Search for Common Ground (Search) is the world’s largest dedicated peacebuilding organization envisioning a world of safe, healthy, and just societies, free from the threat of violent conflict. Founded in 1982, Search works on the frontlines of today’s most consequential conflicts where millions of lives are at stake and manages over 150 awards from over 50 different institutional donors. Our core methodology is called the Common Ground Approach, through which we help adversaries learn to trust each other, create avenues for collaboration, and generate breakthroughs for peace. Search works in countries across the Levant and Arabian Peninsula with our MENA Regional Office based in Amman. We have a strong and evidenced history of operating in difficult and volatile contexts to bring societies together. Search’s presence in Iraq began in 2016, and sought to expand its work in 2018 and established a fully-operational office in Erbil. The Search Iraq Country Office team is small, and relies on strategic local-partner organisations to effectively implement projects in tandem with a wide variety of all level stakeholders with strong partnership with local communities, partners and authorities across the country on issues of social cohesion, climate change, women peace and security, gender, youth empowerment, community resilience, inclusion, and religious tolerance.

After decades of protracted conflict, Iraq is finally entering a reconstruction phase, where the international community are shifting their priorities from emergency response to development and peacebuilding. The reconciliation process is strongly influenced by political dynamics, the lack of a cohesive and accountable security sector, and the needs and grievances of Iraq’s many ethnic and religious groups. Iraq is a religiously and ethnically diverse country where both religion and ethnicity are closely bound identity markers. As such, Iraq still suffers from sectarian and ethnic tensions. The Arabization policies introduced by Saddam Hussein first in 1979, undermined Iraq’s social cohesion and have to this day negative impacts on Iraq’s social fabric. The stronghold ISIS had over the country post 2005 reinforced sectarian cleavages and while not active today, its influence in certain areas should not be overlooked, especially as the social fabric remains fragmented. This is negatively impacting religious communities and the ‘Freedom of Religion and Belief’ (FoRB), as a lot of religious and ethnic communities are commonly “pegged” against each other, by authorities. This is particularly the case in the Disputed Territories between KRI and GOI.

Iraq’s economy is gradually improving as oil markets are recovering. However, this recovery is slowed down by the global pandemic and more importantly, structural bottlenecks, such as poor public investment management. This is negatively impacting the public service delivery and causing slow clearance of arrears, especially those related to public wages. Iraq’s dysfunctional governance is foremost impacting the Iraqi youth, as there are limited future possibilities within Iraq. This is a critical issue as 60% of Iraq’s population are under the age of 25. Additionally, the youth of Iraq will further be impacted by climate change. Iraq is considered one of the Middle East and North Africa’s (MENA) most climate-vulnerable countries because of its arid climate, rising temperatures, downstream positionality and lack of precipitation.

Iraq implemented its first National Action Plan (INAP I) under the UN Security Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (1325 WPS), and is currently implementing INAP II. Still, women and especially women from ethnic and religious minority groups, are actively excluded from decision-making processes both at a local and national level.
Search Iraq Mission

Search Iraq’s mission is to enhance social cohesion between Iraqi communities, creating an enabling environment for stabilization and reconciliation. Search engages with a diverse range of Iraqi stakeholders, including religious clerics, political authorities, youth, women, internally displaced people (IDPs), and host populations on issues of social cohesion, community resilience, inclusion, and religious tolerance.

In an ethnically and religiously diverse country, Search Iraq’s programming focuses on enhancing engagement and dialogue across social dividing lines to build inclusive reconciliation processes based on respect and tolerance. Search invests heavily in local partner organizations with the capacity to deliver programming objectives while upholding the principles of the Common Ground Approach. Working alongside local partners roots our projects in local dynamics and sustainable principles ensuring that communities gain long-term benefits. With Search’s expanding network of local partners across Iraq and throughout the world, we are able to leverage strategic frameworks and consortiums to multiply and broaden our impact. Through these partner-based collaborations, Search adopts a two-tiered approach to program implementation: localized operations and innovative peacebuilding approaches. Search has had decades of experience implementing conflict sensitive interventions, fostering inclusive governance practices that produce government bodies able to support stabilization and promote peace.

Social Cohesion & Community Resilience

Fragmentation and lines of tension continue to intensify in Iraq, even as reconciliation processes unfold. Exclusionary identity narratives divide communities and contribute to the further polarization of Iraqi society. Within these deeply divided contexts, Search Iraq’s social cohesion and resiliency programming encourages communities to identify and leverage windows of opportunity for dialogue and local conflict resolution processes.

Religious Engagement

Search Iraq enhances inter-religious dialogue, mitigates conflicts between and within minority and majority religious groups, and raises awareness of religious minority persecution. Search Iraq’s intra- and inter-religious dialogues bring diverse religious stakeholders together, creating an environment of mutual understanding and community growth. These dialogues address historical religious and sectarian divides, to identify and embrace cross-religious commonalities and values.
Youth Empowerment

Search Iraq supports young people in unleashing their potential as changemakers and peacebuilders. Through a community-based approach, Search Iraq provides skills training and venues for youth to foster productive engagement with local, regional, and national authorities. Search encourages a culture of civic participation and inclusive local, regional, and national governance. Search Iraq strives to advance UN Security Council Resolution 2250, increasing youth participation in governance and peacebuilding efforts.

