

## **IRAQIS CALL FOR END TO DIVISIVE POLICIES AND GREATER EU INVOLVEMENT**

Ending ethnically divisive policies and increasing EU involvement are crucial to building a secure and viable democracy in Iraq, a group of prominent Iraqis told an international conference convened in the UK by the Foreign Policy Centre.

The 17 Iraqi participants, who included lawyers, judges, journalists, leaders of NGO and women's groups and two Ministers in the Interim government, emphasised the need to engage with local groups. The conference was a unique effort to identify the views of local Iraqi groups and NGOs, whose voice has been conspicuously absent, on security, the rule of law and institutional reform.

Its official recommendations call on the international community to stop analysing issues according to ethnic and religious divisions – an approach that has unnecessarily exacerbated tensions between Iraq's different groups. Coalition forces must be replaced with Iraqi troops in major cities at the earliest opportunity, and the US should adopt "softer" policing methods, along the model of the British in Basra. Initiatives such as cash-for-guns and dialogue with local groups are deemed essential to making Iraqis feel safe.

*"Ordinary Iraqis have not been listened to enough on matters that affect them dramatically,"* Rouzbeh Pirouz, chairman of the Foreign Policy Centre's Civility programme on Middle East reform, commented. *"The international community must pay heed to the conference findings to begin winning hearts and minds."*

Bringing the EU on board in Iraq's reconstruction was a recurrent and popular theme in the discussions. This would increase the coalition's legitimacy, and make use of Europe's strong expertise in post-conflict work.

*"European and American leaders must stop using Iraq as a pawn in transatlantic politics,"* Mr Pirouz added. *"They must work together to build a safe and viable democratic Iraq."*

### **OFFICIAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (1)** Increasing **security** and **justice** by emphasising dialogue over force, as in Najaf; using senior Shi'a at front lines of negotiation; adopting "softer" policing methods; disarming the population with cash-for-guns
- (2)** Greater **EU involvement** in political, economic and humanitarian affairs; allaying Iraqi fears about meddling by regional neighbours

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- (3) Promoting awareness of **elections** through school programmes, the media, and partnerships with local Iraqi NGOs
- (4) Developing an **independent Iraqi media** with a “BBC-style” charter
- (5) Increasing **accountability** of process for awarding reconstruction contracts

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The **Iraq Retreat** organised by the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre was held at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire, from 22-24 October 2004, under the Chatham House rule. Seventeen prominent Iraqi nationals attended, including the **Minister of State for Civil Society**, HE Dr. Mamou F Othman, the **Minister for Human Rights**, HE Mr. Bikhtiyar Amin, and representatives of 15 civil society organisations. British, European and American officials also attended.

2. The Civility Programme is a programme of research, events and publications aimed at informing Western strategies for political reform in the Greater Middle East. Underpinning its activities is the belief that meaningful reform in the region can only come from a functioning civil society supported by the values of the rule of law and essential freedoms of speech, information, publication and association. Rouzbeh Pirouz is its founder and chairman.

2. The Foreign Policy Centre is an independent think-tank on international issues set up under the patronage of British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998.

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