

# Equal Rights Now!

10/May/2004

*Paper of The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq* Issue No 13&14

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## Denouncing Statement

# Stop the Genocide against the People of Falluja City in Iraq



The American military troops have proven unprecedented cruelty and barbarism throughout a whole week of aerial bombing on the residences of Falluja city in Mid-western Iraq. This followed a terrorist act administered by some local youth over four American contractors that ended in killing them and dismembering their bodies.

The continuous American bombing has killed around 600 Falluja residents with brutality equivalent to that of the Baath regime and the former dictator Saddam Husein. The masters of "Democracy" and "Human Rights" have administered

one of the bloodiest mass punishment over the civilians of Falluja City with cruelty unprecedented in modern history. As a result, the torn and shredded dead bodies of children and women filled the streets of the city. A sight to which the eyes of Paul Bremer and his generals, the professional mass-killers, did not even blink.

Moreover, the Arab Nationalists and figures of Political Islam in Falluja city have proven to be leaders of the most inhuman terrorism in Iraq, with indifference to human lives, even if those belonged to their families, their women or children. One week ago, Falluja city was doomed with a criminal mob that found it quite easy to kill and burn bodies. After dragging dead bodies and dismembering them, they celebrated hanging them with brutality that will smear the humane conscience of millions of Iraqis for decades to come. In these days, these fanatics of Arab Nationalism and Islamism have managed by their determination to fight the American enemy to turn their homes

into graveyards. In their neighbourhoods, they agitate battles with their long-awaited American enemy, even if these happens at the expense of the lives of hundreds of their women and children. From all freedom lovers, people in Iraq need a stance of solidarity against one of the bloodiest genocides that was fully expected from the masters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Stand up against both poles of terrorism that have decided the verdict of death and destruction over the civilians of Falluja city.

Down with the two poles of terrorism and their wars against innocent civilians. Lets all work to drive both poles of terrorism out of Iraq.

There will be no salvation for the agonized humanity and no guaranty to civilians' right to life with the existence of the professionals of genocide and terrorism.

Yanar Mohammed  
Organisation Of Women's  
Freedom in Iraq OWFI

April 11, 2004

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## ***Women Are the First Targets of Islamic Terrorism.***

Defenders of civility, modernism, and human rights: Voice your protest against political Islam in Iraq!

The atmosphere of war, occupation, and the absence of an authority responsible for the security of citizens in Iraq has unleashed political Islamic movements to disseminate fear, fascism, and savagery in Iraq, especially in the southern cities. They have transformed the cities of Basra, Nasirya and Imara into models of Tehran, and thus have restored the legacy of the deposed Taliban movement.

Supported by the misogynist terrorist arsenal in Tehran, and backed by the U.S., these Islamic movements seek to destroy all features of contemporary civil society. Just as it supported the Taliban movement in the 1990s that terrorized Afghani society and imposed reactionary policies by using extreme terrorist methods, the U.S. government today is supporting similar Islamic movements in Iraq with the justification that Shiites make up the majority of the Iraqi population. Thus, the US has given the majority of the seats on the Governing Council to reactionary members of these movements, staunch enemies of human rights, and especially women's rights. There is impending danger of establishing Islamic emirates in the south of Iraq in accordance to the U.S. and the Governing Council's approach and their provisional constitution in the name of a federal government.

From the very first days of the aftermath of the war on Iraq when chaos and lawlessness prevailed, these Islamic movements proceeded to veil women by

force, ban unveiled women from public places, trade in women's bodies under the name of pleasure marriage, ban music, and to kill non-Muslims and owners of liquor shops and pubs. In other words, to destroy many features accepted in a normal society.

Islamic terrorism has been given free rein in the city of Basra and the entire southern part of Iraq by British forces that entered Iraq in the name of human rights and democracy. The British forces witness the daily terrorism of Islamic movements, which can easily be compared with Baathist fascism. With each passing day, the hypocrisy of "liberation forces" becomes more evident. The defenders of freedom and democracy are in denial about the atrocities of the Islamic movements against the population of this city. The democracy is nonexistent when it comes to human rights and women's rights. We hold the British authority responsible for its violations of citizens' rights and women rights, in particular in Basra and the south of Iraq. The Iraqi masses did not seek to removal of the Baath fascism only to have it replaced by Islamic terrorism. Our efforts must be united and intensified to remove the danger of Islamic terrorism to the masses in Iraq and to women in particular. All parties that adopt terrorism as a method to impose their beliefs and policies must be banned. We also condemn the intervention of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the affairs of the people of Iraq. The people of Iran can no longer wait for the day when the government that has ruled them with an iron fist for last 26 years is overthrown. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq along with its sister organization, the Organization of Women's Liberation in Iran, struggles to end the danger of

Islamic terrorism to the masses of Basra and other southern Iraqi cities.

