

Equal Rights Now!

Fortnightly paper of the Iraqi women's Rights Coalition

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Editorial Word



Movements for women's Equality are on the rise in Iraq!

After decades of oppression in Iraq and violations of human rights by the Ba'ath regime, women's conditions were appalling. However, it now getting even worse. Iraqi women were the primary victims of the previous regime and are now **also** the primary victims of the post-conflict situation.

The invasion of Iraq lately lead to a lack of safety, and security for people in particular women. The situation is such that women can not leave their houses without being accompanied by men. The presence of the occupying forces, and the most reactionary, nationalist and Islamic parties supported by US/UK governments have created more problems for women in Iraq.

Women are been deprived of the right to work, study, or even to have a social life, just because they are women they are supposed to 'stay at home'. They are vulnerable to attacks and "Fatwas" have been issued by Islamic clerics against women, calling for enforced veiling of them.

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Azar Majedi's Message of

Congratulation To the Founders of Organisation of Women's freedom in Iraq

Yanar Mohammed, Nasek Ahmed, and Nadia Mahmood three well-known Iraqi communists and veteran of women's right struggle, our dear and long time comrades have launched the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Baghdad. We congratulate these brave women and all freedom-loving women and men of Iraq.

In this dark time in Iraq, in the atmosphere of chaos and confusion, which has created a breeding ground for any vulturous tendencies, such as

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Let the Facts speak!

Nadia Mahmood's Speech at Meeting on 19th June 2003 in parliament-London

Dear Friends:

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak to you today; and thank you Indira for organizing this meeting. I am here today to share with you, my deep concern, my anger, and my hope to

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Statement of Founding: Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq – OWFI

Women's freedom is the measure of freedom and humanity in society. Not only in Iraq, where women endure the most severe types of discrimination and injustice, but also in the more developed countries in the world today, the realisation of full equality among women and men still requires continuous struggle and serious and rapid steps.

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Editorial Word

At this moment the situation appears to be very negative. However, now that the establishment of the **Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq** has been announced, there is a new element to take into consideration: Women's voices will be raised, women's demands will be backed and the daily suffering of women will be put under the light. Laws will be questioned, and the

parties' discriminative programmes regarding women will be challenged. Violence against women will be challenged and projects to support women will be set up, with the establishment of the **Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq**, women in Iraq will enter a new era. The fight for equal rights, and the establishment of an egalitarian society will be on the agenda of the whole society.

Yanar Mohammed one of the founders of **Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq** said in her launching speech in Baghdad on 22nd June 2003 that: *History is in the making.* My call to all our readers is: Support women in Iraq - do not feel sorry for them - give them support and solidarity. That is what they need in their challenge to change the grim future being prepared by America. .

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Azar Majedi's message ...

political Islam, at times when the Islamic mafia is terrorizing women into veil and into their houses, at times that women and young girls have been deprived of any sort of security, and the number of rape and murder of women is at a significant rise, at the time the two poles of world terrorism, USA and political Islam are fighting to spread the rule of reaction over Iraqi society, the launching of the organization for the Freedom of women in Iraq is a breeze of freedom, hope and tranquility. The launch of the organization of Women's Freedom is

an important event in current Iraq, in an Iraq trapped by dark forces of reaction. This organization and its leaders are the hope for millions of Iraqi women whose lives are being destroyed by Islam, reactionary tendencies, backwardness and misogyny, women whose aspiration is to achieve freedom to lead a free and independent life, they are the hope of thousands of women who have been forced into confinement of their homes and deprived of independence. They are the hope for hundreds of victims of honourary killings. We in the Iranian organization for liberation of women are fighting in the

same trench with you; we are struggling for common aims and aspirations, for liberation of women and complete equality of the sexes. We together have raised the flag of women's liberation in the region vis a vis the monster of political Islam. We have a formidable and difficult task before us. But we are ready to overcome the obstacles and to raise the flag of freedom and equality in Iraq and Iran. It is an honour to fight alongside comrades like you.

Long live freedom and equality

Azar Majedi

25 June, 2003

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IWRC'S Congratulation ...

