



EPIC Plan to Empower Iraqi Youth to Build a Better Future in Iraq

MISSION STATEMENT:

EPIC promotes peace and positive youth development in Iraq by implementing high-quality projects that reach young people in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. EPIC's youth and peacebuilding initiatives offer young Iraqis unique opportunities to develop new skills, learn beyond the classroom, strengthen their leadership and teamwork abilities, share stories, and form friendships with peers from different backgrounds and areas of Iraq. EPIC's initiatives equip Iraqi youth with tools to contribute to a more peaceful, interconnected, and prosperous Iraq.

EPIC strategically partners with Iraqi civil society, as well as key allies in the public and private sectors, to help carry out its mission. Our Washington DC-based advocacy informs policies that support and affect Iraqi youth.

VISION:

Over the next year EPIC is aiming to:

- **Secure \$250,000 to implement** youth development and peacebuilding projects in Iraq.
- **Build organizational capacity** for research, project design, monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality programming.
- **Formalize ties with local partners and develop youth programs** in the following four program areas: *environmental education, innovation and entrepreneurship, female empowerment, and arts and technology.*
- **Prioritize youth outreach and peacebuilding in Kirkuk** where EPIC's programs can reduce tensions and promote friendships across the city's political divides while seeking ways to support bottom-up "win-win" solutions.



Sept. 2011 Iraqi Youth Hike: Nabil Musa of *Nature Iraq* shows EPIC Director Erik Gustafson and Iraqi youth a porcupine, mountain goat, bear and other wildlife caught on film by a well-placed camera trap.

By 2013, EPIC plans to implement one or more distinct projects under each program area and to reach youth from rural and urban areas in southern, central, and northern Iraq. EPIC will include, involve, and integrate youth with disabilities, and potentially youth from other vulnerable groups, like orphans, in at least one of project per year.

In the long-term, EPIC's vision is to establish a permanent, year-round operational presence inside Iraq to carry out multiple sessions of "Summer Camp," year-round youth programs, teacher education programs, and partnerships with key government offices, universities, public schools, communities, organizations, and other groups.

YOUTH PROGRAMS AREAS:

Outdoor Adventures

bringing youth of diverse backgrounds together for environmental education, volunteerism, camaraderie, photography and great outdoor adventures

Summer 2011 Kirkuki Youth Nature Hike

Spring and Summer 2012 Iraqi Youth Hikes

Generation Next

mentoring the next generation of Iraq's leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators

Spring 2012 Business Plan competition and program for young Iraqi entrepreneurs

The 2012 Next Big Idea Photo and Student Essay Contest

Female Empowerment

Promoting leadership, teamwork, confidence-building, and critical thinking, for equality and empowerment of young women and girls

Summer 2012 Basketball Camp for Iraqi secondary school girls

Storytelling 2.0

supporting meaningful cultural exchanges and civic engagement, while promoting respect and understanding through storytelling, media, arts and technology

“Day in the Life of Iraqi Youth” Competition with students in intermediate & secondary schools

Youth Nation: sharing stories and ideas between intermediate & secondary schools

Special Projects

Establish a special fund for a new basketball court in support of the American University of Iraq – Sulaimani College Women’s basketball program and EPIC’s summer youth projects, especially for girls and young women.

FUNDING:

EPIC has received more than **\$40,000** in support from **252 active donors in 2011** – their support made the *Iraqi Youth Hike* possible. EPIC has 1,200 followers on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and its emails reach more than 14,500 subscribers. EPIC is appealing for an additional \$20,000 in individual donations by the end of 2011.

In 2012, EPIC will seek to more than double its base of support from individual donors. The organization also receives \$50,000 in grants each year, and hopes to grow that amount to over \$150,000 in 2012.

EPIC HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Successfully implemented the *Iraqi Youth Nature Hike*** (www.IraqiYouthHike.org). Nine Iraqi Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmani youth from the city of Kirkuk participated in the 5-day program, including nature photography, navigation, educational activities at Nature Iraq’s Eco-Camp, and a day hike at Mt Piramagroon.
- **Convened the policy forum *The Future of Iraqi Civil Society*** with leading experts Michael Corbin, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State; Ellen Laipson, President and CEO of the Stimson Center; Manal Omar, Director of Iraq, Iran, and North Africa Programs at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP); and others.
- **Played a key role in building support for passage of Senator Edward Kennedy’s *Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act***, which increased refugee admissions to the US.
- **Initiated and led a national policy forum and *Iraq Action Days*** (www.IraqActionDays.org) with 20 national groups, including InterAction, the International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Amnesty International, and Church World Service. The effort contributed to the US Government significantly increasing assistance to the region and admissions/resettlement of vulnerable Iraqi refugees.
- **Chaired the Iraq Peace & Development Working Group**, a working group of dozens of NGOs including the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, the Episcopal Church, NETWORK, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, CHF International, Amnesty International, and 12 other nationally respected NGOs.

ABOUT the FOUNDING DIRECTOR:

Erik K. Gustafson founded EPIC in 1998 to improve humanitarian conditions in Iraq and defend the human rights of the Iraqi people. Under his leadership, EPIC has hosted dozens of policy forums and led Iraq-related humanitarian advocacy in Washington DC. In 2008, Gustafson organized *Iraq Action Days*, which generated \$1.8 billion in funding to help war-affected Iraqis and other vulnerable persons worldwide.

In March 2009 – July 2010, Gustafson took a sabbatical from EPIC and spent time in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, where he directed a \$1 million human rights training project for Iraqi NGOs. Since his return, Gustafson has focused on incorporating innovative youth and peacebuilding projects into EPIC’s work. EPIC’s first project on-the-ground in Iraq, the *Iraqi Youth Hike*, was crowd-funded by EPIC supporters and friends.

Gustafson served in the US Army during the 1991 Gulf War. Witnessing the consequences of war fueled a life-long passion for human rights, peacebuilding, and humanitarian work. Following military service, Gustafson attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison to pursue a degree in Education. While there, he led the Madison chapter of the East Timor Action Network, supporting East Timor’s right to self-determination and the protection of East Timorese civilians. Gustafson traveled to Iraq in 1997 and 1999 to investigate the deterioration of humanitarian conditions under Saddam Hussein’s regime and the most comprehensive economic sanctions ever imposed in the history of the United Nations.