

REPORT

On the participation of women from Iraq in the UN CSW 54th session & commemoration of Beijing +15

organized by the Norwegian Church Aid

March 2010

“Capacity building is important, a process which takes time to develop skills, to gain data and ensure proper documentation. It is a competitive market and it is difficult for NGOs and especially for the women’s organizations who have limited resources to retain qualified staff members. There is a need for dialogue between civil society, organizations and government.”

(Dima Al Baqain, Programme Officer, NCA)



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

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Background

In June 2005, NCA's first Capacity Building, a Democracy and Human rights Programme in Iraq was started. This was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway, in response to the huge human rights violations, especially the precarious situation of the women and girls. During the past four years, the program has supported the building and strengthening of civil society in Iraq, with a focus on democracy and women's rights. The main aim has been to proactively address the emerging civil society after the war, mainly in the south of Iraq, providing women with support, assistance and enhancing their competence, in order to play an active part in the reconstruction processes in Iraq. Raising awareness and building capacity in the area of human rights and women's rights as well as addressing gender-based violence and trafficking of women and girls have been among the focus issues. Besides, the programme has further provided a space for women to identify their needs and prioritize methods, for working on the provision of protection and security for women, within the framework of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

During the last two years and in view of the assessed needs of women in Iraq, the programme has expanded both geographically and thematically. This has happened in response to the needs of women in Iraq and with increased awareness of the isolation and fear, which overwhelms women's lives in the south. The programme has therefore reached out to women's organizations in other parts of Iraq, linking the women in the south with other women's organizations and networks. Furthermore, the programme has also provided a forum for the women to establish connections, share experiences and lessons learnt by experts and activists, regionally and internationally.

Through the experience gained and work carried out in the region in recent years, NCA has identified *isolation* as a key factor leading to the lack of participation, the marginalization, exclusion and subordination of women both in private as well as public life, including their vulnerability to gender based violence. Women experience isolation and exclusion at the personal, political and societal levels. Thus, finding ways and approaches for overcoming this isolation is essential for developing initiatives that would promote the full participation of women, provide protection for women who have been subject to violence and abuse, as well as prevent violence against women. Moreover, women's advocacy for rights and of the corresponding provision of services and measures can be more effective, if they can work strategically in networks. *Networking*, regionally and internationally, has been one of the main components of the NCA Capacity Building, Democracy and Human Rights Project. The project has supported the consolidation of women's organizations and networks within Iraq with a particular focus on linking women's organizations in the South of Iraq with others in the country and the region. The project has also worked on raising awareness on the situation of women in Iraq at the regional level, providing a forum for regional meetings

with women's organizations that address violence against women, UN agencies and other international NGOs.

Under the new time frame of the project starting in January 2010, the NCA facilitated the participation of women activists and committed leaders of women's organizations in Iraq, in the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held in New York at the beginning of March 2010. This year's session of the Commission was of particular importance and interest to the global women's movement, as it was marking the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. This session of the Commission reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform by the governments. Furthermore, women NGOs from the Arab Region and from the world were holding side events highlighting issues of concern to women.

Participation in this session and in the lobbying process with NGOs from around the globe was an opportunity for empowerment for women from Iraq. It also gave a better understanding of the Beijing Platform for Action and its 12 critical areas of concern, for enabling them to use the Platform as a tool in their own work in their organizations, addressing violence against women in Iraq. Furthermore, participation aimed at giving them an insight into the UN system, and the lobbying mechanism, this way raising their competence and enabling them to have their voices heard both nationally and internationally. This occasion also provided a unique opportunity for networking, creating links with the international women's movement, and making alliances. This was of special importance, as women from Iraq have had very limited possibilities for contact with the international women's movement or the international community in general.

Making alliances and links with international women's organizations and donors is of critical importance to the young emerging women's groups from Iraq, ensuring the *sustainability* of their work and to find ways, by which they can in an independent manner, carry out their work.

List of participating organizations from Iraq:

Baghdad Women's Association, BWA

Women's Leadership Institute, WLI

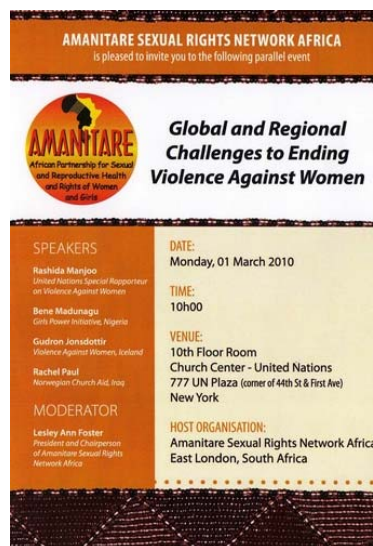
Asuda for Combating Violence against Women

Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, OWFI

The sessions at the CSW

In the below reported sessions the women from Iraq and the NCA staff were either organisers and/or made presentations.

Global and regional challenges to ending violence against women, Amanitare



The session was moderated by Dr. Lesley Ann Foster, President and Chairperson of Amanitare Sexual Rights Network Africa. The speakers were Gudrun Jonsdottir, Stigamot, Iceland, Rachel Eapen Paul, Norwegian Church Aid, Amman, Bene Madunagu, Girls Power Initiative, Nigeria and Rashida Manjoo, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

Amanitare aims at building a strong voice for the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls in Africa, through focusing on an advocacy campaign on access to basic SRH services, bolstering and building feminist leadership at a national, sub regional and regional level. The overall impact is an improved status of the sexual reproductive health of women and girls

in Africa and the outcomes are improved access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls in Africa,. As well as visible leadership in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights at regional, sub regional and national levels.

Gudrun Jonsdottir, Stigamot, Iceland spoke on the issue of rape. The common public stand is that women have themselves to blame, when raped. A British public opinion poll shows that one third of the British people think that flirtatious women bear part of or the whole responsibility if they are raped. One third thinks the same about women who are drunk. One fourth thinks that women who dress provocatively can thank themselves, at least partly if they are raped. 15% think that women who are believed to be promiscuous bear some responsibility for being raped. 8% think that promiscuous women have all the responsibility if they are raped. Women are more judgemental than men and similar opinion pools have been carried out in Denmark and Norway. Other kinds of crimes would not be estimated this way.

Amanitare aspires to create a working partnership of African activists, women's groups and networks covering fundamental rights of women, to sexual and reproductive health, autonomy in sexual, reproductive decisions, the right to bodily integrity and freedom from coercion and violence. This partnership seeks to create a platform for dialogue and consensus building, exchange of information, skills training to coordinate advocacy at policy level and to build support among various popular constituencies, towards social transformation.

Moreover, women do not report being raped because of the shame and blame on themselves. Between 2002 and 2006, 714 rapes were reported to Stigamot. Another 617 were reported to the Rape Crises Unit. The total number in Iceland is unknown. 156 cases were sent to the prosecutors. 105 were dropped. 51 prosecutions were carried out. 24 sentences were given in the County Court and 14 sentences in the Supreme Court.