Dear, Friends;

Nadia Mahmood, Yanar Mohammed and Nasik Ahmed we would like to send you our message of congratulations, appreciation, and solidarity for the valuable work you have carried out in Iraq by setting up the **Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq**.

Many of the Iraqi political parties - among them Islamic Groups backed by USA and UK governments - have started to impose their rule by attacking Iraqi women's rights.

Other women's groups supported by

UK government have been struggling to get permission to hold their meeting, but Paul Bremer turned down the idea of holding tent meeting in Baghdad. That is because he has already chosen women representatives who will serve USA's interest inside Iraq.

When Iraqi society is being pushed back in to the dark ages and there is a lack of state protection, security, and even a lack of basic human rights, the presence of the occupying forces is leading to the most dangerous times in Iraq's contemporary history.

In such a situation you have courageously launched your organisation, which is a major step towards freedom and equal rights for women. You have also proved that those women who actually want to

improve the disastrous situation of women should follow your example - start to work with the grass roots; tackle the roots of inequality in Iraq and establish a safe and better world for women to live with dignity and as equal human-beings to men.

We would like to offer all our support and solidarity wherever we are. We will be part of this great movement to change this chaotic situation. The existence of our progressive, secular, and humanist movement in Iraq and abroad is a necessary element to the liberation of women from a chain of reactionary customs and Islamic traditions which are the main obstacles to women's freedom.

Houzan Mahmoud

Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition-

London

30/06/03

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Statement of Founding ...

The *Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* considers itself basically an indivisible part of the great, historic, and universal struggle for women's liberation. Women's rights are universal. They do not submit to any divisions based upon country borders, cultures, ethnicities and religions. Furthermore, women's liberation from male chauvinistic shackles in Iraq will have a profound ripple effect on women's status and people's lives in the Middle East. The suffering of women in Iraq during the past eras due to deprivation, lack of rights, and oppression, is one of the most malicious phenomena and bitter fact in the Iraqi society. Women were officially and legally deprived even from the trivial and limited rights and freedoms that the men enjoyed. In addition to starvation and destitution resulting from the economic sanctions and the absence of opportunities for women, women were the first victims of oppressive regimes, especially the fascist Ba'ath regime, and the regressive political changes whether originating from the United States and their destructive wars or the nationalist and Islamist movements in Iraq. Nowadays, the simplest personal freedoms of women are subject to pressure and restriction that may threaten women's right to life. Women are considered second rate citizens and officially dependant on men. In Iraq, we confront male chauvinism and religious backwardness and tribalism that threaten women's humanity and strongly question her presence in all fields.

The freedom of women and their full equality with men will always be a hope and aim for the protesting masses and freedom lovers in Iraq. The marginalization, violence against women, discriminatory laws and misogynist policies were encountered by continuous masses denunciation of contemporary Iraqi society. There is a huge emancipatory and secular force in this society that aims at achieving

freedom and a better life for women. Women's situation needs to be changed as the women in Iraq deserve another kind of life; one that is full of freedom, equality and prosperity. Therefore, the need arises to found the *Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* for the immediate realisation of this human cause.

Our objective is the unconditional freedom of women and full equality among women and men in Iraq. The *Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* thereby struggles to realise the following demands:

- 1-Establishing a humanistic law based upon equality and assurance of broadest liberties for women in addition to the abolition of all discriminatory laws of all kinds.
- 2-Separation of religion from state and education.
- 3-Stopping of all kinds of violence against women and of honour killings and stressing on punishment of the murderers of women.
- 4-Abolition of compulsory veiling, children's veiling and protecting freedom of dress.
- 5-Equal participation among women and men in all social, economical, administrative and political realms and at all levels.
- 6-Abolition of sexual segregation in schools at all stages.

The *Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* strives to attract women's masses outside the dark corners of their houses and to organise their ranks along a struggle that develops the status of women and assures their participation in economic, political and social life. The *Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* calls upon all women, men and groups protesting against the abnormal situation of women to join it's ranks and struggle to strengthen and support the emancipatory and egalitarian movement for a better life for women. **Nasik Ahmad, Yanar Mohammed, Nadia Mahmood, and Independent Women's Organization**
June 2003

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Appeal:

Women in Iraq were denied their rights for the last 35 years, and even now after the regime change, they are about to face the worst. They need to set up women's organisation to defend their rights, advocacy centres, and refuges for protection, and newspapers to raise their awareness. Women in Iraq need your help and support to be able to combat this difficult time they are going through.