Terrorist forces and political Islam: Get your hands off the Iraqi masses!

For women's freedoms and rights!

Down with Political Islam.

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

**March 28, 2004**

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## **Violence against women in Iraq increases**

**By Duska Bosnjak and Ruban Selvanayagam of Amnesty International UK**

US Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Colin Powell, said last month that Saddam Hussein's "republic of fear is over and the torture chambers and rape rooms are shut down. In their place, women's self-help centres are blossoming from Baghdad to Babylon." Mr Powell's views stand in stark contrast to the realities for women on the ground.

In fact, violence against women and girls is on the increase in Iraq because of the breakdown in law and order.

Women and girls in Basra have told Amnesty International that they do not dare go out alone anymore for fear of being harassed, beaten, kidnapped, abducted, raped or murdered. Parents are frightened to send their daughters to schools and university.

In May 2003, 19-year-old Fatima was shot in the legs by her husband after she tried to leave an abusive situation and return to her own family. She had been married at the age of 12, treated as a servant and regularly beaten in her husband's family home. Numerous people witnessed the shooting yet no action has been taken against the husband,

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## **Violence against women in Iraq increases**

even after she was treated in hospital for her injuries.

A young engineer, Asma, was abducted in Baghdad last year. She was shopping with her mother, sister and a male relative when six armed men forced her into a car and drove to a farmhouse outside the city, where she was repeatedly raped. A day later she was driven to her neighbourhood and pushed out of the moving car. Amnesty has also found evidence of radical groups issuing threats against women not observing the Islamic dress code or against women human rights activists. In Basra, women and girls not wearing the hijab have been threatened. Now almost all cover themselves.

The violence against women on the street and in communities reflects attitudes towards women that have also led to threats and violence against the very few women in positions of power. The assassination attempt against the only female member of the Iraqi cabinet, Nisreen Mustafa, on Monday, 29 March 2004 was the second directed at a female political leader.

Aquila al-Hashimi who was one of only three female members in the Iraqi Governing Council was killed in September 2003. Iraqi women have been arrested solely because the authorities were seeking their relatives or husbands. The wife and daughter of the former Vice Chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Council, Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, were arrested last November. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) has acknowledged that they have been detained, but nothing has been said about their legal status or the reason for their detention. Iraq is reported to be completely awash with guns, and easy availability of

weapons is threatening Iraqi women's safety. Nineteen-year-old Fatima was shot by her husband's own Kalashnikov. She said: "He shot my legs, I could not feel them, they were numb, the sun was setting. I was looking at the sky. I said to the men: I don't want to die. They took me to the hospital."

Yanar Mohammed, a head of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, has received several death threats for campaigning against the introduction of sharia law. When she asked officials of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for protection, she was told that they had more urgent matters to attend to.

According to the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, since the intervention of the coalition forces rape has been on the increase with one or two reported rapes each day. There have been instances of women being "traded" for \$100 in Baghdad. Attempts to impose restrictions on work, movement, inheritance as well as abductions and "entertainment marriages" are the reality in this male-dominated society.

These cases demonstrate all too vividly how the lack of security, law and order has curtailed all aspects of women's life and their human rights. Violence is endemic in Iraq, whether in the form of attacks by armed groups or criminal gangs, or abuses by the occupying forces. Amnesty is concerned that such growing insecurity and other impacts of the conflict are leading to an increase in violence against women.

Amnesty believes that the coalition forces, as occupying powers, are clearly failing to guarantee the safety of the Iraqi civilian population. They are also failing to let women play an equal role in the political process and the rebuilding of the country. Male members of the Iraqi Governing Council have reportedly refused even to shake hands with the three women members.

Amnesty International is calling on the USA, United Kingdom and other governments to fully implement UN Resolution 1325, which reaffirms women's protection in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, put pressure on the coalition to face up to their international obligations and to ensure that women's rights in Iraq are fully integrated and protected in law and practice.

