

UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

"Violence against Iraqi women continues unabated", says UN expert

GENEVA – "Iraqi women have seen their rights eroded in all areas of life while the world observes from afar," warns the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Yakin Ertürk, on the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November).

"The ongoing conflict, high levels of insecurity, widespread impunity, collapsing economic conditions and rising social conservatism are impacting directly on the daily lives of Iraqi women and placing them under increased vulnerability to all forms of violence within and outside their home", says Ms. Ertürk.

Although too often overlooked, "violence against Iraqi women is committed by numerous actors, such as militia groups, insurgents, Islamic extremists, law enforcement personnel, members of the family as well as the community", laments the UN Special Rapporteur.

Women are victims of rape, sex trafficking, forced and early marriages, murder, and abduction for sectarian or criminal reasons; many are driven or forced into prostitution. Women also fall victims to the disproportionate use of force by members of Iraqi and multi-national forces (MNF-I), including during raids on private homes. To escape the cycle of violence many women turn to suicide, sending a clear message of despair to their society.

"I am also concerned by the increased violence within the family", says Ms. Ertürk. The so-called 'honour killings' appear to be on the rise and are largely committed with impunity. On the rare occasions where perpetrators are arrested and charged, they are given lenient punishments under the Iraqi Penal Code. As a result, women and girls are reluctant to even report sexual attacks for fear of then being ostracized or even killed by their family.

'Honour killings' are among the primary causes of unnatural deaths among women in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq, and a number of reports are also documenting the practice of female genital mutilation. Medical personnel operating in Iraqi Kurdistan and women's rights activists report that incidents of self-immolation are on the increase, with at least one case reported daily and many more remaining either unreported or concealed as accidents.

Iraq, as a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, must protect women from violations by State agents and private actors, whether they are family members or armed groups. The Security Council, in its Resolution 1820 further demands that all parties to an armed conflict cease all acts of sexual violence against civilians, especially women and children.

"I urge the Iraqi government and the international community to prevent women and girls from being the 'soft targets' of violence and the invisible victims of the conflict in Iraq.", concluded the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk.