



# UN PONTE PER

## The FAI e Un Ponte Per - Middle East

**Un ponte per...** is an international solidarity association of volunteers that was set up in **1991**, just after the end of the bombing in Iraq and the beginning of the embargo, with the aim of promoting cooperation initiatives in favour of the Iraqi population who had been hit by the war.

Since then it has worked to **prevent new conflicts**, particularly in the Middle East, through information campaigns, cultural exchanges, civil peace interventions, humanitarian support projects and international cooperation, always in close collaboration with the civil society organizations of the countries in which it operates.

After the war in Iraq in **2003**, Un ponte per... launched initiatives in support of the Iraqi civil society, which was working to protect its cultural heritage, human and environmental rights, the minorities, freedom of expression and association and the culture of non-violence.

Since **2009** the association has been supporting the **Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI)**, a coalition of Iraqi and international civil society organizations that carry out many campaigns. The ICSSI organizes an annual international conference with human rights activists, journalists, trade unionists, women's associations and representatives from NGO's from every part of the country. In 2013 the ICSSI became the Iraqi Social Forum.

Some of the ICSSI's most important campaigns that Un ponte per has supported include: "**Shahrazad**" for the protection of women's rights and "**Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes**" to safeguard the cultural heritage.

The aim of the **“Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes”** initiative is to protect Iraq’s environmental heritage, its aquifer resources, the Tigris River and the Mesopotamian Marshes. Thanks to the work of the activists, this initiative achieved a great result; in 2016 the Marshes were included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

As a result of the ICSSI project, in 2016 the three-year **“Paths of Coexistence in Mesopotamia and the Middle East”** programme was set up. This project aims to overcome the social and cultural fractures caused by the war and by Daesh (IS) in the Middle East, by encouraging social cohesion and building trust among the communities that live along the Mesopotamian rivers (in Iraq, Syria and Turkey) and in the countries of the area with the greatest number of refugees (Lebanon and Jordan).

The **Iraqi Civil Society’s organizations**, which are the direct beneficiaries of these projects, often lack a strategic vision when organizing their campaigns because of the precarious security conditions that cause them to work as if they were in a continuous emergency. They therefore need space in which to increase their advocacy and communication skills. Unfortunately however, it is far easier to receive funds from international donors for humanitarian assistance based on emergencies, rather than for projects that aim to make structural changes that focus on the problems of the Iraqi state and society, which are the underlying causes of the crisis.

## SUPPORT FROM THE FAI:

The FAI has stood by *Un ponte per...* since **2009**, and through the ICSSI it has provided its support for the **growth of the associations** that are working bravely and with great determination to **defend human rights, to strengthen their skills and community leadership, their ability to manage conflicts and to improve inter–community relations**.

The road to peace is a long one but it goes this way too and building a future of peace and coexistence begins with dialogue.