For more information on Amnesty International and its work in Iraq and elsewhere go to [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk) or call 020 7814 6200

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## **Response to a request from a US army official**

**By Houzan Mahmoud & Nadia Mahmood**

In early April 2004, we received a letter from "GREGORY B. ELMORE -, MSgt, USAF Coalition Military Assistance Training Team, C-1" from Baghdad - Iraq, offering to "Help us to recruit Iraqi women for a "Special Military Police unit" and to support us "to integrate Iraqi women into the new Iraqi Armed Forces", saying that "Organizations such as the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition (IWRC) and the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) are key to our success", stating that "We're confident that this isn't only good for the country of Iraq, but also the women of Iraq".

Thanks Mr. Gregory B. Elmore!

I would like to start with the question: **which Police for which State?** All of us know that the police force is an element in the hand of those who are in the power. Do you want women policing the street to serve the aims of the occupation and the puppet- government who designed and-

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## 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, day of demanding freedom and equality in Iraq!

The war and occupation of Iraq have brought the most agonizing consequences for women in Iraq. Most of the women have lost their jobs. Unemployment and lack of economic independence are two aspects of the enslavement of women in Iraq in addition to the rise of the Islamists who are terrorizing women and girls by trying to impose the veil, issuing Fatwas against them, and preventing them from receiving an education. This is all the result of the U.S.'s so-called war of "Liberation" which has brought nothing to the people in Iraq but tens of thousands killed, many more maimed and injured, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, fear and a society in ruin. It has given life to the most reactionary and dangerous forces, such as political Islam, and imposed upon the people a hand-picked assembly of tribalist, religious and nationalist reactionaries, the so-called Iraqi Governing Council, to serve the interests of the U.S. administration in Iraq.

The whole situation is very dire and promises still further misery, privation and rightlessness and a grim future for us in Iraq. But despite all this, women are organizing and mobilizing themselves to fight more firmly against the current situation in Iraq to achieve equality, freedom and an egalitarian, secular society that can guarantee full equality for men and women.

On May Day, which is a day of celebration of our ideal for freedom and an equal world, our movement reaffirms that it is an integral part of this universal movement for equality and liberation. It is the day of our protest, as an international movement, against the oppression and inequality that women, workers and the overwhelming majority of people, are subjected to under capitalism.

We call upon all progressive organizations and people across the world to help the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, which is standing at the forefront of the

progressive women's movement in Iraq struggling for a better world worthy of human beings. The women in Iraq, having suffered 35 years of Ba'athist dictatorship, are now facing further attacks, abuse and violation of their rights. It is time to help and support our movement and organization in Iraq to be able to overcome the hardships that we are facing in Iraq as a result of the U.S.'s war.

Help us defeat both the U.S. and political Islam in their plans to oppress workers and women in Iraq.

### **OWFI in May 1st demands:**

- Jobs, or social welfare.
- Equal opportunities for women in employment, training and education.
- End all kinds of discrimination against women and implementation of high standards to employ women.
- Laws for maternity leave with full paid wages.
- All facilities for women with children.
- Equal opportunities in training, promotion, election for all state administration positions

### **Long Live May Day**

### **Long Live women and men worker's struggle for full equality.**

**Organization of Women's Freedom  
In Iraq-Representative abroad.  
1<sup>st</sup> May 04**

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## **Response to a request from a US army official**

engineered to serve everything except what the "country: and "women" needs.

Right from the beginning we have witnessed how the war and occupation have pushed women back into the dark ages in Iraq. When your army invaded Iraq, bringing Islamic groups to power or to opposition (does not make any difference), women suffered rape, abduction; they were sold as property, honour killings increased tragically. What did your "Special Military Police unit " do to protect women from daily terror and violence? Do you think that

by integrating Iraqi women into the "Special Military Police unit" this will solve the problems of women and make them "equal" to men in the political and social life of Iraq? Securing women's human rights? End the sexual apartheid against them? End violations against women? Provide them with the most basic need such as food, education, welfare and dignity as a human being? Are you looking for women in the police like "Women in Black" in our neighboring country "Iran", where their task is to oppress women, to insult them if they put few grams of powder or make up on their faces? To have women arrested, and checked in the check points by their "sisters" on behalf of their "brothers" in the police forces.

