

**Education for future members of the legal profession in emerging economies:
the role of humanities as intellectual infrastructure**

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It is a pleasure for me to be here in New York and to participate in such an important event. We all are here to share our thoughts and experiences about education, discuss some common concerns and eventually to further educate ourselves about the topic of education.

I am participating in this event under two titles: one as the Minister of Justice for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the other as the Head of the Ihsan Dogramaci Erbil Foundation of Erbil, the founding institution of the İhsan Dođramacı Bilkent Erbil College. So I will be talking about my experiences through those two positions and as a person coming from an interesting and unique region of the world, which is the Middle East and more precisely Iraq.

My country, Iraq, has suffered and is still suffering from violence. The continuous conflicts and wars have deeply affected the infrastructure of the country. But the main organ that has been seriously damaged is the people of Iraq. On the other hand, the Iraqi society is originally a tribal community. This tribal community comes from the fact that Iraq was an agricultural country until oil was discovered, and thus the demography of the country has been drastically changed. In addition, politics and the desire for controlling the country have provided a vacuum which has allowed the flourishing of tribal beliefs in the community and the use of those notions as a tool to rule the country as a dictatorship. By addressing these two facts, I am trying to identify two important factors that have limited access to education and decreased the quality of education in Iraq. Indeed instability is one of the main factors limiting access to education. Unfortunately, Iraq has suffering from warfare ever since the revolution by which it declared itself a republic back in 1958.

Those continuous conflicts led to depriving many Iraqi people of their simplest right to education and moreover decreased the quality of what education was offered. Unfortunately, right now about 10% of Iraqi people are still internally displaced and they are suffering from a terrible humanitarian situation, including the limited access to education. On the other hand, the tribal traditions and notions have also affected education in Iraq and its quality. The tribal beliefs have prevented many people from receiving an education, especially women. Until the last decades, in some Iraqi communities it was considered shameful for parents to send their daughters to school. I am sorry to say that there are some areas in Iraq still exhibiting that mentality. Furthermore, I believe that tribalism is counter to civilization due to the fact that it limits

the perception of the people within some narrow beliefs and prevents openness to the international community.

It is a fact that there are many other important factors that may affect education and its quality; however, through my experience, I have tried to highlight the most important two factors that lead to the poor quality of education in my country. Those two factors are instability and tribalism. Since we addressed the cause for the problem, we need now to address the solution. Obviously the ultimate solution is quality of education. Access to a quality education will help our people to understand and accept each other. It will help them to break the tribal ties and make them open to the international community. If we succeed in producing an educated generation, obviously our people will succeed in overcoming their divisions and ultimately will be accepting of each other.

Now, allow me to share another side of Iraq, this time the bright side of it. Although Iraq has suffered for years from conflicts, one part of Iraq, which is the Kurdistan Region, has succeeded in consolidating stability and security within its territories. Ever since the year 2003, this region has maintained its status as the safest area in Iraq and maybe even one of the safest areas in the Middle East. Due to the factors of stabilization and the pressing need for quality of education, the Ihsan Dogramaci Bilkent Erbil Foundation, with the cooperation of Bilkent University in Ankara, has successfully established the Ihsan Doğramacı Bilkent Erbil College. This school is the first school of its kind in Iraq where quality education is provided utilizing the newest methods of education and international curriculums delivered by a number of highly qualified international teachers. This school was established only in 2010, but it has succeeded in taking a position at the top of the schools in Iraq. The mission of Bilkent Erbil College is to produce a new generation with solid backgrounds in science and arts. Meanwhile, in our school, we are focusing on developing the notions of respect and accepting others among our students. Another goal of our school is to graduate a new generation made up of constructive individuals with a mindset for critical thinking. In our school we are working on establishing a new generation of that kind of individuals required to develop our country and bring prosperity to its people. Although our school is a private school, it is getting financial support from Bilkent University in Ankara, where each year a number of students showing good potential are enrolled through a special scholarship program. The target of this program is to spread the quality of education not only among the people who can afford the tuition fees but even to low-income families.

I am confident that in a city like New York or any developed city, there might a good number of similar schools to Bilkent Erbil, but let us ask ourselves how many schools of this kind are available in developing countries and particularly in Iraq? I believe we need to make the ultimate use of conferences like the one today, not only to broaden our knowledge about education and the developments it is witnessing within its methods,

but to establish networks where we connect our educational institutions with each other to further develop our schools and the educational systems in our countries.

The second part of my experience comes from my current position as the minister of justice. When I was preparing myself for this conference I asked some colleagues who are professors in colleges of law in Erbil to provide me with information about their curriculums. When I started studying and comparing them with those of other countries like Turkey I discovered that although ours were full of different essential legal topics, they were rigid and they missed a flavor. Actually I concluded that they were missing that flavor for two reasons, one related to the lack of the humanity flavor. The problem about those topics is that they are purely about legal subjects and they miss other related social and psychological topics. Obviously an officer of the law or a judge will not be able to investigate, understand and adjudicate fairly unless he or she is aware of the social and psychological aspects of the case. On the other hand, the other reason for that missing flavor is that those curriculums and references are missing modernization. Today, the world is developing at a very rapid pace and the other aspects of our lives have to develop at a similar pace to keep up with the international community. However, the educational system in Iraq is not developing in harmony with the people's lives. Therefore, a gap has opened between people's lives and the knowledge they acquire during their education. Accordingly, those curriculums are not responsive enough to organize the life of the people and solve their problems. I'm quite confident that this missing flavor is witnessed not only in the law or in my country Iraq, but it is a common problem shared among the various disciplines and within most of the developing countries. Now, since we know that we cannot develop our countries without developing and modernizing our educational systems, let's start to work together to reach this target and eventually to have a better world. Again, we shall focus on networking and cooperation to get the knowledge and experience we need to jointly develop our countries.

I will conclude by presenting my gratitude to the organizers of this conference for the preparation of this event and their warm hospitality. It is my wish that this conference will be another successful step to further develop our educational systems and thus the quality of our life.