



Appeal from Iraqi women on the 18th anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325

The Iraqi Women's Network¹ and the High Council for Women's Affairs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq² express their deep concern and condemnation of the increase in violent crimes against women in Iraq. Over the past two months, four high-profile women, known for their public presence and civic activism, have been killed, including two of the most prominent cosmetic experts in Baghdad - Dr. Rafiq Yasiri and Ms. Rasha al-Hassan - who died one week apart in the second half of August under mysterious circumstances. An official at the Ministry of Interior declared Dr Rafiq al-Yasiri as having died of a medication overdose, while a spokesperson of the Ministry of Health said Rasha al-Hassan had suffocated to death!

On the 26th of September, street surveillance cameras in the city of Basra recorded the assassination of civil activist Su'ad al-Ali, president of Al-Wed for Human Rights, and a prominent figure who played central role in demonstrations in Basra against the pollution of drinking water, poor living conditions and widespread corruption.

In fact, there is a tendency to classify such crimes against women as honor killings until calls for investigation stop, as usually happens when such crimes are committed against women. Even though police investigations in Basra have not yet been concluded, a police representative has already allegedly reported that the victim's ex-husband was behind the assassination, an accusation denied by the ex-husband's family.

Two days later, on 28th of September, model and former Miss Iraq contestant, Tara Fares, was killed by three bullets while driving in the streets of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. The incident was captured by cameras on the street. The 22-year-old Tara Fares was a well-known figure in her field in Iraq and her Instagram account boasts nearly three million followers.

The common denominator among these victims is clear. Each of them worked to enhance the role of Iraqi women in public and civic life through managing successful economic projects, supporting popular protest movements, and actively participating on social media to freely and courageously share their personal ideas and aspirations.

These crimes have raised widespread concern among young women, especially women activists. Indeed, many have received death threats over the phone and on social media, stating "it's your turn". This caused many activists to flee their cities or even the country all together, cease all their activities, and even close their personal social media accounts. Civil society organizations and feminist activists similarly considered these crimes against public figures as a threatening message aimed at depriving all women of their rights to life, security, freedom and personal privacy enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution. Additionally, this can be seen as an attempt by extremist and oppressive groups to hinder and stop social movements that emerged after the defeat of Daesh.

Despite statements by senior officials in the Iraqi government promising to follow up these crimes and to identify and hold perpetrators to account, the incidents have negatively impacted public opinion regarding the weakness of security institutions and the proliferation of illegal weapons outside the control of the state. Some officials have implied knowing who Tara Fares' murderer was, however it has not been made public yet, which has added to feelings of public distrust of government protection.

¹ A women's group founded in 2004 and including more than 100 organizations and women's groups from all over Iraq

² An official institution of the Kurdish Government



Over the past 15 year, delays in investigations, fear of impunity and the inability of investigators to identify perpetrators have been common feature of the results of the investigation of such crimes, in particular cases of violence against women.

We in the Iraqi Women's Network and the High Council for Women's Affairs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, condemn these acts of violence against women in our country as coward terrorist acts aimed at reducing women's role in building stability, security, peace and justice. At the same time, we commend the initiative of international women's organizations in solidarity with Iraqi women here at the United Nations in New York in conjunction with the commemoration of the eighteenth anniversary of Resolution 1325.

We call all women around the world and the international community to pressure the Iraqi government to:

- Reach transparent results of the investigation of these crimes, prosecute the perpetrators and prevent impunity.
- Provide the necessary protection and support for women victims of violence and extremism, and put forward reforms that include developing the skills of security and judicial officers to combat gender-based violence.
- Strengthen efforts to create a safe environment for women, and to enhance their participation in public life and in the development process.
- Develop women's participation in conflict resolution, negotiations and decision-making positions, and strengthen their role in confidence-building measures, national reconciliation and community cohesion, and in achieving security, peace and justice.

In international feminist solidarity,

The Iraqi Women Network and the High Council for Women's Affairs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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