

Advocacy Letter on the Harmful Impact on the Iraqi Civil Society and Vulnerable Communities of the Suspension of US Development Funding

February 02, 2025

Dear Sir / Madam,

We write to express our deep concern regarding the recent suspension of US development funding in Iraq. It poses significant harm to civil society and the vulnerable populations we serve. The abrupt cessation of critical programs has not only disrupted essential services but has also eroded trust in the NGO sector, leaving both workers and beneficiaries at heightened risk.

Communities in Iraq already experience a profound distrust toward public and private institutions. NGOs have long served as the last supporter of hope for many, particularly survivors and victims of domestic violence and individuals seeking economic empowerment. The sudden halt of our operations has led beneficiaries to express sentiments such as, *“You were our last hope, and now you leave us like the others.”* This loss of trust leaves workers and beneficiaries vulnerable to increased violence, displacement, and forced migration. Communities are also expressing reluctance to trust future aid programs.

Moreover, NGOs have played a pivotal role in fostering community-level cooperation and bridging sectarian divides. These efforts have proven effective in mitigating violent conflicts. However, with the closure of these spaces, communities are left without platforms for dialogue and reconciliation. Coupled with increasing sectarian rhetoric, the likelihood of renewed violence grows alarmingly high.

Meanwhile, extremist groups and militias have perpetuated narratives that NGOs serve foreign agendas, using these claims to justify violence against civil society organizations. The suspension of US development funding unfortunately reinforces these dangerous narratives. It also increases the likelihood of attacks on NGOs and furthers jeopardizing the safety of humanitarian workers.

On the other hand, the Iraqi legal environment is shifting rapidly, with the current parliament pushing for laws that violate fundamental freedoms and human rights. Civil society advocacy campaigns have been instrumental in halting these regressive legal changes and lobbying for equitable reforms. The suspension of US development funding severely undermines these advocacy efforts, allowing authoritarian policies to gain momentum unchecked. Authoritarian actors now have also greater room to dominate public discourse, suppress dissent, and limit civic freedoms due to lost accountability efforts.

The suspension has also directly impacted livelihoods, both for NGO workers and the thousands of direct beneficiaries reliant on these programs. Even NGOs with diversified funding sources are struggling to sustain their operations, causing long-term harm to one of the essential pillars of democracy in Iraq.

We urge all relevant stakeholders, including US governmental actors and international partners, to reconsider the ramifications of this suspension. The humanitarian sector is not just about service delivery, it is about safeguarding democracy, protecting human rights, and preventing the further deterioration of social stability. We strongly advocate for the **immediate resumption of US development funding while the review process takes place simultaneously**. This approach ensures that urgent humanitarian and development needs continue to be met without further harm to civil society.

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