Furthermore, Gudrun Jonsdottir explained that myths and clichés about gender based violence, the perpetrators and their victims, are misleading and harmful as well as creating invisibility. The stereotypes promote the misconception that women and children are to bear the shame and guilt, and prevent them from seeking help and report the violence. These myths justify the violence and minimize the perpetrators' responsibility. They promote the perpetrators "innocence" and prevent them from being reported or sentenced. This has to be addressed and fought. Women must be taken seriously.

The agenda for addressing this issue should be changed to contain a holistic view on rape. Statistics should include the perpetrators. Preventive work should be aimed at boys and men in a positive way. Rape should never be considered the fault of the victim.

Rachel Eapen Paul, Norwegian Church Aid described, by way of introduction, NCA's work on the UN SCR 1325 in the Middle East. Furthermore, Rachel Eapen Paul stated that there is little space for women's organisations to act in. There are few safe spaces to meet and even when protection measures are taken into account and used, they turn into situations of control. For instance, women in Jordan who are under the threat of being killed in the name of honour, are put into prison in order to protect them from their families.

In society, women are often not seen as right holders. Women are looked on as either victims or as a source of temptation to men. An everyday humiliation and control of women goes on. Sentences in cases of alleged honour related crimes are mitigated, and the perpetrators are sometimes bailed out of prison. There is a strong need for civil society to call for governmental accountability.

There is a lack of knowledge of the mandate of the UN Rapporteur on Violence against Women. It is important for the rapporteur to meet with women's groups and organizations. The women's movement needs to work towards facilitating this.

Bene Mamunago, Girls Power Initiative Nigeria, explained that the issue of violence against women, in particular, and of sexual violence against girls and women, is a major concern and a huge challenge, because it encompasses implications of gender inequality which is deeply rooted in the patriarchal cultures of most African countries. Many countries in Africa have adopted several declarations, but despite the strides made by African governments in terms of structures and legal provisions to address the different forms of violations of the rights of women and girls, the forms and intensity of violence continue to be on the increase and more devastating. Culprits continue to abuse women with impunity.

Several well known factors reinforce violence against women and girls. As well as the overall analysis referring to patriarchy as the social order that is based on the maintenance of male power in the decision making, male centeredness in policy formulations and control of social processes, which is used to justify and sustain inequality between the sexes. It is widespread and is deeply embedded in socio-political institutions. It is a social norm in which women's behaviour is influenced by what society perceives to be the norm. Girls, boys, women and men continue to be socialised to accept this gendered patriarchal value as natural.

Reforming legislation is considered the way forward in trying to curb the problem of violence against women and to provide justice to victims and deter would-be perpetrators of violence. However, in practice criminal procedure and laws as they function presently do not adequately address the crimes of sexual violence. It is important therefore, to review with the active involvement of Human Rights legal practitioners, the existing legal procedures in a way to ensure justice and compensation to victims as well as to deter culprits.

Many countries have failed to ratify and domesticate international and regional obligations. This makes it difficult to hold governments accountable and to ensure that justice is done to victims. Hence, it is important to hold governments accountable by ensuring that they ratify and domesticate agreements reached at both the global and regional levels. It is important that advocacy be targeted at the compliance of governments to international, regional and national obligations.

There is an urgent need for public information and education to assist victims to receive justice, and a need for focused education of both law

enforcement and judicial officers, and to ensure that victims are treated with respect Civil society organisations working on the issues of violence against women need to network to support each other at national and regional levels to assist victims obtain justice. Finally, cases must be reported to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Rashida Manjoo, UN's Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, explained on how to handle the mandate of the special rapporteur. This demands close interaction between the rapporteur, NGOs and other mandate holders, such as the CEDAW Committee. Rashida Manjoo regards reports from NGOs extremely useful.

Concerning the Special Rapporteur's Annual Reports to the UN system, Rashida Manjoo questioned the focus for 2010, and called for clarification and precise concepts. For instance, the theme of prevention

Amanitare consists of 57 partners representing 21 countries:

Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, The Gambia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

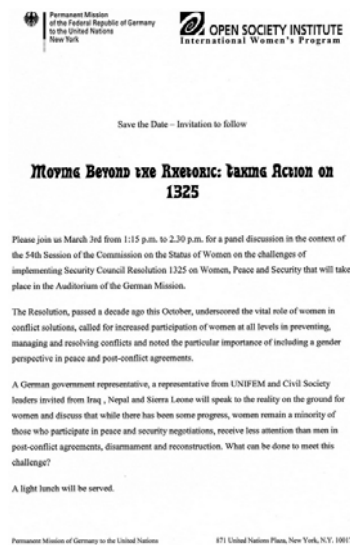
needs to be conceptualized. Still, the annual reports open up for dialogue about the status of women. The report is a public document to be used in every context.

Furthermore, women's organizations and women's movements are constantly challenged when working on the issue of violence against women. When men enter the Boards of these organisations, this opens up for further control under the flag of protection.

The resources for carrying out work of the Special Rapporteur are a drop in the ocean. There are limited options for going to other countries. The fact finding missions include interviews with governments and meetings with representatives from civil society. It is an ongoing challenge to find ways for meetings with the civil society, who should be able to transmit information about human rights violation.

It is still a challenge for the NGOs to find ways for using the annual reports in their work. Not only to monitor the use of the Special Rapporteur, but also to apply the report in the specific country contexts, this will help both the NGOs and the mandate. So far the Special Rapporteur has participated in various consultations, with three meetings in Africa and some other regional meetings, as well as in Europe.

Challenges around UNSCR 1325 and women's participation in peace and security



The session was organized by the German Mission in cooperation with the Open Society Institute. The session was moderated by a representative from the German Mission. The speakers were from Iraq, Sierra Leone, Nepal and UNIFEM. The presentation from Iraq is reported below. The three other presentations are summarised.

The sessions aimed at reflecting on how UNSCR 1325 after 10 years, can be applied into concrete goals and attain sustainability. The German Mission representative stated the following reasons for organizing the session. As women are the

“Germany has been working with UNSCR 1325 nationally, globally and in the context of EU 2009. A gender action plan was developed, including a focus on women’s roles during conflicts. The time has come for pooling various experiences and for stronger activities in governments, in order to ensure new ways in peacekeeping and rebuilding processes.”

landmarks for peace, they need to be included in all peace making processes. Up till now, there has been no gender perspective in the peace processes and no women in the rebuilding strategies. There is a need for the NGOs and donor countries to cooperate on what to do in the future.

Sundus Abass

In the 20th century Iraqi women have earned progressive levels of education that meet the needs of the explosive societal and economic development and the needs for being part of public life, when men joined the military sector. Women succeeded to manage most of the country’s institutions without abandoning their roles in the family. However, they did not reach decision making positions.

The constitution of Iraq, from 1970, ensured equal opportunities for all the citizens, but did not include any mechanisms that would guarantee women’s political participation, despite the fact that woman were members of the Iraqi National Council (1980-1990) with nine women represented. In 2000, the number of women was 20, a high number compared to similar numbers for the rest of the Arab region.

“With the establishment of the Republic of Iraq in 1958, women enjoyed the progressive Personal Status Law, including the right to run for elections and to vote. Iraq had its first female woman minister in 1959. However, women’s real participation was limited, and their interests were only represented through one organization, the Iraqi Women Union which was affiliated to the regime. Moreover, women were persecuted due to their own or their families’ political activities.”

