

**Security Council**

Distr.: General  
7 April 2020

Original: English

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**Letter dated 6 April 2020 from the representatives of the Dominican Republic, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Germany and the Dominican Republic, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and the United Kingdom, which worked in close cooperation with them, would like to share the summary of the meeting on Iraq held by the Group on 5 March 2020 (see annex).

We should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* José **Singer Weisinger**  
Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Christoph **Heusgen**  
Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Jonathan **Allen**  
Chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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**Summary of the meeting on Iraq held by the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security on 5 March 2020**

On 5 March 2020, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Iraq. The members received briefings from the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and from a representative of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD), who provided a comprehensive overview of recent developments on women and peace and security.

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the work of UNAMI to promote the participation of women in politics and other areas of the public sector and to engage in dialogue with women participating in the current protests. As a second national action plan on women and peace and security was being developed, they asked about the challenges faced in the implementation of the first such plan and any lessons learned from that phase. Other questions focused on the draft law against domestic violence and the inclusion of provisions related to safe shelters, the situation of internally displaced women and girls and returnees from the Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, the documentation and investigation of attacks against women's human rights defenders and the harsh punishments meted out to women in the prosecution of crimes related to terrorism. Council members inquired about the impact that the UNITAD focus on sexual and gender-based violence could have on the practice of the Iraqi judicial system, as well as the UNITAD approach to the protection of victims and witnesses, including to avoid their retraumatization.

The main points raised during the meeting are summarized below:

- The participation of Iraqi women in the current protests was unprecedented. Women who were not directly protesting took up an active role by providing food, clothing and medical supplies or were documenting human rights abuses against protesters. Many of the women's demands were directed against the patriarchal structures that limited their participation in public life. UNAMI had recorded several cases of female protesters being killed or injured and had documented cases of assassination or attempted assassination and allegations of abductions of female protesters. Despite police investigations, no suspects had been arrested. Women activists continued to be targeted by threats, intimidation and defamation campaigns. The protesters' demands for political change, equality and combating corruption aligned closely with their own long-standing women and peace and security agenda. The protests had created an opportunity for Iraqi women's voices to be amplified and to gain visibility and new public support. However, women were equally concerned about a backlash against their activism and their demands, their lack of representation in any discussions between protest leaders and the Government, and the potential for their demands to be ignored altogether.
- Under the Constitution, a 25 per cent minimum quota applied to the representation of women in the parliament but not in the Cabinet, judiciary, diplomatic service, academia or civil service. Following a Cabinet reshuffle in late 2019 in response to protesters' demands, there was currently 1 woman

among the 23 ministers of the caretaker Government. The Women's Advisory Group, supported by UNAMI, had expressed concern that religiously conservative parties that were represented in the parliament's constitutional review committee might press for language adversely affecting women's rights in the revised constitution. There was only one woman among the nine members of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, but the new Board of Commissioners had appointed her to the role of Chief Electoral Officer. The Board had indicated its commitment to establishing gender-responsive electoral processes that supported women as candidates, voters and electoral stakeholders, including voter outreach campaigns to tackle defamation, intimidation and gender-based violence directed at women candidates. UNAMI was providing expert advice, including lessons learned, to the Electoral Commission on the establishment of gender-responsive electoral processes.

- The draft law against domestic violence faced resistance within the Council of Representatives, and its passage had been stalled since 2011. There were two competing versions of the draft law: one had already been submitted to the parliament by the presidency in September 2019; the other had been produced by the Directorate for the Empowerment of Women in the secretariat of the Council of Ministers, following an inclusive consultative process supported by UNAMI and involving civil society, women's organizations, government officials and United Nations entities. The latter version included provisions on protection orders, safe shelters, restrictions on perpetrators' access to the family home and prosecution of perpetrators.
- Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) enforced strict gender regulations in areas under its control and subjected those deemed not to conform with its concept of gender roles to harassment, torture, murder and sexual violence. Women across the religious spectrum suffered under ISIL rule, including Turkmen Shia women in Tall Afar who had been encircled by ISIL in June 2014 and captured and raped; Christian women who had been detained at checkpoints around Mosul, and sometimes abducted and enslaved; Shabak families who had been taken from their houses in the Jaza'ir, Maliyah and Arbajiyah neighbourhoods of Mosul, with the women then separated and enslaved; young women and girls of the Yazidi faith who had been corralled in Sinjar and transferred throughout ISIL-controlled territory to be sold off or gifted as sexual slaves; and Sunni women who had been executed simply because they refused to help ISIL fighters or have sex with them.
- The Commission for Investigation and Gathering Evidence of the Kurdistan Regional Government had recorded more than 1,000 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, predominantly against Yazidi women and girls. As of February 2020, more than half of the 6,417 Yazidi abductees, including 1,200 women and 1,041 girls, had been rescued or had escaped since 2014. The number of women and girls missing or still in captivity stood at 1,300. Several ISIL publications and policy documents identified by UNITAD showed that gender-based persecution by ISIL was systematic. The highest-ranking members of ISIL knew about the crimes and actively participated in them by personally owning, raping and torturing slaves. UNITAD had established a specific victim and witness protection unit that provided psychological support to victims and witnesses. A draft law on Yazidi female survivors recognized the suffering of Yazidi women and established provisions for reparations, rehabilitation, reintegration and a specialized court in Sinjar that would address the civil status claims of children born of women held in captivity by ISIL. The new Global Survivors Fund established to provide reparations to victims of wartime rape was set to implement its first pilot projects in Iraq. In early March 2020, for the first time,

