. In the spirit initiated by the celebration of the achievements of Iraqi-Americans, the conference will seek to evaluate the efforts of the IAAPC, look at Iraqi higher education policy, and explore new ways that the community can address Iraq’s higher education challenges.

## **Appendix A**

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### **Iraqi Academic Conference Program:**

#### **Saturday, March 14:**

##### **8:30am Opening Ceremony**

Welcoming remarks:

- **Dr. E. William Colglazier**  
Executive Officer, National Research Council, The National Academies
- **Dr. A Hadi Al Khalili**  
Cultural Attaché, Embassy of Iraq, Washington, DC
- **Mr. Richard J. Schmierer**  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

Seniors remarks:

- **Dr. Hussain Toma**  
Former Chief of Science Policy Planning and Evaluation Branch and Executive Director of the NIMH Science Advisory Board  
Emeritus Prof. of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Presentation of “The Mesopotamia Award:”

An award of distinguished achievements shall be presented in each of the following fields:

- Medicine
- Science
- Engineering
- Humanities
- Culture

Higher Education in Iraq: Past, Present and Future

- **Dr. A Hadi Al Khalili**



## 9:30am Panel 1:

### “How can we help Iraqi academia?”

(Opportunities for Iraqis to engage in sabbaticals, research, courses, or other training)

**Moderator: Dr. Karim Altai**, Prof. Integrated Science and Technology, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

1. **Dr. Salih Al Wakil**, Distinguished Service Professor, L. T. Bolin Professor, Chairman Verna and Marrs McLean Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX
2. **Dr. Qais Al Awkati**, MD, Robert F. Loeb Professor of Medicine, Columbia University, NY
3. **Dr. Muthanna H. Al-Dahan**, Professor and Chair of Chemical and Biological Engineering at Missouri University of Science and Technology, MO
4. **Dr. Zaniab Bahrani**, Edith Porada Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology, Director of Graduate Studies, Columbia University, NY
5. **Dr. Osman Shinaishin**, Program Officer, Middle East Portfolio, Office of International Science and Engineering, National Science Foundation, Arlington, VA
6. **Dr. Peter Agre**, Director, Malaria Research Institute, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and **Nobel Laureate**, Chemistry, 2003, Baltimore, MD

## 11:00am Coffee/Tea Break/Lunch

## 1:00pm Panel 2:

### “How can we help in reforming curriculum and teaching methodologies at Iraqi Universities?”

**Remarks by Dr. Idris Hadi Salih**, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Kurdistan region, Iraq, on higher education in Kurdistan and Iraq in general.

**Moderator: Dr. Shakir Mustafa**, Professor of Modern Languages, College of Arts & Sciences, Northeastern University, Boston, MA

1. **Dr. Hamid Al-Mondhiry**, MD, Professor and Chair, Search Committee, Division of Hematology/Oncology, Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, PA
2. **Dr. Shihab A. Shamma**, Professor, Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Maryland at College Park, MD
3. **Dr. Ihsan A. Al-Shehbaz**, Professor, University of Missouri-St. Louis and Curator and Head of the Department of Asian Botany, Missouri Botanical Garden, MO
4. **Dr. Taha Al-Sabea**, Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA
5. **Dr. Nariman Farvardin**, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, University of Maryland, College Park, MD
6. **Dr. Mounir Farah**, Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR

2:30pm Break

3:00pm Panel 3:

**“What specialties should be emphasized for Iraq’s 10,000 graduate fellowship awards next year?”**

**Moderator: Dr. Farouk Mishu**, Professor and Head, Civil Engineering, Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN

1. **Dr. Hazim Safi**, MD, Professor and Chairman, Department of Cardiothoracic & Vascular Surgery, The University of Texas Medical School at Houston, TX
2. **Dr. Hussain U. Bahia**, Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI
3. **Dr. Donny George**, Professor, Asian and Asian American Studies, Stony Brook University, NY
4. **Dr. Hayder al-Shukri**, Professor and Director of Arkansas Earthquake Center and Chair of Applied Science Department. Arkansas, Little Rock, AR
5. **Dr. Ernestine Psalmonds**, Senior Program Officer at the National Academies and former Director, Graduate Research Fellowship Program, National Science Foundation, Washington, DC
6. **Dr. Eric Davis**, Professor, Political Science, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

**4:30pm** Day 1 Closing

### **Saturday evening event**

**8:00-10:00pm** Concert Hall, Smithsonian American Indian Museum

1. Acknowledging senior Iraqi academics and professionals
2. The Philadelphia Doctors Chamber Orchestra, (Iraqi conductor), joined by an Iraqi musician.
3. Performance by: The Lyre-of-Ur, (Githara Al Sumeria), London, UK (<http://www.lyre-of-ur.com>)

### **Sunday March 15:**

9:00 am Letter from **Dr. Abid Theab Al Ajili**  
Minster of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Baghdad, Iraq

Plans for Action Working Groups: Panels 1, 2 & 3

10:30am Coffee/Tea Break

11:00am Steering Committee Recommendations

12:00pm Closing

Sunday evening event (optional):