After the occupation in 2003, and forming of the Governmental Council, women's representation was limited to three women out of 25 members. Since 2004, the legislation dictates a quota of no less than 25%. This was adopted due to extensive lobbying and efforts of the women's movement.

At the first elections in 2004, women won 87 of the 275 seats (31%), while the percentage of women in the local councils was 28% in the closed list elections. In the government, six of the 36 ministers are female. Women NGOs made great efforts towards raising awareness among women, and in training women candidates to run their campaigns. This resulted in a wider participation of women's voting.

The Committee that drafted the Constitution of Iraq of 2005, consisted of nine women and 55 men. In the Committee for Constitutional Amendments, the female participation was reduced to two.

Women are still absent and absented from any negotiations relating to forming of the government, the political dialogue, the national reconciliation and even the liberal parties. There is no positive response to the continuous requests from the women's movement.

Women's participation in Parliament has since

deteriorated. At present there are 75 female members of Parliament and four female ministers. At the latest elections of the local councils in five of the Iraqi governorates, the 25% quota was not achieved due to the electoral system (open list) which place women at the bottom.

UNSCR 1483 refers to UNSCR 1325, urging Iraq to abide by its commitment in implementing the resolution. But efforts and initiatives on part of the government are limited and sporadic. There is a lack of support from UN agencies for developing a national plan of action to implement the resolution, particularly UNAMI, targeting both the government and the civil society.

In 2009, NCA and UNIFEM invited women NGOs and civil society representatives to take part in a consultative regional process, towards the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This process is ongoing and the way forward is still unclear.

From *Sierra Leone* it was reported that women are stuck in poverty and lack confidence. Due to these facts there is no capacity for participation. As it is, women are not open for participation and prefer to stay in the domestic context.

"The participation of women in Iraq still faces various challenges.

First, the instability of the security situation and the prevailing violence targeting women.

Second, lack of willingness from the leadership of the political parties in empowering female members and advancing them. Women are not actively involved in making vital decisions; neither are they supported in their campaigns.

Third, the social stereotypes and lack of confidence in women's abilities.

Fourth, the current electoral system in Iraq and the way of counting votes (women are usually placed at the bottom of the party lists).

Finally, the limited experience women have in politics, and the lack of capacity building programs."

In 2007, Sierra Leone succeeded in documenting domestic violence and since then gender based violence



has been addressed. A national plan of action has just been developed. But due to technical and resource problems there are huge problems concerning implementation.

From *Nepal*, Bandana Rana explained that before the conflict ended in 2006; women had been in front on the issue of peace making. During the period of conflict they gathered a great deal of experience in negotiations between soldiers and civilians/communities.

In spite of this, women were not involved in negotiations after 2007. Women were considered as passive victims. The political parties have no structure for including women. Men are at the top and women at the bottom, with no chance for getting elected. However, women advocated for women to gain access to parliament and a few women were elected in local committees. In spite of this, women are not found in decision making committees. The high level committees are formed with men. For example the Ministry of Reconstruction consists of men alone.

The continuous impunity, the lack of access to justice and the cultural silence about what is going on, are the factors for the predicament. On the one hand, women do not have the capacity for participation, and on the other hand, societal structures and agencies have no capacity for making women participate. There is a lack of support structures, lack of various mechanisms i.e. no monitoring mechanisms and no culture for creating evidence. And there is lack of resources, especially allocated towards women.

A call was expressed for structured partnerships between local and national parties, resources specified for women's needs, support to victims and technical expertise for the government to develop a national action plan. Finally, a wish was expressed: to have Margot Wallström, the EU Commissioner visit Nepal.

The *UNIFEM* representative stressed that although UNSCR 1325 focuses on special needs of women, the declaration is developed without clear goals that can be hold states accountable. A toolbox for implementing has been developed and mediators have been trained, as well as standards for women's participation have been developed.

Sex trafficking and women's situation in armed conflicts, CATW & NCA

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW)
Invites You To Join Us

Wednesday, March 3, 12:00 - 1:30pm
Without Demand There Would Be No Supply: How Men Can End Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Panelists include:
Ranaiah Chahal, Author, Slave Hunter
Catherine Ferguson, UNHCR International
Agnes Shinn, Women's Force of History
Teresa C. Ulloa Ziaurriz, CATW - Latin America and the Caribbean
Asia: Aranyasree Arora, The New Crossling Guide
Moderator:
Tisha Aulakh, Association BCRC, India

Friday, March 6, 10:00 - 11:30am
Targeting Women in Armed Conflict: Trafficking, Prostitution and Pornography

Panelists include:
Rachel Eapen Paul, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
Yanar Mohammad, Organization of Women's Freedom
Sara Engqvist, CATW - Asia Pacific
Teresa Ulloa Ziaurriz, CATW - Latin America and the Caribbean
Jimmie Briggs, Author, *Immigrants Lost When Child Soldiers Go to War*
Moderator:
Malka Marcovich, CATW - Europe

Friday, March 6, 12:00-1:30pm
Mass Marketing Prostitution: Sexual Exploitation as Entertainment

Panelists include:
Gail Dixon, Stop Slave Culture
Malka Marcovich, CATW - Europe
Dorcas Lee-Buch, CATW International
Jonathan Wilton, Free People
Asia: Aranyasree Arora, The New Crossling Guide
Moderator:
Nereza Ramesh, CATW International

All panels will be held at the International Hotel, 221 E. 12th Street, Denver, CO 80202
Event sponsors: Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), UNHCR International

For more information about CATW, please visit our website at www.catwinternational.org

COALITION
Against Trafficking in Women

The session was moderated by Malka Marcovich, CATW. The panel consisted of Teresa C. Ulloa Ziaurriz, CATW, Latin America and the Caribbean, Jean Enriques, CATW, Asia Pacific, Rachel Eapen Paul, NCA, Yanar Mohammad, OWFI and Jimmie Briggs, Author.

The opening speech by *Teresa C. Ulloa Ziaurriz* presented an understanding of the issue of sex trafficking. Part of this is reported below, as well as the presentation given by Yanar Mohammad. The rest of the presentations are summarised in brief versions.

Teresa C. Ulloa Ziaurriz stated that human trafficking for sexual exploitation is a lucrative criminal activity that affects nearly every country in the Western hemisphere and is a growing problem in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Traffickers take advantage of young poor women with minimal education in countries where extreme poverty, political instability, high unemployment and corruption exist. Countries in Latin America serve as a

source, transit and destination countries, and one major destination is the US. Latin America is a primary source for the estimated 14,500 to 17,500 people trafficked into the US every year.

UNSCR 1820 and 1880 adopted on the 13th June 2008 and 30th September 2009, stress that sexual violence, as a tactic of war in order to

target civilians, or as part of a widespread or systematic attack, can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of peace and security.

These resolutions affirm that effective steps to prevent and respond to sexual violence can

significantly contribute to the maintenance of peace and security, and adopt appropriate steps to address widespread or systematic sexual violence. They demand that all perpetrators be brought before justice and reiterate all the points of previous resolutions.

