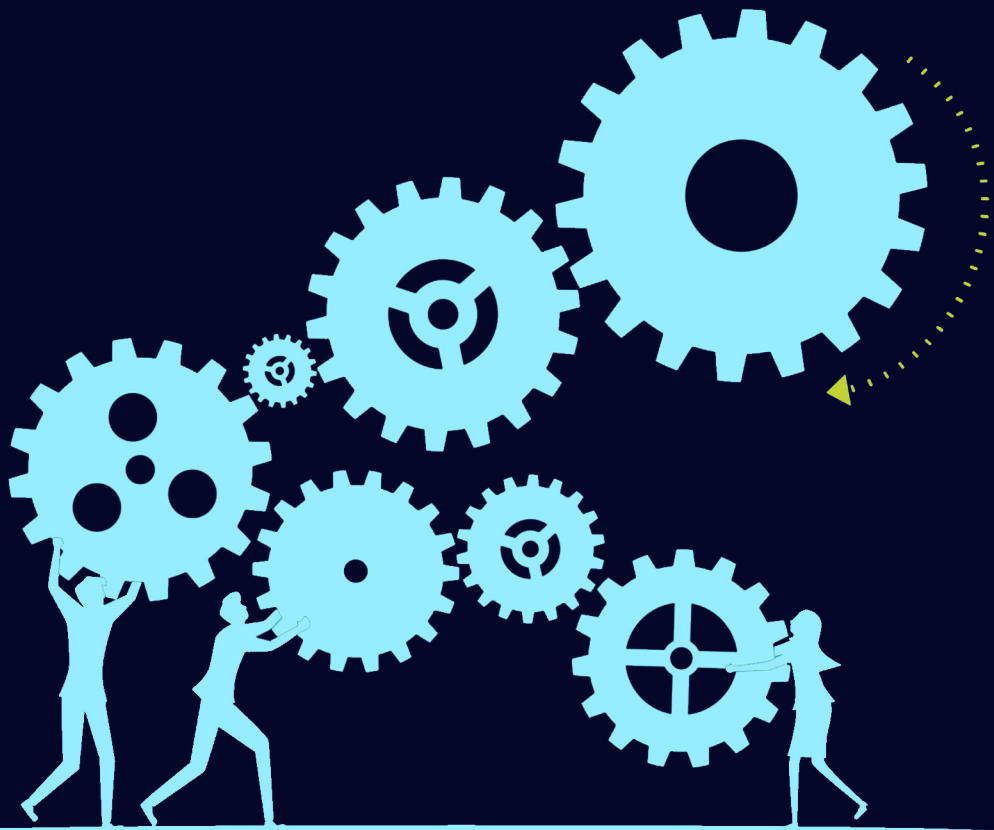


STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027

Peace and Freedom Organization



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Introduction

Peace and Freedom Organization is a non-governmental organization officially established in 2013 through the initiative of a group of human rights and peace-building activists. It is currently officially registered with the NGO Department in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in Baghdad and the NGO Department affiliated with the Council of Ministers in Erbil.

The organization operates on two main tracks:

- **Peace-building and protection of diversity and social cohesion**
- **Human rights and public freedoms**

This initial draft of the strategic plan for 2024- -2027 comes as a continuation of the organization's previous plan for 2019 - 2023, which will guide the organization's work for the next four years.

The organization recognizes that the strategic plan is a necessary tool to ensure clear mandates and work objectives, so that available human, administrative, and financial resources can be adequately allocated and used to achieve maximum expected results. Additionally, Peace and Freedom Organization is interested in ongoing changes in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region as well as in the Middle East region.

This strategic plan document is the result of the organization's work experiences and internal reports, and the result of internal discussions and meetings in previous periods about the current dynamics affecting the political, economic, and social situation and the reality of human rights and public freedoms in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Organization members conducted brainstorming and studied the Iraqi reality and context to design goals and strategies for the organization's two main programs. A SWOT analysis was also relied upon to determine priorities related to the necessary steps to ensure the organization's continuous institutional development.

These meetings, workshops, and discussions were participatory processes aimed at ensuring the effective participation of all organization members in developing the organization and fostering a strong sense of belonging and dedication to achieving the organization's specified goals.

The initial draft of the organization's strategic plan was also presented at the board meeting held on September 21 and 22, 2022. During this meeting, the plan was discussed and developed, and a committee was tasked with amending it to be presented to the organization's general conference in July 2023 for approval. The new board of the organization was also tasked with initiating amendments to the strategic plan as needed.

