

Madame President, your Excellencies,

I would like to thank the United Kingdom for providing me with the opportunity to represent the Iraq Cross Sector Task Force on Security Council Resolution 1325 as its Coordinator, at this very important meeting. We are a cross-sector body that has developed the first Iraq National Action Plan on 1325 between 2012-2014 and that has been responsible for its implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. I would like to thank also the Netherlands and Euromed Feminist Initiative for supporting my presence here.

I would like today to draw your attention to how several crises experienced in Iraq have impacted women; how we have addressed this situation through mobilizing State and non-State actors in the NAP 1325 process, and finally to emphasize how much remains to be done and the need of international support and coordination it takes.

From internally displaced people, to returnees and Syrian refugees, figures indicate that up to 8.2 million Iraqis require immediate protection and assistance, most of them women who are denied access to their basic rights and security, lack protection, access to facilities, clean water and sanitation. Still 91% of the camps across Iraq have no women in their management, which prevents their needs from being addressed adequately.

Sexual and gender-based violence continues at alarming rates. Women and girls who have been living in areas under ISIS control have been exposed to the most extreme forms of violence as a way to subjugate the whole community: kidnappings for sexual slavery and exploitation, rape, and forced marriages. Due to the strong patriarchal culture and tradition, victims are forced to bear social stigma and shame, in addition to the assault itself, and continue to be marginalized by their families and community upon their return.

Furthermore, even if a huge work has been done by the women's movement, there are still discriminative laws which impact women's security and the full enjoyment of their rights. Protection services are offered to women, including in refugee camps, mostly through local and international organisations. While organizations do their best with few resources, there is still a huge need for protection and psychosocial services to reach the most vulnerable, in particular women and girls.

The collapse of the social security network has further impacted the social and economic status of women, and made the face of poverty predominantly female. Female heads of households, the poor, the unemployed, widows, and internally displaced, all lack access to financial resources and public social benefits like social security, pensions, and food programming.

Women's security and rights are tightly linked to their participation and role in decision-making. In spite of a 25% quota in the parliament and public institutions, women remain under-represented or absent in decision-making, including in political parties, as there is a general lack of acceptance of the importance of women's role in decision-making. This is due to the weight of tradition, the economic dependence of women on men, unequal share of family responsibilities, the influence of religious extremism on society.

To address the security needs of the most vulnerable women and girls, in 2012, women's civil society organizations and representatives from 23 Ministries and Institutions (15 in Federal Iraq and 8 in Kurdistan), as well as legal experts and MPs, formed the Iraq Cross Sector Task Force that developed the NAP on 1325. In 2014, Iraq became the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to have adopted a NAP on 1325, and now the first country in the region to have reported on the NAP implementation. Iraq is also probably the first country where the

civil society has been structurally included in the whole process, enabling the voices of the diverse women's civil society organizations from across Iraq and Kurdistan region to be heard through the CSTF.

This broad involvement of authorities, together with civil society, to work on women's security agenda, demonstrates a collaborative example and understanding that women can't be left aside, cannot be considered victims only, and that their needs should be addressed in a comprehensive manner: an approach that the NAP has adopted.

What are the urgent security priorities today that we need the Security Council to work on with the Iraqi government?

- I) Social Protection: We need to establish a system to widen women's access to comprehensive specialised services: GBV related services, free psycho-social and legal support services;
- II) Legislation: To ensure protection and enable participation, active work is required for changing and annulling all laws that discriminate against women. A comprehensive law on violence against women is a priority in order to criminalize all forms of violence against women and girls, and end impunity of perpetrators.
- III) Stabilization: The huge efforts on the stabilization in Iraq cannot be achieved without drawing attention to and linking with WPS Agenda, including allocating of stabilization budget and resources to this goal.
- IV) Livelihoods: Women, including those that are refugees, IDPs and in host communities, must have access to empowerment programs and work opportunities, such as vocational trainings, and literacy programs to erase illiteracy, keeping in mind the double burden and social stigma they carry.
- V) Support the participation of women: from high-level political decision making to local governance, in reconciliation and peace building. Opportunities must be provided for national and local women leaders to participate in peace building and facilitate community cohesion.
- VI) Last but not least: This year the Task Force is developing the second NAP 1325 to address these gaps and priorities.

I would like finally to emphasise that Iraq has made a tremendous and unique work on WPS through the Cross Sector Task Force on NAP 1325. However, in this challenging context to respond to the multiple needs of women and support efficiently their equal participation in peace building and society at large, it requires stronger coordination, stronger commitment to women's rights, financial and technical support of UNAMI, the Security Council as well as of broader international community.

We look at the Security Council to strengthen this work and coordination on WPS in Iraq.

Thank You.