

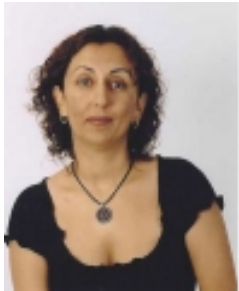
# Equal Rights Now!

Fortnightly Newspaper Of the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition 20//10/2003 No 8

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

## ***A report on Houzan Mahmoud's trip to Greece for seminars on women's rights in Iraq, in the post war period.***

Houzan Mahmoud was invited by the Coalition of the Left, the Movements and Ecology of Greece to participate in the youth festival of this party in both a panel about the attitude of the left, and in a seminar on the violation of women's rights in post war Iraq.



Continue on Page 2

## **Houzan Mahmoud took part in a seminar with Tariq Ali in Birmingham. On Page 3**

**(Anahid) was suspended to a tree and then killed by her own father. On Page 3**

***The Founding Declaration of the Organization for the Defense of Secularism in Iraqi Society – DSIS*** On Page 6

**A Forum Organized by the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq at General Railway Company in Baghdad**

On Page 5

## **Press release**

### **The activities of OWFI in Switzerland:**

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq - Switzerland organization, in co-operation with many left parties and movements in Switzerland, organized a series of sessions and forums for the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq in many Swiss cities. Aso Jabbar, the WCPI cadre and OWFI activist, worked with these parties to organize the OWFI activities from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2003. Continue on Page 4



### **An evening with Yanar Mohammed in London-UK** On Page 5

**Layla Mohammed of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq visits Al Huda residential complex in Baghdad** On Page 2

**An Appeal from: Women's Shelter Center in Iraq!** On Page 4

**Equal Rights Now was widely distributed in the anti occupation demonstration on 27/09/2003 in London**

On Page 5

## **Editorial Word**

### **International solidarity is what women in Iraq need now!**

We have been reflecting on the appalling situation, and news of women in Iraq in the last issues, and we have also stressed the point that our struggle is for achievement of universal rights for women in Iraq, and their recognition as a human being. These are very simple and basic rights. One of the effective ways of achieving it is with the help of many different organizations, and individuals across the world, those who believe in our struggle for liberation of women from all kinds of reactionary rules and values, to achieve equal status in society. If there were not international pressure on the Nigerian government, Amina Lawal would have been stoned to death by now. This particular international campaign did not save one woman's life, but many thousands of women's lives, and not just in Nigeria but wherever these Islamic groups want to ruin women's lives. Many of you will remember the international campaign to save Nawal Al-Sadawi's relationship with her husband, from the Islamic groups who wanted to divorce her forcibly from her husband. So your support and solidarity is making a big difference, and could help us achieve a lot of rights for women Iraq. Through reading some of our activity reports you will come across the level of support and enthusiasms that we have received so far. This has a big impact on empowering us and encourages us to feel that there are others who would fight for the same cause. That is what makes our struggle and life much more beautiful and meaningful.

**Long live international solidarity.**

**Houzan Mahmoud**

From page 1

## ***A report on Houzan Mahmoud's...***

In the first panel on the 26/09/2003, there were in the same panel Professor Kostas Vergopoulos, Professor of Economic from Pantion University, also Nikos Houndis, a member of the political secretariat of the coalition of the left. Houzan spoke about the



attitude of the left in the UK towards the war, and stressed the point that they have allied with Islamic groups, and have provided them with many opportunities for propagating Islam, but they have not created such an environment for the Iraqi left and communists to have their say too. She added that the left in the UK lost the opportunity to become a socialist alternative for power. She also added that the left in Europe should support and strengthen the communist forces in Iraq.

She explained how Islamic groups are another burden in the Iraqi society, they have nothing to do with equality and freedom for people. Some left groups seem to think that Islamic groups are against imperialism and should be supported, which is an entirely wrong decision. Strengthening these groups will just weaken our socialist movements in Iraq. These groups are only seeking to set up an Islamic empire to rule the world, nothing else, and they should not be supported – instead, support and promote communism in Iraq. In the second seminar on the 27/09/2003 Houzan Mahmoud spoke about the appalling condition of women's rights in Iraq, and the open violation of their rights by the Occupying Forces, the so-called Ruling Council, and the Islamic