Join our coalition, membership is free, be part of us to achieve equal rights for Iraqi women.

Make a donation to the following bank address:

BARCKLAY BANK
Sort Code: 20- 80- 57
Account No: 80 98 15 67
Nadia Mahmood

MECWR

From page1 Let the Facts ...

change women's situation in Iraq.

I do not want to speak about women situation in Saddam's regime; every body knows about the 35 years of bloody dictatorship; the 3 wars, and the 13 years of economic sanctions - it was a real hell! I do not want to speak about the heavy burden women face due the lack of electricity, water, lack of food, and lack of employment opportunities. I do not want to speak about women's contribution in "**Reconstruction**" as described by the UK and US governments.

What I want to share with you today is that:

After 70 days since Saddam's regime collapse, women are starting to whisper to each other, they say "if the situation goes on like this, we will pack up and leave Iraq", "we cannot live in another new Afghanistan or new Iran". Now women are not living in the same circumstances they were under Saddam, - in fact we hear that the situation for women is getting worse! Now, you cannot see women alone in the streets. Women cannot walk with out been guarded by men. 300 raped women have been found just in one hospital alone - that was Al - Yarmook hospital! The news we have received from Iraq says that female secondary school students feel unable to go to schools because of the lack of security, unless families guard them and take them to and from schools like we are doing with our junior pupils. I have been told that in a secondary school in west Baghdad the parents have arranged to have 5 men, fathers or male relatives to guard the school while their daughters are in their classes, to protect the girls from being kidnapped.

Where is the Security?

What are the US occupying forces doing to protect our women?

Is this situation what the UN wanted to see happen in Iraq, when they authorised US occupation? Most dangerously, we are worried about the attack on women's rights by Islamic

groups in the new situation in Iraq: Islamic groups are trying to take advantages of the political Vacuum to impose their policies.

I would like you to listen to these quotes: "Women who don't wear the veil won't be served when they go shopping;" - this is the same instruction as is practiced in North Tehran in Iran!

"Taxis won't pick them up" and "they might have eggs and rotten tomatoes thrown at them".

"I do not consider the difference between Muslim or Christian women, all of them should veiled, but the Punishment of Muslim women is harder". That is what the 31-year-old Sheikh Mohammed Fartusi has said in mosques in Baghdad and other cities in Iraq during the last 2 months. Al-fartusi also said women cannot walk in Al -Kathmai city not veiled, - Just imagine - Al -Kathmai is one of the biggest Shopping Centres in Baghdad! The Islamic groups went to Al -Basra University, to hospitals, to secondary schools, they wrote on the walls "wear veils" or stay at home! Now, our women - that is - women who are defending women's rights in Iraq and exposing the current violations of women's rights through the media, have themselves been threatened. In some mosques, it has been said that 'these women want bring western liberties, which threaten our society'. They said that the "one liberty" we should only consider, is "the freedom to obey God's instruction". When we speak about all these dangerous threats to women, some argue 'why do you criticize? Is it not now better than in Saddam's time?' - they want us to remain silent. Is it right that we should not to expect any thing, and accept all that is going on? We strongly believes that continuation of occupation on the one hand, and the full support of the occupation forces for the heads of tribes, religious leaders, ethnic community leaders, will result in a horrendous state for women. Women were and are the first victims in Saddams regime and now after occupation. To get out of this impasse

we have called in our statements for the immediate withdrawal of the U.S. and British troops for an end to the occupation. We called for the intervention of the UN to create a safe environment for people to be able to choose their representatives to supervise the election process. But we were so disappointed with the resolution 1483, where the UN decided to step to one side and let things going on with out their influence. While we were discussing resolution 1325, we did not know that we were just wasting our time. I hold the US occupation and the UN accountable for the threat those women in Iraq are facing now. We have to stand shoulder to shoulder with Iraqi women. They are starting to stand and organise themselves, they are working to make their voice heard, and change the situation.

You are the people who I could ask to get their support.

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