History of the organization

Reason for existence

Peace and Freedom Organization has dedicated itself to promoting a society that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to fostering a culture of non-violence and conflict resolution through peaceful means.

In 2013, a group of activists, intellectuals, and journalists gathered to establish the organization in an attempt to address the increasing restrictions on individual and collective freedoms and the violations committed against human rights throughout Iraq. There was concern about the society's inability to address conflicts positively, leading to an increase in violence affecting the social fabric in the long term.

Peace and Freedom Organization is a genuine non-governmental organization based on membership, belonging to a strong circle of activists in Iraqi society, who play a significant role in guiding the organization's work and expressing opinions regarding the organization's reports at the general conference.

The first conference of the organization was held on September 21/2016 ,22-, in Erbil Governorate, with the attendance of 58 members of the organization from both (men - women) and from all different Iraqi components. The new administrative body of the organization was elected, followed by the election of the organization's Board of Directors.

The second conference of the organization was held on September 21- 22, 2019, in Erbil Governorate, with the attendance of 58 members of the organization from both (men - women) and from all different Iraqi components. The new administrative body of the organization was elected, followed by the election of the organization's Board of Directors.

The third conference of the organization was held on July 6/2023 ,7-, in Erbil, with the attendance of the majority of the organization's members and wide participation from local and international partners, representatives of official partner and supporting entities of our organization in the Council of Representatives, representatives of the Kurdistan Parliament, the federal government, and the regional government. The new Board of Directors was elected, the strategic plan was approved, the internal regulations were amended, and the activity, financial, administrative, and human resources reports were ratified.

The current Iraqi context

Political status

1- The Iraqi government has been struggling with weak organization of its institutions since 2003 and has severely suffered from various types of conflicts, including sectarian and political strife among different ruling political parties.

2- Neither the central Iraqi government nor the Kurdistan Regional Government has been able to make progress towards building a civil state based on citizenship.

3- There is no clear separation between the legislative and executive branches, as well as attempts to correct the path of the judiciary. The executive authority has centralized all powers, which is not conducive to any form of democracy.

4- The central government lacks the strength to enforce the rule of law throughout the country, and tribes, especially in southern and central Iraq, still hold influence and power. This leads to numerous problems and challenges in applying laws, as tribes often interpret laws in ways that suit them.

5- The imbalance in the participation of all components of the Iraqi people in governance, the persistence of corruption and political discord, and the widening gap between security forces and civilians have opened the door to violence and extremism since 2003. This has led to the emergence of militias and extremist groups, the latest being the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014. Minorities have been similarly neglected in decision-making, despite laws providing protection for them, their political participation remains weak, and discrimination exists.

6- There is a weakness in the implementation of the civil articles of the 2005 constitution, which are based on the concept of citizenship and a unifying identity, providing fair opportunities for protection, development, and active participation for all. Additionally, there is a need to diagnose the impact of constitutional provisions that conflict with concepts of democracy and civility.

7- Regarding the political vision, there is a clear lack of rehabilitation and stabilization programs for the post-ISIS period, suggesting a bleak future for the political situation.

8- The democratic process in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, still lacks much effective and comprehensive planning. Political participation remains limited, freedoms are restricted, and media is subject to control and monitoring, while non-governmental organizations are unable to oversee

government work on one hand, and there is a misunderstanding of the concept of citizenship on the other.

9- The impact of international and regional interventions on Iraqi affairs, which have made Iraq a battleground for ongoing political and economic conflicts in various forms.

10- The elections for the Iraqi parliament are not without challenges and issues. In 2018, the parliamentary elections were marred by many suspicions of fraud and the burning of ballot boxes even before they were re-audited. These elections resulted in a government similar to its predecessors with a sectarian division that lasted no more than a year before protests began, with citizens taking to the streets in Baghdad followed by central and southern provinces of Iraq in October 2019, which resulted in the death of more than 600 people and injury of more than 24,000 people according to official Iraqi government figures. This popular pressure led to the resignation of the government and the formation of a transitional government in May 2020, whose main task, as announced, was to prepare for early elections. On October 10, 2021, the parliamentary elections were held, but the formation of the federal government was delayed until October 2022, during which many demonstrations and sit-ins occurred, leading to the storming of the Green Zone and confrontations between more than one political party.