Groups. They have turned women's life in to a hell. She also spoke about the emergence of the radical, secular and socialist forces within the Iraqi society such as, the Organization of Women's Freedom, the Union of Unemployed, the oil workers trade union, and the councils in Kerkuk. Houzan pointed out that these are the hopes for Iraq's future and that people in the world should strengthen these movements and socialism in Iraq. Above all, the Worker-communist Party of Iraq is behind every secular and radical movement in Iraq, and is trying to organize and mobilize people to establish an egalitarian socialist republic in Iraq where everyone will be treated equally and people could live with freedom. In the seminar there was a Member of Parliament of Greece. He promised that he will be passing a resolution in support of Iraqi women, in the Greek parliament, and will take it to European Parliament. Houzan was interviewed by a few different Greek newspapers about the current political situation in Iraq, the Organization of



Women's Freedom in Iraq, the Union of Unemployed, and other secular forces in Iraq, also about the role of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. On the same night there was a concert in the festival of youth. Houzan and other women from the coalition of the left's Women's Department attended the concert of Mario, the popular Greek singer.

She dedicated her first song to Houzan Mahmoud for fighting for equal rights for women in Iraq, and also to the Iraqi people in solidarity. Houzan went on to the stage to thank Mario for her solidarity and to thank people in Greece for their great solidarity and support with Iraqi people. She also stressed

the point that people came to the street yesterday against the war, and today against the occupation but it is important to support and strengthen the socialist movements in Iraq, to be able to defeat Americas New World Order and end it there.

**Personal thoughts; this trip to Greece will remain as part of my most beautiful memories because of the sense of solidarity, and the endless support of the people in Greece in particular the women's department of the coalition of the left.**

From Page 1

## **Layla Mohammed of the Organization ...**

A delegation of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq led by Layla Mohammed and Iman Lateef visited Al Huda residential complex on September 27. The delegates met with a group of women and discussed their problems in the complex and how to solve them. Layla Mohammed briefed the women about the OWFI, its formation, goals and approaches to tackle women's conditions in Iraq.

Then, she talked about the importance of unity and organization for the cause of women and to defend their rights and freedom. 38 women joined the OWFI. It is worth mentioning that a group of Islamites made an attempt to prevent women from attending the gathering. OWFI's supporters took on the Islamite and forced them to retreat unceremoniously



From Page 1

## Anahid was suspended...

A tribe celebrates the killing of a girl in Baghdad Jadida

Anahid was a teacher and in her mid-twenties. The neighbour's son was in his early twenties. Her father was a solicitor and his father was a judge. She was an educated person with a great personality; and was aware of her rights.

The couple loved each other and decided to get married, but the boy's family didn't accept that their son wanted marry a girl older than him and they refused to ask for her hand from her family. That night there was an execution for the crime of love and happiness.

Anahid's family refused to accept their love because the boy's family didn't come to ask for her hand. For the families it was a relationship between two big tribes, not between two loving people. As Anahid was an educated person and aware of her rights, she didn't want to accept her family's rejection of her happiness. The couple decided to go to Najaf to ask the "Sheikh" of their tribe to come and convince her family to allow them to get married. When her family discovered that they had gone together and that Anahid was alone with him, they became very angry, and reactionary thinking took control of them. They thought that this kind of action let down the reputation of the tribe and it was unacceptable even if the purpose was marriage.

Many male members of Anahid's family, her uncles and their sons gathered in her house, armed and prepared to fight against love and humanity, to participate in "honour killing". She came home and was expecting to begin a new life full of happiness when she was met by the man she loved as her father. He is an

educated man, a solicitor defending human's rights. Her father decided to forget his great profession and reverted to being a reactionary man. He was under pressure from his brothers to get rid of his elder daughter to prove to society that the females of his family are without feelings and that they are obedient human machines. They didn't have any choice in thinking about their future, nor should they disobey social restrictions.

He became a victim of fear, worry and anxiety for a while and hugged his beloved daughter and cried his last cry. He wanted to bid her farewell before the barbarian part of his mind took control of him. The male members of her family came to her and **suspended her from a tree**. Her father was the first person to shoot her, and then all the armed males of the family followed him. Some of them wanted to take revenge for her action, and they used an axe to cut her body to pieces. J.H said to me that whenever they used the axe to tear her, her uncles' wives celebrated the purifying of the family honour, and Anahid's mother and sisters were heard crying. This was a mother obliged to bear the shock of killing her beloved daughter in order to protect their reputation. They used Anahid as an example to all females of their family that this would be the fate of anyone who did not obey them, anyone that dares to brake social restriction. Anahid's family burned the house of her beloved one, and his family arranged for him to leave the country. He is alive while the turned body of Anahid has been thrown in the bin.

