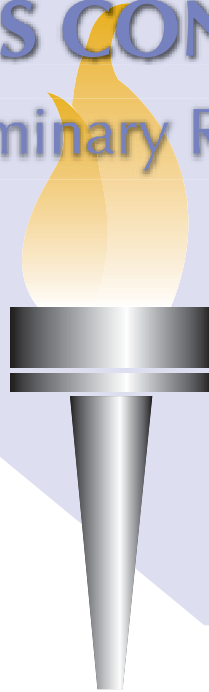


# **THE HEARTLAND OF IRAQ WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

**Preliminary Report**



**University of Babylon, Hilla, Iraq • October 4 - 7, 2003**

**Women for a Free Iraq**

**The American Islamic Congress**

**The Iraq Foundation**

# The Heartland of Iraq Women's Conference Preliminary Report

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### **Preparatory Committee**

Salwa Ali, Tanya Gilly, Eleana Gordon, Fem Holland and Rend Rahim

### **Conference Hosts**

Ala Talabani (Chair), Tanya Gilly, Rend Rahim, Safia al-Souhail and Zainab al-Suwaij

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## CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

One of the largest gatherings of Iraqi women since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime took place at the University of Babylon in Hilla, Iraq, from October 4-7, 2003. Over 150 women attended “**The Heartland of Iraq Women’s Conference**” organized by the Women for a Free Iraq, with support from the American Islamic Congress and the Iraq Foundation, and sponsored by the US Agency of International Development’s Office of Transition Initiatives and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in South-Central Iraq.

The participants came from the five south-central provinces of Babil, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniya and Wasit. They included women who are engaged in the establishment of women’s centers and organizations in these provinces. The majority are professional women - doctors, lawyers, teachers and engineers. The conference also hosted visiting women’s delegations from Basra and Kurdistan.



The conference aimed to discuss the women’s aspirations in the new Iraq, inspire them to pursue these aspirations, and identify strategies for doing so. The discussions were rich in ideas, proposals and debate as the women reviewed the legacy of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship on their status in Iraq society, and expressed their hopes and fears for the future. There were notable differences between the delegations in the issues and priorities they identified, highlighting the diversity of Iraqi women.

The theme of the first two days was on the connection between democracy and women’s rights. The last two days focused on developing plans for establishing women’s centers in their communities and enlisting the participation of women in future elections.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WOMEN OF SOUTH CENTRAL IRAQ

Delivered to Ambassador  
Paul L. Bremer on  
October 7, 2003

- At least one third of the members of the Constitutional Committee should be women.
- All laws that violate women's rights should be abolished, and new laws must be enacted that protect the rights of women.
- The future Iraqi Constitution should assign a quota of no less than 30% participation of women in all political institutions, including but not restricted to the national parliament, and regional and local councils.
- Monitoring committees should be established in all government institutions to ensure that women's rights are respected, and to provide women with educational, economic and employment support according to strategies identified by the women themselves.

The speakers included Iraqi women returning from exile who talked about their experiences living in democratic countries, and experts in constitutional law and elections. Representatives from the newly elected Baghdad City Advisory Council related their recent experiences with city government, and Kurdish women activists shared lessons learned over more than a decade of advocating for women's rights in Kurdish areas that were outside of Saddam's control.

On the last day, the participants had the opportunity to address Ambassador Paul L. Bremer, the CPA Administrator, who delivered the conference's closing remarks. He also brought with him a videotaped address by U.S. National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice.



The women presented Ambassador Bremer with a list of four major recommendations for the new Iraqi government. The conference participants were not selected as representatives of their communities, so these recommendations, as well as the other suggestions highlighted in the rest of this report, should not be taken as expressing the views of all the women of South-Central Iraq. They do offer, however, a glimpse of what is on the minds of women in today's Iraq.

## BACKGROUND THE BA'ATH REGIME AND IRAQI WOMEN

Although much has been written about deteriorating economic, health and social conditions for women in Iraq, not enough focus has been given to the unique legacy of Ba'athist rule on Iraqi women. There is a common misperception that the Ba'ath regime, which took power in 1968, contributed to the advancement of Iraqi women, and that the situation of women in Iraq only began to deteriorate in 1991 with the Gulf War and economic sanctions.