Just few meters from the police headquarter, the rightful women who are enjoying equal rights with the male members in the "Ruling Council", shoulder to shoulder with religious leaders, tribal leaders and criminals are complaining" no one is shaking our hand or making an eye contact, let alone listening to us, or giving us time to speak in Ruling Council meetings"!

As having three women in the Ruling council has made no progress for women in Iraq other than furnishing the "hall meetings" of the Ruling Council, the recruiting of women into the police will do the same job. To achieve security and peace in Iraq, the occupation should be ended, dissolve the Ruling Council, elect representatives of the people in Iraq not on the basis of the tribe, sect, religion, nationality or sex.

The Organization of Women's Freedom is in the forefront of fighting to achieve women's rights, full equality, in political, economical, and social life. OWFI and IWRC are fighting with everything to have women in the running of the whole society in Iraq. Release women from their prisons in the houses that were created after the war if you want to ensure women's contribution in all fields. equality, prosperity and security for women and the whole society is our task.

Thanks for approaching us!

# *International Women's Day* From Page 1

## *March 8 in Baghdad*



Yanar Mohammed addressing the demonstrators

Although under veil and Aabaia, big crowds of women gathered in Al Fardawse Square chanting slogans of freedom and equality for the International Women's Day. After decades of marginalisation and denial of women's issues, that morning revealed immense potential and determination to turn a dark scenario into a bright one.

Demands of a secular and egalitarian constitution were loud and clear among this crowd. Across the river, in the CPA, 25 members of the Governing Council, individuals that are hand-picked by the Americans, were signing a constitution based upon religious, ethnic and gender divisions leaving millions of women vulnerable to systemic discrimination and oppression. The demonstration of almost 1000 people (mostly women) started at the OWFI headquarters in streets that were covered with March 8 posters and slogans. Their children in front of them holding up March 8 posters that showed a silhouette of a woman with her hair blowing in the wind. Surrounding the women's demonstration, groups of guarding men with red bands on their arms protected the demo in these times of total chaos and random bombings. The guards were from the only political party supporting OWFI, the

Worker-communist Party of Iraq. In spite of receiving 2 death threats via email within the last month, Yanar Mohammed was leading the demonstration among vigilant women activists and also side by side with the leaders of the WCPI. Hadeel, a previous target of honour killing, organized the mobilization and transportation and masses of hundreds of women. Sahera took serious steps in assertiveness after throwing the veil a few months back. She was leading the March chanting the slogans of Freedom and Equality. The older and politically determined Um Sabbah accompanied Yanar so closely stressing she will not let anyone hurt her by any chance on such a great day. From every residential



complex, came an OWFI activist with one or two buses full of women outraged by the current women-unfriendly situation.

Um Muhammad, a retired nurse, in her traditional clothing from Al Huda is a born leader. Her adult sons say she's the man of the house.

Another Um Muhammad from Al Jihad neighbourhood, a full-time tailor, is a fashionable woman with a diplomatic method. She is leading a campaign in her area to oust the corrupt neighbourhood council member selected by the Americans. She gathered two busses of women with their children. Lamaan who is a previous member of the Iraqi Communist Party, is sick and tired of their compromises about women's rights. She visited her friends in the area factories and managed to gather around fifteen workers. Muna from Al Ansar complex for displaced people, Um Abdallah and others from other districts... Usually they are called by their son's names, where Um Muhammad means the mother of Muhammad...etc.

Yanar's speech emphasized on secularism as a precondition for women's freedoms. She stressed on the need to work on a women's

power and voice that decide the future for Iraq. No more inferiority under Political Islam that equals four women to one man. The speech also denounced any attempts by the GC to change International Women's Day into another date during the year that is a newly invented Islamic women's day. She exposed those attempts as a

## *International Women's Day March 8 in Baghdad*

plot to isolate Iraqi women from international women's solidarity, as the first step of keeping women oppressed by the support of religion and the pretext of native tradition.

The following part was a tribute of solidarity and support to the women employees of banks that were thrown in prisons as a cover-up for the administrative corruption and failure connected to big fraud operations handled by officials connected to members of GC.

Yanar finally announced that OWFI provides the alternative to women threatened by honour-killing or domestic abuse by taking them into safe houses. The speech was interrupted many times by slogans of freedom and putting an end to oppression.