UNSCR 1325 adopted on the 30th April 2000, recognizes the consequences of armed conflict on women and children and its impact on durable peace and reconciliation, including HIV/AIDS awareness to protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts.

The resolution reaffirms the need to implement special trainings for peacekeepers on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations. As well as, the need to integrate a gender perspective in peacekeeping, urging the need to place women in decision making positions related to peace and conflict resolution and in UN Field-based operations.

The below mentioned factors have contributed to the breakdown of traditional norms and social values of most Colombian communities, but are significant factors for organizing sex trafficking all over the world: many years of conflict, widespread violence, displacement of the population, family and community disruption and a largely ineffective law enforcement system. Moreover, a variety of new threats should be taken into account when combating sex trafficking, such as international terrorism, trafficking in drugs and illegal arms, trafficking in persons for various reasons, the global sex industry, money or asset laundering, institutional corruption and other forms of organized crime.

Jean Enriques presented photos illustrating the situation at Mindanao in the Philippines. A massacre took place at Mindanao four months ago and at least 120,000 people died and a further two million people were affected. 45% live in absolute poverty and the unemployment is five times higher here than the average in the Philippines. There exist several burdens on women when seeking refuge. They have to negotiate while taking care of their families. Women end up as domestic workers and are often forced to arrange marriages for the girls in their families. Due to the soldiers demand for sex, both girls and boys are lured

into prostitution. Girls and women are recruited to prostitution in Malaysia. Indigenous women are trafficked for various reasons. The encompassing cultural silence is overwhelming.

Jimmie Briggs reported his experiences on trafficking in Congo having been exposed to two serious conflicts during the last decade. Although people are aware of what is going on, the silence is not broken about what is happening. The patterns and the organization are the same all over the world. Half a million girls are estimated victims of sex assault. The youngest of them were six months old.

This tactic is effective. The consequences are tremendous. The rise of HIV infected persons. The girls are stigmatized. There is no justice due to immunity for perpetrators. Gang rapes are not reported.

“Congo is rich on minerals and the consumers’ silence is part of the problem. The minerals e.g. are used cell phones and laptops. The solutions should be clear. UN should take action. Congolese men even as perpetrators are bystanders and victims themselves. Cases should be taken to court. The companies that benefit from the conflict should be tracked down and held accountable.”

Rachel Eapen Paul elaborated on the role that *silence* from the general public and from the communities, plays in addressing the serious issue of sex trafficking. In armed conflicts societal structures break down. There is no rule of law. The systems - police, health, social systems - do not work or are corrupt. Women and children become especially vulnerable. And when losing protection from the systems, they become even more dependent on their families.

In Iraq for example, military groups fight each other. The situation has been characterized by a civil war predicament combined with an extreme patriarchal society, where women are considered the property of their families. In Basra, women were attacked, abused and kidnapped. In conflicts, there is an influx of troops trained to fight who have access to the civil society they need to protect. These days the protection often turns into power and control. Furthermore, the women are punished for crimes committed to them by the militia.

When NCA started the program on trafficking and prostitution, no one wanted to talk about these phenomenons. The program and the report on a consultation process in some countries in the region, aim at changing this.

Yanar Mohammad spoke about the work of OWFI, a project on women's freedom in Iraq. Yanar Mohammad left Iraq in 1993, returned in 2003 and started a project with other women in an abandoned room in a burnt out factory in Baghdad. The intention was to meet and collect reports on the situation, having heard about kidnapping of women. The women wondered what the kidnappers would do with the women. The organization opened a shelter in March 2004. The residents were most teenagers, runaways and victims of so-called honour crimes. One tenth of the girls had been in a brothel for one to two years. Some of them have gone through the so called temporary/pleasure marriages (see text box). OWFI also found girls and women in the prisons for prostitution, but with no cases brought to court.

At the end of 2006, OWFI started talking to feminists in the international world, from Sweden, Norway and the US, and learned that the issue of trafficking and prostitution is a war related phenomenon. The organization started to document its work and has compiled a report on 74 cases.

Temporary/Pleasure Marriages

This practice was once uncommon under the Saddam Hussein regime, but has begun to increase in recent years, esp. due to Iranian influence in some areas. Although previously only found in Shiite cities in Iran, now they are becoming more common even in Baghdad. The practice is growing among both Sunnis and Shiites. The agreements, sometimes verbal, and sometimes written, and prepared by a religious cleric, stipulate that the man will pay the woman in exchange for sexual relations, which can often be appealing to vulnerable poor women or young women students who need money, a job, or even a mobile phone.

Many women are forced into the cycle of entering into one temporary marriage after another due to stigma. As a result, after marriages are dissolved, women sometimes end up committing suicide or are murdered by male family members due in so-called honour crimes. If a woman ends up getting pregnant, there is no protection and she is most likely forced to seek out an illegal abortion.

It is also clear there is a link between temporary/pleasure marriages, sex work, and trafficking.

OWFI estimates that between 5,000 and 10,000 women are exported to surrounding countries. The organization knows of 129 women being trafficked in 2007 to tourist areas. Moreover, that two members of government are part of a trafficking ring. When reporting this to the authorities, OWFI was accused of exaggerating, as well as women being in prostitution were neglected. OWFI has used the media to break the silence and has experienced government



campaigning against their organization.

Violence against Women in South Africa and Masimanyane's solidarity work with Iraq



The session was moderated by Dr. Lesley Ann Foster, Director of Masimanyane Women's Support Centre. Presentations were made by Fezeka Mantakana and Portia Donti, Masimanyane Women's Support Centre, Sundus Abass, Women's Leadership Institute, Baghdad and Khanim Latif, Asuda.

The four contributions are reported in the following summing up versions.

Fezeka Mantakana carries out empowerment work among women in a rural area challenged by illiteracy and huge poverty, where people depend on social grants. Girls are being prostituted in Cape Town and

Johannesburg and when returning home, they have serious problems with the families.

A mobile clinic comes at times, but there is lack of medicine. With a high rate of HIV and a high rate of orphans often being abused by family members, with little food and few teachers, life conditions are extremely difficult. Rapes are not taken seriously and forced marriages are commonplace. The program provides counselling, protection and training.

Sundus Abass is the leader of one of the first women's organisations in Iraq, started after the fall of the Saddam regime. Before 2003, there were no NGOs due to the political regime. Still, women used to work in several sectors and took part in public life. After 2003, women's groups started to organize themselves and faced many challenges, such as new fundamentalist and armed groups. When women are needed in societies and public life for

Masimanyane Women's Support Centre works on various forms of violence against women. These are rape, domestic violence, sex trafficking, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. The organization operates mainly in the Eastern Cape, South Africa but works also nationally and globally. The organization runs four programs, provides services for women exposed to violence, educates about risks and prevention measures, a women's leadership program in local communities and how to develop competences for engaging in activism. Apart from this, the organization is involved in research, advocacy and lobbying. The solidarity work with Iraq rises from the fact that both countries experience a transition period and can learn from each other.

instance during conflicts, men allow women to take part. But when not needed, they are sent back to their households.