11- On December 18, 2023, provincial council elections will be held according to the date announced by the central Iraqi government after they were frozen to contain the popular protest movement that began on October 1, 2019. At that time, the Iraqi parliament decided to freeze the work of the provincial councils and terminate the district and sub-district councils. Although the formation of local governments was delayed in some provinces, new governors were elected, and the provincial councils held their meetings and began their work.

12- The participation of minority representatives in general elections remains symbolic and ineffective, and there is an unfair distribution of seats for minority representatives in local councils, the Iraqi parliament, and the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. Moreover, there are minorities that are politically unrepresented or involved in decision-making or even constitutionally recognized.

13- Regarding the political situation in the Kurdistan Region, the conflict between the two main Kurdish political parties creates increasing instability in the region, which was considered the safest in Iraq since 2003, in a way that has not allowed new political movements to operate in the political arena.

14- The ongoing dispute between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional

Government has negatively impacted citizens' lives economically and socially. The agreement on oil resource management has not been settled, and the budget issue between the two governments remains unresolved. The dispute over the contested areas is expected to continue, especially after the liberation operations in 2017. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq's referendum on independence in 2017 further widened the gap of mistrust between the political parties in the region and other Iraqi areas.

15- The Kurdistan Region is currently experiencing a legislative vacuum due to the Federal Court's decision to annul the extension of the parliament's term in the region and to consider the regional government a caretaker government, in the absence of any prospects for holding Kurdistan parliamentary elections. There are multiple concerns in this regard, which negatively affect the political, economic, and security situation in the region.

Economic status

1- Iraq has suffered from a crisis in managing economic and monetary resources since 2003, which continues to this day.

2- Iraq's economy relies entirely on the oil and gas industries and has not invested in developing other industries in the country. A drop in oil prices affects Iraq's budget and consequently the economy, resulting in the halting of many projects, as seen in past years.

3- No economic plan or strategy has been activated by the Iraqi government or the Kurdistan Region regarding investments and the development of local production. Relying solely on oil and gas revenues and imports poses a significant threat to the stability and sustainability of the Iraqi economy.

4- There is an absence of an existing strategy or plan regarding the provision of basic services throughout the country, with levels of services related to water and electricity supply deteriorating significantly.

5- The extensive war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant - ISIS, caused the Iraqi government to focus on massive military expenditures. The war also led to the displacement of millions of citizens from provinces occupied by the organization, leaving the authorities unable to provide suitable living conditions and manage the forced displacement in a timely manner.

6- The Iraqi government's borrowing of numerous loans from the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank had a direct impact on citizens, leading to an increase in commodity prices and higher tax rates to repay debts and loans.

7- Amid the severe economic crisis that hit the global economy due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the halt of global oil sales during the worldwide lockdown, a global economic recession occurred, affecting the Iraqi economy and resulting in delays in paying employee salaries for several months and rising commodity prices. The Kurdistan Regional Government also deducted amounts from employees under the title of compulsory savings, and to this day, the accumulated amounts have not been returned to the employees despite numerous attempts by the community and the judiciary.

8- The Iraqi government announced economic reforms through a reform paper called the «White Paper,» which economists considered to implement what the World Bank wants. The government also devalued the Iraqi dinar against the US dollar, stating that this measure would help reduce financial corruption and support local production. However, the opposite occurred, as it burdened low-income individuals due to increased prices of food and consumer goods. Recently, the current government made another adjustment to the US dollar exchange rate, hoping for economic improvement.

9- Iraq is ranked among the top 10 most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption poses a challenge in both Iraq and the region, significantly affecting citizens' and private companies' trust in the national and regional governments.

10- Laws related to workers' rights remain weak, as no law for trade union freedoms has been issued despite the completion of the specialized committee, and the draft law was submitted to the federal government in 2018. However, it is still awaiting submission for approval by the Iraqi Parliament. Recently, a delegation from the International Labour Organization visited the International Standards Committee and recommended the urgent enactment of a law for trade union freedoms in line with international conventions, especially Convention No. 87 of 1948, which Iraq ratified.

11- The Iraqi Parliament enacted the Retirement and Social Security Law despite the observations made by Iraqi labor unions and federations on some articles of this law. There is also an emphasis on implementing Convention No. 87 of 1948, which Iraq ratified with Law No. 87 of 2017, and a demand for the Kurdistan Regional Government to implement the Iraqi Labor Law No. 37 of 2015.

