

SHABAKA NEBELUNG FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

شبكة نيبيلونج لحقوق الإنسان

A Virtual Platform for Networking on Human Rights/Criminal Justice in Yemen and Iraq
(Pilot Phase 1/2014 – 4/2015)



What is the “SHABAKA Nebelung for Human Rights”?

“SHABAKA” means “network” in Arabic. It is a peer-to-peer advisory network of human rights professionals from Yemen and Iraq, supported during a pilot phase by GIZ Division 8170 (Global Knowledge Sharing and Learning) on behalf of the GIZ Transformation Support Program (TSP) Yemen. The network, which does most of its knowledge sharing on a virtual basis complemented by face-to-face meetings, communicates mostly in Arabic and addresses the need for continuous collaboration formulated by the participants of the GIZ workshop “Training and Institution Building in the Human Rights Sector in Yemen and Iraq” in November 2013 in Bonn. With the add-on “Nebelung”, the workshop participants honor the late Dr Michael Nebelung, former GIZ Country Director in Yemen, who welcomed the workshop attendees and died during a violent attack in Sana’a shortly after the workshop.

Why was SHABAKA created?

As requested by GIZ-TSP, the network was intended to achieve the following aims

- Encourage trust-building dialogue, knowledge transfer and expert knowledge-sharing between Yemeni governmental and civil society representatives in the field of human rights and with their Iraqi peers.
- Support GIZ-TSP’s partner organizations in the elaboration, signing and implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the purpose of assessing Yemeni prisons in order to improve the conditions of the penitentiary system and care of prisoners.
- Contribute to capacity development of Yemeni human rights professionals to monitor human rights in the field of criminal justice through (external) expert input and knowledge-sharing with their Iraqi peers.
- Lay the ground for a broader human rights network in the MENA region, related to criminal justice.

Who are the SHABAKA members?

SHABAKA has a unique composition. Currently, the network comprises around 50 members: 40 from both Yemen and Iraq (in nearly equal numbers) plus 10 staff from GIZ, including external consultants. The Yemeni and Iraqi members work either in governmental institutions (such as Ministries of Human Rights/Justice/Legal Affairs, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights) or in civil society organizations (Adala/HOOD/Markaz Maeen - Yemen; Justice Network for Prisoners - Iraq). Most members have a degree in law. About 25% are women, the age ranges from 32 to 61 years. Nine members from Iraq/Kurdistan are alumni or resource persons from a former InWEnt/GIZ Human Rights Program for Iraq (2005-2010). The daily work of the SHABAKA members is related to protecting and promoting human rights in their respective countries.

**Efficient ‘modes of delivery’
in fragile states:
combining virtual (75%) and
face-to-face (25%) training**

Virtual Collaboration

- guarantees to a significant extent the continuation of cooperation when conventional cooperation methods fail or can’t be applied for security reasons (conflicts/transition, post-war),
- can deliver up-to-date information in a confidential and professional way
- goes beyond borders and limits

To be efficient and target-oriented, a virtually based network needs to be steered and documented professionally and systematically.

Face-to-face meetings

- are a necessary complement to virtual exchange, as they reinforce personal and professional relationships.

They are efficient if held under politically stable conditions in a third country and if prepared and followed up closely by the virtual sessions.

How did SHABAKA work?

The SHABAKA Team, consisting of a facilitator, a human rights expert, a language tutor and a project manager from GIZ Division 8170, was formed in January 2014.

Until the start of the chat sessions in March, the Team systematically developed a SHABAKA identity (logo, e-mail address, mailing list and terminology). By means of a questionnaire, it identified the desired contents and timing of the chat sessions and conceived the SHABAKA work space in Arabic and English accordingly. In parallel, it developed templates (invitation, summary) and prepared a user guide. Finally, the work space was set up on the virtual GIZ platform "Global Campus 21", which unites long-standing experience in virtual collaboration with a high level of data protection and reliable technical support.

During the kick-off period, weekly meetings took place to enable members to become familiar with the virtual workspace and use of its tools. The topics chosen were either related to the MoU signed in Yemen on 31 March 2014 or to the needs mentioned in the questionnaire. Between March and June 2014, input for discussion was contributed by the SHABAKA human rights expert, SHABAKA members and an external anti-corruption expert.

