

# Equal Rights Now!

Fortnightly paper of the Iraqi women's Rights Coalition

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Editorial Board: Houzan Mahmoud and Nadia Mahmood equalrightsnow@hotmail.com



Houzan Mahmoud

***The victims should be punished, and the criminal is set free!***

***This is the fair law of the "liberators"!***

We have seen how America attacked Iraq, destroyed its socio-economic infrastructure, and created a political vacuum, and we have seen how the Islamic fundamental groups have exploited the situation and are terrorizing women, forcing them to wear Hijab. More than ever we are hearing now that they throw acid on women's legs if they are walking in the streets without wearing socks, or if they are not wearing gloves in this burning summer, where the temperature reaches 45 degrees!! *Continue on page 2*

***Yanar Mohammed's Shelter has become a safe heaven for women !***

***Mahmood Ketabchi's Testimony from his visit to Iraq.***

On Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2003 Patricia Ackerman and Jodie Evans, two NYC activists, gave a talk about their recent trip to Iraq. They were part of a 'United for Peace and Justice and Global -

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***Letters to Equal Rights Now***

We are delighted to see that Iraqi women's issues have attracted the attention of many decent people all over the world who express their support. Many people have been interested since we started writing our newspaper in English and circulating it via emails. We have received an enormous number of letters of solidarity, which gave us a huge support, and backing.

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## Editorial Word

Dear Readers:

In this issue of Equal Rights Now! I would like to say a few things. Firstly as the occupation goes on there are more violations of human rights generally, and in particular women's rights, the amount of killing, abduction, and rape is escalating and no one is held responsible. In a country with no mechanisms to protect the inhabitants, women will be the first victims of any violations.

The imposed political parties in the ruling council have a long established agenda of opposing women's liberations. This, together with the agenda of the American administration in Iraq means that we can expect the worst, and women are now living in the most outrageous situation.

We have received letters from many people all over the world, we will publish some letters from our dear readers.

Also we have some news from Iraqi women's rights activists. I have to mention that Human Rights Watch published a report about the women's situation in Iraq titled "Climate of Fear, sexual violence against women in Baghdad"

I hope you will have fruitful reading

## Human Rights Watch Report on Iraqi women

Human Rights Watch July 2003 Vol. 15, No. 7 (E) published a report about women in Baghdad titled "**Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Baghdad**". The 17-page report details cases of sexual violation and abduction of girls in Baghdad from 25<sup>th</sup> May till 20 June 2003. The report indicates the impact this has had in raising fear for women, their access to medical treatment and their access to education. The report tackled the barriers to prosecution in such cases, police failure to investigate, the policing vacuum, barriers to obtaining forensic medical examinations and the legal barriers to justice. You can download a copy of the report from the Human Rights Watch website: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

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## ***The victims should...***

Even little girls are not safe. These groups looted the medicine from hospitals and took them to their mosques so people have to queue at their doors to get an aspirin tablet. They have banned women from education and work.

The USA brought back to force the most reactionary Islamic norms and values, which are highly discriminative against women, the USA has empowered them in the so-called Governing council.

Lack of law and order, lack of state and security has lead this society into the worst situation one could imagine. Women are been abducted, killed and raped on a daily basis but they do not dare to reveal it. If they tell their own families they fear for their lives, because rape is bringing shame to the family's "honour", and in order for the shame to be cleared, the family will kill their own daughter. This is a very primitive notion about women's subordination to men and family rules.

It is very difficult to imagine that a man could kill his own daughter just to please others, or to show them that he is in control and is protecting the "honour" of his family. What kind of values and rules are these in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that allow women to be battered in such brutal way? Yet the victim is the one to be punished in the most inhumane way, after a huge amount of pain both physically, and psychologically and despite the horror of been killed later on by their own family, i.e. their father or brother.

She of course will try to hide it, because if it is revealed she will lose her life, and the criminal is free with out investigation or punishment. In this chaotic situation where there are no proper authorities, and even if they are established they will be treating the matter according to reactionary rules and values, most of the women will prefer not to report to the authorities.

In other countries, raped women will receive some kind of services and the attitude of family and the society is much different compared to the one in Iraq.

