



WE HOPE A CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN IRAQ AND TURKEY AIMED AT DEVELOPING THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ.

Abdul Razzaq Abdul Jalil al Isa



Abdul Razzaq Abdul Jalil al Isa was born in 1949 in Najaf, Iraq. He was graduated from the Chemistry Department of Basra University. He got his Phd from London Liverpool University on Organic Chemistry in 1979. He served as the Cultural Attaché of Iraq to London between 2011 and 2012, member of Jordan Arab Thought Forum in 2013, and the Cultural Attaché of Iraq to Jordan between 2012 and 2014. Between July 2014 and September 2014, he served as the Cultural Attaché of Iraq to Turkey. Besides, he attended more than 60 conferences and 120 symposiums and wrote several books. He also led the efforts to write the tourist guide on Najaf in Arabic, English, and Persian. In 2012, he served as the editor for the guide prepared for the students holding scholarships who sent to London.

ORSAM: How was the education in Iraq affected by the presence and advance of ISIS?

Abdul Razzaq Abdul Jalil al Isa: Higher education in Iraq started with the founding of a Law Faculty in 1908 and continued with the Faculty of Engineering (1921), High Faculty of Education (1923). An important threshold was passed with the opening of the University of Baghdad in 1957. Even though the faculties mentioned forms the foundation of the University of Baghdad, the first university in Iraq is the University of Al Hikma, which was established by the Jesuits in 1956. Afterwards, with the founding of the University of Technology (1960), the University of Mustansiriyah (1963), the University of Basra (1964) and the University of Mosul (1967) and others, there are 51 private and 53 state universities in Iraq –except the universities in the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (IKRG)– as of 2016. The student count is 800,000 in state universities and 200,000 in private universities amounting to a total of approximately one million. The number of university professors is approximately 50,000.

I have to remind you that the higher education in Iraq before the Iraq-Iran war, in the 1970s, was the best among the Gulf countries. Most of the doctors in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates were Iraqi citizens while most of the university professors in the Gulf countries were generally Iraqis. The higher education in Iraq was established in accordance with the rules and foundations of the British education system. Nevertheless, the academic institutions in Iraq have weakened as many academics and university professors left Iraq due to Iran-Iraq War and the economic embargo issued by the USA from 1980-2003. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the number of academic conference and workshops held by our universities declined and almost no one attended conferences held outside Iraq. Besides, communication with universities outside Iraq was very difficult due to internet and computer bans. In order to address these problems, we have developed various programs aimed at opening the Iraqi universities to the world and developing capacity for our academics. Our universities have reconnected with the world and internet usage has increased. The Iraqi Ministry

of Higher Education has participated in the U.S. project of Virtual Library developed for the American troops in Iraq. Various programs within this library have helped university professors and high level officials for rehabilitation. Despite all these efforts, the needs of the academic institutions in Iraq are many. Between 2005 and 2011, a high number of Iraqi students benefited from the scholarship provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and had the opportunity to study abroad. In addition, some students pay for their own expenses since the economy has developed after 2003.

The higher education in Iraq also needs professional and well trained personnel. This issue is among the motivations of my visit to Turkey. During our visit, we have seen that Turkey is eager to engage and cooperate with Iraq in the field of education. Education exchange cooperation that we have agreed upon will enable support for training academics and high level officials as well as providing student exchange programs. We are grateful for these. I hope the future will bring more comprehensive cooperation.

Coming back to the ISIS issue, it has dealt a great deal

of damage to the universities in the cities it occupied and looted the equipment in classrooms and laboratories. This is only one aspect. From this point onwards, it is important to provide support for the education institutions in the cities liberated from ISIS. The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education will support the universities in these cities but the psychological trauma suffered by families and students under the ISIS rule is the real problem. We have made the necessary preparations to provide rehabilitation services to not only students but also families in order to tackle this problem.

As the Minister of Higher Education, are you prepared for the post-ISIS period? What are your plans? Does the Iraqi government support this issue? What do you expect from Turkey?

The government provided a special budget for rebuilding universities, procuring the necessary equipment and rehabilitating the students in the cities liberated from ISIS. In addition, works have been going on in order to organize education programs and cultural activities in the post-ISIS period.

The academic institutions in Iraq have weakened as many academics and university professors left Iraq due to Iran-Iraq War and the economic embargo issued by the USA from 1980-2003.



Can you regulate the universities within the IKRG? Or do they act in accordance with their own regulations?

I am one of the technocrat ministers. Two months ago I visited IKRG for discussing about revisions on higher education laws and regulations dating back to the Saddam era that are still in force. One of the most important of these laws is the Law No. 40 passed in 1988 which is in force for almost 30 years. Therefore, we have started to change these laws and talked to the IKRG about that. In addition, we are conducting joint studies with the IKRG about the future of higher education in Iraq and academic plans.

You had some talks in Turkey. What do you think of these talks and what did you expect from Turkey?

The talks were successful and many common views were declared between the two countries about the rehabilitation and capacity developments pertaining to the academics. We need expertise in higher education and we need to actualize the scholarships in this field through the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education. Turkey has adopted a positive perspective toward the issues we raised. We are grateful to Turkey for its support. We hope a closer cooperation between the two sides aimed at developing the higher education in Iraq. In

this context, we declared our positive opinion on establishing Turkish universities in Iraq. In addition, we have Turkish language departments in two universities (Universi-

ty of Baghdad and University of Kufa). We hope Turkey will provide special support to these departments which contribute to the spread of Turkish culture.

ORSAM is an independent think-tank specializing on Middle Eastern affairs. ORSAM seeks to diversify sources of knowledge on the region and establish a channel of communication between the local experts and Turkish academic and policy circles. Toward that end, ORSAM facilitates the exchanges of officials, academics, strategists, journalists, businesspeople and members of civil society from the region with their Turkish counterparts. ORSAM conducts studies on the regional developments and disseminates their results to the policy and academic circles as well as the wider public through various publication outlets. ORSAM publications include books, reports, bulletins, newsletters, policy briefs, conference minutes and two journals *Ortadoğu Analiz* and *Ortadoğu Etütleri*.

© Content of this report is copyrighted to ORSAM. Except reasonable and partial quotation and use under the Act No. 5846, Law on Intellectual and Artistic Works, via proper citation, the content may not be used or re-published without prior permission by ORSAM. The views expressed in this report reflect only the opinions of its authors and do not represent the institutional opinion of ORSAM.



Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (ORSAM)

Süleyman Nazif Sokak No: 12-B Çankaya / Ankara

Tel: 0 (312) 430 26 09 Fax: 0 (312) 430 39 48

www.orsam.org.tr