I am Yanar Mohammed, president of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq. I address you at a moment when Iraqi human rights defenders, including women, are being shot at, tear-gassed and abused for raising their voices in the ongoing demonstrations. Yet women must continue to speak out about the many violations which we suffer from.

Tens of thousands of women have suffered gender-based violence, including rape, trafficking, and honor killings, both under the government and ISIS. After liberating cities from ISIS, women victims were not liberated—they were sent back to their tribes where they were ostracized or even killed. They receive no support or compensation, and there is a lack of accountability for ISIS’ sexual and gender-based crimes. OWFI alone documented more than a thousand reports of ISIS SGBV crimes, and UNITAD has requested our documentation.

Thousands who fled such crimes have nowhere to go. Victims must receive a judge’s order to enter the scant government shelter that exists, putting women at risk. Our organization shelters women at the risk of patriarchal violence, trafficking, and forced marriage without conditions that defeat the purpose of protection, while security forces accuse us of kidnapping women, or even running brothels. The pending draft family protection law, if passed, would allow NGOs to safely shelter all those in need of protection.

While the constitution prohibits slavery, no penal code provisions punish it, and victims receive no compensation. The government also turns a blind eye to religious institutions facilitating temporary and early marriage of girls as young as twelve.

Many women victims lack identification papers. Government policies deny women identification papers unless their male relatives support the process, which is impossible for many. Abused and trafficked women who left their homes with nothing are stateless. They can’t get employment, health care, or even register their children in school.

One particularly marginalized group in Iraq is Afro-descendant women. That their children are referred to by the insulting term “slaves” at school illustrates the widespread discrimination they face. They lack adequate access to incomes, education, and participation in public life.

We encourage the Committee to recommend the Iraqi Government:

Pass the draft family protection law with an amendment allowing NGOs to provide shelter for all vulnerable groups.

Eliminate the penal code provisions that give lesser sentences for honor crimes.

Pass a law that prohibits enslavement and includes compensation for victims.

In line with the CERD’s 2015 recommendations, pass the draft Law on the Protection of the Rights of Religious and Ethnic Minority Groups, and the draft Law on the Protection of Diversity and Prohibition of Discrimination.