

# 16 Days Campaign to End Violence Against Women

25 November - 10 December 2010

## UNiTE to End Violence Against Women in Iraq



## Brochure

Violence against women and girls is a violation of their human rights, causing them physical, sexual and psychological suffering. Violence against women limits their ability to realise their legal, social, political and economic rights and participate in Iraq's development. Eradicating violence against women is a crucial part of Iraq's efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in all spheres of life (Millennium Development Goal Three) and will provide impetus to Iraq's efforts to achieve all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Although women's political representation has increased and the Government of Iraq has committed to achieving MDG 3, this has not yet translated into a broader recognition of gender equality across Iraqi society and government bodies.

### Domestic violence

Violence against women in the home is a major problem that prevents women's full participation in society. One in five women (21%) in Iraq aged between 15-49 has suffered physical violence at the hands of her husband.<sup>1</sup> 14% of women who suffered physical violence were pregnant at the time.<sup>2</sup> 33% have suffered emotional violence,<sup>3</sup> and 83% have been subjected to controlling behaviour by their husbands.<sup>4</sup>

Emotional violence includes insults, threats and public humiliation, and many men seek to control their wife's social life and access to medical care.

### Early marriage

Early marriages still occur, but are decreasing. 4% of young women aged between 15 -19 were married before they turned 15, compared to 11% among those aged between 15-49 years.<sup>5</sup>

Marriage before the age of 15 is illegal in Iraq, and marriage between the ages of 15-18 requires special authorization from a judge.<sup>6</sup>

### Trafficking

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many women are being kidnapped and sold into prostitution. Victims are trafficked internally and to neighbouring countries including Syria and the Gulf states.<sup>7</sup>

### Female genital mutilation

Reports have indicated that female genital mutilation affects many women and girls in northern Iraq, though the exact extent is unclear.<sup>8</sup> There is an ongoing campaign among civil society organizations and the General Directorate of tracing violence against women in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to outlaw the practice.<sup>9</sup>

### Women's awareness of their rights

Evidence shows that many Iraqi women and girls are not fully aware of their rights. 59% of women aged 15-49 believe that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife under certain circumstances.<sup>10</sup> This figure is higher in rural areas (70%) and among women with no formal education (71%).<sup>11</sup> Women aged between 15-24 years are just as likely to tolerate abuse as older generations.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of legal barriers to early marriage, one in ten young women aged between 12-30 years believe that it is best for a girl to marry before she reaches the age of 18.

Forced marriages are entirely illegal,<sup>13</sup> but a third of young women believe that a girl must marry her relative if it is her guardian's wish.<sup>14</sup>

### Access to care and justice

The capacities of the state authorities to prevent, protect and prosecute are limited. Medical and police authorities lack adequate training on caring for and protecting survivors of violence, leaving women vulnerable to stigmatization and reprisals from family members for reporting their case.

Few shelters exist to provide a safe haven for victims. Women victims of violence are forced to take refuge in detention centres due to the lack of shelters.

The lack of a strong legal framework for prosecuting perpetrators and supporting victims means that mediation between the victim and her family is often preferred to prosecution of the perpetrator.

Women's rights activists and shelters have been threatened and attacked by armed groups and family members of those they seek to protect.<sup>15</sup>

### Eradicating violence against women

Young Iraqi women and men cited family upbringing (40%), the law (35%) and religion (37%) as the major factors that would help prevent violence against women.<sup>16</sup> Little confidence was expressed in the power of the media (6%) or schools (3%).

Men and boys play an important role in eradicating violence against women. 57% of young Iraqi men believe that, in general, violence should not be used to solve problems.<sup>17</sup> 63% believe that a woman is no less than a man,<sup>18</sup> rising to 75% among those with a university education. However, 68% believe it is acceptable to kill a girl for damaging a family's honour and 50% believe wife beating is acceptable.<sup>19</sup>

Engaging men and boys in their roles as economic providers, decision makers, husbands, fathers and brothers is central in eradicating violence against women in Iraq.

## Iraq's International Obligations and National Response

In addition to having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 and other international human rights treaties, Iraq has adopted in 1993 the Declaration on Elimination on Violence against Women, the only instrument that defines Violence against Women.

As a Member State of the United Nations, the country is committed to the Millennium Development Goals, including gender equality, and is bound by UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820, and 1888 which address women's participation in reconciliation processes and the understanding of rape as a tactic of war.

In light of the disproportional impact of conflict on women, the Government of Iraq (GoI) is taking steps to address violence against women in a comprehensive manner starting with the introduction of a domestic violence bill that is being developed both at the national level and in the KRG.

At the national level, the State Ministry of Women's Affairs (SMWA), despite its limited capacities, has played a key role in promoting gender equality through direct interventions, inter-ministerial coordination and a dialogue with civil society actors and organizations. One of its major interventions is the establishment of Committee 80 which consists of representatives of different line ministries who, under the leadership of SMWA, are joining forces to address violence against women (VAW) in a strategic and coordinated manner.

