

The political situation in Iraq has been in a downward spiral, and 2018 witnessed the decline of most democracy indicators, especially those related to the elections, and indicators of good governance and parliamentary performance. Moreover, there was an absence of an independent media in reporting facts, investigating corruption cases and supporting democracy. The last parliamentary elections in Iraq in May 2018 witnessed the largest boycott rate exceeding 50%. Iraqi voters described the elections as lacking transparency and being manipulated by the parties.

Likewise, citizens in Iraq lost their confidence in the government, after successive governments failed to implement their programs in the absence of transparency and accountability. In the same context, the relationship between citizens and the House of Representatives was almost severed, due to the insistence of the political blocks to pass important laws and legislations in a manner that serves their interests.

The decline in democracy indicators and the citizens' lack of confidence in the democratic process intensified due to the weakness of the methodology and tactics that civil society uses to mobilize the masses and put pressure on decision-makers. Modern technics had to be used to achieve an optimal response.

The Launch of Iraq Point Project

In May 2018, as a representative of Tawasul Youth Empowerment, Radi, participated in a fellowship program prepared by Action SEE that is active in southeastern Europe, and implemented by "Zasto Ne?" in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zasto Ne (Why not?) is an organization that works on the creation of a safe, secure, healthy, active, efficient and accountable BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina) society through increasing civic participation, and influencing government accountability.

The purpose of the fellowship was to train activists from the Arab region and create a coexistence with network organizations specializing in promoting democracy through the use of modern technology and media tools, and to launch more effective networking methods between groups and organizations interested in this field.

At the end of the fellowship, Radi wrote a graduation project, which transferred the Point Conference, that is held annually in the city of Sarajevo, to Iraq for the first time in the Arab region, in order to highlight the challenges facing modern democracies in the region, and develop the tools of civil society organizations through the use of modern technology and media tools.

The conference marked an important start for the Point MENA project, which provided a space for civil society, technology and media institutions to meet. The conference held twenty-two specialized sessions, hosted more than forty experts and focused on targeting the main axes, including:

- 1- The use of interactive platforms to enhance the relationship between citizens and decision makers
- 2- The importance of using modern technology (such as maps) to monitor human rights violations
- 3- The role of modern media and citizen journalism in exposing false news and enhancing the role of independent media
- 4- The employment of interactive open source platforms to train young people and increase their involvement in the labor market

The conference was held in August 2018 and contributed to building partnerships and networks with local and international NGOs (the most important was the Code for Iraq team and the IT Live project), as well as building a partnership with government institutions and the House of Representatives.

After the conference, the launching of the Point Iraq project was announced, and through it the public opinion platform project (www.pop-iraq.org) was implemented in partnership with the House of Representatives. It is the first interactive platform in Iraq that helps citizens to view the laws that the House of Representatives legislates interactively by voting on the laws, and corresponding with the parliamentary committees working on them, as well as holding MPs accountable for their activities. A preliminary agreement was reached with the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee and the Commission for Human Rights in Iraq to implement a program (an open data interactive platform) that enables the citizens to submit any violations they are exposed to on an interactive map and send it directly to the relevant authorities.

With the beginning of 2019, Point MENA began to expand its partnerships and became one of the contributing members in the Accountability and Integrity Network (a network of organizations and members who graduated from the aforementioned Fellowship Program in Bosnia). Partnerships were built with international organizations concerned with technology and modern media. All Point partners were invited to attend the regional Point Conference, which is hoped to be held as soon as the situation in Iraq improves (perhaps the end of March 2020). Regional meetings will be held on the sidelines of the conference to discuss the status of Arab governments,

especially after the transition of democracy to the countries of Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Sudan.