The Women's Leadership Institute works on different programs and issues: Committee leader projects, leadership, family law, international treaties, declarations and conventions, lobbying, protection of women, and listening centres. This proves extremely difficult, as the society consider activists adopting the US agenda. Violence against women is especially difficult to address, as it is considered a private problem and women who deal with this issue are considered "bad" women. Neither is working easily with the media. Moreover, there is lack of resources available for these issues.

It is complicated to achieve solidarity from women in other countries and to handle the vague donor agendas. Still, keeping contact with NCA and being part of Masimanyane's solidarity work has meant a lot. Solidarity is not only conferences and funding, but personal contacts, support to prepare shadow reports and being in touch with the world outside Iraq is crucial.

Portia Donti has worked 15 years with Masimanyane and runs a community program about violence against women in an area of high rate crime, including violence against women, children rape and a high rate of HIV/AIDS.



The work in the program is about listening to women's stories, educating women about their rights, training women in how to keep safe and secure, giving advice, accompanying women to the police and to court, running groups, girl clubs and clinics. Since 2008, the program carries out empowerment courses on the issue of violence against women.

Khanim Latif is the director of the organisation Asuda and runs a shelter in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan. Asuda also develops strategies to combat violence against women, provides legal and social services, runs

workshops, awareness raising campaigns and work with the media. Asuda has developed a capacity building programs for its own staff and has been training women's groups in the south of Iraq since 2003.

Asuda has contributed to legislation change in Kurdistan e.g. the so-called honour killing is now considered a crime. Carrying out advocacy and solidarity building are also a part of Asuda's work. The organization has achieved cooperation with the police and the court. The government has recently established a shelter and asked Asuda to train the staff.

Also in Kurdistan, it is difficult to work on protection of women exposed to violence. There is lack of resources and a lack of contacts. There is a demand for solidarity from other NGOs and women's groups within and outside of Iraq.

Arab Women amidst occupation, patriarchy and the challenge of change, Roa'

The Roa' session was moderated by Fawzaih Al-Yousef, Saudi Arabia and the speakers were Victoria Shukri, Palestine, Sundus Abass, Iraq, Aida Nassrallah, Lebanon and Abla Abu Elbeh, Jordan.

Through photos *Victoria Shukri* described the daily life of Palestinians struggling with Israeli check points and the dividing wall being erected by the Israelis. The whole population is affected: students, workers, sick persons and families.

The Arab Women's Network, Roa' is a coalition of Arab women's organizations working on discrimination against women, raising awareness of women's equality, addressing issues of suffering of women and raising the level of women's participation. As well as the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

The network consists of organizations from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon. The network has produced a shadow report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Sundus Abass explained about the predicament in Iraq. In 2003, women did not imagine the challenges of daily life in the forthcoming years. They had expected to take part in rebuilding the society, but it turned out differently. Fighting between various military groups destroyed the society and affected mostly the women. The consequences are violence against women in many forms, trafficking, prostitution and the difficult situation for widows belonging to families.

Since 2006, 120,000 women have been killed, a fact that is not possible to discuss in Iraq. When women's groups and organizations address this, they are blamed for adopting the US agenda.

Aida Nassrallah explained that Lebanese women are subjected to male cultural sectarianism and excluded from the decision-making fora. During the last five years women have been subjected to an even wider range of violations due to the Israeli war. Mainly woman and children are affected. The destruction of buildings, factories and fishing boats hinder stable living conditions. Vast areas of agriculture are affected and one million Lebanese people who had to flee are now back to rebuild. In the south this is hindered by landmines, positions of which the Israelis will not report.

The war has restricted the participation of women. Lebanese women call for respect of a sovereign state and call for the women to practise their rights.

Abla Abu Elbeh talked about the predicament of Palestinian refugee women. 6 ¼ million Palestinians live in occupied areas. Since 1949, an agency has monitored the Palestinian refugee situation and UN Declaration 194, has been used in vain to claim the refugees' rights to return to their homeland. This resolution is not implemented. The refugees live in severe poverty under harsh living conditions, many of them suffering aggression from the Israeli army and most of them are women.

An unannounced representative from Syria explained about the situation in the Golan Heights, which is not different from the situation in other parts of Palestine. The occupied areas have been handed over to Israeli settlers. Families are separated and not allowed to visit each other more than once a year. The population suffers from the consequences of the landmines and especially the women and children suffer.

A Round Table meeting on addressing violence against Women: Challenges facing women's organizations in Iraq, NCA

The Norwegian Church Aid's session was moderated by Rachel Eapen Paul, Regional Programme Manager of Civil Society and Human Rights Programme for the Middle East. Liza Albroari, President of the Baghdad Women's Association, Sundus Abass, Director



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

Speakers

- Liza Al Broari**
Baghdad Women Association
- Khanum Lateef**
Asuda for Combating Violence Against Women
- Sundus Hasan**
Women's Leadership Institute
- Dima Al Baqain**
Norwegian Church Aid, Iraq

Date: Wednesday, March 10th 2010
Time: 10:00 hrs
Venue: Church Center for the United Nations, 2nd Floor

Moderated By Rachel Eapen Paul
Norwegian Church Aid, Iraq

of the Women's Leadership Institute and Dima Al Baqain, Programme Officer, NCA presented various aspects on the challenges facing women's organizations when addressing violence in Iraq.

This session was attended by about 75 persons.

Rachel Eapen Paul opened the session by stating that all over the world women are subject to systematic violence due to the unequal power relation between men and women. This is even more severe in conflict and post conflict areas, and referred to the UN Special Rapporteur's statement that the everyday degradation and humiliation that many women all over the world are subject to, is a form of violence against women, which often tends to be overlooked.

This is no exception in Iraq, but it has become more difficult because of the armed conflict. The break down of societal structures means that women and children are the first to be affected. During the Saddam regime, civil society and especially women's organizations were suppressed. After this period, women's groups tried to get together and build up a women's movement and to address the need for global contact with the women's movement. Isolation is a major factor that contributes to sustaining the oppression of women. This session aims at giving voice to Iraqi women and to break this isolation.



Liza Albroari stated that the armed conflict left serious reflections on women's lives. Violence against women is widespread in families and takes various forms such as sexual abuse, psychological abuse and the so-called honour crimes. The Iraqi society tends to deny gender based violence.

In 2004, the Baghdad Women's Association started to work in the deprived areas of Baghdad city and has connected to other women's organizations and groups in Iraq. As the main topic, the association addresses the issue of violence against women. Although there is a lack of statistics, there are several indicators of the phenomenon, such as the so-called honour crimes, domestic violence, discrimination of women regarding employment, and the prevention of women's access to health care and reproductive rights.

Through cases heard in listening centres, it is documented that the men in the families have a great influence on how women live. Due to child marriages, mortality of girls and women has increased. Young women and girls are sexually abused in families, especially in families living in 1-2 room houses. In some areas girls drop out of school due to poverty and the inadequate security situation.

The unemployment rate of women is high. Male employees are preferred, and women suffer from marginalization.

Sundus Abass explained that women's issues have been raised through campaigning starting in 2003, right after occupation. Before 2003, NGOs were not allowed, but women worked in all fields, got education and were able to travel. In the middle of the last century, legislation was considered one of the most progressive personal status laws in the region at the time. At that time Iraq had a female minister and there was an effective women's movement. Even during the war, women took responsibility in public life and within the families. The situation in Iraq should not only be estimated in the perspective of before and after 2003.

