

Update on women, peace and security in Iraq June 15th 2017

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on **October 18th 2016** to discuss the situation in Iraq, with the participation of the leadership of UNAMI and the United Nations Country Team. A record of the meeting was issued as [S/2016/1104](#). The group decided to reconvene once during 2017 to review progress and challenges in the implementation of women, peace and security commitments. This update summarizes relevant developments since the IEG's meeting on Iraq in October 2016.

Several of the recommendations highlighted last year have been taken forward. The UN's reports and briefings to the Security Council have included stronger information and analysis on women, peace and security, as well as regular updates of the UN's ongoing efforts, including by its senior leadership, to advocate for women's inclusion in decision-making about stabilization, recovery, and national reconciliation. The Government of Iraq has begun implementing the Joint Communiqué on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence signed in September 2016 and has established a new Directorate-General on women's empowerment following the abolition of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2015. UNAMI's capacity has been strengthened by the recruitment of a Senior Women Protection Advisor, as called for in resolution 2299.

However, **the overall situation for women and girls has continued to worsen in a context of economic crisis, large-scale military operations, mass displacement, and 11 million in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.** Women's organizations have noted the increased role of military and religious actors in decision-making, to the detriment of their own voice. A recent assessment led by UN Women and Oxfam details ISIL's brutal enforcement of rigid gender norms and sex segregation, and its severe impact at the household and community level, including a visible regression for women's rights and women's empowerment in public life and increased intimate partner violence at homes. ISIL recruited rural male youth from villages outside Mosul, with lower employment opportunities, income, and literacy, and forced young women and girls to marry them, thereby binding their whole family networks to the organization. During the Mosul operation, women and girls were used as sexual slaves, human shields, and suicide bombers, forced into early marriages, and executed in public. It is estimated that 1,670 Yazidi women and children remain enslaved by ISIL and many have been sold or relocated to ISIL-occupied areas in Syria. Newly displaced women and girls are stigmatized and marginalized in the camps, or subjected to sexual harassment and exploitation, and many are left stranded in detention sites. More than 90 percent of IDP camp management committees lack female representation. Hundreds of women die from "honour" killings each year, which severely undercuts women's ability to report violations or exercise their rights.

Efforts continue to support women's participation in national reconciliation, the security sector, and upcoming elections, with mixed results. For example, in the process of selecting new commissioners for the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), only seven women have been included in a shortlist of 118 candidates. Currently, there is only one woman in the IHEC, and UNAMI is engaging with the relevant parliamentary committee to change that. In spite of the 25 percent quota for women established by the country's electoral laws, implementation continues to be a challenge. Young women's representation in recent youth forums on national reconciliation has hovered around 40 percent.

The National Reconciliation Commission has a Gender and Women's Office and an MOU with UNAMI focused on integrating gender equality into the work of the Commission, but women continue to be under-represented and marginalized in decision-making. Female Members of Parliament have recently presented to the Council of Representatives a five-year Ninewa Peace Initiative to reconcile communities divided by ISIL, and need political and financial support for its implementation.

Concerns remain about the implementation of the **National Action Plan on 1325**, given the lack of funds, a recent split in civil society, and skepticism about the capacity or status of the lead government entity. In March, the Council of Ministers issued an executive order restructuring the **Committee on the Advancement of Women**, which reports directly to the Prime Minister and is the highest governmental entity on women peace and security. The Committee is chaired by the Mayor of Baghdad, after having been inactive following the abolition of the State Ministry of Women Affairs. The Committee is responsible for the implementation of the national strategy for the advancement of women (2014-2018), the National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325 (2014-2018) and the National Strategy to Eliminate Violence against Women (2014-2017). The **Directorate 'Empowering Iraqi Women,'** established in December 2016, functions as the Secretariat to this Committee and monitors the implementation of women, peace and security frameworks.

The **Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict** visited Iraq in February to follow up on the signing of the **Joint Communiqué**. High-level focal points have been appointed at the federal and regional levels and an inter-ministerial task force will be established to oversee its implementation. In February, Sunni religious leaders issued a fatwa calling for the protection, care, and acceptance of survivors of rape, following similar pronouncements by Yazidi religious leaders. Religious leaders from all communities have met in roundtable forums to discuss community-based protection of returning survivors of sexual violence and children born of rape, and plan to hold a national conference in July. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has called for legislation to specifically address the issue of children born of rape. Following the deployment of a Senior Women Protection Advisor in February, the UN has taken steps towards establishing the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) on CRSV (SCR 1960). The UN is focused on supporting survivors in areas retaken from ISIL control and helping them reintegrate back to their communities, and continues to urge the government to take steps towards holding perpetrators accountable for all crimes of sexual violence.

