

Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Girls in Iraq



Prepared by the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq OWFI

Fact finding in 2008

Documentation in 2009

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1. Introduction

In spite of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) background on women's rights, we did not expect nor comprehend the extent of the problem when we received reports of the kidnapping of women and girls in Baghdad in May 2003. When we started to gather reports from Baghdad neighborhoods the following summer, the numbers were shocking. We expressed our dismay to the media and fearing that a new and vicious era has attacked the women of Iraq. OWFI learned that trafficking of women is the hidden face of war, insecurity and chaos.

In those days, we sympathized with women who were forced or maybe sold into prostitution. We did not have the same consideration for women who were already prostituted in brothels. We thought of them as the unfortunate margins of the society. It was only in 2006, that we noticed an epidemic rise in the number of women who prostituted for a living, whether in formal brothels, in regular working places, or in a hidden neighborhood hideaway. The numbers were obviously no longer something we could consider an unfortunate marginal minority. It was only then that we, in OWFI, decided to investigate the extent prostitution in Iraq, in order to better understand the underground industry of trafficking which thrives on the exploitation of women's flesh.

We also needed to gather some background information about the history of prostitution and trafficking in Iraq. Our efforts started with documenting kidnappings in the first years, but gradually expanded into searching for places where girls and women are sold. We found ourselves documenting prostitution houses where the actual buying and selling take place. Eventually, it was impossible to separate one issue from the other.

After confronting officials throughout 2008 and 2009 about the issue of trafficking, OWFI developed a reputation of a fierce defendant of women's integrity against the war-time disasters. As a result, eye-witnesses and the victims of trafficking began contacting OWFI with their stories. Some reports were of incidents too big for OWFI to handle. For example, distressed witnesses reported the kidnapping and trafficking 128 women from the city of Diyala in 2007.

Following an interview with OWFI activist on MBC TV, the government campaigned against OWFI starting in May 2009 with active attacks over the public Al Iraqia television, and intervened to stop the airing of televised broadcasts were OWFI sought to tell the trafficking story. Frankly, we were intimidated and scared. Moreover, OWFI was advised by allies that publishing these facts may jeopardize our lives as we are touching onto one of the biggest industries in the world, and a new and thriving one in Iraq. We decided to be silent, stay safe, and keep our information to ourselves. OWFI could not maintain that position for long.

A visit to the female juvenile prison in Baghdad in January 2010 reminded us that OWFI served an important mission that required courage, but facing our fears. It was the faces of 12 year old Mena and her sister that reminded us of our responsibilities. They were imprisoned after being sent back from the Arab Emirates as "prostitutes." Meeting those two children and hearing their stories was a heavy experience for the activists of OWFI. Some rushed out crying; some promised to help; while others hardened their resolve to document and reveal these crimes against the women of Iraq, including innocent young girls. Innocent girls who should still be enjoying childhood under the protection of their mothers were being incarcerated for the crime of prostitution, an ordeal in which they were modern-day slaves.

At this point, we do not know if the numbers of Iraqi teenaged trafficking victims of the recent years are in the thousands, or tens of thousands. We do know that the Iraqi government does not want to hear the facts nor acknowledge the sufferings. Lawmakers do not feel an urgency to eradicate the crime of trafficking.

One recent letter from an informed OWFI supporter gave us the ultimate push to publicize the facts. He had previously forwarded us a report which was too big to handle. That letter said, "You need to do something. The women and their families need to know that someone stands with them. The fact that 128 young women from Diyala were exported into sexual slavery within a few months cannot pass unnoticed. The traffickers and their official partners are set free while the trafficked women and their families suffer in silence, from shame and slavery... The case just cannot be closed".

2. Background information

This section describes the context of prostitution and trafficking in the modern times in Iraq; with special focus to laws, social and political circumstances relevant to the issue.

a) A. K. Qassim period 1958-1963

Within a turbulent progressive scene, this period was resilient with prostitution and practiced a policy of regulation for the "trade". Recommendations were given to seclude prostitution into special zone while providing medical services for the women in the industry.

There was a strong women's movement on the ground, albeit a leftist one, that did not specifically advocate women's human rights. Demands of general access to education and work prevailed while

social demands connected to women's sexuality or bodily integrity were not included in the mainstream political agenda.

b) Baath Regime Period before economic sanctions (1963-1991):

There were great contradictions during the Baath Regime era. On the one hand, it was a ruthless unprecedented dictatorship in the modern times of Iraq. On the other hand, the political system advanced modernity, socialism and secularism. This period was affected also by incredible financial wealth as the result of nationalized oil resulting in economic stability and relative prosperity. This prosperity made Iraq attractive to small numbers of traffickers from other parts of the world, but Iraqi women were rarely prostituted unless in secluded gypsy gatherings\settlements.

Baath regime laws made prostitution illegal. Article 3 in the anti-prostitution law resulted in six months prison time for convictions for brokerage, while Article 4 gave three months of imprisonment for prostitutes. In a repeated prostitution case, the imprisonment becomes one year. The punishment for prostitution was minor compared with neighboring countries with more brutal laws and regulations. Moreover, there were provisions for rehabilitation houses for prostitutes with the state maintaining those facilities.

Night clubs and adult entertainment were legal and employed women coming from Egypt, the Philippines, and other countries, as well as some local women.

Gypsy gatherings\settlements (Ghajar) were known to host parties for officials and sheikhs and offer them sexual services afterwards. They were in many locations around Iraq such as Abu Ghraib, Kamaliya, Diwaniah, old part of Basra, Shummali in Kut, Al Dawassa in Mosul, Touz in Kirkuk, Al Hussein district in Kerbala, and Al Zahra' district in Hilla. The Karaj are also similar in nature to the gypsies, but they prostitute through begging money and not through entertainment.

The Baath regime attempted building them residential complexes with schools such as Hay Al Rissala. The main idea was that education will help this population to resort to other ways for a living, and will create awareness against the sex-industry.

c) Baath Period during Economic Sanctions 1991-2003

Although the economic sanctions were designed to overthrow Saddam's Baath regime, the main result was unprecedented poverty for the people. The poverty also rendered them helpless against the ruling party.