Furthermore, statistics are not the only way to understand Iraqi issues. Still, there is a demand for statistics and data, but the capacity for achieving these is weak and the situation in poor areas demands that the organizations spend more time with women who need support, rather than documenting the predicament.

"The final goal for the Iraqi women's movement is not necessarily to increase the number of women in Parliament, but to better the lives for women in general in Iraq. Today, there are four female ministers and 27% women in parliament."

A call for the need to exchange experience and the need for moral support was expressed. There is a lack of support for Iraqi women, maybe because it is difficult to reach them. But it means a lot for Iraqi women to keep in touch with the world outside Iraq, to share information and to gain experience from other countries.

On behalf of *Khanim Latif*, Director of *Asuda* who was absent, Sundus Abass reported on the work of *Asuda* in Kurdistan. Since 2000, the organization has been running a shelter. Today, there are five shelters in Kurdistan. *Asuda* receives victims of all forms of violence. The organization gets support from international organizations situated in Kurdistan.

Asuda cooperates with women's organizations and women's groups in Baghdad and Basra and other governorates. Women are sent to *Asuda* from other parts of Iraq and the organisation offers training to other activists working on the issue of violence against women.

Dima Al Baqain shared her reflections on the challenges when working for three years in NCA with partners in Iraq. The challenges and problems in supporting women's organizations and women's groups in Iraq are as follows:

As NCA has to be situated in Amman and the partners are in Iraq, the programme is strained due to remote management.

There are huge problems when arranging visas and finding safe places. The women face risks when travelling. In addition, they need to go through screening processes at the borders that many of them find humiliating. The women are often held up at the borders for being Iraqi. And, it is especially difficult to travel from the south as flight schedules are never reliable.

Furthermore, some aspects of greater concern were mentioned. Donors should not forget the reality within Iraq. There is a great need for sensitivity. Also, there is a need for coordination between donors in order to avoid duplication in work. Often donors have their own agenda and should not impose these, but rather listen to the Iraqi needs and priorities. Emerging young organizations are often understaffed and suffer from lack of resources.

Capacity building is important. This is a process which takes time - to develop skills, to gain data and ensure proper documentation. It is a competitive market and it is difficult for NGOs and especially for the women's organizations who have limited resources to retain qualified staff members. There is a need for

dialogue between civil society, organizations and government, but due to lack of trust and dialogue, this does not materialise as needed.

Themes from the discussions:

The constitution of Iraq states that 25% of parliament members must be women, also in local councils, but in spite of this women are kept out of the *peace and reconciliation process*. This is not due to women's lack of capacity, but due to the structures established around elections. Women are placed at the bottom of the electoral lists. The constitution forbids discrimination, but the laws are expressed in more subtle ways to hinder women participating. Moreover, women are not let into meetings where decisions are made. When women insist on getting involved, meetings are cancelled. There is also the dilemma of quantity vs. quality. Nevertheless, women who take upon these tasks should be supported.

"Currently, there is no action plan for adopting UNSCR 1325, but the regional NCA programme is supporting women's organizations in taking the resolution into account of their work."

The *media* is used in campaigning, but by exposing themselves, women are threatened. Many of them have encountered death threats, and the need for solidarity from international organizations is crucial. There is a need especially for sharing experiences on how to support widows. There is no proper program on this serious problem. What the government suggests is that men take on more wives.

"It is difficult to involve men in raising awareness on the issue of violence against women. When men engage in the discussions they tend not to acknowledge the fact that women have no freedom to speak, move, etc. In the rural areas and among marginalized groups especially the problems are extensive."

The importance of *gaining data and documentation* was stressed and does not necessarily conflict with carrying out important initiatives for women who need protection and support.

Meetings

Meeting with Dorchen A. Leidholdt, Esq., Director, Sanctuary for Families

The Iraqi women met with the Director of Sanctuary for Families' Centre for Battered Women's Legal Services, Dorchen A. Leidholdt, Esq.

The Legal Centre is the largest provider of legal services exclusively for victims of domestic violence in the country. It offers comprehensive, culturally, and linguistically sensitive legal advice, assistance, and representation to domestic violence victims, in cases involving divorce, child custody/visitation, child and spousal support, immigration and prosecution of abusers in criminal matters.

The Legal Centre staff members also engage in advocacy and training. They offer training and workshops on domestic violence law on a regular basis, give presentations at national and international conferences and forums, as well as provide expert testimony in the courts and legislative bodies.

The Legal Centre specializes in providing services for immigrant and undocumented battered women, who make up over three-quarters of its clientele. To serve these clients best, Sanctuary actively recruits bilingual and bicultural staff and pro bono attorneys.

Sanctuary for Families is the largest non profit organization in New York State, dedicated exclusively to serving domestic violence victims and their children. Each year, Sanctuary helps thousands of victims and their children build safe lives by offering a range of high quality services to meet their complex needs.

These services include clinical, legal, shelter, children's and economic stability services. Sanctuary also works to end domestic violence with its far-reaching impact through outreach, education, and advocacy. Sanctuary provides services in nine locations, including the Manhattan Office, Bronx Community Office, the Brooklyn Family Justice Centre and the Queens Family Justice Centre.

The organization provides services to victims of domestic violence and their children in New York City. Clients from all backgrounds are accepted. However, Sanctuary for Families have specialized services for the following populations: immigrant victims and provide services in 30 languages and have targeted outreach programming for African women and Spanish-speaking women. For victims of LGBT and for victims of sex trafficking.

A couple of cases in Iraq were discussed and a strategy for further action was developed. Dorchen A. Leidholdt offered ongoing contact, moral and practical support to the Iraqi women's organizations when needed.



Meeting with Anne Havnør, Senior Advisor, Section for global initiatives and gender equality, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Anne Havnør asked the women what they got out of attending CSW Beijing +15 and the parallel events. Moreover, what they could take back and work with in Iraq.

The women explained briefly about their work and responded as below.

Liza Albroari

The Baghdad Women's Association has worked on various issues during the last 3 years, especially on gender based violence. The Board members support the organization's out reach activities in Baghdad, which target mainly women subjected to domestic violence in conflict areas. The organization has

developed audiovisual material on the issue of violence against women. Moreover, work is carried out in general on human rights issues. During the past two years a special program on the issue of violence against women where drama is used as a methodology, has been carried out with young women in high schools. A special program for boys is carried out in conflict areas. Since March this year, the organization has organized a listening centre for battered women.

Liza Albroari has needed further knowledge about the UN system and is impressed by the women's different experiences all over the world. There is a communality of problems and it is comforting to see that women's struggles are the same, but in different contexts. It is impressive to be part of this and listen to the women. Moreover, it is impressive to be voiced here. Normally, Iraqi women are voiced incorrectly by the mass media. Big thanks to Rachel and Dima from NCA for making this possible.