12- The move towards privatizing services such as water, electricity, and petroleum products poses a threat to low-income citizens due to the significant increase in service prices, making it unaffordable for all citizens to pay for or purchase essential services.

13- The deteriorating economic situation negatively affects the living conditions of Iraqi citizens. There is an increase in the disparities between social classes, creating social gaps. Additionally, there

is a rise in poverty levels, a lack of suitable job opportunities, and an increase in unemployment rates. One of the reasons might be the reliance on foreign labor, as they work for lower wages and longer hours, which is unsustainable for the Iraqi worker. Moreover, the absence of labor rights protection and social security makes it easier for employers to exploit them, leading skilled young people to migrate in search of better economic opportunities.

14- The presence of a large number of illegal foreign workers entering Iraq with tourist visas or for religious tourism directly affects workers' rights. Foreign workers are treated inhumanely and are forced to work long hours for low wages.

15- Iraq and the Kurdistan Region need to develop and implement economic plans and enhance local production. It is also necessary to address the widespread corruption in most state institutions. The government must be accountable to its citizens to foresee a better economic future.

16- The approval of the budget in Iraq for three years, from 2023 to 2025, raises many concerns about potential tensions between different parties regarding its provisions, especially between the region and the federal government, alongside the estimation of the oil barrel price at around 70 USD per barrel. The approval of this budget may have negative consequences in terms of:

First: Any drop in the oil barrel price below 70 USD negatively impacts the budget.

Second: The lack of agreement on selling Kurdistan oil and not sending Kurdistan budget could create tensions that may negatively affect the economic reality in Iraq and Kurdistan Region.

Social status

1- The deterioration of the political, economic, and security situation in Iraq after 2003 had severe effects on the social level across the country and led to numerous conflicts based on religious, sectarian, and political grounds. Many social groups were marginalized for several years on both political and social levels, while ethnic and religious minorities, in particular, suffered from systematic discrimination and intolerance. Minorities became targets for extremist groups, and the situation intensified in 2014, escalating to international crimes against humanity, including the perpetration of genocide against minorities in Nineveh, including the Yazidi community. The impact of this war resulted in internal displacement to the Kurdistan region and southern Iraq, and a significant portion of minorities sought external migration due to feeling safer and more protected in those countries, while their own state proved incapable of ensuring their protection. This led to a loss of diversity in Iraq's original components, despite the Iraqi parliament enacting the Survivors Law in 2020 to

guarantee the rights of survivors from the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria - ISIS, including Yazidis and other components. However, it is also necessary for the Iraqi government to find comprehensive solutions for the thousands of children left behind by the liberation operations and the war against the organization.

2- The displacement of many citizens due to the violence of extremist groups and military operations created a demographic imbalance and the presence of social categories such as displaced persons and the host community. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government struggled to provide basic needs amid the 2014 crisis, primarily with humanitarian support from international organizations. Tensions may escalate between host communities and displaced persons as internally displaced persons are viewed as a burden on available resources, with concerns related to the stability of displaced persons in the Kurdistan region and their non-voluntary return to their areas after liberation, despite the federal government's decision to close displacement camps.

3- In recent years, there has been a frightening increase in drug abuse and trafficking among young people and women, amidst the absence of any real response from state institutions to prevent smuggling and sale, and a lack of attention to rehabilitation clinics according to mental health standards for users and the availability of treatment for them. This creates a crisis and a breakdown in social cohesion, an increase in suicide cases among users, and cases of violence against women and children in the absence of a domestic violence prevention law.

4- The spread of uncontrolled weapons outside the Iraqi security forces, such as tribal weapons and post-2003 crime gangs, and the promotion of the militarization of society, has led to increased violence within the community and the resolution of disputes using violence outside the authority of the law, with women often being victims of this violence.

5- The patriarchal society, which heavily relies on religious standards, customs, and traditions, continues to restrict women's freedom and role within society. There is a noticeable weakness in women's participation in work, the economy, decision-making, and peace-building processes. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of child marriage remains prevalent in poor communities, leading to the continued victimization of women and girls by crimes of rape and enslavement by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

6- The deterioration in the level of education in terms of curricula, administration, and its alignment with scientific and technological development and the modern labor market has clearly impacted the social reality and has had evident effects on raising the future generation.

7- The abundance of conflicts, disputes, and sectarian wars has shaken the trust between the ethnic, religious, and sectarian components of the people, leading to fear of the other and a lack of acceptance, reflecting on the bonds between the Iraqi people and the preservation of diversity and social peace.