Translated by Sazan Salih from 'Equality' Arabic Newspaper of OWFI

**I would like to welcome, and congratulate Aso jabar from Switzerland, and Mustapha Chihabi from Belgium for joining our coalition.**

From Page 1

## Houzan Mahmoud took ...

Houzan was invited by the South Asian Alliance to give a speech about the political situation, and violations of women's rights in Iraq, while Tariq Ali, the historian and film maker, launched his book "Bush in Babylon".



In this seminar Houzan openly spoke about the chaos, and the political vacuum that the war, and the occupying forces have created in Iraq. She explained how the Islamic groups are using this chaos to impose themselves through open intimidation of people and in particular of women, and how America brought these reactionary forces into power in its Ruling Council. She spoke about the role of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq in organizing workers, women, and the youth of Iraq in different organizations, with the most radical agenda, towards the establishment of a socialist republic.

### Appeal:

Women in Iraq were denied their rights for the last 35 years, and now after the regime change, they are about to face the worst. They need to set up, 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  
MECWR

From page 1

## Press release The activities of OWFI

“The Movement for Socialism” and the WCPI-Switzerland organization hosted Nadia Mahmood, the OWFI representative and WCPI politburo member, in the forum held in Fryeburg on 8<sup>th</sup> October. Many members, women and men, of the left Swiss organizations attended the forum where Nadia Mahmood talked about woman’s conditions in Iraq in the current state, and the activities of OWFI. She then answered questions raised by the audience, and asked them to support the OWFI. Many participated in the debate, which was translated in French. The Fryeburg city press covered the forum. On 9<sup>th</sup> October, the OWFI representative and Diyar and Younis, the WCPI members, met with delegate from “Service Civil International” for an hour to introduce the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq and its activities. The hosting organization was introduced. Then both sides discussed the means possible to

support the projects of OWFI. On the same day, a forum was held in conjunction between the WCPI-Switzerland organization and movement for socialism. Nadia Mahmood presented a survey about women’s conditions in Iraq. The audience, a majority of young people, asked many questions about the status quo in Iraq. Finally, donations were collected for the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October, CFD, a peace and development organization in Zurich, hosted Nadia Mahmood to talk about the women’s situation in Iraq and the activities of OWFI. The Zurich woman’s organizations and Amnesty International, Women Department, participated in the two-hour forum where the participants discussed how to support women’s causes in Iraq and the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq. Donations were collected for OWFI. This forum laid the basis of future co-operation between the Swiss women’s organizations and the Organization of Women’s Freedom. The participants affirmed their readiness to help the OWFI and find other links with more relevant organizations.

On 11<sup>th</sup> October, “Movement for Socialism” and other organizations in Zurich hosted Nadia Mahmood to talk about the political situation in Iraq and especially women’s conditions. The participants suggested introducing the activities of OWFI internationally. There was a proposal to translate “Equal Rights Now” issued by OWFI in London into Spanish, in co-operation with a number of volunteers. Aso Jabbar, the OWFI activists and WCPI cadre, declared that “Equal Rights Now” would be issued in German, monthly.

**The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq  
The Worker-communist Party of Iraq  
13/10/2003**

*WCPI- Post Box 325- 3000 Bern 11  
-Switzerland Tel .Aso Jabbar /0041  
78 882 55 89  
MECWR-Caxton House 2nd Floor,  
129 St. John’s Way- London N19  
3RQ- Tel: 020 7263 1027- Fax: 020  
7561 9594- Mobile: 07956883001  
& 07890 065933- Website:  
www.equalityiniraq.com*

From page 1

## An Appeal from..

**To: All humanitarian organizations**

**Organizations defending women’s rights**

**All mass libertarian organizations**

**Progressive parties and trade unions**

The state quo for women who live in Iraq is worsening everyday. Women suffer from killing, kidnap and assault, not to mention daily maltreatment at home, in the office and in the streets. The authorities and occupying troops have discharged their responsibilities, as expected, concerning the provision of security and protection in Iraq, especially for the women.

This has created a society overwhelmed by chaos and insecurity. It has unleashed the Islamic, tribal and reactionary movements and parties,

alongside the gangs that interfere in family life, especially women’s lives. The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq announces the foundation of the Women’s Shelter Center in Iraq.

The OWFI holds itself responsible for the defense of woman’s rights, and for protecting women from any kind of violence, physical and moral harm, arbitrary killing and to help women avoid danger. This center is a safe shelter for the women in Iraq.

It is an important mean to stop any violations practiced against women, and will be a progressive humane symbol of a Society that makes women’s dignity one of its priorities.