Raped women in the West are more able to talk about their problems and seek medical treatment, and counselling, so they are open about it somehow and they can talk about the amount of pain and pressure they have been through. This helps them to at least share these horrors with someone else which could help them to rebuild their lives in some way, but now in Iraq as well as a lack of any services to provide women with treatments and counselling, women's lives are in a greater danger, under threat of being killed by the family.

The attitude of people towards rape is very backward and the reason for that goes back to their attitude towards sex, and the importance of virginity of a girl before marriage. A non-virgin girl will not have a good chance of been wanted by a man for marriage, so therefore the victim will have no respect in society. Basically, raped women and non-virgin girls have no place in society. Previous laws have institutionalised discrimination against women in relation to sex, marriage and divorce and in many other spheres, but the situation for women was not as outrageous as it is now.

Women's liberty and freedom are in great danger in Iraq, they are dying. There is collective rape either by American solders, or by Iraqis in order to take revenge, women are been kidnapped and sold to other neighbouring countries, there is widespread prostitution in Iraq. The question is - who is responsible? Is it the Iraqis themselves who are "satisfied with the freedom and welfare that America brought for them" or is it America and its allies who started a war in 1991 followed by 12 years of sanctions, and who know are occupying the country after destroying it completely and who have imposed a bunch of puppets who could only secure America's interests?

They have left the entire nation with nothing, no electricity and water supply. These are the most basic need of human beings. There are no jobs, and no protection in such a chaos, everyone is doing what they want to, taking revenge, killing, rape, there are assassinations.

There are terror groups such as Islamic groups that are another burden on women and their liberties.

The occupying forces must withdraw from Iraq, and hand over the ruling of Iraq back to the real Iraqis who have organized themselves in different organisations, workers, women, young people, unemployed, etc.

We want to see law restored and the criminal justice system take place on a fair and equal basis. We want to see the health system function as it should be, not closing their doors after noon. We want to see policing going on wherever there is violation of women's rights. They told us that the export of the oil is increasing, they told us how much it would increased in the next 6 months, but they can not say how, and when they will end rape killing and kidnapping women in Iraq. It is beyond their abilities, We secular people across the country are struggling for an equal and egalitarian society to be established in Iraq, and representatives of Iraqi people from their own organizations are the only ones who could manage the society in an equal and fair way.

There is no place for American administration and its engineers for its New World Order.



***Exhibition of photos about the damages of war in Iraq, displayed on the streets of USA by Mahmood Ketabchi, and Jennifer Fasulo***

# Launch of the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq celebrated in Kirkuk

Hundreds of women and men gathered in Al Rehab Hall in Kirkuk to celebrate the foundation of the Organization of Women Freedom in Iraq. A gallery of photographs was displayed showing women's equality and freedom movements and their leaders during the past twelve years. Yanar Mohammed, the co-founder of OWFI and the editor-in-chief of AL Musawat, welcomed the attendees. A film about the activities of the "Women Protection Centre" was screened. The centre saved the lives of tens of women during two years of its operation until it was closed down because of the armed threats of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. In solidarity speech the representative of "Emancipative Women Movement in Kurdistan" expressed her support for the OWFI. The celebration was concluded with the affiliation of forty men and women to OWFI. During the ceremony one woman threw her veil away amid the rapturous applause of the attendees.



**Women's rights activists from IWFO participated in the Unemployed Union's demonstration in Baghdad on the 29/07/2003** photo from German magazine Frankfurter Rundschau

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## Letters to...

In this issue of ERN, we would like to publish some letters we have received recently. Other letters will be published in the next coming issue. We want to say a big thank you for all of your great support.

From Jennifer Fasulo: "My name is Jennifer Fasulo. I am a socialist feminist living in Jersey. I want to tell you first that I have been distributing Yanar's speech and the Equal Rights Now! Newspapers to people in at least five different states: NJ, NY, Philadelphia, Massachusetts and Florida. It has generated enormous interest and

enthusiasm, especially among feminist organizations.

Recently there was a talk given by Patricia Ackerman and Jodie Evans, two NYC activists, on their recent trip to Iraq. They were part of a United for Peace and Justice and Global Exchange delegation to Baghdad who went to set up a Baghdad Watch Center, which will be monitoring the U.S. Occupation and the human rights situation in that country.