An alarming increase in prostitution started during the first years of the Economic Sanctions of the nineties, to become epidemic numbers in 1994. A starvation-style economy translated into exploitation of women in workplaces. Although women were a big part of the public work force, their monthly salary became equivalent to few dollars. A huge population of widowed single mothers started to practice individual and hidden prostitution in workplace or in neighborhoods for survival.

d) Faith Campaign: "Cleansing" the society through mass executions of prostitution

The years of 1994-1998 reflected a massive practice of oppression against women. Numbers of "honour-killings" rose to their highest rates in the modern history of Iraq. While the numbers are not documented in central and southern Iraq, the Kurdish north, a no-fly zone then, had relative freedom in documenting, and the result was, as documented by a local group¹: 9000 honour-killings within nine years. In parallel, Saddam Husein flirted with rising powers of Islamism in the region. The faith campaign followed in October 2000. Almost 200 Iraqi women were publicly executed by the Fedaeyin Saddam (Sadam's guerillas) for claims of prostitution. While it is reported that some of these women were political, most of them were known to have practiced prostitution.

e) Post –war abductions and assaults against women

Ousting the government and all systems of security left Iraqi cities vulnerable in the following months to gangs of men who kidnapped women and girls and assaulted them sexually.

It was noticed that kidnappings increased especially in the capital Baghdad². Houses which "stored" girls before selling them to other countries were found in 2004³. Borders with other countries were in a state of chaos and made easy the trafficking of kidnapped or destitute females to Syria and other neighboring countries.

In 2004 OWFI held weekly meetings with volunteer women from many parts of the city of Baghdad and attempted to estimate the numbers of abductees. OWFI knew little about trafficking at that time.

f) Rising militias' crack down on prostitution: Al Battaween's bloodbath

¹ "Cry from Kurdistan" was written by the Independent Women's Organization, a secular group which opened the first shelter for women in Kurdistan in the late 1990's.

² OWFI's weekly membership meetings reported as many as ten kidnappings from different parts of the city.

³ As indicated in a Human Rights Report.

After the religious parties took control of the Ministry of Interior, they openly managed mass killings of prostitutes in Al Battaween in central Baghdad. On July 2006, Amal Kashkool witnessed the execution of six women and one man of Al Battaween. A bullet was fired into the back of the head and a second then fired into the victim's back. Seven intelligence cars (Batta) brought the militia members to Ally 7 in Al Battaween. Those militia members then performed group-honour killing executions.

Although small and medium sized brothels spread all over Baghdad by 2005-2006, Al Battaween district – a mix of light industrial and residential slum – has surpassed them all in housing the most populated and inhumane brothels.

g) Crimes and punishment against prostitution

Prostitution is illegal under Iraqi law, where a prostitute is detained for 3-4 months, while solicitors get longer imprisonment periods. Police raids are administered on brothels, but most escape using a watch system and mobile phones. Almost half the women in the central women's prison of Kadthimiya⁴ are convicted under "prostitution".

In the previous regime, the law included reform houses in which the convicted women would be sent, but these houses no longer exist.

Mass killings of women took place in the southern cities of Basra and Umara between 2006-2008. Although some of them may have been accused of prostitution, the verdict was spread to include unveiled and made up women. It was enough for any vigilante to say that she was not good and the case would be closed immediately.

3. Report Overview

The sections of the report are compiled from the collection of the information and interviews prepared by OWFI activists along with their analysis and conclusions. The facts were collected in small reports in 2008, while categorized and analyzed in 2009. The last report –the second part of the report - was delivered to OWFI after it travelled between two cities by individuals who preferred not to reveal their identity in an effort to assure their own safety. These individuals knew the trafficked women and their families. They yearned to deliver some

⁴ The central women's prison was moved to another location in 2009.

justice for them after the local system failed to do so. The events which followed in May 2009 made OWFI refrain from publishing both reports and wait for better times.

a. OWFI Report:

i. Reason for undertaking study

OWFI first noticed the issue of increased prostitution in 2006. The signs were many: the downtown location of the OWFI offices⁵ at a walking distance from Al Battaween gave OWFI activists direct interaction with the women; complaints about some of the women whom OWFI hired, reporting that they were "moonlighting"⁶; and what a curious activist⁷ found when she visited brothels, reporting back to OWFI about the prostituted women and their dire situation.

Throughout 2007, OWFI began to learn from our allies in the international women's circles about the issue of trafficking in military conflict zones. We also began to interview victims of prostitution while visiting the Kadhimiya women's prison in Baghdad. Cruel and inhumane tribal treatment of females seemed to be one of the reasons for young females to run away from their homes, sometimes lured by males who were connected to prostitution rings. Once alone, without a family and penniless, they became vulnerable victims to a thriving sex industry. For the females who were sold into the industry by their own families, they were mostly from families which had taken the business of prostitution as a family business. The rest were from destitute families who were driven to desperate measures as a result of chronic hunger and deprivation of the last two decades.

ii. Tentative intervention:

In 2007 OWFI took on the challenge of investigating and documenting the extent of trafficking and prostitution within our outreach in Iraq. While OWFI leadership learned about prostitution and trafficking at international women's conferences, OWFI focused initially on providing shelter for women, helping them escape from the vicious cycle of poverty and prostitution. The education of OWFI activists on the issue of trafficking led to a program of anti-trafficking, initially experimenting with methods and procedures.

⁵ Between All Ferdawse square and Al Battaween ill-reputed district

⁶ As in working after hours in paid sexual services

⁷ Basma Haid – not real name- raised OWFI's attention to brothels situation.

In 2008 some former victims of trafficking began working with OWFI adding a new passion to OWFI's efforts. Their contribution opened a victims window, giving OWFI a clearer view into the industry of prostitution and trafficking in Iraq from a victim's point of view. This industry looked like an octopus with its head in Baghdad while the limbs reached out to Damascus, Dubai, Jordan, and the Emirates.

iii. **Initiating an action plan:**

OWFI leadership began an anti-trafficking program including outreach, documentation, physical and moral support, and, when needed, sheltering. The 2008 report on prostitution and trafficking was a first attempt to understand the phenomenon/industry, map it, and indulge in documenting the ways of abuse which the females in the industry witness.