In fact, the critical period for the advancement of Iraqi women took place before the Ba'ath regime came into power, from 1920 to 1968. The major women's organizations founded in that period included the *Women's Empowerment Society* (Jamaet Alnahda Alnisaeaya) in 1924, the Kurdish Women's Federation (KWF) in 1928, and the *Iraqi Women's League* (IWL) in 1951. These organizations established schools for girls, women's centers and women's publications, and advocated for the rights of women and children.

By the time the Ba'ath party took complete control of Iraq in 1968, women were already organized, obtaining university degrees and active in the workforce. The Ba'ath party inherited a society in which women already played a prominent role, it did not create it.

Although the Ba'athist Constitution of 1970 granted women and men equal rights, and the regime passed new laws that expanded the rights of women, these protections on paper were meaningless in a police state ruled through terror. The Constitution's Article 42 gave the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) the power to promulgate any edict, even if it contravened all the other articles of the constitution. Thus, in one fell swoop, Article 42 nullified the entire constitutional basis of government in Iraq and made its citizens subject to the absolute power of Saddam Hussein, who controlled the RCC.

Laws in favor of women were never enforced, or were cancelled. Instead, Saddam's regime issued numerous decrees that hurt women, such as Decree No 111, dated February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1990, which legalized so-called "honor killings." "No person shall be liable to penal prosecution if he kills or commits the premeditated killing of his mother, daughter, sister, and niece to wash out dishonor."

Similarly, organizations such as the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GIFW), ostensibly created to “ensure that regulations regarding women were complemented by capacity-building and literacy programs,”<sup>i</sup> were in fact geared towards a single goal: to squash opposition and consolidate the party’s power. GIFW members were forced to enroll and were spied on by the regime.

Zakia Hakki, the first woman judge in Iraq (nominated in 1959), describes the GIFW as follows:

*“It was established by the direct order from the tyrant and his fascist bloody regime to be the voice of Ba’ath ideology, and as such did not reflect or represent the struggle of millions oppressed Iraqi women.”*

Indeed, one of the greatest obstacles in rebuilding Iraq is that civil society was totally destroyed in Iraq. As Françoise Brie of the *International Alliance for Justice* wrote in a statement about women in post-war Iraq on April 24:

*“All the organizations, such as women’s organizations, trade unions and newspapers, remained under government control....For the Iraqi women, everything needs to be rebuilt.”*<sup>ii</sup>

Another aspect of Saddam’s legacy on Iraqi women that is often overlooked is the psychological toll of decades of repression and terror. The Ba’ath regime pitted Iraqis against each in various ways – from ethnic cleansing campaigns in which certain ethnic groups were given property confiscated from others, to the use of civilians as informants. These policies created a general climate of fear and mistrust that extended into the heart of the family, since even children were used against their parents.

As Rend al-Rahim, the Executive Director of the *Iraq Foundation* explained at a State Department briefing on the “Human Rights Legacy on Women of Saddam’s Regime” on April 23<sup>rd</sup>:

*“A particular issue for women coming out of the Saddam era is their mental health – the whole Iraqi nation suffers from post-traumatic stress*

*disorder, but women bear the brunt of the impact of wars and repression.”*

Given this legacy, it is remarkable how quickly Iraqi women organized themselves after the fall of Saddam's regime. Hundreds of women's organizations have popped up around Iraq. The emerging women activists we met at the conference were smart, articulate and assertive. They were hungry for information, eager to hear from the panelists, and not shy about voicing their opinions.

Iraqi women know this is a historical time in Iraq and want to be at the table building the new Iraq. Unfortunately, the women's groups have yet to gain any leverage in the political or social arenas, and so far, the participation of women in politics has been meager. Only two members of the Governing Council are women (the third member, Akila Hashemi, was assassinated in September 2003); there is only one female minister in the newly appointed cabinet (the former minister of public works in the Kurdish government); and there are no women in the preparatory committee for the constitution.

With elections planned in the near future, women have no organizational capability to run election campaigns and compete for office. If they are appointed to any positions at all, it will have to be by a dispensation from male politicians.

The conference participants specifically asked for more training, education and support to build democracy in Iraq. But despite the stated US policy to promote the building of democracy in Iraq, little money has been allocated so far to foster democratization and strengthen Iraqi civil society, and there has been little in the way of democracy or civic education campaigns.

The potential to transform Iraq into a democracy where individual rights and women's rights are respected is real, but it will require much more focused and sustained support from the United States and other democracies.

*i*“*Winning the Peace Conference Report,*” by the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars and Women Waging Peace.