In July, the Team sent out a mid-term questionnaire, and used the Ramadan Break for evaluation and adaptation. In August 2014, the network added further experts from Yemen and Iraq following the recommendations made by its members. It also focused its virtual knowledge-sharing even more on specific tasks related to the implementation of the MoU (preparation and realization of field visits, data collection, report writing).

In October 2014, a face-to-face meeting took place in Istanbul, uniting selected Yemeni and Iraqi network members according to their expertise or role as multipliers for the implementation of the MoU. The meeting concentrated on trainings for the prison assessment visits, including team building aspects. The content and results of this workshop were summarized and made accessible to all SHABAKA members via the virtual workspace.

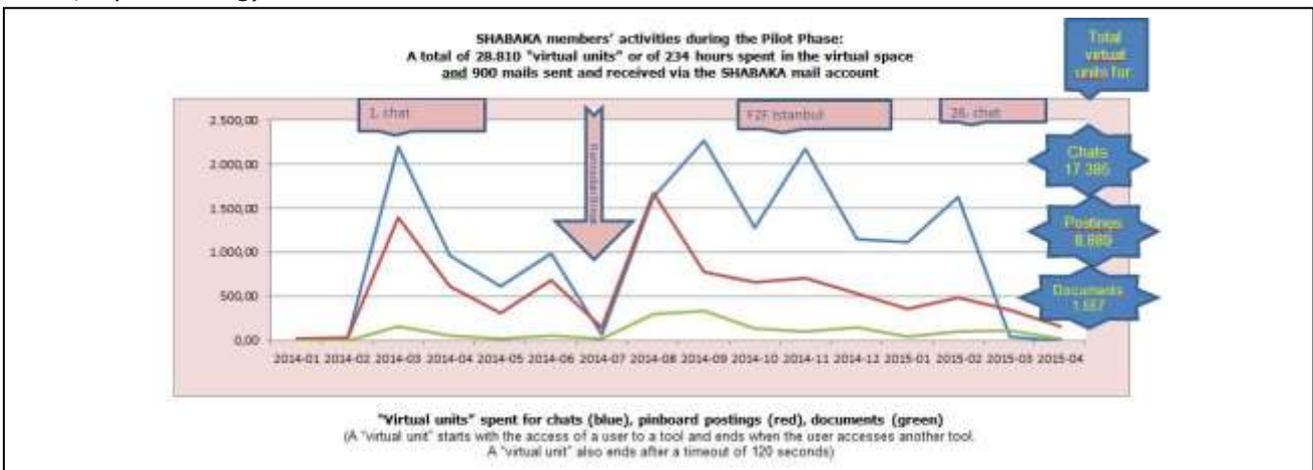
"SHABAKA has been important for me to develop my skills and my expertise through chat communication with experts, also through training and qualification, which makes us experts in different areas of human rights." (A network member from Yemen)

In December 2014, the pilot phase was extended by four months, as administrative procedures to implement the MoU in Yemen took more time than planned. During that time the network supported the Yemeni members with further chats on their task to train their teams for the prison assessment mission. 1-day training courses were finally held on 24 and 26 March, 2015 in Sana'a, Aden and Taiz.

The last facilitated virtual meeting took place on 17 March 2015. Ten days later war broke out in Yemen, preventing or delaying further planned steps like chat sessions, field visits for data collection and report writing.

The GIZ-TSP pilot phase funding ended on 30 April after 26 facilitated chat sessions and one face-to-face meeting in Istanbul.

"SHABAKA is so far the most active shared work space in Arabic on the Global Campus 21." (Santiago Amaya, GC21 project manager)



What did SHABAKA achieve during the Pilot Phase?

Through a mixture of various information, communication and interaction tools, SHABAKA

managed to

- shape a process that required a mutual understanding between the different parties involved and consensus on a defined target: the writing and implementation of a MoU aiming at the improvement of Yemeni prisons, in particular editing an assessment report on four Yemeni prisons;
- make the expertise and knowledge of the SHABAKA Team human rights expert and of the resource persons from Iraq directly available to the network members;
- build bridges and trust-based relationships both between representatives from Yemeni government and NGOs and between those from Yemen and Iraq;
- offer its members a safe space for constant, reliable, professional and confidential peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and advice on criminal justice topics;
- enable its members to better cope with the challenges of their daily work;
- create new partnerships for the advocacy of human rights in their respective countries;
- document all steps within the virtual space.



