Cultural Salon on “Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Iraq in the light of international experience and standards”

Baghdad, 13 June 2011

Recommendations

On 13 June 2011, an open panel discussion was held at the “Safia Souhail Cultural Salon” to discuss the status of freedom of opinion and expression in Iraq and the legislative requirements to ensure their protection. This meeting attracted significant attention both from the media and the political class, considering that the Iraqi parliament is in the process of passing a number of laws, including the law on the freedom of press, the law on freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association and the law on political parties and the rules for their funding.

The meeting provided an opportunity to open a space for free dialogue on these outstanding issues of the Iraqi political agenda, allowing to Iraqi civil society organisations to express their vision and concerns on these bills and providing an opportunity to assess the extent of maturity of the Iraq’s institutional framework to the light of its constitutional provisions as well as relevant international obligations deriving from the conventions and treaties ratified.

More than 300 persons participated in the meeting, including journalists, youth activists, academics, CSO’s, members of the Baghdad Councils League as well as members of the diplomatic corps, namely the EU Ambassador in Iraq, Ms. Jana Hebashkova, the Chargé d’affaires of the Australian Embassy, Mr. David Livingstone, the First Secretary of the Italian Embassy, Mr. Francesco Fedele, and representatives of the UK, French and other European embassies.

Participants to the meeting agreed on the following recommendations:

1. Participants stressed the importance for the new version of the Journalists Protection Law to respect Iraq’s commitments to the relevant and ratified International conventions and agreements (in particular Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) as well as to preserve the gains of constitutional rights and freedoms and ensure their concrete application on the ground.

2. Participants also emphasized the importance of benefiting from positive international experiences as well as of scrutinizing the outcomes of the recent Tunisian and Egyptian developments, in order to identify the legislative requirements that would enable Iraq to empower itself and strengthen its transition towards democracy and respect for the rule of law in the area of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of opinion and expression.