an Iraqi court had convicted a member of ISIL in a trial in which the rape of a Yazidi woman was part of the evidence adduced, in the form of the testimony of a survivor.

- Women facing charges related to terrorism made up only 3.5 per cent of defendants in the 21,657 terrorism cases that had thus far come before the Iraqi courts, but statistics indicated that women received comparatively harsher sentences. Between 1 January 2018 and 31 October 2019, 23 per cent of male defendants received life sentences, compared with 42.5 per cent of women. The combined number of death and life imprisonment sentences for women was even higher, at 62 per cent, compared with 43 per cent for men.
- In total, 21 per cent of households of displaced persons that lived in camps were headed by women, compared with 11 per cent living outside camps. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse (including by security actors and humanitarian workers) and child marriage, was widespread both in camps and in out-of-camp settings. Limited economic opportunities and gaps in assistance could lead to negative coping strategies, including survival sex. It was estimated that some 500,000 households in Iraq were missing at least one piece of key civil documentation, with female-headed households particularly affected. Missing civil documentation limited access to basic services and restricted movement and children's access to education. Discrimination against female-headed households with perceived affiliations to extremist groups was prevalent.
- The lack of resources had significantly limited the implementation, and therefore the effectiveness, of the first national action plan on women and peace and security. The Government of Iraq was working towards finalizing the second iteration, but sufficient funding needed to be allocated to its implementation in order for it to be successful.

As the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) emphasized that there was a fear within civil society that the emerging leadership of Iraqi women in the protests would not be represented in negotiations, the formation of the Government and any resulting reforms. The Entity pointed out that the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities had been mandated by the Security Council in 2017 to explore the issue of trafficking in persons and sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL and Al-Qaida, but its reports contained little information on the issue. The Entity recommended that the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group discuss the issue with the Committee. UN-Women urged Council members to retain the existing references to women and peace and security issues in resolution [2470 \(2019\)](#) when negotiating the next extension of the UNAMI mandate and recommended that additional language be added, including to urge the Government to allocate adequate funding to the implementation of the second national action plan and to call upon the Government, its international partners and the United Nations to ensure that the full diversity of Iraqi women's voices and demands were represented in any political process.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict emphasized that conflict-related sexual violence continued to be underreported in Iraq owing to fear of reprisals, stigma, lack of trust in the justice system and ongoing security concerns. Male and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer/questioning survivors were particularly afraid to report such crimes. There were still 2,893 Yazidis missing and the Office urged Council members

to continue to work for their return and reunification with their families. More than 100 Iraqi women who were survivors of sexual violence had been identified in the Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic. The children of those women who were born in captivity continued to be unwelcome in their communities and, as a result, some of the women chose not to return. The Office reiterated its call to recognize victims of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups as victims of terrorism who were entitled to support. Decisions regarding children should be guided by the principles of the best interest of the child and family reunification. The Office highlighted the importance of the joint communiqué on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence that had been signed by the Government of Iraq and the United Nations in 2016 being mainstreamed and integrated in the new national action plan on women and peace and security. The Office also urged the Council to strengthen its support for the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with international standards and as an international crime, and to broaden the scope of the draft law on Yazidi female survivors so that it included all forms of sexual violence and all victims.

In closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked the briefers for their participation and committed themselves to following up on the recommendations made.

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