OWFI activists could not gain a comprehensive view of the full trafficking network of Iraq with Baghdad at the center. Still this report attempts to draw a preliminary map of the network, its routes, gateways, and administrators.

iv. **Fact finding**

City: Most of the information was gathered in Baghdad's brothels. Although some of the females are trafficked to or from the Kurdish zone, the report primarily addresses issues of prostitution and trafficking (P&T) in Baghdad and its suburbs.

District: 34 reports of P&T are documented in both sides of the riverfront: the Karkh and Rassafa: 5 in the Karkh side, 26 in the Rassafa side, while the rest are in street situations, military or paramilitary environments.

The brothels of the following neighborhoods and districts were visited in this report (listed in order as presented in the report): Al Jihad district, Al Battaween(5⁸), Zayuna, Baghdad Al Jadida(5), Oor district(2), Abu Nawas street, Camp Sara, Thawra/Sadre city(2), Karrada (2), Al Aadhamiya(4), Al Shu'la, Al Doura, Sheraton Hotel, Al Shorja, Al Alawi bus station, Al Fadhil, Al Oubaidy, Haidar Khana, Al Mansour.

Environment: Some reports included prostitution for the service of US military \ translators(2), National Guards troops, Militia in Sadre city, and security\police in Al Mansour.

⁸ The number inside brackets determines the numbers of brothels visited in that area or the visit to a prostitution ring in that place.

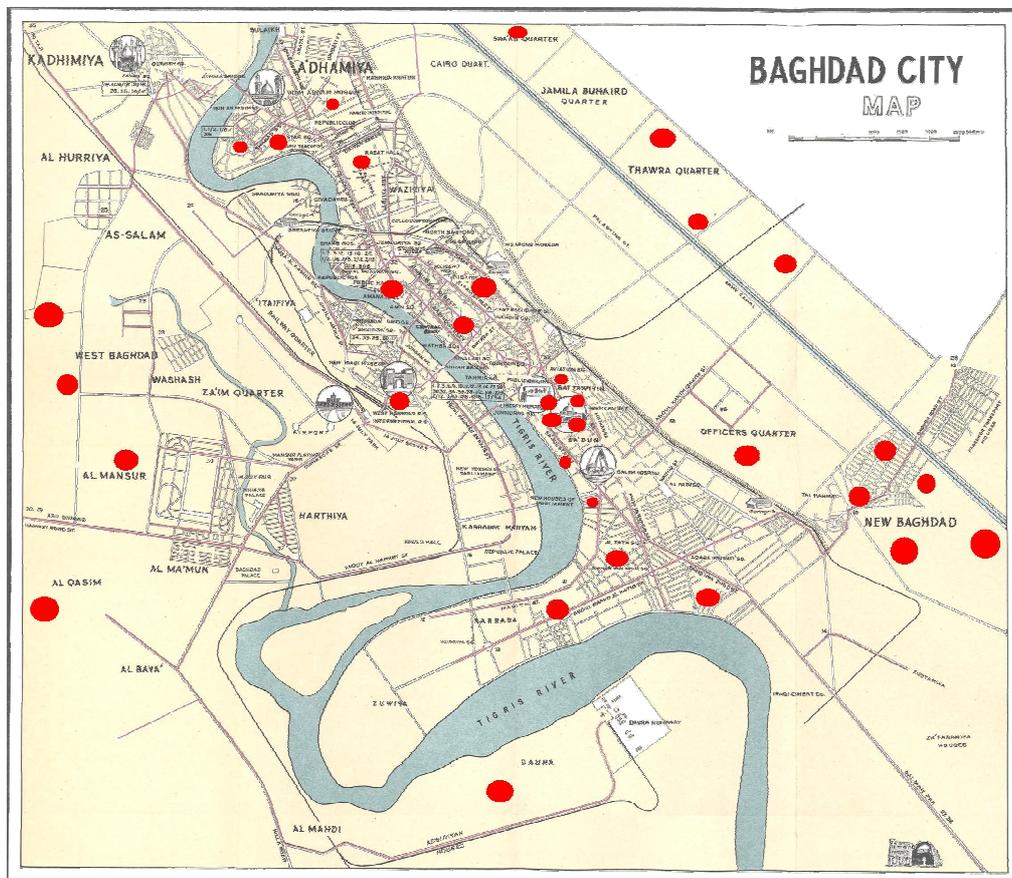
Trafficking Connections: Some of the pimps\traffickers had connection of trafficking to: Kurdish zone Erbil & Suleimania(3), Emirates(3), Syria(2), Dubai(1), Jordan(1), Mosul(1), and Basra(1)⁹.

Original background of victims: Three of the interviewed prostituted women\girls have run away from their homes which were originally in: Basra (runaway from relative\family rape), Zakho (sold by a destitute family), Nasiria (runaway from incest). Five of the interviewed victims were trafficked and prostituted by their own families. Twelve of the women had been imprisoned for prostitution and left the prison to be taken into the brothels again.

Numbers of prostituted and trafficked females covered by report:

	Total prostituted females in the 2008 P&T report	Minors\children females among the prostituted females (less than 18 years old)	Adult prostituted females (over 18 years old)
Numbers	72	47	25
Percentages	100%	65%	35%