Yanar Muhammad

OWFI opened a shelter in Baghdad when Yanar Mohammad returned to Iraq after 2003. Four shelters are now opened, but neither with governmental acknowledgement nor governmental financial support. The focus of OWFI is on trafficking and prostitution. The organization has the reputation of being very radical. Especially religious parties do not like what OWFI says. In October 2009, the organization started a radio channel in order to involve young women. OWFI has applied for this to be registered legally.

Yanar Mohammad explains that CSW has been an eye opener. It has been an opportunity to learn about the women's movement. Huge thanks to Rachel, NCA.

Khanim Latif

It was difficult to decide to go to CSW Beijing +15 due to the elections in Iraq taking place at the same time. Furthermore, there are many UN decisions that Iraqis are against. Despite of this, Asuda hopes to be able to come back to the yearly CSW.

Sundus Abass

It is important to meet and to be with other women. The session about how to engage

List of other attended sessions

- CSW plenary sessions on countries, regional and NGO reports and discussions
- CSW session on the UN Rapporteur on Violence against Women's report
- Engaging men for Gender Equality, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Global Network of Women peace builders
- Women's Learning Partnership's 2020 Vision: Mobilizing for women's rights and eliminating violence against women
- The role of women in social transformation, Universal Peace Federation

and involve men was important. The question is how to adapt this in Iraq. The Board of Women's Leadership Institute will be presented with this. By chance, we have met with a man from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and agreed on meeting again back in Iraq in order to discuss women's issues. Also, it is important to hear about how African women developed a plan of action, and how they have started the same process in Sierra Leone. We experience a lack of bridges between the NGOs and governmental levels. NCA is supporting us in networking and we are developing new strategies for making contacts. Normally, donors offer a grant and demand a report and nothing else.

An Evaluation

- *Voices of the women:*

Sundus Abass, Women's Leadership Institute

Participation in such a significant international event, and its activities in which women from different countries participated has left an enormous impression since the first day. As an Iraqi activist participating for the first time, I had heard and read about this event. However, we as Iraqi women had not planned to participate, due to the difficulties we would face at several levels. I was impressed by the logistical organization since the first day of the event. It was also very beneficial and fruitful for us to meet with a large number of international organizations, those we usually only hear about or work with remotely, without meeting their managers or staff or visiting their offices.

The discussions that took place in the sessions and the meetings we participated in, have given me a real picture of the challenges we face as Iraqi women and women's rights activists, not only in Iraq but also around the world. While women around the world face these challenges to different degrees, the challenges are similar and all women fight against them, even in the developed world. The presentations delivered were very important and gave me confidence in my capabilities as an Iraqi woman. In the past, I have not had such opportunities to participate in international events. Now that I have participated in this event, I have had the opportunity to listen to topics related to women's issues which are not adopted in my country. For example, I attended a session about the importance of men's engagement in achieving gender equality in the society and the family, which has made me wonder whether this methodology can be adopted. This is what I will take back to the Board of my organization.

The general atmosphere was impressive and the sessions required that we are attentive and respond promptly. They needed initiative and investment of our presence. They gave us the opportunity to rally

support for our causes in Iraq. I think we have achieved part of this, and maybe in the future we will achieve more and use the skills we acquired this time.

Perhaps because of the complicated arrangements for my travel to New York and participation, I had not expected much from this big event. But participation in the sessions and meetings and learning about the experiences of other women and women's organizations was way beyond my expectations from all angles, except for the Arab organizations' participation, which I had expected to be more active.

I have learned about working methodologies in some sessions that have not been adopted in my country and in our organization, in addition to the importance of networking and building local solidarity among women and the importance of women NGOs' initiatives, rather than waiting for what governments can achieve for women. As well as the importance of coordination between local women organizations and proper preparation for participation in international events.

The most important thing I will take back to Iraq will be to talk with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, about the importance of participation next year and share with them the experiences we shared this time. We will suggest that the Ministry coordinates in good time with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and prepares a feasible report on the status of women in Iraq.

We will also conduct a meeting with other women's organizations to update them on our participation and the experiences achieved and discuss with them ways to invest in this participation.

I think that NCA's initiative to enable Iraqi women to participate in this big international event is historic for the women's movement in Iraq. We will continue to extend our thanks and gratitude for this opportunity. And if we must give some suggestions, we would suggest that NCA continue in adopting such initiatives. We also suggest that an initial meeting for participants from local organizations is held at an early stage to prepare for their participation. Also, to identify topics they can work with in the sessions and presentations they can organize, since women's organizations in Iraq need to learn the basics, and need encouragement like all women in conflict areas. Although some of the potential participants may not be able to participate due to visa procedures or other reasons, it is important to have written preparations in good time and distribute tasks among participants in accordance with the topics and issues to be addressed, or ones we would like raised.

I also think that it would be helpful to introduce the group members to each other in advance, and inform them about the topics on which the sessions will be organized. I believe that it is every participant's right

to be aware beforehand and choose to participate in the available topics. I have benefited a great deal from the arrangement of several individual meetings, with some figures and organizations, and we plan to coordinate with them in the future.

Liza Albroari, Baghdad Women's Association

I had the opportunity to visit the UN headquarters for the first time in my life, which in itself has been a dream come true for me. Thanks to those who made me realize this dream. Being present at the halls of the UN and listening to states' reports, has been a very importance experience to me. Hearing them talk as if we lived in a utopia and attending these sessions have given me a great deal.

Among the discussions that enlightened me and had an influence on me, was the one during our visit to the Sanctuary for Families on March the 4th. It was a wonderful experience, and I was touched by the Director's modesty and willingness to cooperate with the Iraqi women victims of violence and to provide free services.

I also enjoyed the discussions that took place and also listening to the women who talked about their experiences, especially women from South Africa, as well as the meeting on engaging men in gender issues. The meeting with OSI was also significant because we shared the same difficulties and challenges that Iraqi women and women's organizations face and the needs they have. The meeting was wonderful by all means.

The last meeting which NCA organized for us on March the 10th before our return to Iraq, was the one that touched me most. I really liked that meeting since it was an important one where we presented our own thoughts and concerns.

Everything that was arranged by NCA, who invited us, was excellent and my expectations were met. I was somewhat disappointed by some of the Arab women's initiatives. Some of the topics presented were far from what BWA experience as women's reality.

The meeting with the Iraqi government's representative in the Women's Status Committee was also important and beneficial, and we will apply it in our work with the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as Mr. William Ash'iyā is the head of the organizations' department in the ministry. However, at a session where the Iraqi ambassador to the UN was present, some of the reflections were incorrect, minimising the suffering of Iraqi women, and did not present the true image of the situation of women in Iraq.

Khanim Latif, Asuda

It was beneficial for me to exchange updates, information and contacts with colleagues from different countries.

In general, the event was impressive particularly for me, although I had visited the US before, but it was the first time I visited the UN Headquarters in New York and met with a group of women from different parts of the world.

The UN Headquarters was impressive, not only because it was a big building where many people work and is visited by many organizations and leaders, but also because it is a place where important decisions are made about the people in the world, especially Iraq and Kurdistan. The atmosphere of the meetings and events was also impressive, as everything was well organized. What impressed me most was the Women Peace Builders network meeting, as there were many women from around the world who shared very interesting and important information and experience with others.