The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq and Women’s Shelter Center in Iraq call on all progressive

people in Iraq and all over the world to align with our movement to defend women’s rights. We ask you to financially and morally support the Center, a significant symbol that defends women’s rights in Iraq and the world.

**Long live women’s freedom!  
Forward to a better world!**

**Layla Mohammed  
Chairperson of Women’s Shelter  
Center in Iraq**

**Long live freedom  
Long live equality!**

From Page 1

## **An evening with Yanar Mohammed...**

A great opportunity to find out about women's situation in Iraq since the occupation.

Yanar Mohammad, one of the founder members of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, will be in London on the 07/11/2003 to talk about women's situation in the post war Iraq. Yanar has been in Iraq since the occupation of the country and brings with her a great deal of information that we have not heard before. The "Middle East Centre for Women's Rights", and "Equal Rights Now" newspaper will be hosting this seminar. More details about this event will be given in our next issue. For further information please contact us on the following e-mail addresses or telephone number:

**Nadia Mahmood:**

[nadia64uk@yahoo.com](mailto:nadia64uk@yahoo.com)

**Houzan Mahmoud:**

[houzan73@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:houzan73@yahoo.co.uk)

[equalrightsnow@hotmail.com](mailto:equalrightsnow@hotmail.com)

**Tel: 00 44 7956 88 3001**

From Page 1

## **A Forum Organized by the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq at...**

On September 9, 2003, the OWFI organized a forum at the General Railway Company in Baghdad, which has over 11,000 employees all over Iraq. Two hundred employees attended the forum, which was chaired by Yanar Muhammad, the head of the OWFI, and Layla Muhammad, the activist who returned from Australia to join the struggle of women in Iraq. Yanar Muhammad's speech focused on explaining the objectives of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq to achieve full gender equality in economic, social and political fields. She emphasized the need to struggle to repeal the Iraqi family laws that are based on Islamic Shariah, a law that permits polygamy and discrimination against women, including killing females for the sake of "family honor." She also talked about other egalitarian demands of OWFI, such as the rights of women to choose clothes and their partners, access to jobs of their own choosing, and equal pay for equal work. She urged working women to resist the current downsizing in the workplaces, particularly laying off female workers.

Moreover, Yanar Muhammad spoke about the necessity of joining the political -

struggle of the women's movement to change the appalling situation of women in Iraq after 35 years of Ba'ath oppression and 13 years of absolute deprivation under economic embargo. She said the same situation exists for the few underrepresented women in the Governing Council and Ministerial Council, and she exposed the reactionary parties like the Islamic groups that restrict the participation of women in economic and social fields, let alone their right to engage in political activities. Finally, it was suggested to establish a committee made up of women leaders in the company to defend the rights of women employees in cooperation with the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq.

Layla Muhammad spoke during the second part of the forum. In her speech she focused on ending violence against women. She exposed the political system, which profits from forcing women into the inferior position in society, and talked in detail about women's rights in the UN resolutions and the necessity to legislate laws that could change the situation of women. She said women have the right to live free from violence and harassment. Layla Muhammad pointed to the real causes of gender oppression and to the parties trying to strip away the gains of the women's movement. After Layla Muhammad spoke, a period of discussion followed. Many questions and comments were about separation of religion and the law. The attendees were sharply divided on this issue.

**Continues on Page 6**

From page 1

## **Equal Rights Now was widely ...**

During the anti-occupation demonstration of 27 September 2003 in London, hundreds of copies of "Equal Rights Now" were distributed amongst the demonstrators. Our activists made every effort to raise the situation of women in Iraq.

**Gona Saeed** member of both Organization of Women's Freedom (OWFI), and Iraqi Women's Rights

Coalition addressed the demonstrators from the Global Women's Strike's open microphone.

Gona Saeed took the microphone and talked about the current situation of women in Iraq pointing to the lack of general security, lack of protection for women in their every day lives and the kidnappings and sexual harassment. She also talked about the launch of OWFI and its aims and activities and its achievements to date. She also told the crowd that the OWFI has established a shelter for women in Baghdad and needs help and support to improve the capacity of the shelter

and the quality of its services to help as many women as possible who are under the threat of "honour killing" and domestic violence.

In her speech she highlighted the work of OWFI and referred to some of the areas of its activities. She also talked about the activities of IWRC abroad and called on progressive and libertarian people to lend their support to women's cause in Iraq.

Other activists like Rezan Nadir, Sazan Salih and Samira Ahmad participated by talking to the people and collecting donations. The response to these activities was overwhelming.