Locations of reported brothels on Baghdad Map

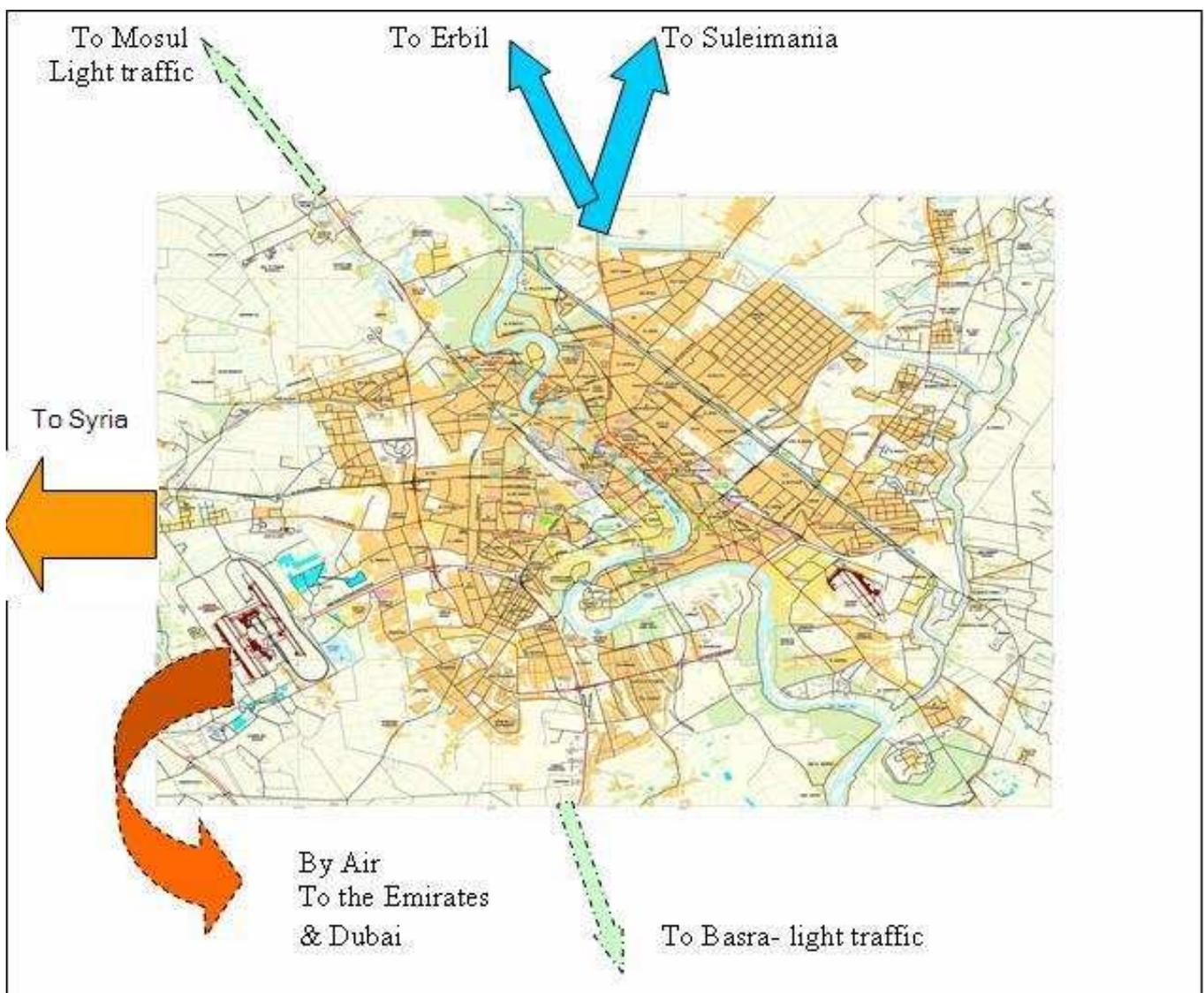


⁹ To be explained in more details in the Trafficking Network paragraph.

- ✚ **Period of report was in 2008 before the government's decision to re-open Baghdad night clubs¹⁰, a decision that helps the sex industry thrive.**

Note: two young women who work in a Baghdad night-club took refuge in OWFI shelters on February 13, 2010 after a night of rapes and beatings.

- ✚ **OWFI's outreach includes residential neighborhoods of low-medium income. The current report did not have access into the green zone and the riverfront ruling class – palaces where most of the high-end sexual exploitation happens.**



Main routes of trafficking as found in the reports

¹⁰ Night clubs started to open with the obvious permission of governmental authorities in the early months of 2009. Reports indicate that two central night clubs offer “complimentary” services include sexual services.

Local network: trafficking from Baghdad was to Suleimania and Erbil primarily, and to other cities with less demand, such as Mosul and Basra.

Regional Network: Airport gateway is the route to the United Arab Emirates where the highest regional sex market is. Special emphasis is given to Dubai as the regional attraction point for P&T.

Note: The map above was drafted before receiving the Diyala report, which showed a heavy traffic towards Saudi-Arabia via Mosul.

Listing of Prostitution and Trafficking houses Found in 2008

Note: OWFI strives to conceal the identities of the prostituted and trafficked victims, and has changed their names through the report, while the traffickers/solicitors are listed in the names which OWFI has.

Location (Area\District) & date of report	Main Trafficker\solicitor and assistants	Number of women\girls found in house	Trafficking destination	Comments
Shorja 6-8-2008	Sabreen Nouri (female solicitor)	4 girls	Not Applicable House is a brothel – no trafficking practiced.	-Solicitor hunts for young runaway girls in crowded public places. She found her last victim –13 year old– in the downtown Shorja market. -One of the girls, a 13 year old, is pregnant in her 7 th month.
Al Alawi – public transportation bus and car station 10-8-2008	Unknown	1 woman	From Mosul to Baghdad	Taxi drivers of the intercity routes take advantage of runaway girls and women. First driver planned to sell her to a brothel in Fadhil district. Policemen planned to take her in for similar purpose when OWFI activists intervened and took her to OWFI shelter.

Karrada 15-8-2008	Um Rasool (female solicitor)	1 girl and 1 woman	Not applicable	-Girls rented to militia members -When detained by national guards, nobody claimed them
Adhamiya 16-8-2008	Hussein Saleh (translator for US base in Tikrit) and wife (forced to assist) Khaldoon (assistant)	variable ¹¹	Not applicable	Wife was forced into fake marriage after her brother (a militia member) was imprisoned by US troops. The translator married her and opened an apartment with her to entertain US military officers.
Baghdad Al Jadida ¹² 17-8-2008	Shaimaa Asaad (female solicitor)	2 women	Undisclosed neighboring country	Police involvement in sexual exploitation and trafficking in previous years (while report was taken in 2008, the trafficking took place in earlier years)
Karrada 21-8-2008	Bashar Gorkis (male trafficker) Rita (girlfriend- and assistant) Abeer (female assistant)	4 girls	To Dubai and Syria	Bashar and his female assistants visited the Sheraton-Ishtar hotel on the date of this report. Bashar marries young girls in a court and smuggles them to Dubai or Syria. ¹³
Al Dora 23-8-2008	Sheikh Muhannad	1 woman	Not applicable	-Militia members use women for ambushing officials of the police.
Al Battaween 28-8-2008	Unknown	1 girl- 13 year old	To Mosul	-Sold to a female solicitor from Mosul
Oor District 6-9-2008	Alaa Sabah (female solicitor) Alaa is assisted by her husband and her cousin Hussein Sayed Ali (male solicitor)	7 girls for sale- 3 for local prostitution	-Suleimania & Erbil -Main Kurdish importer in Erbil: Kaka Hamad -Local	- Family of solicitors also practiced stealing from passing by cars at gunpoint in Al Adhamiya

¹¹ The translator brought different girls for the US officer on every visit and let him use his own bedroom

¹² Translated as New Baghdad, it is a relatively new residential expansion of the seventies and eighties, similar to Sadr city.

