

Update on women, peace and security in Iraq October 2016

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on **29 April 2016** to discuss the situation in Iraq, with the participation of the leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Country Team. A comprehensive background note was prepared for the meeting and a record of the meeting was issued as [S/2016/683](#). The group resolved to reconvene in approximately six months. Below is a non-exhaustive list of **relevant developments since then**.

Follow-up by the Security Council and renewal of UNAMI's mandate

A few days after the meeting of the Informal Experts Group, in his **briefing to the Security Council**, SRSK Kubis highlighted the deteriorating situation of women's rights due to the armed conflict against ISIL, the conflict's consequences for women and girls and the need for greater investments in humanitarian assistance for displaced women and girls. The SRSK particularly stressed the need to sustain high-level advocacy and political engagement in support of women's participation in public life and the implementation of Iraq's National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325. In **closed consultations**, many Council members referred to specific women, peace and security issues in their questions and statements. In July 2016, the Security Council adopted **resolution 2299**, which included specific language on women, peace and security. The resolution stressed the need for women's full participation in national reconciliation and peace processes, stabilization planning and political decision-making, and expressed concern about the lack of implementation, funding, or a lead government entity for the implementation of the NAP on 1325. It also highlighted the need for specific information and practical recommendations related to the gender dimensions of the conflict, the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, and took the additional step of explicitly calling for the swift deployment of relevant and dedicated expertise, including that of Women Protection Advisors.

A new Integrated Strategic Framework (2016-2017) of the UN's presence in Iraq

The new Integrated Strategic Framework for the UN's presence in Iraq was endorsed in July 2016. Its three main mandate areas are a) providing advice, assistance and support to promote dialogue and reconciliation in Iraqi society, b) strengthening the rule of law and improving respect for human rights, and c) promoting stabilization and inclusive development. All three of them include **gender equality issues as part of the planned priority results, as well as the overall assessment and vision of the strategic framework**. Most importantly, this emphasis is also reflected in the accompanying targets and outputs, and the identification of lead entities to carry them forward: UNAMI (especially the Office of Political Affairs, Gender Unit, the Electoral Affairs Office, and the Human Rights Office) and the Country Team, including UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, IOM, and FAO. **These results include:** helping ensure the implementation of the NAP on 1325; supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission Gender Unit and the development of the IHEC's gender policy; promoting women's leadership in politics and national reconciliation; mainstreaming gender in all mission activities, and scaling up the attention to gender issues both in analysis and in programmatic focus; and protecting women's rights, including through monitoring Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and supporting accountability initiatives. In this context, UNAMI/OHCHR will prioritize advocating for legal and judicial reforms to provide domestic courts with jurisdiction over international crimes and continue to verify and document human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by ISIL and other groups against civilians.

Examples of targets include:

- Funding for the implementation of the NAP
- Training hundreds of health service providers, social workers, and law enforcement personnel on SGBV and harmful practices

- Doubling the number of women centers providing services to survivors, the number of health facilities providing reproductive health services, the number of women with access to legal aid services, and the number of SGBV cases receiving judgment in the first instance of the formal justice system
- Establishing an effective regulatory framework for women's groups to function in the public sphere
- Supporting maternal health services in recently liberated areas in Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates
- Including women heads of households in income-generating activities
- Launching campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage
- Strengthening the leadership of women in IDP camp management committees, as currently 91 percent of committees in IDP camps lack female representation

Conflict-related sexual violence

ISIL continues to systematically use sexual violence against women and girls in Iraq and Syria. While some women have managed to escape their captors, there are still around 3,800 abducted Yazidis, including women and girls, who are missing, which is of grave concern. The deployment of a **Senior Women Protection Adviser** was approved by the UN Action Against Sexual Violence Network in September 2016 and funds were transferred to UNAMI. Calls for accountability for crimes committed by ISIL continue to be made by the UN, the international community and Iraqi minority communities. Statements issued by the SG and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC) on the second anniversary of ISIL's attacks on Sinjar highlighted the urgency for initiating a judicial process for these crimes.

The SRSG-SVC and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq signed a **Joint Communiqué on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq in September 2016**. The Joint Communiqué marks the beginning of a more structured collaboration between the Office of the SRSG-SVC and the Republic of Iraq, and will contribute to addressing some of the pressing challenges that Iraq faces with regard to justice and accountability for crimes of conflict-related sexual violence committed within Iraq or against Iraqi nationals. This support will include improving the documentation and collection of evidence of conflict-related sexual violence crimes; strengthening the Iraqi legal framework to address such crimes; contributing to potential prosecutions of ISIL crimes; and assisting in modalities for victim compensation. It will also serve as a framework for action and cooperation to address the urgent need for services and livelihood support for survivors and children born of pregnancy resulting from rape. The joint communiqué places special emphasis on ensuring that the protection and empowerment of women is central to all strategies to combat ISIL, including in the context of the operations undertaken to liberate Mosul.

