

Intervention to the conference "Women as actors for peace in Middle East and North Africa", held by Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll/Germany, February 2008

Iraqi women movement: outcome and challenges

Iraqi women movement has a long history in fighting for liberty and democracy. In the long run, it has linked the struggle for women emancipation with people fighting against colonialism, repression, ignorance, backwardness and the old social traditions.

Immediately, after the fall of the dictatorship regime in 2003, women organizations started advocating and lobbying for women integration into political process, demanding for equality and recognition special quota for women within political power, taking into consideration the SCR 1483/2003 on Iraq, which has reiterated its pledge to promote gender equality in accordance to SCR 1325, and successfully enacted in the Temporary Administrative Law adopted in March 2004 and in the permanent Constitution in December 2005.

In addition, women's groups and organizations as part of the civil society movement have actively participated in the elections and the constitutional referendum, through monitoring, watch, lobbying, advocacy, and awareness campaigns, conducting field researches, capacity and skills building, through sustained programs of spreading culture of dialogue, pluralism, tolerance and mutual understanding and human rights, including woman and child rights, promoting concept of non- violence, conflict resolution, peace building, and human security, focusing on citizenship values and principles, efficiency, integrity, national unity, sovereignty of law, transitional justice, and democracy.

Iraqi women organizations, in general, with their diverse formations, have succeeded in crossing the hindering and sensitive lines of extreme sectarianism, regionalism, ethnicities, tribalism, and parties affiliations. They have proved their capacity in lobbying and mobilizing at the social level, and as motivating mediator to a national and civil revival in Iraq.

As women NGOs, we have set to ourselves several commitments to promote and protect human rights and women human rights in particular, taking into consideration Iraq ratification of the two International Covenants on Political, Civil, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, in addition to the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights conventions and resolutions especially SCR 1325.

We are looking forward to achieve the strategic dimension of reviving human rights and women human rights, not only in mechanisms and laws, but also as an education and cultural dedication reflecting on behaviors, practices and visions, incorporating with the structure of various/multi cultures in society to becoming an essential component of it.

Building on this concept, our organizations are working in many fields, and the main subjects/concerns of our activities are:

- 1- Considering the International conventions of human rights as one of the national legislation references within the Iraqi constitution,
- 2- Enhancing the principle of citizenship and equality before law for all citizens without discrimination, by ridding the constitution from all articles and items of sectarian nature in the constitution preamble and texts, including article (41), which deals with the personal status affairs, to avoid the dedication of sectarianism, nurturing terrorism and sectarian violence, planting hatred and disparity amongst the components of Iraqi society, now and in the long run.
- 3- The necessity of watch, monitoring and documenting the human rights violation in our country by local and International organizations, taking into consideration detainees' protection and displaced people victims of sectarian violence and terrorism.
- 4- Awareness on the women rights as part of human rights, with a full integral citizenship and rights, and working on changing the existing dominating stereotype concepts of the role of women, by focusing on education, legislation and economical empowerment.
- 5- Human rights education and criteria within the educational formal system, especially within the educational curricula, building capacity of governmental personnel working in human rights and educational sector, developing non – formal school activities, building the concepts and values of citizenship, gender, social coexistence, peace, discarding sectarianism and extremism amongst students and educational institutes.
- 6- Building capacity of state institutes, especially employees at the executive departments concerned with reservation of law (police departments), on respecting human rights as a primary concern to enhance their professional performance.
- 7- Creating a healthy atmosphere to empower women, providing them with equal opportunities, widening their participation in the decision making positions at different levels.
- 8- Exposing and revealing all incidents of terrorism and violence targeting women, especially killing, kidnapping, raping, women trafficking, and so called honorary crimes. And lobbying for drafting a law on violence against women in order to restrain any order or norm that comes as a tribal and traditional norm issued by few, misleadingly, as responding to religious and Sharia rule, while such orders are against human dignity, human rights and freedoms.
- 9- Demanding to establish legal protection system, shelters, necessary health and social care for women victims of such violations,

In conclusion, we appeal to the international community; the UN and donors states and international agents to render their support to our programs through:

1. to put concrete pressures on the Iraqi government to fulfill its commitments and obligations concerning human rights issues and empowering women to participate in the political power, peace building and national reconciliation process,
2. to make a priority to provide financial assistance for training on gender equality in the Ministries of Interior and Justice the Judicial Institute, law schools and universities and NGOs,
3. to provide legal awareness training for Iraqi civil society organizations and women's groups, in particular on SCR 1325, includes funding for advocacy and lobbying training, workshops, and conferences and media campaign.
4. to assign a gender advisor in the diplomatic missions located in Iraq, in order to follow up the international and national commitments on gender issues in Iraq.
5. to render relief assistance to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, with majority of women and children, and facilitating measures of asylum for those who applied refuge in European and North American countries.
6. to put pressure on Turkey to stop its interference and attacks on Iraq, which turning into a continuous chronically explosive situation and call Turkish government to respect Iraq sovereignty and to come with understanding to improve the security situation and progressing the political process in Iraq.

We wish that our joint efforts with state's institutes and international parties to enhance the rule of law and justice, respect of human rights and gender equality, while looking forward to restore national sovereignty in the near future, and for the efforts of building peace, democracy, reconstruction and development to witness a tangible progress nationwide.

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