¹³ Normally, such a procedure would need ID papers which give the girls an older age if the marriage is in court. The girl can still be a minor and be married a religious\ cleric marriage.

			trafficker Sabiha Shallal of Baghdad Al Jadida trades girls with Alaa.	
Adhamiya 9-11-2008	Home servant raped and pushed into the sex industry	1 woman	Not applicable	Family has runaway from insecure situation. Left alone, she was an easy victim.
Baghdad Al Jadida 8-11-2008	Um Nashwan (female solicitor)	1 girl	To Syria through female solicitor Um Saad	Um Nashwan's house specializes in trafficking and not prostitution Trafficker Um Saad bought the girl for 4 million Iraqi Dinars, prepared marriage papers for the girl with her son so she will be taken to Syria and sold there.
Baghdad Al Jadida 8-11-2008	Um Majed (female solicitor)	3 girls	To Suleimania through her sister Um Ali the solicitor And to Basra	-One girl was shot in the face. -Two girls were trafficked to Suleimania while deals were made for trafficking to Basra
Al Mansour 9-11-2008	Eman Jabbar (female solicitor) Waleed (male solicitor and her son)	3 girls	To the United Arab Emirates	-Girls were in the Kadhimiya prison and had nowhere else to go after being released -2 girls were prepared to be trafficked to Emirates.
Adhamiya 14-11-2008	Wafaa (female solicitor)	2 girls (including solicitor's daughter) and 2 women	Not applicable	Protected by a militia leader All girls and women were sent to his house. Next day 3 of them came back but her daughter was kept.
Aadhamiya 2 houses –in Safina, and Antar square 16-11-2008	Yusra Ibrahim Hamadi (female solicitor) Muhamad Ibrahim Hamadi (male)	3 girls trafficked 7 females prostituted (4 girls and 3 women)	undisclosed	-The main solicitor trafficked 3 girls on the day of the interview. -The male solicitor

	trafficker) Kareem Ibrahim (male solicitor)			beats the girls with an electric stick. He also denies them food and drink. He aborted one while beating her brutally. - Solicitors are well connected with officials, according to the sayings of the main solicitor.
Haidarkhana - to Shawaqa 24-11-2008	Kareema (female solicitor)	1 woman interviewed outside house	Not applicable	-Woman was 2 months pregnant and wanted to leave brothel. When she asked for her money, solicitor Kareema asked her son to beat her on the belly. She left bleeding and called OWFI activist to help her get to a hospital.
Baghdad Al Jadida 8-12-2008	Um Kareem (female trafficker)	1 girl	Buys from Kurdistan poor families. Sells to Syria (trafficker: Waleed the Syrian)	-The trafficker is from gypsy origin. -She prefers to specialize in trafficking 12-13 year old girls. She finds it more profitable than prostituting. -Well-connected with local officials.
Al Dora 9-12-2008	Um Nashwan ¹⁴ (female solicitor)	3 women & 3 girls	Not applicable	-A 20 year old became pregnant but had to continue working. In a stay-over working night, she served 4 males and was aborted. -She is forced to continue working or lose the roof on her head.
Baghdad Al Jadida 10-12-2008	Saleh (male solicitor)	1 girl (14 year old)	Tafficked to Dubai by female	-Sells his daughter to sheikhs ¹⁵ for 15 million

¹⁴ Not the same Um Nashwan which is listed above.

¹⁵ In this kind of sale, there may be religious marriage papers. The sale could last from one week to one year, when the male exploiters throws her back to her parents or to the sex industry.

			solicitor Almaza for 7 million dinars (approx. 6,000\$)	dinars(13,000\$) -Sold his daughter to a female solicitor in 2007 -Girl is down with syphilis and is forced to serve men continuously.
Al Oubaidy 10-12-2008	Mahasen Saleh (Solicitor and prostituted) Sabah Saleh (assistant male solicitor)	1 girl, 1 woman	Mahasen was trafficked both to Emirates and Syria	-She bought a girl for 4 million ID -Mahasen is the daughter of the solicitor Saleh(in the previous report). After being sold many times by father, she opens her own house, which is a common trend in families in the sex industry.
Oor district 15-12-2008	Hanan um Rana (female solicitor and trafficker)	4 girls	Jordan	- Sold daughter to a Kuwaiti sheikh in Jordan- in a pleasure marriage. -After returning to Iraq, opened her own brothel in which she exploited her daughter over and again.
Al Jihad 22-12-2008	Amal um Ali (female-solicitor) Adhab (male- trafficker) Adel (translator)	5 women (18-19 years old)	Emirates & Kurdistan	- Solicitor Amal has a badge for access to the nearby American military base who are the main clients. - Women are rented for 400\$/night, 300\$ goes to the solicitor.
Zayuna 24-12-2008	Kareema Al Ora ¹⁶ (female solicitor) Al Sayed (male assistant)	3 girls-women ¹⁷ (16-18 years old)	Erbil	- Drugs (hallucination pills) and alcohol are sold inside the house. - One girl said she needs to be drugged before serving clients. - Kareema has inherited the trade from her parents.

¹⁶ The exact translation is Cross-eyed Kareema. The prostitution houses are usually known by the names of the soliciting women, while the men change from time to time.