The situation of women and girls in the current security and humanitarian situation

The humanitarian situation is extremely concerning, as imminent military operations against ISIL are expected to trigger one of the largest and most complex global humanitarian crises that the United Nations has seen in recent decades. Massive displacement numbering in the hundreds of thousands may be expected in the worst-case scenario, with detrimental repercussions for women and girls. The number of women-headed households is expected to increase significantly due to the death and/or disappearance of male family members, and the screening procedures for men in liberated areas have the potential to lead to more family separation. Women of all communities in liberated areas may suffer retaliation whether they are suspected of being the victims of abuse or of being associated with ISIL. Additional mass displacement is expected to bring about an increase in domestic violence and child marriage, linked to severe over-crowding and limited resources and economic opportunities. The significant presence of armed actors in and around displacement sites may reduce women's freedom of movement, and increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNAMI/HRO has continued to document incidents of targeted attacks against LGBT individuals, including in, but not limited to, the context of the conflict. A generation of children born of rape may suffer from stigma, abandonment, trafficking, and statelessness. Meanwhile, most international partners working on SGBV and CRSV lack the presence or resources to provide much needed services in all conflict-affected areas.¹

¹ Within their capacity, UN agencies are offering protection services and livelihood opportunities, particularly to women through the provision of immediate protection response accompanied by income generation activities, including cash-for-work initiatives. Services range from psychosocial support to GBV survivors, capacity building on clinical management of rape, mentoring for

Women's participation in key government bodies in local and national reconciliation

There has been **very little noticeable progress on the implementation of the NAP** on women, peace and security, and concern remains that, following the abolition of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, women's rights issues have failed to receive adequate attention at senior level. **The current number of female ministers in the Council of Ministers is two out of a total of 17 ministers** currently endorsed by the Council of Representatives. In the context of ongoing reviews of the electoral legal framework in Iraq, UNAMI is advocating for stronger guarantees for women's participation and representation in Iraq's elections, and greater and more influential female representation in the new Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. Efforts to support the Parliamentary Women's Caucus and the participation of women in national and community reconciliation efforts continue, including through a Women's Unit within the National Reconciliation Commission, which is now part of the task force on implementing the National Action Plan on 1325, and the creation of a Civil Peace and Social Coexistence network, which is meant to facilitate the engagement of civil society in community reconciliation and combatting ethno-sectarian divisions.

Recommendations for the Security Council

The IEG should consider taking the following actions:

- In October, 71 Iraqi NGOs, 21 international NGOs, and a number of prominent Iraqi individuals signed and submitted an Open Letter to the Security Council, with copy to UNAMI, OHCHR, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, and the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, **calling on the Government of Iraq to issue a directive clarifying that Iraqi NGOs may provide much-needed shelter and other services to gender-based violence survivors**. This urgent issue was highlighted in the April meeting and should be brought to the attention of the Government of Iraq, coupled with the recommendation to urge the Government of Iraq to legally allow displaced women and girl to obtain Civil Status Identification documents without requiring verification of their identity by a male relative.
- Request UNAMI (in particular the Offices of Political Affairs and Electoral Affairs) as well as human rights and humanitarian partners to **strengthen gender- analysis and sex disaggregation of its assessments, reports and briefings to the Security Council** and expand the documentation of gender-based violence to include other violations of human rights, targeted attacks against women human rights defenders and against LGBT individuals. Further request that UNAMI and the UN Country Team include in UNAMI's Quarterly reports to the Security Council updates on their respective engagement and activities to promote women's full participation in national and community reconciliation, political decision-making, and stabilization planning.
- Commend the Government of Iraq for the commitments made through the **Joint Communiqué**, and **call upon the GoI to move towards its implementation** beginning with the designation of high level focal points at the central and regional level; the development of a plan of action on the basis of the agreement and; the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee.
- **Call upon the international community to support the Government of Iraq** in the actions it will undertake to implement the Joint Communiqué and the National Action Plan for the implementation of 1325. The acute fiscal crisis in Iraq could constrain the Iraqi Government's ability to finance much needed activities to promote the women, peace and security agenda.
- Call upon UNAMI to continue the use of its good offices mandate to advocate the Government of Iraq to **designate a lead entity to oversee implementation of Iraq's National Action Plan on 1325**.
- Call upon UNAMI to **accelerate the deployment of the Senior Women Protection Adviser** in order to support the implementation of the Joint Communiqué; the establishment and functioning of the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting arrangements on CRSV; and the adoption of early-warning indicators on CRSV.

health workers in governorates hosting returnees, distribution of dignity kits, and reproductive health services, including supporting existing maternity facilities to increase access to family planning and ante and post-natal care services. A Rapid Response Mechanism (under the leadership of UNICEF and WFP and in partnership with UNFPA and several NGOs) responds to requests for emergency assistance to people in need within 72 hours UN Women and FAO are supporting economic livelihood projects for women in newly liberated areas, and IOM is supporting community-policing initiatives. UNDP and UN Women are supporting legal aid services for displaced populations. Additionally, the UN has implemented a system-wide mechanism for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).