*ii*“*For the Iraqi women, everything needs to be rebuilt,*” by Françoise Brie at [www.i-a-j.org](http://www.i-a-j.org)



## DAY 1: WOMEN IN THE NEW IRAQ

### Welcome:

*Fern Holland* – Conference Organizer, USAID/OTI

*Donna Kerner* – Senior Program Officer, USAID/OTI

*Mayor Titwit* – Mayor of Hilla



### Opening Remarks:

#### A Shared Legacy and Vision for Iraqi Women

*Rend al-Rahim* – Host from Women for a Free Iraq;  
Executive Director of the Iraq Foundation.

*Safia al-Souhail* – Host from Women for a Free Iraq;  
Advocacy Director for the International Alliance  
for Justice.

*Ala Talabani* – Conference Chair; Acting Liaison for  
the CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council with  
Iraqi women's groups.

The hosts from the Women for a Free Iraq introduced themselves, and explained how their campaign had brought together Iraqi women from different backgrounds who shared a common goal of advocating for the removal of Saddam. Now they are seeking to engage with women inside Iraq to learn about their needs and explore how they can help.

Safia al-Souhail reviewed how Iraqi women of all ethnic and religious backgrounds shared a legacy of oppression under Saddam. Iraqi women should work together to ensure that they are protected from oppression in the new Iraq, by establishing democratic rule based on liberty and the rule of law.

Rend al-Rahim emphasized the importance of



women's involvement in Iraq's political, social and economic reconstruction from day one. Iraqi women must seize this chance to have control over their lives and the laws that govern them and their families.

Ala Talabani referred to the "Voice of Women of Iraq" conference that took place in Bagdad on July 9<sup>th</sup> as a first step in engaging Iraqi women in the country's reconstruction. This conference now aimed to focus more specifically on the aspirations of the women of South-Central region, while enabling them to interact with women from other parts of Iraq. She introduced the visiting delegations from Kurdistan and Basra.

### **Overview of the Global Women's Movement:**

*Leslie Abdallah – British women's rights activist now working in Iraq.*

Leslie Abdela gave an overview of how women throughout the world have endured various forms of oppression, and how through democratic reforms and activism they have been able to achieve more freedom and equality. She provided examples of equal rights legislation that resulted from women's activism and political participation.

### **Workshop: Women's Goals in the New Iraq**

The delegates were asked to identify their primary aspirations in the new Iraq. They were then divided into smaller working groups that explored in more depth the issues they faced in fulfilling these aspirations, and identified specific actions that could help them address these issues, including what they wanted from the new Iraqi government and what women could pursue independently. Their suggestions are summarized further in this report.

## DAY 2: WOMEN'S RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

### Presentations

Each working group presented the ideas they discussed on the prior day.

### Key Concepts of Liberal Democracy and Discussion.

*Rend al-Rahim* – Executive Director of Iraq Foundation.

*Mishkat el-Moumin* – Professor of law at Baghdad University.

*Zainab al-Suwaij* – Host from Women for a Free Iraq; Executive Director of the American Islamic Congress.

Rend al-Rahim made the connection between the problems that the women identified during the workshops, and the lack of democracy in Iraq over 35 years of absolute power for the Ba'ath party. If women want government to be responsive to their needs, they will need institutions that ensure that their leaders are representative and accountable, and they must have the freedom to voice their opinions and organize themselves.

Mishkat el-Moumin explained the role of a Constitution in guaranteeing women's rights by making all citizens equal before the law, and establishing protections for the freedoms mentioned by Rend al-Rahim.

Zainab al-Suwaij triggered an animated debate about the role of Islam in the new Iraq when she described concept of separation of religion and state. Some women interpreted this to mean that religious women and men should not be allowed to participate in politics, and others feared that it meant the imposition of secularism as occurred in Turkey and Tunisia (where women were forbidden from covering their hair in public office).



*Mishat el-Moumin and delegate from Najaf.*

A number of the conservative delegates insisted that Islam should be the official religion of Iraq, arguing that Islam is tolerant of other religions. But others raised the question of how non-Muslims could be sure their rights were protected. A debate ensued over whether democracy required specific protections for minorities, or simply consisted of majority rule.

## **Workshop**

### **What Women Want from the New Iraqi Government.**

Each provincial delegation was asked to prioritize what they needed from the new Iraqi government to ensure that their rights are secured and enable them to overcome the obstacles they face in being full participants in Iraqi society. These results were then reviewed by all the delegates together in order to come up with the four recommendations that were presented to Ambassador Bremer on the last day.