From Page 1

## ***The Founding Declaration of the Organization for the Defense of Secularism in Iraqi Society – DSIS***

There is a wide belief among the people in Iraq and the so-called Arab or Islamic world that the contemporary society is totally fettered by the chains of religion and its dogmatic, intellectual, and social oppression.

The Iraqi society is in predicament. In addition to its daily agony from the impact of the devastating war, and the U.S inhumane policy towards it for the last 14 years, and its exposure to a horrific campaign of both material and cultural impoverishment by the international – U.S imposed economic sanctions, and the 35-year-rule of the Nationalist trend represented by the Ba'ath regime and its chauvinist religious practices embodied in the "Faithfulness Campaign", the Iraqi society has started to stagger under the eccentric sword-strikes of Political Islam which has pushed the struggles of secular and liberating forces of Iraq, decades back. The civility of the Iraqi society, today, is undergoing a real crisis. The Organization for the Defense of Secularism in Iraqi Society-DSIS, was founded, for the immediate promotion of values of intellectual freedom, secular principals, respect to human rights, opposition to religious dogma, and its intervention in the civil society of Iraq.

DSIS promotes freedom of \_\_expression, freedom of thought, belief and conscience, freedom of being a believer or Atheist, the total freedom of dress and appearance, the unconditional freedom of intellectual and scientific research, the unconditional freedom of criticism, and promotes the principals opposing to all forms of religious or Nationalistic provocations. It also promotes principals of total and unconditional equality between women and men.

### **The Theoretical Agenda**

· We strongly call for the separation of religion from state; without which there could be no freedom from tyranny. This separation would be the basis for any secular state.

· We immediately call for the radical abolishment of all antiquated ideas and traditions, reactionary moralities that stimulates discrimination and contemptibility, and the firm establishment of humane relationships, values, and culture; totally free and liberated. We share the ideals to firmly establish the values of civil society and secular state that does not adopt any religion or religious institution or any religious dogma. The basis of authority in such a state is found in a man-made law not in religious doctrine or in divine revelation. In states, which Political Islam wants to establish, sovereignty belongs to God, while in secular states,

sovereignty belongs to people. We believe in the primacy of a common civil code under which all men and women have equal protection of their rights and freedoms, a civil code that establishes full equality between women and men.

· We endorse the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights without qualification. We are particularly concerned to promote and protect the rights of women and those with minority beliefs: all should be equal before the law. We call for the implementation of wide and unconditional political freedoms and rights granted and equal for all. We share the will to abolish all forms of discrimination based on gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, and age.

· We are determined to fight fanaticism, intolerance, and religious violence, by showing the intellectual inadequacy of the programs of the reactionaries, the historical inaccuracy of their claims, the philosophical poverty of their arguments, and the totalitarian nature of their thought and above all; the harsh and relentless social criticism for their discriminatory practices against people. We call for the immediate prevention of violent and inhuman religious rituals.

· We defend the complete separation of religion from education. We call for the prevention of religious classes, religious set of laws and interpretations for subjects taught at schools or educational institutions. We stress the immediate abolishment of all laws and regulations opposing non-religious education. We defend the right of free inquiry, and the free \_\_expression of ideas. We therefore reserve the right to examine the historical foundations of Political Islam, —and- to explain the rise and fall of Political Islam by the normal mechanisms of human history.

### **The Practical Agenda**

We work:

· To create a network of secularists and freethinkers in Iraq, the Arabic-speaking countries and the world.

· To establish a women's network to provide mutual support and to highlight the plight and the achievements of women in Iraq, the Arabic-speaking countries, and those countries under the tyranny of Political Islam.

· To organize seminars and lectures about Secularism, its values, and applications, and the defense of civil society.

· To publicize acts of terror and oppression.

· To honor the memory and promote the work of those who were suppressed or died in the cause of defending humanity against religious suppression and tyranny.

· To attract activists as members of the Committee and as contributors to the debate.

· To establish a database of books, articles and news reports, an annotated bibliography of texts of interest, and a suggested reading list about Secularism.

· To seek funding for the committee activities.

· To publish a web-based newsletter and a monthly magazine.

From page 5

## **A Forum ...**

However, they all warmly received the idea of equality between men and women in the workplace and the idea that women need to form a committee to work on women's issues. In the end many women signed a petition against the kidnapping of women and another petition to demand the repeal of the Iraqi family law. Many women joined the OWFI and asked to hold such forums regularly.

**Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq.**