Al Battaween 28-12-2008	Unknown in two houses	2 girls 3 women in the first house 1 girl and 1 woman in the second house-13 year old, and 28 year old with her 2 children		- Women with 2 children has no other alternative Child of 13 year old was already and divorced, and has currently runaway from her parents who wanted to get her into a second marriage.
23 P&T houses	19 soliciting\ trafficking groups found in the period of this report 14 out of 19 have trafficked girls or women in 2008 (73%) 2 out of 19 are specialized only in trafficking (10.5%) 17 groups practice prostituting girls and women. While they all traffic inside Iraq, some of them do not pursue trafficking when not needed.	47 girls are included in this count. (65%) 25 women are included in this count. (35%) Total = 72 females 7 females were originally born into families which are in the industry= 5% While 4 females were sold by destitute families= 3% (Most of the rest (92%) were runaways from tribal situations with the help of a seducer, or from sexual harassment- no seduction involved.	9 groups traffic to <u>neighboring countries</u> : 5 to Emirates including Dubai, 5 to Syria, 1 (older case) to Jordan. -9 groups traffic <u>inside Iraq</u> -5 groups of trafficking to Kurdistan, 2 to Mosul, 2 to Basra.	Regular practices: - Selling girls of 11-15 year old inside Iraq for prices (1-4 million ID, equals 800-3600 \$), and outside Iraq for an average of 7 million ID (equals 6000\$). -2 brothels sell drugs (hallucination pills) and alcohol to customers ¹⁸ . -Runaways from their families are partly because of tribal cruelty which pushes girls to seduction and escape, 2 females had run away from sexual assault from relative, -5 females were born in families who prostitute their daughters.

¹⁷ It was hard to confirm that some of the girls were 18 or less as they do not know their exact age.

¹⁸ Actual number may be more, as many interviews did not include the question.

b. Report of a Sex-trafficking Ring: in Diyala¹⁹ 2007

Police report forwarded to OWFI

As OWFI spoke over the media throughout the years 2008 – 2009, many people responded and described it as a disastrous epidemic which needs to be addressed urgently.

One of the responses came unexpectedly from a police officer who was tormented by a case which he had witnessed before being transferred to another city. During his duty in Diyala City, the head of a trafficking gang was arrested and investigated concerning the trafficking of 128 women to Saudi Arabia, through the city of Mosul.

Shyaa Hmoud Salman testifies on September 21-2007: "...I was only one of many other men who were summoned to the city of Mosul by the Saudi-Arabian Abou Mansour on 18 March 2007. The agreement was that he will pay us 3000 US\$ for every young woman brought from Diyala. After a few days, we went to the city of Diyala where we started a branch of the "Arab Humane Organization" NGO after we paid its owner an amount of money....we announced that we will pay a 200 US\$ salary to young women, which we did with a big number until we gained their trust... With many we tried seduction and alluring...The first group we sent were 20 women."



signed and sealed testimony of the head of the trafficking ring

Salman continues his testimony: "Abou Mansour informed us that he will raise the price to 5000US\$. We told the women that they will be working in Saudi Arabia, and we convinced them

¹⁹ City of Diyala, almost 80Km northeast of Baghdad is part of the so-called Sunni triangle where Al Qaeda had major influence in those years. Residents were also heavily punished by the ruling Shia militias. The city remained a place of major sectarian violence for many years.

to get rid of a life of poverty and stress under their strict families' control. We were able to convince and send a total of 128 woman from Diyala City to Saudi Arabia, through the city of Mosul."

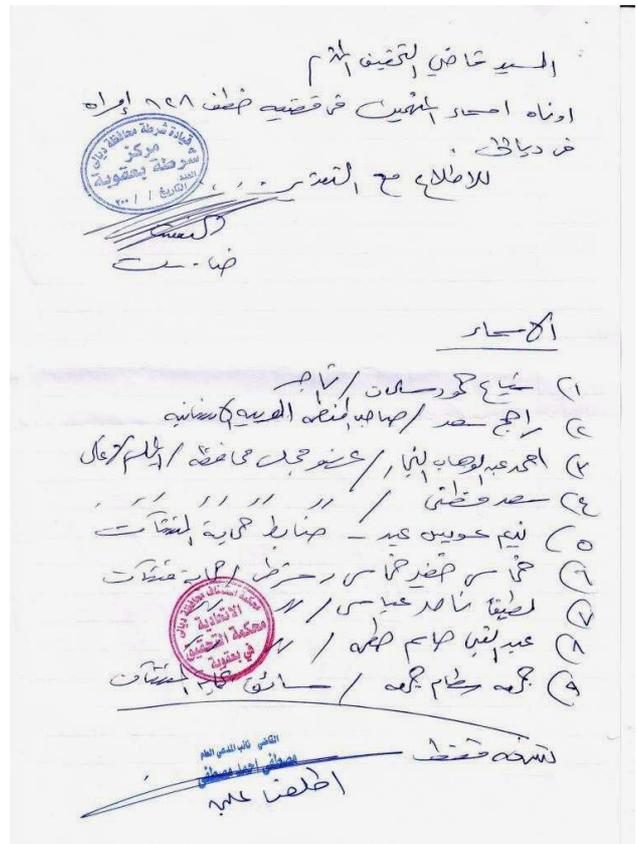
"We had learned beforehand that they will be sold to touristic houses where they will be sexual servants and will prostitute for a living, but will not be allowed to say anything to anyone."

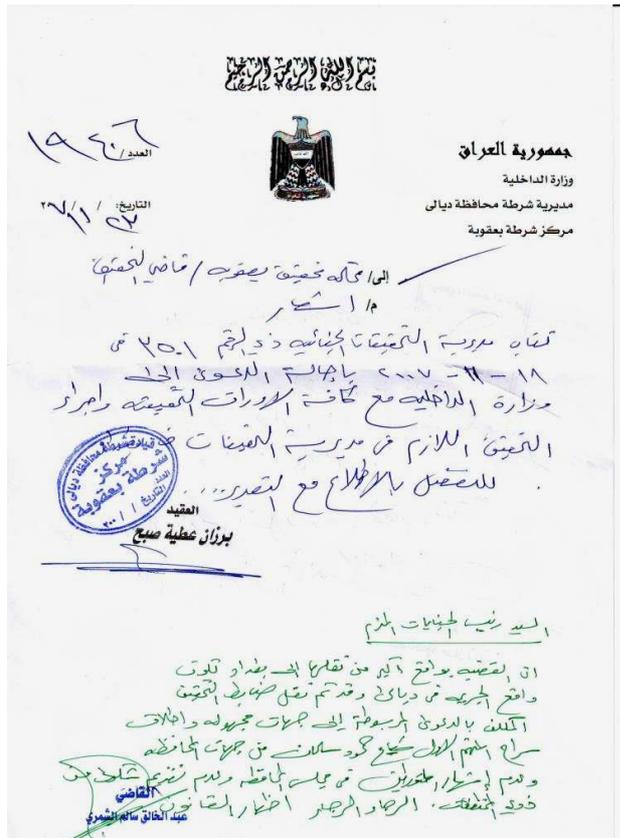
Other members of the ring: In addition to the head of the ring, there are two members of the Governorate's Council (members of a religious political party), one security officer, three police men, and one security driver.

