

IRAQ

PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with Iraq in July 2011. The program is designed to focus on committee operations (with a specific emphasis on public hearings and legislative oversight of the executive branch), constituent outreach, assistance to the research department, and strengthening the legislature's budget analysis capacity. Amid challenging circumstances, MPs have participated in one-inbound program to date, and an HDP CODEL visited Baghdad in 2011.

Accomplishments

- Peer-to-peer assistance to Iraqi legislators both in Washington and in Baghdad, focused on committee operations.
- Constituent relations programs focused on Erbil, in northern Iraq.
- Formal visit by U.S. legislators to the Council of Representatives.

Background

After the regime of Saddam Hussein was deposed, and rule by the Coalition Provisional Authority and an interim Iraqi government, a new constitution took effect in October 2005, and a constitutionally based government took office in March 2006. Iraq is now in the latter stages of a transition from the dictatorship of Saddam to a multiparty parliamentary democracy that encompasses varying regional and religious sects and ideological and political factions.

Since its first election for a transitional National Assembly in January 2005, Iraq has held four largely credible and legitimate national elections, with the most recent parliamentary elections for the Council of Representatives held on April 30, 2014. Prior to the elections, the parliament decided to expand from 325 to 328. As with the 2010 elections, eight seats were reserved for ethnic and religious minorities. The elections decided the 328 members through an open party-list proportional representation system, using governorates as constituencies.

Congressional Delegations

A delegation of five Members of Congress, led by House Democracy Partnership Chairman David Dreier, inaugurated HDP's partnership with Iraq in Baghdad on October 1 and 2, 2011. The Partnership held its first official meeting with members and staff representing the Committee on Foreign Affairs, where the technical needs of the Iraqi Parliament were discussed. This was followed by meeting with the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee and the Chairman of the Higher Education Committee, who added their insights into what the Council needed to become a more effective legislature. The delegation stressed the importance of oversight of the executive branch and the ability to use the budget process to advance the legislature's goals. On October 2, the delegation traveled north to Erbil

to visit the constituency of two Members of the Council of Representatives to discuss constituent services. The delegation learned that these members provide a great deal of services to their constituents but receive very little backing from the government in support of their efforts.

MP Seminars

In March 2011, two Members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives participated as observers in a Washington, D.C., based seminar on strengthening committee operations in a legislature, with a focus on public hearings and legislative oversight of the executive. The MPs heard from over a dozen of their peers in the U.S. House of Representatives, learned about the U.S. committee system from the Congressional Research Service, were introduced to budget analysis by the Congressional Budget Office, and were exposed to media and constituent relations by other speakers.