

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms. Yanar Mohammad
UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am here today as the co-founder and President of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). On behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security,¹ as we reflect on the 15th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000), I implore the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the entire international community, to take action on implementing its women, peace and security commitments.

Much of what Madame Julienne Lusenge has said is applicable to my country, Iraq, and to neighboring Syria. These situations illustrate why peace will never be established while governments fail to implement Resolution 1325 (2000) and consider the rights and concerns of women.

As the world's attention is on ISIS, let us remember that ISIS arose from ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, in which the rights of women, girls, LGBT persons and other marginalized groups were already degraded, leaving them far more vulnerable to abuse by ISIS and other combatants. This violence has helped produce the largest wave of refugees in modern history.

To understand the crisis for Iraqi women today, you cannot ignore what has happened beginning in 2003. A government was formed as a result of politics of division based on sect, ethnicity and gender. This government failed to uphold basic rule of law, allowing extremists to take up positions of power. Ten years ago, Iraqi women spoke to the Security Council about the situation for women. What would Iraq look like if you had heeded those calls then and promoted an inclusive process in which women and minority groups were fully engaged?

The situation which we now have in Iraq is the twin hallmarks of what did eventuate - the subjugation of women and the disenfranchisement of minority groups. Indeed, instead of building a unified democracy, those empowered by the occupation designed the state and the new constitution to guarantee their rule. Speaking in the name of religion, these politicians denied Iraqi women their rights—as citizens and as political leaders who could truly represent women.

Women's rights were hijacked by articles of the constitution which guaranteed the interests of religious and ethnic groups at the expense of human rights, making Iraqi women vulnerable to Sharia law. Since then, Iraqi women have experienced unprecedented disempowerment and violence. In fact, within a decade, a century of women's struggles for better social and legal status was halted by the creation of a state which claims to be democratic but marginalizes entire portions of its population in policy and practice.

It was only a matter of time before such a government began marginalizing minority groups, most notably the Sunnis of western Iraq. Building a state on a corrupt foundation subjected millions to poverty and hunger in a climate of sectarian hatred. These are the politics that paved the way for the creation of ISIS and the enslavement of Iraqi women for the first time in our modern history.

¹ The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is comprised of: Amnesty International; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Femmes Africa Solidarité; Global Justice Center; Human Rights Watch; International Rescue Committee; The Institute for Inclusive Security; MADRE; Refugees International; Open Society Foundations; Oxfam International; Women's Action for New Directions; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; and Women's Refugee Commission.

When I speak about the enslavement of women, I am speaking of the countless women being trafficked, in both ISIS and government controlled areas. For example, over 3,000 Yazidi women and other minorities were enslaved by ISIS fighters. We at the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq have documented the execution of over 150 women in one area controlled by ISIS, because they refused to obey the so-called "Islamic State."

In the absence of government-sponsored services, local women's groups meet the needs of those most vulnerable to the conflict. We are at the forefront of providing aid and services in places unreachable by international aid organizations. Yet we remain vastly underrepresented in our efforts to prevent and address conflict and violent extremism. Our rights are not protected, let alone promoted.

ISIS' use of sexual and gender-based violence has been discussed at length in this chamber. Yet, civil society efforts which seek to combat this violence are stifled. Iraqi authorities do not allow women's organizations to provide shelter to the thousands of women fleeing conflict-related violence, and independent radio stations that promote peace across sectarian divides, dispel misogyny and combat homophobia have been shut down.

Discriminatory laws and policies prevent women who are fleeing armed conflict, honor crimes, trafficking, abductions, sexual and gender based violence, or forced marriage from obtaining legal identification without a male family member. Perpetrators of honor killings receive mitigated sentences, if they are punished at all. Reforming these laws now will build more equitable and inclusive foundations for the long term, and such reforms must also be pursued in times of peace. Without these reforms, discriminatory practices and social norms, including the denial of services and stigmatization of rape survivors, become exacerbated in times of conflict.

Research demonstrates that women's meaningful participation improves peacebuilding and sustains efforts to counter extremism. The inclusion of Syrian women in the Geneva Peace Process is therefore critical—not only to safeguard women's human rights but also to produce an accord that will prevent a resurgence of violent extremism in the region.

With support for ISIS and other violent extremist groups being voiced by individuals from the Philippines to Yemen and from Europe to West Africa, extremism is not an Iraqi or Syrian problem: lessons from our region must be applied globally.

Together we have the tools, evidence and resources to implement strategies for inclusive and lasting peace. The full and holistic implementation of Resolution 1325 and international human rights standards provide a comprehensive roadmap for the prevention of armed conflict and the integration of gender equality across all peace and security actions. What is primarily lacking is the political will. I urge you to act now to:

- Condemn all forms of violence against civilians on all sides of the conflict.
- Remove barriers in law and practice to NGOs' ability to provide vital services, including shelters.
- Increase support and protection for women's organizations and women's human rights defenders.
- Call on Iraq, and all other Member States, to fully implement and fund its National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 in consultation with civil society.
- Prosecute those responsible for violations that may amount to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence. We are documenting these abuses and their perpetrators, and will be ready for that day.

I urge the UN Security Council and the entire international community, to take action on its commitments. We cannot wait another 15 years for the women, peace and security agenda to be implemented.

Thank you.