The SHABAKA members

- deepened their knowledge of international and national laws, regulations and standards, especially in the field of criminal justice;
- gained a clear understanding about the process and expected results of the prison assessment in Yemen and about the interconnections between assessment, monitoring and prison management;
- were provided with documents relevant to their daily work and for the implementation of the MoU;
- became aware of the importance of team work for all activities and learned how to apply key techniques;
- became familiar with virtual exchange tools and used them increasingly.

"I consider SHABAKA an important source for transfer of expertise and knowledge acquisition for myself, being a prison work professional and a human rights activist." (A network member from Iraq)

They expressed

- their appreciation for the professionally structured and facilitated peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and its usefulness;
- their need to systematically develop their capacities, key competencies needed for their human rights work and to regularly update their relevant knowledge within a structured framework;
- their ongoing commitment to criminal justice issues;
- their wish to continue "the South-South-dialogue" and networking within SHABAKA's structures.

What are SHABAKA's perspectives after the Pilot Phase?

Criminal justice is a sensitive issue that can hardly be dealt with in open forums or social media. Reforms in the field of rule of law / criminal justice in the Arab region and a real improvement of the living conditions of prisoners and detainees remain essential. Joint efforts by government institutions and civil society are necessary. The target groups (decision-makers/multipliers) need confidential space and opportunities for a goal-orientated dialogue to build up further capacities in order to better manage the challenges they face.

What were SHABAKA's success factors during the Pilot Phase?

In order to ensure successful networking, SHABAKA applied the following strategies:

- **Combination of virtual and face-to-face elements in a 75:25 ratio:**
SHABAKA collaborated mainly on a virtual basis despite multiple technical problems faced by members (no internet access, power cuts...). The training workshop, which took place in a third country, was prepared and followed up by virtual sessions.
- **Selective membership:**
SHABAKA concentrated on a limited number of reliable, dedicated and professional members, characterized by high commitment.
- **Tested and transferable expertise:**
The SHABAKA human rights expert and resource persons were selected for their long-standing experience and field-tested knowledge.
- **Easy-to-use virtual tools:**
The SHABAKA Team decided to use only those virtual tools that were crucial for the knowledge-sharing and easily useable: the chat tool, the pin board and the library. Members can post messages any time, share knowledge in chat sessions on specific dates and consult chat protocols or core documents from the library whenever they like.
- **Confidentiality:**
Confidentiality among members and towards or among the Team was extremely important given the sensibility of the subject and data/information exchanged.
- **Unambiguous communication in the members' language (Arabic):**
The network mainly communicated in the common language of its members. This is considered an important precondition for unambiguous communication. A constant linguistic and terminology check by the SHABAKA Team helped to reduce sources of misunderstanding to a minimum.
- **Clear structure, roles and rules:**
The Team acted according to clearly defined roles and rules communicated to the members.

Regularity, constancy, predictability:

The SHABAKA procedures were conceived to be predictable. Invitations, chats, summaries and documentation were sent out on time and at regular intervals, with the intention of offering a stable and reliable framework for the members.

- **Availability, reliability and flexibility:**
SHABAKA members could reach the Team 24/7 via SHABAKA- email and be certain of getting a competent answer. This reliability and the underlying trust were important for the participants, who live in a fragile environment.
- **Participatory and ownership building approach:**
The SHABAKA Team encouraged the members to contribute regularly to the network's activities, for example by messages to SHABAKA's e-mail address, its mailing list, on its pin board, by summarizing chat sessions, by suggestions on topics or feed-back on questionnaires.
- **Conflict awareness:**
The SHABAKA Team were careful to reduce conflict potential on different levels and to mediate on the spot when necessary.
- **Documentation and knowledge-sharing:**
The SHABAKA facilitator promptly filed documents dealt with during the chat meetings into the virtual library or submitted them via e-mail to all members, thus giving concrete form to SHABAKA's principles of transparency, participation, reliability and sustainability.

If the methods that proved successful during the Pilot Phase were applied during an Extension Phase, SHABAKA, would be an ideal platform for the continuation of such knowledge-sharing and the further development of this human rights network.

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