The reality of human rights and public freedoms

1- The general situation regarding freedoms and human rights in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region has deteriorated in recent years, especially after the October 2019 protests. The deterioration of the security situation related to combating violence and extremism has also led to additional restrictions on freedoms, which cannot be adequately monitored by civil society organizations, as they are often preoccupied with emergency cases. While the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 provides sufficient protection for public freedom and human rights, Iraq has signed most international agreements and treaties related to freedoms and human rights. In addition, the Iraqi government has accepted all recommendations made to Iraq under the Universal Periodic Review, yet violations of freedom and fundamental rights in Iraq continue.

2- There are draft laws in the Iraqi Parliament related to freedom of expression and the right to access information in 2016, while the Kurdistan Parliament adopted a law on demonstrations, and most of the texts of these legal drafts do not guarantee the fundamental freedoms of individuals. Current legislation also suffers from a lack of implementation in reality, meaning that although there are texts that provide protection and guarantees for public freedoms, they are not implemented as required.

3- The absence of implementation of legal texts and provisions that guarantee public freedoms has affected the work of journalists in both Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, with many journalists facing threats, arrest, and in some cases, murder, without any condemnation of these acts. Political parties continue to exert pressure on journalists, restricting them, and radical groups have adopted practices and actions to prevent the publication of reports on violations and opinions that oppose them.

4- Recent popular demonstrations, protests, and political conflicts have led to increased violations of rights and freedoms through arrests and deliberate assaults on civil society activists and journalists, and in some cases, media channels have been threatened and their headquarters closed, and there has been an increase in malicious lawsuits.

5- The multiplicity of unions and associations is not restricted by law or organized according to international standards, so most unions are restricted in their work.

6- Modern/New legislation for managing civil society organizations in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region has been adopted, but the instructions being implemented do not match the legal texts and differ from the actual legislative text. It is clear that there are interventions attempting to limit the ability of these organizations to operate and report adequately on the state of human rights and freedoms in general. Additionally, restrictions and procedures are imposed on the work of civil society organizations, confining their work in various ways, most recently by pressuring organizations working in the field of justice between both (men - women), interfering in their affairs, and accusing them of promoting homosexuality.

7- The central government and the regional government, after a comprehensive review of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, agreed to develop two plans to improve the human rights situation according to international commitments.

8- It is important to note that religious movements with significant authority are also responsible for limiting access to fundamental freedoms and human rights.

Vision

A peaceful, democratic, and diverse society that guarantees human rights and freedoms for all, expands the work of civil society, promotes the values of social justice and citizenship, a culture of non-violence, and rejects extremism in all its forms.

Mission

Peace and Freedom is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that is administratively and financially independent. It operates in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure peaceful coexistence by strengthening trust and cooperation among different components of society and building partnerships with governmental and non-governmental institutions in drafting laws, decisions, and regulations that guarantee freedoms, rights, and justice according to international standards.

programs

Peace and Freedom Organization operates within two main areas over the next four years:

First Program: Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

The program aims to preserve and develop the diversity present in Iraq by building the capacities of individuals and key stakeholders to resolve conflict and promote peace to ensure peaceful coexistence

among communities with diverse national, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, and to ensure the establishment of appropriate policies to guarantee the protection and participation of all segments of society according to international standards.

Second Program: Human Rights and Freedoms

The program aims to highlight violations of public rights and individual and collective freedoms occurring throughout Iraq, and to establish policies to ensure the protection and promotion of these rights and freedoms.

In all programs, there are common themes, including: Justice between both (men - women), youth, minorities, transparency, and climate change.