Dear: Houzan Mahmoud  
I have just received and read through your newspaper and I would like to send you my thoughts and care for all these you have been going through. As a human being, woman, teacher and mother I feel outrageous for all these and I promise to do my best to support your case. If this is not a problem to you, will you allow me to translate in Greek some of the paper's material and publish it to local newspapers? Please take care!  
Give my best to your associates.  
Cordially-Eva Skoudaropoulou  
English Language teacher  
Florina-Greece

Dear: Houzan Mahmoud,  
This is just to let you know that I support the aims and purposes of the Iraqi women's rights coalition and I will make others aware of your effort as well as finding ways to support them myself.  
Michele Birch-Conery-Canada

To contact the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq and abroad contact:

**Yanar Mohamad:** The editor in-chief of "Al Mosawat" newspaper- email: yanar2002@hotmail.com

**Nasik Ahmad:** One of the founders of the OWFI-Iraq e-mail: naskuk@yahoo.co.uk

**Nadia Mahmood :** Representative of the OWFI abroad: London-UK: nadia64uk@yahoo.com

### 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:**

BARCLAY BANK-UK  
Sort Code: 20- 80- 57  
Account No: 80 98 15 67  
Nadia Mahmood  
MECWR

Dear, friends

I am interested in this. Is there any more documentation about violations of Women's rights suffered under the Ba'ath regime? My understanding was that at least up until the Iran-Iraq war, the conditions of women politically and economically, had improved compared to other countries in the Middle East, for example, Saudi Arabia,

Thank you

Philippa Winkler,  
Instructor

Women's Studies Program,  
Northern Arizona University

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## ***Yanar Mohammed's Shelter...***

Exchange' delegation to Baghdad that went to set up a Baghdad Watch Center, which will be monitoring the U.S occupation and the human rights situation in that country. There were more than 150 people present at the talk.

The stories they told about the conditions in Iraq were horrific. As they described it, things seem to be getting worse every day. There is more than 60% unemployment, and those who work often do not get paid. Lack of safety and security is rampant. American soldiers are always ready to shoot. They are always aiming their guns at people. In addition, in Baghdad alone, there are eight million guns in people's hands. Lack of sufficient food, clean water and electricity are major problems. These were just a few examples. According to the speakers, people say the US is causing these problems or that the US just sits by and lets them occur so they can punish the Iraqi people, humiliate them, and break their will to refuse the US occupation.

Also, the soldiers responded to the American activists with happiness to see them - the activists thought they would get a hostile reaction, but instead the soldiers were hopeful that their work would help them to get out of the country. They also spoke about how women in Iraq are being kidnapped, raped, murdered, and victimized through "honor killings." They spoke about how Iraqi women are being forced to stay home, forced out of their jobs, and forced into wearing the veil. They said they met Yanar and visited her organization and the women's shelter she is running. Her shelter has become a safe haven for many women running away from their abusive and violent homes. They spoke to women in the shelter who said they had nowhere else to go. They had a copy of the women's newspaper El Mosawat (EQUALITY) and were very impressed with the work of the organization.

Yanar's organization was excluded from a women's conference organized by a woman called Margaret Batty. She is the "Gender Advisor" to Paul Bremer, the top US official running Iraq. They hand picked some of their cronies to participate in the conference to talk about the future of women's role in Iraq.

They also spoke about the Union of Unemployed workers in Iraq that has tens of thousands of members. Yanar's organization and UUI are in the same building. The women's organization and the shelter are on the second floor. The UUI has its offices in the first floor. This building used to be a bank. In an article in the London Economist they referred to the bank's takeover as "the appropriation of a bank by the proletariat"! The speakers said that despite how bleak the situation is in Iraq, the women's organizations and the unemployed unions were hopeful signs of people's effort to improve life for Iraqi people. I spoke too, and thanked them for their great work in Iraq, their report, and the support they have give to Iraqi people and their struggle for freedom and equality. They were very happy that I had some literature with me. Anyway it was very nice to be there.

### **Contact Details of IWRC 's**

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***Long Live Freedom and Equality!***