Cultural Salon on
“Iraqi Women as Peacebuilders I”
Baghdad, 7 April 2012

Recommendations

On 7 April 2012, a roundtable discussion entitled “Iraqi Women as Peacebuilders” was held in the framework of the “Safia Al-Souhail cultural salon” in order to discuss and elaborate recommendations aimed at informing Iraq’s larger gender strategy in collaboration with the Iraqi Government, United Nations, and international and domestic stakeholders (including UNFPA, UNWomen, UNDP, OHCHR, and UNAMI).

The purpose of this meeting (to be followed up by a second meeting to be held in June 2012), which brought together approximately 50 including civil society representatives, parliamentarians, members of the executive branch, and international actors, was to capitalise and build on the success of the “Role of Women in Peace-building, Reconciliation, and Accountability in Iraq” conference held in Irbil, Iraq, on 27-28 January 2011. Participants to this major conference, organised by No Peace Without Justice and its Iraqi partner International Alliance for Justice, with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, produced an outcome document outlining more than 64 different goals to advance the peace-building role of women in Iraq.

Participants to the roundtable discussion held on 7 April stressed the need to identity and plan for tangible, practical steps that could carry an Iraqi women’s agenda forward, as well as to develop consensus and understanding of ongoing gender initiatives across what is in many respects a fragmented movement.

There are several disparate, fragmented groups operating to protect women’s rights in Iraq. This is a key issue for several international agencies from the UN family (including UNFPA, UNWomen, UNDP, OHCHR, and UNAMI), other international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and international civil society (including the National Democratic Institute, No Peace Without Justice, and the Iraq Foundation).

Efforts should be undertaken to foster the coordination among organisations composing the Iraqi women’s movement (such as the Iraqi Women’s Network led by the Iraqi NGO Al Amal) as well as their cooperation with the relevant competent public authorities, in particular the State Secretary for Women’s Affairs (which is part of the Iraqi Council of Ministers), Prime Minister’s Office and other Ministries as well as members of the Iraqi parliament, including from the Committee in charge of Women’s issues, Human Rights, Labour and Social Affairs.

With a view to help identifying the measures needed to develop a National Strategy for Women in Iraq, the roundtable discussion also provided the opportunity to review Iraq’s legal framework as it relates to international gender standards, Women and the Law in Iraq and to support comparative analysis on a potential Women’s Ministry and/or a Women’s Commission, of anti-
Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Bushra Al Abaidi presented the results of her own analysis prepared for the meeting. She cited a number of laws that required amendment, including the Penal Code, specifically articles 377 (adultery) and Article 128 (honor as a mitigating factor). She added that the new trafficking in persons law, personal status, and the law establishing the Human Rights Commission should be amended. Dr. Bushra noted that policies and regulations should also be changed, such as the requirement of a male’s permission for a woman to obtain a passport. She noted several laws and provisions that should be repealed, the need for amendment of specific provisions of the Constitution, and urged that domestic violence and sexual harassment legislation be adopted.

Other participants weighed in following the two presentations:

1. The senior attorney at the Ministry of Interior discussed new trafficking legislation, the need for domestic violence legislation, and the Ministry’s Family Protection Units.
2. MPs representing the parliament’s Women’s Committee stressed the need to build a Women’s Ministry and a strong social safety net for women. They encouraged other MPs present to join the Women’s Committee. Participants raised the need to work for insertion of a quota requirement into the draft political parties law currently under consideration by the parliament.
3. Other MPs and civil society leaders stressed the need for reconciliation processes that can complement the specific work being contemplated by the roundtable. Participants stressed that all the goals outlined to date represented an array of tools that further reconciliation. Others noted that reconciliation processes should be added to the broad goals of the roundtable process.
4. Participants recommended that media be added as the fifth priority, and establishing a Women’s Ministry should be folded into the first goal of building the role of women in political leadership.
5. Participants proposed that working groups be established to develop specific initiatives based on the five goals that could be presented at the next roundtable meeting.

At the end of the meeting, participants formed a five-person committee that organized a vote and identified the following priorities for the roundtable process:

1. Increase Women's Political Participation;
2. Build Social, Economic and Health Security;
3. Review and Reform Existing Legislation;
4. Reform Educational Curricula; and
5. Establish a High Commission for Women and/or a full Ministry for Women and Children's Issues

The participants agreed to continue discussions in a subsequent meeting to be held in June 2012.