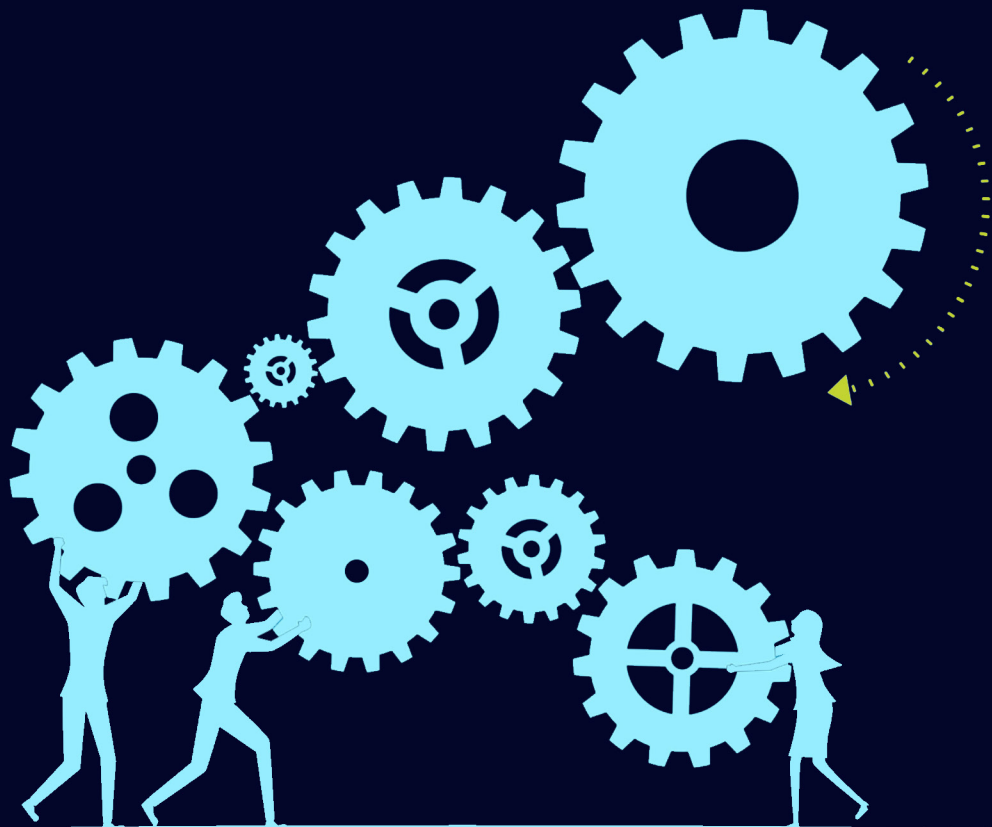
Program Strategies

Program	Strategy	Tools
Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion Program	1. Raise awareness and build capacity of local communities, engage in dialogue and promote peace with a special focus on youth and women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Awareness and capacity building of community members b. Conducting research, studies and preparing reports. c. Participate in joint initiatives that encourage relationship building. d. Work on a national plan for UNSCR 2250: Enhancing the role and participation of youth in peace processes e. Use of media
	1. Promote the positive role of civil society organizations, religious leaders, journalists and community leaders in the prevention of violence and hate speech.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Awareness and capacity building exercises b. Conducting research, studies and preparing reports. c. Radicalization Prevention Programs
	3. Participate in advocacy campaigns with local and national government authorities to develop policies that ensure the protection of diversity, the promotion of peaceful coexistence and the participation of young people in particular in peacebuilding processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advocacy campaigns on key issues related to diversity and peaceful coexistence b. Preparing studies and making recommendations on policies and laws developed in cooperation with the authorities related to the protection of diversity, which affect peaceful coexistence and youth participation in peacebuilding processes. c. Capacity building of key stakeholders d. Building trust and establishing networks and partnerships with governmental and non-governmental agencies, civil society organizations and youth

Program	Strategy	Tools
	4. Building coalitions to promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion in Iraq with NGOs and other networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Building and developing the capacity of local NGOs b. Developing joint program opportunities c. Strengthening coordination and cooperation among non-governmental organizations
	5. Work with community groups affected by conflict and violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Awareness Campaigns b. Training and Capacity Building Workshops c. Creating community initiatives d. Advocacy at the decision-making level
Rights and Freedoms Program	1. Raise awareness and capacity among community members with a special focus on women, youth and minorities on the key principles of human rights and freedoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Awareness Campaigns b. Training and Capacity Building Workshops c. Issuance of the training manual d. Use of media
	2. Participate in monitoring and reporting on violations of human rights and freedoms with a focus on freedom of expression, minority rights and workers' rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Training and Capacity Building Workshops b. Conducting studies and research and preparing reports c. Disseminate information about violations in the media or through publications
	3. Building the capacity of non-governmental institutions and expanding the space for civil society to promote individual and collective rights and freedoms, NGOs, trade unions and youth initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Training and capacity building workshops b. Coordination and networking c. Joint Advocacy Campaigns
	4. Expand civic engagement and enhance participation in advocacy campaigns with government institutions to develop policies that ensure the promotion of human rights and public freedoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Training and capacity building workshops b. Advocacy campaigns at the level of decision-makers.

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