April 20, 2016

The UN Security Council
Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security
Via Email

Dear Members of the Expert Group,

In April 2016, over a dozen Iraqi women’s organizations from Baghdad, Samarra, Tikrit, Al Najaf, Basra, Qadissiya, Salahaddin Diwaniya, as well as the Kurdistan region, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk, and representatives from the Yezidi community came together in Erbil, Iraq for a convening entitled, Strategies for Change. The Strategies for Change Conference series provides an open and safe forum for women working in conflict, humanitarian disaster, and confronting violence and extremism. Convenings are designed to strengthen in-country collaborations between civil society organizations, crossing geographical and political divides for a ground-up approach to movement building.

Over two days participants worked together to share and discuss their challenges, best practices and practical recommendations for the Government of Iraq and the international community to better-inform policy decisions that affect their work and lives. As the facilitators of this workshop we are writing to provide you with the recommendations that were generated from this convening to inform the UN Security Council’s upcoming expert group review of women, peace and security concerns in Iraq. Recommendations address four priority areas: implementation of law and policy, supportive services, justice and security, and the mobilization of civil society. All of the recommendations are below. The priority recommendations are as follows:

1. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs should issue a formal statement clarifying the shelter policy and allow Iraqi NGOs to operate shelters for women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing violence;

2. Increase support to Iraqi organizations meeting immediate needs of women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing conflict-related violence including safe shelter, psychosocial support, medical care, and vocational training;

3. Ensure funding for and implementation of the Iraq National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and; establish and maintain a system for monitoring implementation of the NAP;

4. Expand current documentation efforts on sexual slavery to include other crimes committed against women including crimes against women as human rights defenders and based on gender.
We hope you will find these recommendations informative for your work. In bringing these concerns to your attention, we are lending our support to, and pledging our future assistance with, efforts that the international community may undertake to remedy the plight of women and girls affected by the conflict in Iraq. To this end, we respectfully request that you consider prioritizing these recommendations in your efforts.

Sincerely,

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MADRE

Yanar Mohammed
The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)

Kahnim Latif
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Barbro Svedberg
The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Iraq Civil Society
Recommendations to the Government of Iraq
and the International Community:

A. Law and Policy
• The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs should issue a formal statement clarifying the shelter policy and allow Iraqi NGOs to operate shelters for women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing violence;
• Adequately fund and implement the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law of 2012;
• Ensure funding for and implementation of the Iraq National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and; establish and maintain a system for monitoring implementation of the NAP;
• Establish an independent governmental commission for the promotion and protection of women’s rights to fill the void left by the dissolution of the Ministries of Women’s Affairs and Human Rights;
• Issue a formal statement of commitment by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health to provide resources and compensation to Yezidi survivors of conflict-related violence, including educational and employment opportunities, and access to supportive services;
• Amend the law criminalizing abortion in the Kurdistan region to allow for safe and legal therapeutic abortions for women fleeing conflict-related violence and pregnancy as a result of sexual slavery or rape.

B. Supportive Services
• Increase support to Iraqi organizations meeting immediate needs of women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing conflict-related violence including safe shelter, psychosocial support, medical care, and vocational training;
• Expand access for displaced women to obtain government-issued identification in the absence of male family members beyond the Kurdistan region;
• Raise awareness and facilitate access for rural displaced families to register marriages and births to increase access to schooling and services;
• Provide support for the reconstruction of infrastructure and services in liberated areas to allow for the safe and genuine return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their communities;
• Provide support for the establishment of legal assistance centers within displacement camps and ensure effective referral mechanisms between legal centers and other centers of support;
• Establish community police units in places where there are IDPs gathered, and especially within formal IDP camps;
• Where lacking, ensure the meaningful participation and consultation of IDPs and especially IDP women in the management of camps;
• Build new residential housing complexes to provide long term housing to IDPs who have nowhere to return to;
• Increase support for public education designed to reduce stigma associated with sexual violence and sexual slavery;
• Support the establishment of support centers for Yezidi women that provide comprehensive services including psychosocial support, medical care, and vocational training;
• Support the establishment of locally-run support centers that provide comprehensive services including psychosocial support, medical care, and vocational training for IDPs;
• Increase psycho-social support to Yezidi communities including men and boys;
• Include Yezidi women representatives meaningful participation in the design and implementation strategies for humanitarian policies;
• Provide micro loans to Yezidi survivors to help them rebuild their lives.

C. Justice and Security
• Recognize crimes against Yezidis as a genocide, and ensure victims of these crimes receive adequate justice and compensation;
• Provide direct support to human rights defenders and documenters to ensure they have access to adequate physical and digital security mechanisms and training on these measures in order to best protect themselves and those they serve; and urge the Government of Iraq to provide protection to human rights defenders;
• Expand the capacity building of Iraqi NGOs to engage in legally viable and gender sensitive human rights documentation;
• Expand current documentation efforts on sexual slavery to include other crimes committed against women including crimes against women as human rights defenders and because of their gender;
• Expand documentation efforts to include crimes committed against persons based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity;
• Build the capacity of first responders and tailor supportive services to meet the needs of LGBT persons fleeing conflict-related violence;
• Increase data collection efforts documenting the number of Yezidi women and other Yezidi community members who have been abducted by Da’esh, to facilitate the liberation of these individuals as well as the reunification of families;
• Promote access to justice for women and other vulnerable groups by supporting capacity building and training of judges, lawyers, and security forces on the rights and treatment of survivors of conflict related gender-based violence.

D. Mobilization of Civil Society
• Increase women’s meaningful participation in peace building and reconstruction processes;
• Increase the meaningful civic participation of women including the number of high-level political and governmental posts held by women;
• Provide support for movement building among local Iraqi NGOs and for the establishment and maintenance of NGO networks specializing in support to women and other vulnerable groups;
• Support public education and outreach efforts of Iraqi NGOs working to raise awareness, promote coexistence, and spread messages of peace, tolerance and respect for human rights;
• Include meaningful participation of Yezidi community representatives, and Yezidi women in particular, in domestic and international meetings about their situation;
• Encourage and support public education campaigns that aim to reduce stigma placed on Yezidi survivors, including women who were raped and children born of rape, in order to promote respect and protection for these individuals and to shield them from further human rights violations, including the threat of so-called honor killings;
• Provide support for civil society convenings to facilitate community-based reconciliation and coordination of reintegration services for survivors.
Participating Iraqi Women’s Organizations:
Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)
Women Leadership Institute
Baghdad Women’s Association
Women's Justice Organization
Committee of Labor and Social Affairs
ASUDA
The Women’s Legal Assistance Organization (WOLA)
SAWA Human Rights Organization
AWAN Organization
Women for Progress Organization
*Yezidi Community Representatives

Participating International Women’s Organizations:
MADRE
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
The Sorensen Center at the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law