In the KRG, a ministerial group has been established to address VAW in the region. The KRG has also developed a national strategy for VAW which is expected to become an integral part of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women that aims to address the priority areas for intervention to ensure gender equality in a broader sense.

To facilitate access to justice for female survivors of violence, Iraq has established both at the national level and in the KRG, special units, known as either Directorates for Tracing Violence Against Women or Family Protection Directorates aiming to develop a national database for cases of VAW which will address the current gap in information gathering. Ultimately, the specialized units seek to provide an entry point for violence survivors and offer multiple services (medical, legal, police and psycho-social support) and supporting survivors as they reintegrate into society.

The protection for survivors of violence is being strengthened through the development of a shelter policy which is expected to lead to the development of a coherent strategic plan of action. These shelters are essential to supporting female survivors who need additional economic support while they are separated from the violence perpetrators.

At the same time the biggest emphasis is on the prevention of violence which is being supported by ongoing awareness programs targeting all sections of society. Legal aid is increasingly being provided to help women better understand their rights within the formal justice sector, both for civil and criminal matters.

The most difficult task will be to successfully advocate for the review and passing of legislation that supports the gender equality commitment. A number of stakeholders, including civil society, have been actively lobbying the government and parliament to change the laws within the penal code and the personal status law resulting in some successes within the KRG. The next step is to translate those successes in effective policy and institutional provisions within all relevant line ministries.

The elimination of the VAW will only be possible through stronger collaboration between government and non-governmental organisations and the allocation of sufficient funding. Further political, economic and legal empowerment of women, youth and men will contribute to a culture of zero tolerance towards violence against women and girls.

1-WHO/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Health Iraq Family Health Survey 2006-2007

2-Ibid

3-Ibid

4-Ibid

5-Ibid

6-Iraqi Penal Code 1959, Number 188, Articles 7 and 8

7-Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Girls in Iraq, (2010), cited in UNAMI Human Rights Office, Human Rights Report: 1 July-31 December 2009 (2010)

8-Asuda, Diakonia, Survey of Female Genital Mutilation in Sulaymaniyah Governorate(2009); Wadi, Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan (2010)

9-UNAMI Human Rights Office, Human Rights Report 1 July-31 December 2008

10-UNICEF/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Health Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006

11-Ibid

12-Ibid

13-Iraqi Personal Status Code 1959, Number 188, Article 9

14-UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009

15-Amnesty International, Iraq: Civilians Under Fire (2010)

16-UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009

17-Ibid

18-UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009

19-UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009

## Iraq's First 16 Days Campaign

By launching its first 16 Days Campaign to End Violence Against Women, Iraq joins the international community which since 1991 has mobilized thousands of organisations in approximately 154 countries participating in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. In fact, the 16 Days Campaign is an international event that started in 1991 when the Center for Women's Global Leadership convened the first Women's Global Leadership Institute. Participants from different countries chose the dates, November 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women and December 10, International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, December 1, World AIDS Day, and December 6, which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

The 16 Days Campaign has been used as an organizing strategy by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women by:

- Raising awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels;
- Strengthening local work around violence against women;
- Establishing a clear link between local and international work to end violence against women ;
- Providing a forum in which organizers can develop and share new and effective strategies ;
- Demonstrating the solidarity of women around the world in organizing campaigns against women; and
- Creating tools to pressure governments to implement promises made to eliminate violence against women.

### United Nations' Response

Through several entities, the United Nations is helping Iraq address violence against women in the country. With the support of UNICEF, the GoI is developing policies and assessments on gender-based violence and violence against children, with particular sensitivity towards the needs of girls. In the KRG, the government is working closely with civil society to establish a shelter for victims of trafficking and forced prostitution.

UNIFEM, UNHCR, WHO and the UNAMI Human Rights Office are collaborating under the leadership of UNFPA to develop Iraq's capacity to combat violence against women. These agencies are working to enhance the government's capacity to develop national plans and programmes to combat violence against women; the ability of government institutions and civil society organisations to deal with survivors; and increase knowledge among community leaders, teachers, students and local communities on gender equality. UNICEF is working with national and international NGOs to raise awareness on gender-based violence and provide protection to survivors. UNDP is providing technical support to the Directorate for Tracing Violence against Women and the Family Protection Unit.

### What is violence against women?

Violence against women is defined in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as: ...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

### Iraq's international obligations

Iraq has ratified, signed or acceded to the following international instruments related to the rights of women and girls:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1969, ratified 1971)

Declaration on Elimination on Violence against Women

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1969, ratified 1971)

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981, acceded 1986)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, acceded 1994); Amendment to Article 43(2) (1985, acceded 2001)

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000, acceded 2008)