6:30-8:30pm Performance by: The Lyre-of-Ur, (Githara Al Sumeria), London, UK  
Iraqi traditional musical performance by Amir El Saffar group, playing  
Iraqi and western instruments. (<http://www.amirelsaffar.com>)

**Exhibition:**

University of Chicago, Orient Museum: Iraqi archeology exhibit

**Award Judges:**

1. Medicine: Dr. Mahmud Thamer, professor
2. Science: Dr. Hussain Tuma, professor
3. Engineering: Dr. Mahdi Al Obaidi, professor
4. Humanity: Dr. Louay Bahry, professor
5. Culture: Ms. Shameem Rassam, media expert
6. Coordinator: Ms. Siham Al Rikabi, educationist

**Contact:**

Iraq Cultural Office,  
1638 R St., NW, #220  
Washington, DC 20009  
Email: [Iraqi.academic.conf.usa@gmail.com](mailto:Iraqi.academic.conf.usa@gmail.com)  
Phone: 202-986-2626  
Fax: 202-986-2291

**The seniors group committee:**

Dr. Mahdi Sundukchi  
Zaid J. Hamandi  
Marwa W. Al Khairo  
Sabah Maliki  
Jonathan Kinny

## Appendix B

### Letter from the Iraq Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research

الأخوة الحضور، السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

يسرني أن أرحب بكم في مؤتمركم هذا أجمل ترحيب متمنين له النجاح والرقى. ونشكركم على تجشمكم عناء السفر والحضور إلى هذا المكان مما يدل على حرصكم وتفانيكم للعمل من أجل رفعة بلدكم العراق. وبهذه المناسبة أيضا ندعوكم لمد جسور الصلة بينكم وبين الكفاءات في الجامعات العراقية. وكانت رغبتنا أن أكون بينكم ولكن التزاماتنا المفاجئة أدت إلى إلغاء سفرنا.

أيها الأخوة الأفاضل، أيها الكفاءات العراقية التي دائما ترنو إلى حب الوطن وسماع أخباره، يمكنكم المساهمة في بناء بلدكم وتعزيز وحدته من خلال عدة محاور المحور الأول:

البحث العلمي: البحث العلمي أساس تقدم الأمم وامتلاك ناصي العلم هو امتلاك القوة والريادة. يحتاج إخوانكم من الباحثين في العراق إلى التعاون والإستفادة من خبراتكم في البحث العلمي والنشر في المجالات العالمية والمساهمة في عملية بناء البحث في الجامعات العراقية. وبإمكاننا تنظيم التواصل من خلال الملحقية الثقافية في واشنطن.

المحور الثاني: بناء استراتيجيات التربية والتعليم في العراق. ونحن على وشك الإنتهاء من مشروع بناء استراتيجية متكاملة ونرحب في التعاون مع المختصين منكم في هذا المجال.

المحور الثالث: محور توأمة البرامج في بعض الجامعات العراقية مع بعض البرامج في الجامعات التي لكم علاقة فيها. إن التوأمة على مستوى البرامج (الأقسام) هو الأسلم في بادئ الأمر.

المحور الرابع: تدريب الأساتذة والمعاشنة الفعلية للعمل لمدة محدودة.  
المحور الخامس: تدريب الطلبة الأوائل من الجامعات العراقية في الجامعات والمعاهد الأمريكية.

المحور السادس: توفير فرص تدريبية للبعثات البحثية لطلبة الدكتوراة والماجستير ولمدة ٦ أشهر وعلى حساب وزارتنا. وسترسل التخصصات المطلوبة وخلاصة البحث.

نأمل من التعليم العالي في العراق أن يضع أسس الديمقراطية وتعزيز مفهوم قبول مبدأ تعدد الثقافات والأعراق والطوائف والمذاهب. وسنسعى جاهدين لتمكين الجامعات من أداء رسالتها في تثقيف المجتمع وفي تقديم أفضل الخدمات له وهذا لا يمكن تحقيقه بدون تضافر جميع مكونات المجتمع العراقي وتضافر علمائه ومثقفيه في الخارج الذين يملكون الخبرة الواسعة. وستكون الأجيال القادمة مدينة لخدماتكم. إن المسؤولين في وزارة التعليم العالي سيكون سعداء ومسرورين لتقديم أي نقد بناء وأسأل الله لكم أياماً سعيدة ملؤها العطاء وأن ينعم الله عليكم وعلى عوائلكم بالخير والعطاء.

ولا يفوتنا أن نقدم جزيل شكرنا وتقديرنا للسيد المستشار الثقافي الأستاذ الدكتور عبد الهادي الخليلي للجهد الذي يبذله في جمع شمل العراقيين وخدمتهم ونشكر كل من ساهم في انجاح هذا المؤتمر.

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

عبد نياي العجيلي  
وزير التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

## Appendix C

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### Letter from the Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (translated into English)

Brothers and Sisters, Al Salamu Alykum,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the conference, I wish you great success. I appreciate that you have traveled great distances from all across the United States indicating your willingness to sacrifice and give priority to your home country, Iraq. In this occasion you have been called to extend your hand and help build a bridge between yourselves and your counterparts at Iraqi Universities. I sincerely wish I could have attended the conference and took all the steps to join you but unexpected, last-minute circumstances hindered our trip.

