

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*

Statement by Ms. Khanim Latif  
UN Security Council Briefing on Iraq  
18 May 2023

President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the situation of women and civil society in Iraq this morning.

I am Khanim Latif, founder and director of Asuda for Combating Violence against Women, an Iraqi non-profit organization that strives to achieve gender equality, eliminate gender-based discrimination, and end all forms of violence against women. My organization established the first independent shelter for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in Iraq in 2002.

The current situation in Iraq is characterized by widespread violence against women in all fields, including the targeting of women human rights defenders. In recent months, we have witnessed campaigns against women human rights defenders in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq simply for using the term “gender.” The precarious situation of Iraqi women, coupled with social and economic inequality and the unacceptably low numbers of women in decision-making, means that the space for women to fully and freely exercise their rights is highly restricted.

The current situation of women and girls in Iraq should deeply concern us all. My statement today will focus on how the international community can effectively address four key issues:

- 1) Legal protection from violence against women;
- 2) Women's political participation;
- 3) The gendered impact of climate change; and
- 4) Renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) mandate.

With regard to **legal protection from violence against women**:

Discrimination and violence against women in Iraq are now widespread. Hardly a day goes by without reports of women being killed, maimed, and targeted by their own family members, simply because of their gender. Besides the alarming levels of violence against women across the country — GBV increased by 125 percent to over 22,000 cases between 2020 and 2021, and over 75 percent of those at risk of GBV are women — the brutal nature of these crimes is also of grave concern. So-called “honor killings” of women for transgressing social norms, early and forced marriage and incest are also widespread across the country. This sharp increase in GBV is occurring against a backdrop of impunity for perpetrators, and lack of access to services, legal protection, and justice for survivors of GBV.

Excellencies, without protection from violence and freedom from discrimination, women cannot engage fully or equally on the political, social, and economic levels. The prevalence of GBV not only violates women’s basic human rights as guaranteed by international standards outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Iraq, but also violates Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security (WPS) that have, for more than 20 years, emphasized the important linkages between protection and participation. For women to have a voice in determining their country’s future, the violence must end.

Therefore, I urge the Security Council to call on the Iraqi Government to take all necessary measures to protect girls and women from all forms of GBV and to support access to justice for survivors. This requires adopting the long-overdue draft Anti-Domestic Violence Law, amending the Penal Code, and preventing the interpretation of

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\* On 18 May, Ms. Latif delivered a shortened version of this statement at the UN Security Council. These are her full remarks.

the Personal Status Law on sectarian grounds. Adopting the Anti-Domestic Violence Law could provide an important solution for the thousands of Iraqi girls and women who are exposed to GBV on a daily basis. I also urge you to call on the Government of Iraq to provide GBV survivors with robust access to shelters for those fleeing domestic violence, including shelters operated by NGOs, and ensure their access to psychosocial support, access to justice and legal services, as well as support for livelihoods.

Finally, we call on the Iraqi Government to allocate a budget for and fully implement the Yazidi Survivors Law adopted in March 2021.

**As for women's political participation:**

Today, 29 percent of the members of Iraqi Parliament are women, and the cabinet includes three women ministers, including the Minister of Finance. While this is a positive first step, there must be far greater efforts by political parties to ensure the meaningful participation of women in all processes. It is not enough to only increase the number of women in decision-making positions — they must also have meaningful influence over the outcomes of such processes and negotiations. Quite simply, without women at the table, decisions will remain the preserve of men in the political process and fail to reflect women's rights.

Therefore, I call on the Security Council to encourage the Iraqi Government to establish a national mechanism for women, whether it is a council or a ministry, with competent human resources, and to allocate a sufficient budget to implement the second National Action Plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

**Concerning the gendered impact of climate change:**

We know that Iraq is the fifth-most vulnerable country to climate change in the world. The percentage of Iraqi lands exposed to desertification reached 92 percent. Iraq also contributed 9 percent on average of all global emissions of greenhouse gasses, methane, and carbon dioxide.

As is the case with wars, the first victims of climate change are women. After the agricultural lands dried up in Iraq, migration from rural to major urban centers increased in search of livelihoods, exposing women to sexual harassment, economic violence, loss of adequate shelter, and deprivation of their most fundamental rights.

In this regard, Asuda organized awareness campaigns calling on stakeholders to take concrete measures to mitigate the adverse impact of climate change on women and girls and to include them in programs to improve irrigation systems and resource management.

Therefore, the Security Council should call on the Government of Iraq to abide by the Paris Agreement and the Helsinki Principles on climate change. This would help ease internal migration to large cities and provide livelihoods for the displaced, especially women, rehabilitate them and provide them with information, psychosocial support, and economic opportunities to ensure security and respect for their rights.

**On the renewal of UNAMI's mandate:**

The United Nations has a vital role to play in supporting and advocating for the protection and advancement of women's human rights, gender equality, and their full, safe, equal and meaningful participation in peace and political processes within Iraq.

As the mandate for UNAMI is renewed, it is essential to strengthen its role in advancing any issues related to WPS. I strongly encourage the Security Council to be explicit in calling on UNAMI to support women's participation in all political and decision-making processes. Additionally, UNAMI must monitor and report on any violations or retaliation against women human rights defenders and civil society leaders. UNAMI should also prioritize regularly engaging with Iraqi civil society to ensure their views inform its work throughout the country. UNAMI must also provide the necessary support to the Government of Iraq to carry out judicial and legal reforms, protect women's rights, support women's organizations, and prevent all forms of GBV in line with all relevant Security Council resolutions. Finally, the Security Council should urge the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNAMI to provide comprehensive analysis on WPS issues in all upcoming briefings and reports to the Security Council.

In conclusion, I can say that Iraq is currently in the process of being built. I urge the international community to relinquish militarized approaches and to instead support us, with technical expertise and resources, as Iraqis, to rebuild our homeland, end corruption and work towards lasting peace. As I hope my statement today highlights, none of this is possible without respect for women's rights, or without women taking their rightful place at the table.

Thank you.