## **DAY 3: ESTABLISHING WOMEN'S CENTERS**

### **Morning Fieldtrip to the Babylon Ruins.**

### **Keynote Speaker on the Kurdish Women's Movement.**

*Runak Rauf - Founder of the Women's Information and Culture Center in Sulaymaniyah and prominent Kurdish women's rights advocate.*

Runak Rauf noted that this was an historical occasion for Arab women from the heartland and Kurdish women to meet in a free Iraq. She expressed her hopes that further exchanges would occur between women from different parts of Iraq. They needed to hear each other's stories of persecution under Saddam Hussein, and overcome the policies of division that characterized his rule. She acknowledged that there were differences in opinion between Iraq women (she was alluding to heated exchanges that had occurred over the course of the conference between the women over issues such as whether

women should cover their hair, and whether the Iraqi National Women's day should be on the birthday of Fatima Zahra, the daughter of prophet Mohammad). Kurdish women were not here to impose their views, but rather to share the lessons they had learned in building women's centers and organizations in the Kurdish self-governed areas outside of Saddam's control. She hoped their experiences might benefit the women of South-Central Iraq. She received a standing ovation.



*Ronak Rauf and Tanya Gilly at Babylon ruins*

### **Presentation by Women for Women.**

Representative from Women for Women, a DC-based non-governmental organization, described the job training programs they will provide in the women's centers that CPA-South Central is establishing in each province.

### **Workshop: Creating Action Plans for the Women's Centers.**

Kurdish women who run women's centers were assigned to each provincial delegation to discuss their next steps in establishing the new women's centers – from establishing their organizational structures, to seeking sources of funding and the types of programs they would establish to provide including job skills training, women's rights and democracy education, and shelters for abused women.

### **Evening: Visit to Hilla's New Women's Center.**

## DAY 4: ELECTIONS

### Women's Participation in Elections

*Ala Talabani – Conference Chair*

*Maryam Montague – Elections Coordinator for the National Democratic Institute in Morocco*

Ala Talabani called on Iraqi women to focus their efforts on the upcoming elections by enlisting Iraqi women to vote, seeking consensus on candidates, and forging alliances to campaign for those candidates. If not seized upon now, this chance to elect candidates who can represent their needs may not come again for decades.

Maryam Montague described the of elections in a democracy and the elements needed for them to be free (e.g.; free media, freedom of association); what needs to happen in Iraq before elections can take place (e.g.; census) and the role of political parties.

### Experiences of Women who have Run for Office

*Fardous al-Masri. – Jordanian parliamentary candidate.*

*Liza Nissan Hido – Baghdad Advisory Councilmember.*

### Closing Remarks

*Dr. Condoleezza Rice*

*Ambassador Paul Bremer*

### CPA South Central Activities to Empower Women

One of CPA South Central's primary programs is assisting in the establishment of a women's center in each province. Through these centers, local women's groups will offer job skills training and educational programs for women, to include education on women's rights and democracy. These centers will also serve as an organizational hub for women's groups interested in running women for local and national office. In addition, CPA South Central has helped to organize and supply funds for two women's conferences, both of which involved issues pertaining to women's rights, democracy and the political agenda for women in Iraq. CPA has also organized and funded a series of democracy and constitutional law workshops for women and human rights groups in South Central Iraq.

## WOMEN'S ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEW IRAQ

During their workout session, the participants covered a wide range of issues that they want to see addressed in the new Iraq. Their specific wish-lists for the new Iraq and recommendations are summarized below.

### **Governance and Constitution**

There was a consensus that the new Iraqi constitution should be based on equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, without any distinctions by "gender, religion, sect or color." There is a great concern that the kind of economic discrimination and ethnic cleansing campaigns that Saddam instituted throughout his rule be prevented in the new Iraq:

- Racial, tribal, ethnic, sect-based discrimination should be eliminated in all sectors of Iraqi society.
- Arabs and Kurds, Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrian, and other minorities should be treated equally in accordance with impartial democratic proceedings.
- Resources and funds should be distributed to all segments of population equally; there should be no preferences for any particular gender, race or creed.

"Religious and ideological freedom" and freedom of expression, were specifically identified as critical liberties that should be guaranteed in the new constitution:

- The new government should be established on a democratic, pluralistic, federal basis that respects minority ethnic groups and communities, including the rights and rituals of non-Muslim minorities.
- The constitution should guarantee respect for one other's opinion as basis for dialogue and discussion; it should rely on principle of religious freedom and freedom of opinion, as long as it does not conflict with the freedom of others.

