

BRIDGING THE GULF



Foundation for Human Security in the Gulf Region

BRIDGING THE GULF FOUNDATION

Gulf Cooperation Council

Civil Society Conference

Brussels, May 22-25 2011
(Summary)



On May 22-25 2011, Bridging the Gulf Foundation held its annual conference in Brussels. These meetings are imperative to the effectiveness and capacity building of civil society in the GCC region. This session was graced with the presence of participants from official EU structures and institutions; CSOs as well as NGOs settled in Brussels or involved in activities in the Gulf region; and it strengthened the relationship between these groups which all together form part of the Briding the Gulf network. The conference was divided into a series of meetings intended to provide empowerment through knowledge sharing, and useful for civil society activities and human rights education in the Gulf region. ‘Cooperation’ was a key theme running through all of these meetings and the session was interactive as participants engaged in constructive dialogue, making recommendations for improved performance.

The conference kicked off with the first meeting, which gave participants an opportunity to openly discuss their needs for the Gulf region and decide on areas of improvement to aid the effectiveness of their work in the region. The meeting reflected the ability of participants to work together to achieve the same goals. Some of the issues which were highlighted are: the importance



of training sessions and ways in which these can be improved or tailored to meet the needs of situations on ground in the region. For example, participants discussed the need to further build capacities by organizing training sessions around specific issues which will help empower participants even more; the importance of contacts at grassroots level which is the basis of the Bridging the Gulf network; linking with the EU and other NGOs, so as to obtain important information; and also finding opportunities to update EU institutions and other NGOs working in the region.

In subsequent meetings, participants partook of trainings geared at empowering them on how to protect individual internet communications and upgrade lobbying skills. Emphasis was placed on formulating a clear and constructive human rights policy for the Gulf region. Additionally, the importance of networking with similar bodies in Europe was highlighted as this can help enlarge the network and monitor coordination between groups as they maintain one voice. Participants also discussed the role of the EU in giving civil society a platform to speak and they highlighted the need for the EU to meet with civil society during visits to the region. Participants suggested areas in which improvements can be made in EU policies with regards to GCC countries and expressed the need for NGOs and civil society organizations in the EU, such as Euro Arab Forum to work and focus more on the GCC as this is traditionally not the case.

It was noted that roundtables are a way of sharing experiences and civil society from the GCC countries also appreciate the help of NGOs by helping to find funding for the region and build bridges between different organizations. NGOs and CSOs in Europe are encouraged to work on this area by involving people from the region so as to empower them because change can only come from within.

The NGO networking meeting gave room to individual groups who gave brief updates on situations in the GCC countries. It was noted that NGOs need to involve civil society from the region and make more resources available for the GCC countries in terms of personnel and capacity building, and combine resources and skills so as to aid the development of civil society in the region. Willingness for direct support of civil society in the region and innovation were important elements highlighted in this regard.

Overall, the conference proved quite successful and it effectively empowered participants, youth and pioneers involved in the work of Bridging the Gulf foundation. It further developed the contacts between the EU and NGOs who were present; served as an avenue to generate information and share new ideas for a better future, and participants devised constructive strategies tailored against challenges on ground. The conference drew to a close and participants left with tools and contacts which will enable them work on change by creating networks and taking initiatives on thematic issues.

For the full report, please contact Bridging the Gulf foundation at:
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