

## **Comment: Who is in Charge?**

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Iraqis trying to get on with their lives do not know to whom to turn for guidance and security.

Almost two months after US forces "liberated" Baghdad, Iraqis are living through extremely difficult times - still without a government, without services and without security. The situation in schools is especially difficult. Teaching staff and students are facing a multitude of problems. We do not know where to look for solutions or to whom to address our questions.

We were told to return to our schools and work as we were working before the US-led war to topple Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist regime. We dutifully returned to our posts, intending to throw away all the baggage of the old regime and work to implement this new step on the road to freedom, with all that the word "freedom" implies. Instead we find ourselves in a situation that is nothing short of tragic.

The physical condition of our schools is terrible. Windows have been broken and doors smashed. Fans have been stolen so the children have no relief from the searing heat. In Baghdad today, temperatures rise well into the 40s Celsius.

Teachers are not sure what curriculum they are supposed to teach. With all the political upheaval in Iraq, we do not know what to leave out of the lessons we have been teaching and what new elements to bring in. Without direction about the substance of what we are to teach, how can we direct our students?

At the local level, no-one is providing any information about the situation regarding education. Even now, almost two months after the old regime melted away and the Iraqi administration collapsed, many children have not returned to school. Parents do not know what the situation is regarding schooling - even whether schools are open or closed. Many refuse to let their children go to school because, in the absence of a government, there is no security.

Iraqi educators, like others in government service, have not received salaries for several months. But we have families, and our families have lives. When we try to press our case with what remains of the educational establishment, they say: "Tomorrow, or the next day." Choose any day you like; it would make no difference as tomorrow, it seems, never comes.

In this kind of situation, without remuneration and put off from day to day, how can we be expected to work our best?

We have to ask, Who is responsible for this chaotic situation? Who will deal with these issues if we, who have only just started to feel our way towards a new, democratic order, are not to be blamed for the present, terrible situation? How are we to resolve all these problems and come out safely on the other side?

It is of the utmost importance that this appalling state of affair be remedied. If we, as teachers, are to teach our students the meaning of true freedom, with all its myriad implications, it is vital that we move into the future - not stumble back towards the past.

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**Location:** Iraqi Kurdistan  
Iraq

**Focus:** Iraq

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