At the same time, many of the women insisted that Islam and Shari'a (Islamic law) play a prominent role in the constitution, arguing that "Islam is a religion that does not contradict democratic principles and that does not impose itself on other religions." They did not delve into how to resolve situations where Islamic law might contradict principles of equal rights (for example, when some clerics issue fatwas against women serving as judges).

Women should be included in the Constitutional Committee, which should be elected by Iraqis. The women also pointed out the critical importance of civic campaigns to educate people about democracy:



- The media must be used to teach people about the role of a constitution, the process for writing it and the most important principles that are needed for a good constitution.
- High schools, factories, cultural institutions, and government centers should feature regular lectures on the rights and responsibilities of citizens before the law, the principles of democracy and elections.

## **Legal Reform and Protections for Women's Rights**

The women called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women on the basis of gender, and cited specific examples of legal reforms they wanted to introduce to protect women's rights:

- Women should be able to pass on their citizenship to their children.
- The institution of "muhram" (a woman requiring a male travel companion and guardian) should be abolished.



- Women should receive equal pay and advancement for the same work as men - without distinction by race, creed, or ethnic group.
- Women should enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as men, including scholarships abroad, employee benefits, and medical leaves.
- The minimum age for a women to marry should be 18 years old.

The participants called for protections against all forms of oppression of women in the home as well as the workplace, such as beatings, murder threats and language intended to harass and intimidate women.

The delegation from Basra was particularly vocal and concerned about eliminating tribal practices in which women are considered the property of the tribe, and tribal leaders make decisions about who the women marry and divorce without their consent.

### **Increasing Women's Political Participation**

The women debated the extent to which they should resort to affirmative action, as some women argued that quotas and other affirmative action measures contradicted the goals of a gender-blind society. Even so, they collectively agreed that there should be quotas for the representation of women in the parliament and municipal councils at a percentage rate of no less than 35%.

The participants also suggested that various institutions be created to ensure that national and local governments are accountable to women, including:

- A higher council for women in the new Iraqi government to handle women's issues at all levels of Iraqi society.
- Special committees in all government centers and ministries to track the status of women and ensure that women's rights are respected.



*Zainab al-Suwaij and women from Basra.*

At the same time, women need to take the initiative as well by creating women's organizations, groups, and centers outside of government to advocate and run programs for women.

Other specific recommendations for increasing the political participation of women included:

- A comprehensive media campaign around elections, to increase awareness of female candidates.
- Training and opportunities for women to gain legal and diplomatic experience, and thus obtain higher positions in government and end the monopoly of men in those areas.
- Access for women to courses and higher education abroad (on equal par with men).

### **Economic Empowerment of Women:**

Programs to promote women's financial independence featured prominently on the women's wish list. "Employment and integration in society reinforce the self-confidence of women and faith in their abilities."

They identified an important role for women's centers to provide training in a "craft or a vocation that would enable them to enhance their financial situation," such as:

- English language and computer training courses;
- Sewing, knitting, and embroidery, as well as handcrafts like ceramics;
- Sweets and pastry-making, and pickling.

The women should be encouraged to form cooperative markets to sell their products and thereby fund their women centers. Many women understood that financial self-sufficiency was also an important goal for the women's centers so that they wouldn't be dependent on government funding.

## **WHAT WOMEN WANT FROM THE NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT RESULTS OF WORKSHOPS BY DELEGATION**

### **Diwaniyah**

- Legal reform in the areas of marriage, divorce, alimony/child support and custody in accordance with principles of justice and fairness for women and men.
- The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women on the basis of their gender.
- Equal opportunity for women to reach high-level positions in all three branches of government - judiciary, legislative and executive.

### **Hilla:**

- Funding for women's centers, professional organizations and labor unions to promote women in civil society.
- Social security coverage for women for unemployment, disability and old age.
- Women's participation in the formulation of the new constitution, for if women will be subject to its laws then it is only fair that they participate in writing it.

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**Kerbala:**

- An increased role for women in municipal councils.
- Pre- and post-natal healthcare programs for mothers and children.
- The inclusion of human rights and civic education in the curriculum for most levels of schooling.