Brothers and sisters, you talented Iraqis; who love Iraq and are eager to hear good news of your country, surely you can participate in the rebuilding of the new Iraq for all.

This can be done through:

1. Scientific Research: Scientific research is the foundation which enables the progress of nations. Your fellow researchers in Iraq are in need of your cooperation and the investment of your expertise, in research, and publication in scientific journals to help modernize research in Iraq. We can build the mechanism and open the channel through our cultural office in Washington, D.C.
2. Build Education Strategies in Iraq: We are nearing completion of strategic planning for the rebuilding of the education system in Iraq. We welcome your professional input to help us achieve this goal.
3. Twinning between Iraqi and U.S. University programs: Starting at the departmental level is the most effective way to achieve the twinning of programs.
4. Faculty exchange program: Inviting faculty to physically live with you in your departments for short for training.
5. Student exchange program: Training honor students from Iraqi colleges and universities at your universities.
6. Training opportunities for Ph.D. and Masters Students: Training students for a few months sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Ministry will determine which fields are priorities and send students based on those needs.

Our target at the Ministry of Higher Education is to help build the foundation for democracy and the acceptance of all. We are doing our best to support the Iraqi Universities in the pursuit of their mission to educate and offer the best possible service to society. This mission would not be possible without the help of Iraqi scientists and scholars abroad. The next generation of Iraqis will recognize and appreciate your efforts.

The leadership at the Ministry of Higher Education will be more than happy to offer any assistance necessary to achieve these goals.

I pray to Allah, almighty, for you and your families' health and happiness. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to show our appreciation and thank Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Khalili, the Cultural Attaché, for his marvelous efforts to gather Iraqis in the U.S. in service of all Iraqis. Additional thanks goes to the staff of the Cultural Office and everyone who helped and supported in this effort.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Abid Theab Al-Ajili  
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific  
Research  
March 2009

## Appendix D

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### Mesopotamia awardees:

**Humanities:** Muhsin Al Mosawi

**Medicine:** Ami Iskendrian

**Science:** Salih Al Wakil

**Engineering:** Muthanna Al Dahhan

**Culture:** Zainab Salbi

### Distinction Awardees:

**Humanities:**

Abdul Ilah Al Sayagh

Salih Al Toma

Foad Al Baali

Hind Rassam

Ahmed Farhadi

**Medicine:**

Hamid Al Mundhiri

Saad Shakir

Georger Abbouna

Sabri Shuker

Salah Al Askari

**Science:**

Zuhair Munir

Mohammed Al Shaikhli

Asad Khailani

Abdou Ayash

Nori Barka

**Engineering:**

Hashim Hamzawi

Hani Hayder

Hussain Bhaia

Ahmed Al Kaisi

Muhannad Bakir

**Culture**

Husam Al Fadhli

Hashim Al Taweel

Foad Mishu



## **Senior's Awardees:**

Bahnam Abu Al- Soof, Mohammed Abutabikh, Salah Al Askari, Ridha Al Attar, Mohammad Wassel Al-Dhahir, Jaffar Sadik Al Hasani, Majid Alsikafi, Salih Altoma, Talib Adtrabadi, Farhan Bakir, Badri Chalabi, Hikmat Fikrat, Salman Gailani, Wadie Hamandi, Hashim Hamzawi, Abdul Sahib Hashim, Khaldoon Hilmi, Majid Hussein, Fik Khalil Ibrahim, May Kaftan-Kassim, Latifa Kaftan, Sami Kassir, Asad Khailani, Mohammed Ali Khalil, Khalida Kassir, Tali Makki, Fuad Mishu, Hisham Munir, Taha Naji, Hasan Taha Najim, Maliha Rahmatullah, Abdul Rasul Sadik, Hassan Salih, Jalal Salihi, Adnan Shakir, Ahmed Sallal, Hameed Tajeldin, Sahib Thahab, Hussain Tuma, Salih Wakil

## **Conference Organizers**

### **The Cultural Office:**

A Hadi Al Khalili, MD, Cultural Attaché  
Staff of the Iraqi Cultural Office

### **The National Academies**

John Boright, Ph.D., Executive Director, Office of International Affairs  
Effie Bentsi-Adoteye, Administrative Coordinator  
Michelle Crosby, Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Fellow  
Erin Fitzgerald, Ph.D., Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Fellow  
Todd Haim, Ph.D., Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Fellow  
Sandy Polu, Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Fellow

## **Supporting Organizations**

### **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)**

Rieko Yajima, Ph.D., Senior Program Associate, Research Competitiveness Program

### **U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation (CRDF)**

Nadia Haven, Program Assistant, Centers, Institution Building, & Innovation Programs  
Julie Wilson, Program Manager, Cooperative Grants Program

*The Embassy of the Republic of Iraq and The National Academies express thanks to AAAS and CRDF for their kind assistance with this report.*