Climate Change

Iraq is classified as the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change. The country’s vulnerability is compounded by its physical exposure; a strong natural resource dependency and low adaptive capacity due to continued violent conflict, livelihood insecurity, political instability, and state corruption. To that end, climate change and environmental degradation acts as a threat multiplier, contributing to or inspiring further outbreaks of conflict. Within this context, Search Iraq works at the intersection of peacebuilding and climate change, bringing together local communities, policy actors, informal leaders, marginalized groups, and private sector stakeholders, including youth and women, to peacefully address conflicts and build community resilience to climate change, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity.

Media Programming

Since 1985, Search’s media production division, Common Ground Productions (CGP), has produced conflict-sensitive TV, film, and radio programming that use popular culture to transform social thinking and engender social change to facilitate inclusion and acceptance in communities. Search Iraq harnesses its experiences in empowering the media sector to promote tolerance and social cohesion, while countering divisive and harmful narratives. Search’s media content is designed to provoke discussions within communities in conflict and model new ways to overcome differences. To facilitate horizontal linkages between civil society coalitions in key policy hubs around the world, Search-Iraq uses social media as a localized global platform for communication and advocacy on climate issues, online hate speech and gender empowerment. Programmatic priorities will mainstream media to promote social cohesion through cultural heritage education, the conservation of endangered environmental zones and positive media use combating disinformation, hate speech, and rumors.
ONGOING PROGRAMMING

Woman, Youth, Peace and Security (WYPS) (2022 - 2026)

The WYPS is a four-year regional program that aims to strengthen women and youth’s meaningful, enduring participation in advancing inclusive peace and security in Levant countries and Yemen. In Iraq, Search has partnered with Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) to amplify the influence of youth and women peacebuilders at the grassroots level, catalyze broad inclusion of grassroots peacebuilders in municipal and national institutions and peace processes, and advance social norms that support the meaningful inclusion of diverse stakeholders in peace and security. The program will also foster strong alliances with men and boys in order to sensitize and mobilize influential male allies to promote and support women and youth’s participation and leadership in peace and security and advancing regional networks, synergies, and cross-fertilization to strengthen inclusive peace and security, including through sustained relationships and networking building for Youth Peace and Security (YPS) and Woman Peaced Security (WPS) practitioners over Search’s digital platform ‘ConnexUs’. ConnexUs is a new global peacebuilding platform, that seeks to improve coordination and collaboration across sectors in order to increase the effectiveness of programming in conflict-affected contexts. Something that has been identified as a strong shortcoming in the WPS efforts in Iraq. Under the regional umbrella, the program ensures that national and sub-national WPS/YPS agendas, including but not limited to NAPs, benefit from lessons learned and best practices in other countries. In this way, synching the national and regional activities as complementary and mutually reinforcing efforts.

What WYPS aims to achieve:

- Consolidate Iraqi women’s rights organizations and youth-led organizations’ strategic engagement and influence in municipal and national peace and reconciliation processes.
- Motivate key sub-national and national institutions to strengthen inclusive policies and standards facilitating inclusive youth and women’s participation in peace and security.
- Promote shifts in social norms around Iraqi women and youth’s meaningful inclusion in peace and security at all levels, including stronger alliances with men and boys.
JOINT INITIATIVE FOR STRATEGIC RELIGIOUS ACTION (JISRA) (2020-2025)
Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

JISRA in Iraq is a consortium of three international NGOs, namely Search, Tearfund (TF), and Mensen met een Missie (MM), as well as local partners Peace and Freedom Organization (PFO) and Christian Aid Program Northern Iraq (CAPNI). The consortium aims to address and transform intra-, inter-, and extra-religious dynamics in Iraq to promote Freedom of Religion and Belief through direct and local partner implementation. JISRA leverages the role of a variety of actors, including religious leaders, young women and men from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds and civil society to identify, reflect, and build upon specific entry points for intra-, inter-, and extra-religious engagement and promote an inclusive, tolerant, and flourishing society in Iraq.

JISRA works within religious communities to challenge discrimination, extremist tendencies, and hate towards others (intrareligious sphere). The JISRA program in Iraq integrates a number of strategies for ensuring activities not only ‘Do No Harm’ to the rights of these demographics but provide fertile ground for supporting broader freedom of belief and respect for different points of view.

What JISRA aims to achieve:

- Encourage targeted faith communities to have more tolerant religious norms and practices towards gender, age, and people with other beliefs, and to address harmful religious extremist norms and practices.
- Empower faith actors to establish a long-lasting culture and system of collaboration across religious divides.
- Encourage duty-bearers and decision-makers to adopt, improve, and implement religion- and context-sensitive FoRB policies.

All Search projects include monitoring and evaluation assessments to continuously improve our organizational impact. We regularly update our tools and methodologies to ensure that the design and activities of each program best respond to the specific drivers of local conflicts. Search’s open source platform ConnexUs (https://cnxus.org/) is the premier knowledge-sharing resource for the peacebuilding field.
Search for Common Ground

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Ten Thousands, Three Hundred and Eighty Eight Dollars $10,388.00

Date: February 27, 2023

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