

# KRG Takes One Step Closer to Gender Equality

Glenn Field, September 2, 2016

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region—The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi Parliament are working together to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and further integrate them into all levels of government by implementing a United Nations resolution on women in conflict.

“This is a very great accomplishment,” Janet Alberda, the Dutch consul general in Erbil, said at a conference on Thursday to launch the Task Force 1325 that will support the implementation of the resolution, congratulating the KRG and Iraqi parliament. The region as a whole “should cherish this.”

But implementing the resolution in a meaningful way remains the challenge; without that, “there is very little hope,” Alberda warned.

Iraq has become the first Arab and Muslim country in the Middle East to adopt UN Resolution 1325, which affirms the vital role women play in the resolution of conflict, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Pakshan Zangana, Secretary General of the High Council of Women’s Affairs at the KRG, believes that the integration of women will further strengthen the Kurdistan Region’s ability to fight terrorism.

“This resolution is very important in this conflict against terror,” Zangana told Rudaw. “We have to guarantee basic services of peace and security.”

Implementing Resolution 1325 has been a collaborative effort on behalf both men and women, according to Suzan Aref, head of the Women Empowerment Organization in Erbil, saying they worked with the KRG’s ministry of women’s affairs and women’s high council.

“We are working with both men and women and we have the task force,” Aref said in an interview with Rudaw. “The task force is the state actor from parliament, from high positions in the government, both male and female.”

Resolution 1325 was adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000, but the Kurdistan Region and Iraq were only ready to enact it now that the resources are in place.

“We have the budget and the financial change,” said Boriana Jonsson, the executive director of Euromed Feminist Initiative, at the conference on Thursday. “But we need to

make the changes at the government and grassroots level.

According to Aref, ending gender-based violence and the integration of women into government and other higher roles in society must begin with three pillars: protection, prevention, and participation.

Protection refers to keeping women and girls safe from gender-based violence such as rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, honor killings, and other forms of physical abuse.

Prevention involves enacting policies to ensure an end to the violence.

And participation implies the inclusion of women into enacting and enforcing policy to make sure the prevention of gender-based violence, and also that women are a part of the decision-making that affects society as a whole.

Many challenges must be overcome to achieve these goals, including providing a safe place in society for victims.

In cases of rape or abuse, women often do not feel comfortable speaking to law enforcement personnel.

Women victims often fear that “maybe who is listening to her will abuse her as well,” Aref explained. “But she will be more confident in talking to a policewoman about this.”

“When you have women involved, you can be more assured that issues such as rape or sexual harassment will not continue to be tolerated,” she added. “Women can trust women more to rescue them.”

When women serve in the military and police, women as a whole gain more confidence, a woman’s perspective is heard more clearly, and a more nuanced approach develops. “We can serve all the community, not just half of the community.”

Aref criticized policy makers today saying that they are merely paying lip service to implementing the policies needed in regards to women’s issues.

“They have strategies to support women and poverty and to end all kinds of violence and strategies for economic empowerment, but what is the reality? There is no implementation,” she said. “There’s no action plan or budget. They don’t have the human resources to be able to understand what is the strategy and how to implement it.”

Aref believes the solution is given women an equal role in policy making. “It is again

about women at all levels,” she explained, “women in political parties, women in parliament, women in high positions in the private sector, and so on.”

Equally as important to integrating women into high level positions in society and government, is catering to the needs of women at the grassroots level, “women IDPs, women in camps, women affected by this conflict, women in military, women being kidnapped, women being sold,” explained Aref. “This is to see how they [government officials] respond.”

The shortage of participation of women in higher levels of society and government in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq was an obstacle to enacting Resolution 1325. According to Aref, her male counterparts preferred to maintain the status quo because their goal was to maintain the reputation of the man and the family.

“In the end, no one was thinking about what was happening to the woman,” she said. “She must accept the rape in order to maintain the reputation of the family. She has to accept the continued abuse. She is dying a hundred times.”