In general, most of the events and meetings were quite interesting and useful for me.

The events were more than I expected and therefore exceeded my expectations in terms of organization, participation, as well as reaction and presentation of Iraqi partners. Everything I had expected was fulfilled. It was one of the best events I have ever attended.

I have shared my experience and details about the CSW meeting with many of my staff, colleagues and partners. We issued a press release about our participation. I also had an interview with a local newspaper about Asuda and the participation of the other NGOs in the meeting and the Beijing Platform, as well as the role of NGOs in this context. I also plan to discuss this with the Kurdistan Regional Government to share with them what we did, and ask them if they can be involved in future CSW meetings and writing reports. I suggest NCA continues coordinating and organizing such important events and invite partners from Iraq to be present at such important events, because the Iraqi NGOs are new to these events due to being deprived from attending such events and contributing to them, thus been deprived from playing their role. Also, it would be better if information such as agendas etc. could be shared with invited NGOs in advance, especially as obtaining visas for Iraqi partners usually takes longer than expected.

Yanar Mohammad

My first impression was learning that there are parallels between the governmental and non-governmental venues at such a high level, where our government's representative is speaking in one hall, while we, the oppressed women's representatives can speak/respond in the hall next door. For an Iraqi woman activist

who is used to a lifetime of marginalization and suppression, this knowledge and experience is an eye-opener and definitely a self-esteem booster.

The second impression was through the international atmosphere of the event which connects similar women's organization from all around the globe, and falls very much under the spirit of an International Women's Day event, i.e. in application and not only symbolically. This experience taught me that in every country there is a variety of women's organizations: the radical, the conservative and the moderate. I also learned that their cooperation or enmity is also part of the dynamics of women's movements' local specificity. In the CSW, I met radical and conservative women activists from the US, Pakistan, Turkey, Netherlands and other countries, and I understood that the differences which we have in Iraq among the women's movement has parallels in almost every country. Briefly, the huge size of the venue put our struggles in context with the regional and the international, and at the same time drew clear contrasting parallels between the governmental and the nongovernmental work for women.

The third impression is one of a positive nature about women's solidarity, where all the women meet from around the world and share their struggles and discuss relentlessly, trying to take steps forward in their own battlefields and when possible in others.

I was personally grateful to Ms. Rachel Paul's continuous efforts to fit us into the international scene in a nurturing and positive way, accepting our drawbacks and supporting our commitments while respecting our opinionated positions. She even helps us get over our internal differences as an Iraqi women's group. My expectations were totally different, as it is my first time participating in the CSW. I imagined we would be going to one building with a few halls of consecutive meetings of a few groups. It never occurred to me that the scale of the venue was global, with international connections.

At the level of activism expectations, I was expecting that publishing a report on trafficking and prostitution in Iraq will bring quick and guaranteed results. Nevertheless, it seems that my organization still needs to learn ways to make human rights reports effective, and that finding the right venue is not enough. That is why we are in contact with the Human Rights Watch who is cooperating with us on this issue.

The meeting with the Norwegian official, Ms. Anne Havnoer, on the last day was positive, as she communicated with us in our comfort zone, and in an activist's spirit. This brings us some hope, that there are some governments who respect and attempt to empower women in the world.

I already published the event on our newspaper Al Mousawat [issue 14-page 8]. Our radio Al Mousawat radio (103.8FM) has also interviewed me about the event. OWFI members and friends feel proud that their voices have reached to the UN level. It took time for me to explain that it reached to the non-governmental side of the event, but it didn't seem to make much difference for them.

I suggest that the schedule be lighter and have some periods of resting/relaxation. During a travel taking a few days, some of us arrive already tired and cannot attend events on a full schedule. The organizers need to understand that some activists live under tremendous pressure to deliver work at many levels, and that they cannot take time off their work for more than two days.

Ms. Rachel Paul's understanding of the challenges which Middle-Eastern women activists meet and the difficulties they undergo, and moreover the differences between various groups, has made her a perfect candidate to tailor programs which benefit the biggest number of activists from all venues of women's organizations.

List of contacts

During the conference the Iraqi women made the below mentioned contacts for further interaction.

Equality Now, Taina Bien, Executive Director. NYC

Khanum Gauhar Aijaz Khan, Attorney and former Minister of Social Welfare. Karachi

Yukako Yanagimoto, Chukyo Law School. Japan

Ms. Ranjit Jayanti, Representative at United Nation's GUILD OF SERVICE. NYC

Susanne Riveles, Ph.D. , Human Rights / Africa and Development Consultant. Germany

Anje Wiersinga, M.D. , International Alliance of Women, IAW Representative at the Council of Europe

Eva M. Welskop-Deffaa, Director General of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities

Isis International , Cai Yiping

William Ash'iya, Director of the NGO section, Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Women's Learning Partnership

Save the Children

Alhakim Foundation, Dr. Jafar Jawad

Kjersti Lindoe, Advisor of the Middle East, KFUK & KFUM

Anosh Arminea, Women Media

Acronyms

BWA	Baghdad Women's Association
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSW	Conference on Status of Women
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Defect Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OFWI	Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States of America
WLI	Women's Leadership Institute

Iraqi women's movement started in 2003



True 11.03.2010 By: Jenny Dellegård, RadiOrakel

“When a country is in crisis – when social structures do not work and laws are not adhered to, then women are among the first to be killed”. Yes, this is what Rachel Eapel Paul said at the opening of the day's first events.

Rachel is a member of the Norwegian Church Aid, who arranged a session called: **“Violence against Women - in and post-conflict”**. They work in close collaboration with different organisations in Iraq, and Iraq is the country this meeting is focusing on. This is a country with a tragic history, marked by war and oppression.

As in many other countries the world over, also in Iraq, the situation for women is very hard. Women are daily exposed to violence in many ways, both in major and minor forms. “After the fall of Saddam's regime, it has been possible to establish women's organisations -this has not been possible during the Saddam regime. Civil society was suppressed and organisations had no possibility to work”, said Rachel. She said that a lot has happened in recent years, with a mobilisation in many different ways to build a strong society, where women can live free from violence, though nothing can happen overnight. Changes take time.

Sundus Hasan, member of the Women’s Leadership Institute related that despite the huge obstacles, things are progressing for women in Iraq today. Many women are well educated and get good jobs. However, at the same time many young girls are taken out of school and kept at home by their parents, said Rachel Paul, often because of the critical situation prevailing in the country. Poverty is also a significant reason to keep the girls at home.

“A harsh life in a hard country creates tough women. We must talk about our problems, and we must find solutions. Not only for us, but for the next generation”, said Sundus definitely. She continues: “It was bad before Saddam's regime fell. But the question is, is it better now? It is not only about showing figures and statistics, everyday life must improve for Iraqi women”.

These questions and more were brought up during the [Norwegian Church Aid's](#) arrangement in New York today, in connection with the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, 54th session.

This issue is also published in RadiOrakels website; <http://radiatorakel.no/2010/03/iraks-kvinnorelse-foddes-ar-2003/>

The logo for RadiOrakel, featuring the word "radiOrakel" in a stylized, pink, lowercase font. The letter "O" is replaced by a microphone icon.

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