

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security- 19 June 2008
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IRAQ

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, and Secretary of State Rice for convening this timely and important meeting, which, in my delegation's view, is crucial and necessary at a time when women and other vulnerable groups have become the main victims of armed conflict.

Women's advancement, security and living conditions in Iraq had declined during the past three decades. Wars and economic sanctions and negligence and oppression by the former regime had eroded conditions for women. There had been systematic breaches of human rights, in particular against women, who were subject to gender-specific abuse and violence. In the past few years, thousands of Iraqi women lost their lives and suffered from terrorist acts, which have targeted the most vulnerable groups in society, namely, children, women and the elderly. More recently, terrorist groups have been recruiting and using Iraqi women to commit suicidal attacks against civilians. According to statistics, about 17 women have committed such acts. Terrorists have even used women with mental disabilities to commit suicidal attacks in a market crowded with women and children.

With regard to the new Iraq, equality between women and men and protection against discrimination were enshrined in the Transitional Administrative Law and in the new Iraqi constitution that has been adopted. However, violence against women is rooted in some traditional practices and tribal codes, and is compounded by the socio-economic and security situation in the country.

Throughout the difficulties the country has faced, Iraqi women have shown resilience, courage and determination. For the past few years, they have been playing a larger and more effective role, as they are part of the political process in the new Iraq. They hold no less than 25 per cent of parliamentary and provincial council seats.

They have recently become more empowered, with the creation of the cross-party women's caucus composed of 73 women members of parliament. In a joint effort with United Nations agencies, that party will advance the development of policies to help victims of conflict, including widows, orphans, the families of war victims and Iraqi refugees. The establishment of the cross-party women's caucus will enable Iraqi women members of parliament to emerge as more effective and influential actors in the legislature, by bridging different viewpoints held by the various parties to which they belong.

For the first time, Iraqi women have also been playing an effective role as ministers of important ministries, including those responsible for human rights, municipalities and public works, women, housing and construction and the environment.

I should also mention that the country has for the first time experienced the establishment of women's organizations, through which Iraqi women have proven their capabilities in defeating challenges by taking on difficult responsibilities on different levels. Those organizations have been playing an important role in advancing and empowering women in Iraq. My country is going through the phase of institutional reconstruction, and my

Government realizes that without the effective participation and full role of women, many of the long-term goals will not be achieved.

Iraq's current political situation provides an opportunity to redress persistent violations of women's rights, as the Iraqi constitution will be further amended as part of the political process. It will open space to continue to influence the process of addressing women's rights and promoting gender equality as part of Iraq's institutional rebuilding. It is anticipated that 60 laws will be either revised or formulated, as stipulated in Iraq's new constitution, providing an unprecedented opportunity to influence further the constitution and legislation and to align them with international conventions — in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and both Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which my Government recently ratified.

The Government of Iraq, in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, is implementing programmes and projects to promote the role of women by strengthening the role of civil society organizations in mitigating violence and by contributing to building peace in Iraq. Support for that effort is provided in line with the framework of resolution 1325 (2000), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

That partnership also includes capacity-building for women's non-governmental organizations to promote women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation. Another programme implemented in Iraq by various United Nations agencies involves disseminating knowledge on emerging issues and innovative solutions towards conflict resolution and increasing tolerance, in order to enhance the capacity of community groups and women's non-governmental organizations that promote the culture of peace and foster dialogue among various groups.

As we are discussing sexual violence and rape as war crimes under international law, my delegation is of the view that such crimes against women should be considered as crimes against humanity, as those actions cannot find a place in any culture and should not be excused under any circumstances.

Eight years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. Its purpose was to address the atrocities committed against women and girls during conflicts and even after peace agreements and in post-conflict situations. We agree that since the adoption of that resolution, progress towards reaching its main goals has been slow.

We believe that one of the major problems facing our endeavours to stop these crimes is the issue of shame and the social exclusion of victims. Since we are discussing the issue of data collection on rape and sexual violence, we believe that due consideration should be given to cultural differences and to awareness-raising campaigns undertaken with the help of community leaders in post-conflict situations, in particular among the most vulnerable groups in society.

Preventing and eliminating these atrocities must be the main goal of our endeavours, and to achieve that goal we must act globally. We commend the efforts of the United Nations in that regard, but we call upon all relevant United Nations agencies, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, civil society and non-governmental organizations to combine their efforts to combat these crimes and to establish early warning mechanisms to enable the international community to prevent

these crimes from taking place.

We also believe that an end must be put to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes and that they should be held accountable for their actions.

To conclude, we would like to express our full support for an action-oriented resolution that will put an end to these crimes and atrocities against women and girls, and my delegation hopes that this important debate will bring this issue to the world's attention and make it globally recognized.