Final results:

Traffickers were set free, while the officer on the case was transferred. In spite of the seriousness of the judges on the case which was labeled under the article 4 - Terrorism, it was closed under vague circumstances. The last report indicates the release of the main suspect, the transfer of the officer in charge, and the lack of any complaints from the families of the kidnapped women.

As the case was labeled "terrorism", it becomes clear that anti-trafficking laws were not in place.





Case is transferred to the Ministry of Interior.
According to OWFI's sources, case is closed
under vague circumstances.

4. Situations of Prostitution

Kinds of brothels

Familiar kind: Houses in which 3-5 females are prostituted seem to be the majority of settings in which sex industry is administered in Baghdad. The numbers of these brothels have grown to unprecedented levels in the last years and cover most of the residential neighborhoods in Baghdad.

These houses are known by women's names. The main solicitor is usually a woman who has spent most of her life in the industry, and has grown older. She usually has a male assistant solicitor who is ready to beat the females into obedience. The solicitor sometimes gives out the females to full-night stay at men's houses, where she may have to serve many men. There is no guarantee that a female can come back from these trips. In two of the brothels covered by this report, young females were not returned to the brothel from which they were taken. Both involved security/militia group customers.

Most of the money collected is taken by the solicitor, while the girl\woman could take 25-30%.

Less Familiar: Family business is sex trade where the males and older females procure and prosper by selling their young girls to local Sheikhs –in what is called pleasure marriage. Sometimes the sale bargain gets repeated 2-3 times until a girl is older and gets enrolled into daily prostitution tasks.

Transitional Houses: Houses which service the military and paramilitary. Translators of the US troops play a main role in preparing the scene and procuring for the sex services. The numbers were more in previous years. Locations of these houses changed rapidly.

Al Battaween prostitution district

Al Battaween is in a central location in Baghdad and one of the oldest districts with a mixed residential\commercial use including some light industries, such as printing. Throughout the years, parts of this district have turned into zones of heavy prostitution, trafficking and source of human organ sales. Alley 7 of this district is currently crowded with men who buy sex from the houses populated with families and women who have nowhere else to go. Some males are also prostituted in this district. Police make raids on this ally periodically and detain the women and men who are being prostituted.

Gypsy (Ghajar) and Karaj gatherings: Just like in previous eras, gypsies were unable to change or leave their indulgence in the entertainment and sex services. They live in special areas inside the cities or in the suburbs. The Karaj differ from the Gypsies in the fact that they are street beggars and prostitutes at the same time.

Street based prostitution: is practiced in the crowded commercial streets of Baghdad, such as Abou Nawas, Karrada, or Saadoun.

Temporary houses: because of the epidemic numbers of brothels in Baghdad, suspicions are raised against any house that has many females. After the brothel's reputation spreads, and raids begin to occur, the location is usually changed.

Beauty Salons: OWFI noticed that many of the prostitution reports were connected to beauty salons, where a female solicitor can have a considerable outreach to the neighborhood women.

5. Issues related to Prostitution and Trafficking

Alcohol, Hallucination pills and Prostitution: in most of the brothels, alcohol and hallucination pills are available for clients. In an August 1 report, a man who is in a brothel has sex with a woman after drinking alcohol. When the woman sleeps, he rapes her female child.

In a December 24 report, Kareema Alora, a female solicitor, sells hallucination pills and alcohol in a brothel where teenagers are prostituted. One of the girls said she can not "work" unless she has taken a hallucination pill.

There is a local prejudice that the women who prostitute do it for pleasure. This girl could not have sex with men unless she was drugged.

Mix of P&T or specialized in trafficking: Although a few houses (only 2 in the period of this report) specialize in trafficking, most brothels practice both prostitution and trafficking in the same time. Even those who do not sell girls to other countries rely on changing the girls from time to time with younger ones from other places, and thus creating internal trafficking.

Violence and control: most examples of violence used against prostituted women and girls are against those who become pregnant. In many reports, they were aborted by kicking and beatings. Another similar kind of violence is against women who have had an abortion. They are forced to work immediately. S, was just aborted when the solicitor forced her to spend the night in a client's house. After four men had sex with her she had continuous bleeding.

Problems in need of immediate care: in spite of a big range of problems which the women face in the brothels, the most compelling are:

- Health problems of prostituted women: venereal diseases, forced miscarriages, work after abortion, and torture in case of gang- rape
- Children of prostituted women: sold or raped by pedophile customers
- Vicious cycle of prostituting to imprisonment and back to prostitution
- In few cases, selling organs.

General reasons for girls' vulnerability: Although the reasons differ from case to case, they mostly fall under the following reasons:

- Tribal pressure: runaway from cruelty of treatment turns into an "honour killing" verdict within 24 hours.
- Seduction: by a strange male into a life of freedom away from family discipline and cruelty.
- Sexual assault inside family or extended family causes the victim to panic, as nobody will help or support her, neither is she a virgin who can marry without big problems.

Regular Local Trafficking Patterns: For local situations, female solicitors hunt young runaway girls or women in the public transportation stations in Baghdad. They are well-trained to read young confusion and body language of fear. They keep a girl for some time, before negotiating with solicitors who pays thousands of dollars for a young woman.

In many cases, male seducers are recruited by solicitors in order to convince young women to elope. In a short time, the women find out that they were sold.

Legislation

OWFI supports that Iraq follows the latest international conventions on trafficking and legislate accordingly, without internalizing the problem and making it harder to solve²⁰. An ultimately Iraqi solution means keeping the root of the problem while discriminating against the victims.

