

## **Comment: Rebuilding Iraqi Journalism**

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Iraqi media have a critical role to play in building a new Iraq, and IWPR's new field training programme aims to help.

"Now that the war in Iraq is over, all the journalists have left," the speaker said. "Can you believe it?"

Addressing a modest audience to mark a new book on war reporting, the senior media executive and esteemed editor was expressing a common concern about the short attention span of the media. He makes an important point.

But he misses the other half of the story. For while the mass of the press has moved on, there are more journalists in Baghdad and elsewhere in the country than ever before. These are from a constituency the New York crowd failed to consider: Iraqi journalists.

Indeed, it's boom time for Iraqi media, with hundreds of publications and dozens of electronic media. The explosion represents an important breakthrough in freedoms for the Iraqi people and will be vital for democratic development.

The stakes could not be higher. Especially in light of recent violence, providing responsible reporting and rational debate to the population is a precondition for a successful transition to Iraqi governance.

Yet there is a long way to go. The economics for financially independent media do not exist, and the skills and instincts for balanced, factual reporting have no historical basis in the country. The bulk of the new media is highly partisan, and risks fuelling further conflict.

As highlighted by a recent report by the Iraq Foundation, the Iraqi media fails to present adequate reporting on the humanitarian, economic or political challenges facing the country. As outlined by IWPR's own recent media assessment report, international efforts to date have been beset with problems. All Iraqi media professionals emphasise the enormous need for professional training.

In this context, IWPR is launching the first sustained training programme for Iraqi journalists on the ground. With support from the British Department for International Development, and working with a mixed international and Iraqi-led team based in Baghdad, IWPR is now:

providing training and skills development for a diverse range of Iraqi journalists throughout the country

producing reports for the Iraqi media and international press on humanitarian and political developments - in Arabic, Kurdish and English - available free of charge via the IWPR website, email and hard copy

supporting the incubation of new Iraqi-led media institutions, including an independent media institute to provide local ownership and sustained professional support for the long term.

With this package of articles, IWPR relaunches its Iraqi Crisis Report as a flagship of this training and humanitarian reporting endeavour. Serving as an international platform for emerging Iraqi media and other experts and activists, it aims to provide a unique source of information and debate on the effort to build a new Iraq.

If nothing else, IWPR's reports should serve as a regular reminder that the media have not left - that, whatever the obstacles, for the first time in decades Iraqi journalists are right where they should be, in Iraq and getting on with the job.

For further information, or details on how to support or participate in the effort to support the Iraqi media, see [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net) or contact [mansoor@iwpr.net](mailto:mansoor@iwpr.net).

Anthony Borden is executive director of IWPR.

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