**Kut:**

- Equal rights for men and women before the law and the courts.
- Affirmative action policies for women with quotas of no less than 35% of women in the parliament and municipal councils.
- A woman's right to grant her nationality to her children if she is not married to an Iraqi citizen.

**Najaf:**

- Sharia (Islamic law) as a basis for the Constitution
- Programs to empower women economically, such as credit /loans and longer repayment periods.
- Compulsory education at least until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, for girls as well as boys.

*continued on page 19*

Other recommendations were more general and hard to implement, such as calls to eliminate men's unemployment "which places a burden on wives;" or to improve the "general economic situation and increase women's income."

## **Education and Civic Information Campaigns**

The participants called for the institution of compulsory education, at least until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, especially for girls.

The women emphasized the critical need for educational campaigns to promote not only women's issues, but also democracy and civic education:

- The educational curricula should be changed for most educational levels to include principles of human rights and civic society.

Deep cultural changes are still required to truly change society and liberate women:

- Men must be educated to inform them of their rights and responsibilities, and also of women's rights and duties, especially in the context of the home.
- "Awareness" and educational courses and lectures should be conducted in places of men's employment, and even in the mosque, during the Friday sermon.;
- Specific family and social programs on radio and television should address family rearing and parenting.

## **Social Programs for Women**

The participants' main requests from the government were in the areas of health and childcare, including:

- The distribution of health information to rural women, either through television or town and village forums, focusing especially on contagious diseases, chronic disorders, the dangers of early marriage and motherhood, as well as lectures about child rearing, sexual health and family planning.
- Access to day care centers and kindergartens near places of employment to assist working moms.

- Public transportation from home to work.
- Nursing homes for seniors; centers for orphans.
- The rapid return of street children to schools.
- The restoration of safety and security.

The participants also looked t women's organizations to address issues such as:

- Sheltering victims of assault or abuse.
- Housing homeless widows to prevent them from peddling or engaging in prostitution.
- Providing leadership training

They hoped that linkages could be created between women of different areas of Iraq, through exchanges, visits and conferences, to share experiences and perspectives. They especially called for opportunities to visit the Kurdish areas and benefit from the experiences of Kurdish women working on similar issues over the past decade.

### **Addressing the legacy of Saddam**

The participants called for a number of measures to compensate the victims of Saddam's policies and correct these policies where possible:

- The allocation of a budget in the future government budget to restitute the women affected by the policies of the previous regime.
- Efforts to re-employ Iraqis who were fired by the regime from their jobs because of their religious, secular, or political affiliation
- Programs to assist students who were expelled from school because of their ideological, ethnic or political affiliation to resume their studies.
- Purging of ministries, government centers, and decision-making positions and institutions from remaining Ba'athists.

*Kurdish journalist Shereen Gharoof with a conference participant.*



*continued from page 18*

### **Basra (visiting delegation)**

- A constitutional decree eliminating tribal practices adhered to in some parts of central and southern Iraq in which girls are married by the tribal heads without their consent as a form of compensation to resolve tribal disputes.
- Legal reform to modify laws that are prejudiced against women.
- Equal opportunities for women in the workforce and in government, so they can compete with men on the basis of their qualifications, education and performance.

## ABOUT THE CONFERENCE HOSTS

**Women for a Free Iraq** is a group of women who came together in February 2003 to speak up about the suffering of Iraqis under Saddam's brutal rule, and rally support for the liberation of Iraq. Today they continue to advocate on behalf of a free, pluralistic Iraq that is based on equal rights, the rule of law and representative democracy. They are supported by various Iraqi-American organizations. [www.womenforiraq.org](http://www.womenforiraq.org).

**The Iraq Foundation** is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Washington D.C. with offices in Iraq that is working for democracy and human rights in Iraq, and for a better international understanding of Iraq's potential as a contributor to political stability and economic progress in the Middle East. [www.iraqfoundation.org](http://www.iraqfoundation.org).

**The American Islamic Congress** is an organization dedicated to building interfaith and interethnic understanding, in the belief that American Muslims should take the lead in fostering tolerance, respect for human rights, and social justice. It has offices in Boson and Basra and is actively engaged in reconstruction projects in Iraq. [www.aicongress.org](http://www.aicongress.org).

**The Foundation for the Defense of Democracies** is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. that conducts research and education on the war on terrorism, and promotes liberal democracy in the Middle-East. It is one of the supporters of the Women for a Free Iraq campaign. [www.defenddemocracy.org](http://www.defenddemocracy.org).