OWFI sees the problem from all its sides which need prevention and treatment measures:

- a. Preventing trafficking through one of its stages: city of origin – transportation links\gateways – city\country of destination.
- b. Establishing governmental legal aid for trafficked females
- c. Supporting victims of trafficking\prostitution and their children with adequate social insurance plans and health services
- d. Ultimately, eradication of prostitution can only happen in a different socio-political situation.

²⁰ Some local NGOs describe these issues as Iraqi problems which need Iraqi answers, and thus delaying strong and immediate solutions.

6. Creating Awareness

Among the government, the NGOs, and finally the society at large that:

- a. The trafficked and prostituted women and girls are victims of war-torn misogynist society and not predators threatening the well-fare of an otherwise "pure" religious society.
- b. The root causes behind the phenomenon: an economic system of inequality divides the society into exploiters and exploitees, thus preparing the ground for an industry of enslaving humans. It is the responsibilities of the state and the society to reverse the formula and help the victims regain their integrity.
- c. Clarifying definitions of the female victim's human rights as apposed to local prevailing concepts of "evil filthy women who spread adultery".
- d. Introducing a new set of terminology which is less discriminatory for the victims.

7. Involving Media in the Process: positive and negative involvement

OWFI witnessed a bitter experience in May 2009, after a leading OWFI activist (Dalal Al Bubaie) was interviewed about trafficking by a regional TV (the joint Lebanese-Saudi Arabian MBC).

The show was advertised before being aired. The Iraqi government contacted the TV management and stopped the airing of the show one hour prior to its time on May 10 2009.

OWFI activist, Dalal Jumaa, was shown over the public Iraqi TV, with her face circled in black. In a two-day governmental campaign, OWFI activists were called: "those who humiliate Iraqi women".

The campaign came as a surprise to all. The usual pattern was that a big number of NGOs would lobby against the government regarding an issue or another. This was the first time that the government with all its might campaigned against a women's NGO.

OWFI activists held an emergency meeting to discuss how to protect ourselves and our targeted leading activist Dalal Jumaa. We closed the outer gate of OWFI headquarters fearing common forms of aggressive behavior including violent attacks by militia forces while officials deny any triggering of the violence. In May 2009, scenes of militia violence were still part of everyday life.

Previous Media involvement: positive involvement

OWFI has learnt since 2003 that media was the best weapon when activism needs to reach the society at large. OWFI president Yanar Mohammed started a series of interviews in mid-2008 through 2009 with the primary subject being the trafficking of girls and women of Iraq.

The response was denial by the officials, but major sympathy from people who strongly supported OWFI's work against prostitution and trafficking.

In a regional women's conference, OWFI was informed again that there was a draft law for anti-trafficking that responded to international standards. Although OWFI was not informed of the negotiations that lead to the draft, we were relieved that our efforts finally brought results.

Although another NGO-which had better relations with the government, made some timid attempts to address the issue of trafficking, the officials gave them a public scolding in a local – green zone conference.

At the time- April 16, 2009, we chose to write and publicize a letter documenting the events OWFI representatives witnessed around the issue of trafficking. The letter was a proactive attempt to make the facts known because we knew that these facts would eventually be twisted.

OWFI pressures the legislators into a draft law against Trafficking of Women and Girls

After two years of fact-finding and months of lobbying over local and regional televisions, newspapers, websites and radios, OWFI's activism receives the first results: the legislators have forwarded a draft law against trafficking of women and girls.

- As usual, our NGO was not informed of the draft law and we had to hear it from the media.
- As usual, the government encourages their "SELECT NGOs" to hold meetings and raise their timid demands about the same issue albeit too late. They continue to call them "key" organizations in spite of their feeble agenda on VAW
- As usual, the officials announce that they will someday set up shelters and visit prisons to help the trafficked women with the help of their "SELECT NGOs".

The attempt of undermining our efforts to lead women's struggle for their rights will not deter us from continuing to fight.

For more background, please read the following article in the Time Magazine, dated April 13: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1890728,00.html>

Please note that the writer of the article has misunderstood details on the registration of OWFI. Although we run informal shelters which have saved tens of women from honour killings, domestic abuse, sectarian abuse, and trafficking, our organization is fully registered at the government.

At this point, we need to document our main debates on media with officials:

1. March 6: A shocking article on Time Magazine about OWFI activists who risk their lives while visiting brothels and "no light" districts. Previous victim of trafficking who is an OWFI shelters resident speaks out.
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1883696,00.html>
2. March 12: Spokesperson of the Iraqi government, Ali Al Dabbagh admitting to existence of the problem of trafficking of women in answer to facts brought forward by OWFI president, Yanar Mohammed: Al Arabiya.net website. As a result, 360 people joined the debate and forwarded their opinions.
<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/03/12/68277.html>
3. March 16: Female Parliamentarian rejecting the possibility that Iraqi women can be trafficked or practice prostitution. Sameera Al Mousawi is in charge of the Women and Children's Committee in the parliament. She waived away the issue that Yanar Mohammed brought forward in Al Diyar TV talk show, claiming that the discussion was an insult to Iraqi women. (please see attached photos).
4. April 1: *From Iraq* show on Al Arabiya Satellite TV, interviews OWFI president and also interviews a previous victim of trafficking(resident of OWFI shelters) who discloses being trafficked to a Arabic Gulf country where she and many women were exploited by royalist princes of the gulf: the show was not

not aired for reasons which were not disclosed.

5. April 13: Media exposing the new Draft Law against Trafficking in Persons. Another article on the Time Magazine which leaked the news and interviewed government and ngo women about the issue as mentioned above:

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1890728,00.html>

Our utmost thanks go to the courageous Rania Abou Zeid who ventured into the Iraqi scene and collected the facts. We also thank the Time Magazine for allowing their pages to become reason for protecting a population of exploited Iraqi females.

We will still be watching the Draft Law as the State Shura Council (a newly founded council of clerics in the "democratic" Iraq) reviews it and takes the final decision.

Yanar Mohammed

Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, president *OWFI*

April 16, 2009



Talk Show on Al Diyar



Sameera Al Mousawi M.P
Head of Women's Committee in Parliament



Yanar Mohammed
OWFI president

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