

Stop harassments against women's activists in Iraq/Kurdistan!

Open letter to the Iraqi and Kurdish presidents Mr Barzani and Mr Talabani.

The women's activist in Iraq/Kurdistan today are massively threatened and harassed and targets for a violent attack in their work for Women's Rights in Iraq/Kurdistan. It happens by rumour spread by the speeches in the Friday prayers in the mosques. The religious leaders are back-talking them openly and mention them by names. An example of this in a speech can be like this: " If you listen to the woman(the woman activist) named XX you will die"

We see this as a crime against freedom of speech and we demand the Kurdish government to do its utmost to stop the rumour-spreading in the mosques which contradicts women's rights in Iraq/Kurdistan. Further we want the Minister of the Ministry for Religious Questions (Awkaf) to make a policy of ethical rules of what you are allowed to speak about in the Friday prayers. It means that the religious leaders are obliged to follow the UN conventions of Human Rights and in particular Women's Rights.

Recently a well known author was put into court and sentenced for publishing a picture of a naked woman in his book. The mullahs started a debate about the case and how inappropriate it was and they also succeeded to involve the Ministry of Religious Questions/Awkaf.

We also know that the rights to demonstrate in the streets have been limited and sometimes even been sabotaged by the authorities. This is also a threat against freedom to speech

The mullahs should not be allowed to censorship the artistic performances of any kind such as art, literature, media and enlightenment and the ministry of Religious Questions /Awkaf shall have sovereignty in these questions

When the mullahs independently go out and declare in their own interests, the President Mr Masoud Barzani have in fact have condemned their actions, BUT nothing more have been done to stop their activities and they have not been punished in any way for their behaviour. On the contrary, the women's movement and some front figures, famous women's activists, have been targets for threats and censorship. The government has a particular responsibility for women's rights. The KRG, the Kurdish government must protect organisations and individual members in them if they are threatened.

KRG must make a plan of action to make this protection a reality. An action plan for preventive

work must also be put in place to change attitudes and prejudices in society to make an end to harassments and threats.

It is obvious that NGO:s in general and shelters in particular are working under unacceptable conditions and openly rejected. Rumour-spreading about the shelters for example such as "they encourage women to prostitution", is prevalent.

Threats and gossiping about shelters shall stop immediately and the crimes shall be punished and the perpetrators put before court. The shelters shall be specifically protected by the law and the government.

During the last three years several proposals against violence against women have been put into decisions. Still the signatures for decision making and legislation are missing. The remittance them by the motivation; the word gender is used and that they need a definition of the word. The mullahs have through Internet spread that gender means that the women´s movement promote homosexual marriages.

The law proposal about action against violence against women must be signed immediately and put into action, and the government shall also accept the international definition of the word gender which has been internationally accepted since a long time. The mullahs prejudices and unacknowledged attitude concerning these matters must be rejected by theses actions and by legislation.

After the elections 2009 the government decided to expand the women´s Ministry and replace it by a women´s committee. Still we have not seen such in action, more than a year after the election. The women have put a lot of trust and hope in this committee, they have put up strategies and proposals so women´s right can be reality in Iraq/Kurdistan. We can now see how women´s rights again are ignored. Our opinion is that the committee for women´s and children´s rights are put into work and action directly, and that Iraq/Kurdistan decisively follow and work with CEDAW, UN Women´s Convention.

Legislation about violence against women is needed and the perpetrators shall be sentenced and

punished by law.

The statement above will be transferred to decision makers in the KRG as well as in the Swedish government and will have support from a large number of women's activist organisations in Sweden and abroad in solidarity with the women's movement and human rights activists in Iraq/Kurdistan.

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7. Bayan Nasih ,social worker and women's rights activist
8. Pakiz Mostaffa, human rights activist
8. Farideh Razai Women's Voice
9. Bahareh Mohammadi Andersson, sociologist, women's rights activist, board member Femcenter, public coordinator against violence against women
10. Rebecca Hybbinette, women's rights activist
11. Lena Steinholtz Ekecrantz, PhD in Health and Society, board member of Women for peace
12. Lika Nadaraia, PhD in medical Psychology; President of Caucasian Feminist Initiative, Georgia
13. Judith Martin-Razi, women's rights activist, IFE-EFI France
14. Nina Sankari, women's rights activist, President of IFE-EFI Poland
15. Lilian Halls French, women's rights activist, co President of IFE-EFI International
16. Mirjana Kucer, women's rights activist, IFE-EFI Croatia
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18. Kit Larsen Hughes, women's rights activist, board member Network Against Honour Related Violence
19. Shehin Haidary , women's rights activist
20. Ann Margarethe Livh, chair of International Left Forum (VIF)
21. Margareta Olofsson former Social Vice Mayor in Stockholm
22. Gertrud Åström, feminist and women's rights activist, Sweden
23. Seyran Duran, chair of Women's Federation of Kurdistan
24. Maria Rashidi, chair of Women's Right
25. Dalala AbdelGani, Project Manager, Equal but Different