In recent months, **donors have increased their support for emergency medical care, psychosocial support, and legal aid for hundreds of thousands of women and girls affected by the conflict**. This includes the provision of lifesaving reproductive health services in re-taken areas in Mosul, first-line relief items for displaced women and girls, and legal aid to obtain birth certificates and divorce certificates for the children and wives of ISIL fighters, respectively. However, **these services are often not comprehensive** and there is a shortage of specialized staff, trauma counseling, livelihood assistance, and longer term reintegration support, or are accompanied by livelihood assistance or longer term solutions. The issue of **shelters** for women and survivors of gender-based violence, repeatedly highlighted in last year's meetings, has not been resolved, as the government has not issued any directives on the matter and the draft bill on family protection has been pending for over three years. In recent months, the draft bill has again been subjected to additional hearings, amendments, and debate. There are only three shelters operating in Kurdistan and none in south or central Iraq.

Finally, in spite of extensive documentation of atrocities committed against women and girls in Iraq, **there has not been any justice for international crimes to date**. While disagreements continue about the specific modalities that may be used to provide accountability, victims' advocates are concerned that sexual violence survivors continue to be interviewed and re-interviewed without clear prospects for justice in sight and adequate support or protection for local human rights defenders or organizations working on documentation.

Recommendations for the Security Council and the international community

In its future deliberations and actions on Iraq, including UNAMI's mandate renewal, the Security Council should reiterate its support for **women's leadership and reintegration in stabilization, recovery, and reconciliation efforts, particularly in a post-ISIL context, and justice and accountability for victims of human rights abuses, including sexual violence**, and call on the international community and the Government of Iraq to implement the Joint Communiqué on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the National Action Plan on women, peace and security, with particular attention to the following priorities:

- The Government of Iraq must ensure that the government leads for Joint Communiqué and National Action Plan and have the adequate capacity and leverage, and the existence of effective mechanisms for civil society to monitor implementation.
- International partners, including through humanitarian and stabilization funding and in upcoming donor conferences, should pledge support to specialized programmes for female-headed households and demand that UN joint programmes on economic recovery, reconciliation, transitional justice, civil documentation, frontline service delivery, deradicalization and prevention of violent extremism, disarmament and reintegration, security sector reform, earmark allocations for the integration of a gender perspective.
- Adoption of the Family Protection Act with provisions to allow NGOs to operate shelters for women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing violence is urgent. In the meantime, the Government of Iraq should be urged to issue a directive providing legal coverage to national NGOs and eliminating access barriers, such as the need for a judge order for entry or release into a shelter.
- The Council should promote the representation and participation of women in upcoming election cycles and electoral bodies, such as the Independent High Electoral Commission.
- The UN should coordinate the development of a country-wide joint programme on conflict-related sexual violence, building and expanding on current projects by different agencies, with the support of international partners. Increased support for survivors should include medical care, including access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, psychosocial assistance, legal aid, economic empowerment and livelihood and reintegration assistance, shelter, and protection of women and girls in IDP camps from exploitation, trafficking, harassment, and violence from security actors or their families and communities.
- International partners should support lawmakers and religious leaders and civil society, including women's groups, in their efforts to encourage the non-discrimination of survivors of sexual violence and children born of rape. Decriminalization of abortion in the context of conflict-related sexual slavery should be considered.
- Supporting the UN's engagement on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence will require a core dedicated capacity which should be included in the regular budget of UNAMI, to sustain the temporary support provided by UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict for the recruitment of a Senior Women Protection Adviser.
- The Security Council and the international community should provide political and technical assistance to facilitate legislative reform and domestic prosecution of sexual violence crimes, in addition to supporting international efforts to provide accountability for serious violations of international criminal law.
- The Government of Iraq and its partners should provide increased political, legal, and financial support to women's civil society organizations and women's human rights defenders to bolster their work on women, peace and security issues.