The next two speeches were for the leaders of the Worker-communist Party Samir Adil and Muayad Ahmed. Their emphasis was on the women's question as one of the main fields of political struggle among different parties. An arena that reflects their social aspirations for the masses. "Women's freedom is the measure of freedom and humanity in society," said Muayad Ahmad after an overview of how the authorities had no connection whatsoever to the daily aspirations and miseries of women. Samir Adil criticized the deterioration of women's status under the Islamist parties who were given power by the Americans. Next in line was the outspoken Liqaa Hamza. She is one of the bank employees threatened by jail if she does not pay to the government imaginary amounts of money (equivalent to 20 years of her salary). Liqaa threatened that if the ministry

cannot protect the employees and the GC does not consider the interest of the citizens, they are willing to start a general strike that paralyses the economy; "...and we'll see what they can do about that!"

The next part of the event was for the OWFI women's activists from all over Baghdad. Five outspoken women from all walks of life had one



point in common. Women are strong ... their voices must be heard ... and also an immediate end to all kinds of oppression against women. They all ended with one single voice: "...this is OUR day...the International Women's Day". A big number of male guards from the WCPI, with red bands on their arms guarded and watched every single corner of Al Fardawse Square. At some point, an Iraqi police personnel tried to walk into the square. He was questioned and investigated until he showed his official ID to Fattah and Laith from the WCPI security committee. After making sure of his name and photo they let him go. Local and foreign media filled the square at a time that coincided with the signature of the constitution. One of the correspondents asked Yanar Mohammed: "What are your ideas on this signed constitution?" She answered casually: "The council that was imposed on Iraqi people can sign what it chooses... The future, our future, we decide...we have learnt to organize our ranks. We will not leave our destinies in their hands".

## **8 March activities of OWFI branches in Europe**

### **London-UK:**

\* On the 5/03/2004 OWFI-UK representative organized a demonstration in London in front of 10 Downing Street in support of a secular constitution in Iraq and against the new constitution, which excludes women's equality. In this demonstration Nadia Mahmood, representative of OWFI abroad, spoke of the importance of having a secular constitution in Iraq. Houzan Mahmoud, UK representative, along with Sorma Hamid and Dashti Jamal, OWFI activists, handed in a petition to number 10 Downing Street to be given to the Prime Minister Tony Blair. \*On 13/03/2004 OWFI-UK representative organized a solidarity event with women in Iraq and their demands for a secular constitution. The event was sponsored by various political organization such as Alliance for Workers Liberty, Communist Party of Great Britain, Organization of Women's Liberation in Iran, Worker-communist Party of Iraq, Workers Power League for the Fifth International, Worker-communist Party of Iran, London Correspondent Committee, and Campaign against Racism and Fascism. The event started with a panel that consisted of Nadia Mammoud - representative abroad of OWFI, Khasraw Saya - member of political bureau of WCPI, Sawsan Salim - OWFI activist. Houzan Mahmoud who chaired the meeting greeted the attendees and congratulated 8 March to them. Houzan spoke about the importance of 8 March as an opposition to the Ruling Council's decision, and said that women in Iraq have celebrated this day as women's day in Iraq/ She updated the meeting with the latest news of Baghdad saying that women have demonstrated against the new constitution and were calling for separation of religion from the state and education, also full equality for women. Later on Nadia Mahmoud spoke about the new constitution and that it has no hope for women in Iraq. She was followed by Sawsan Salim who just returned from Iraq who spoke about the miseries women are faced with. The last

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speaker comrade Khasraw Saya who spoke about Worker-communist Party's opposition to this new constitution and that it has no legitimacy. There were contributions from the floor and then the sponsors of the event in support of a secular constitution signed a declaration. The meeting was concluded and followed by serving food, music and dancing.

### Leicester-UK: Sheila Mosely



We gathered for International Women's Day in Leicester, so that we could celebrate women on the same day as our Iraqi friends who want the freedom to do the same. We were people born in different places around the world, who now live in Leicester. A group of women from Derby joined us. There were songs, poems, greetings were brought from left-Parties, and we talked about women's issues.

We thought about Yanar in Baghdad, working to keep women safe in Iraq, a country where women's rights have been eroded; where women cannot be Judges because suddenly they are thought to have half a brain; where the hijab is being pushed on women; honour killings are encouraged; and as always at times of instability, women are used like pawns as each group tries to take power and revenge over the other groups. Donations were given for the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq and a collection of £80 was taken.

### Norway:

#### **BaharMonzir, representative of OWFI, took part in an event to celebrate 8 March**

Oslo:



In Oslo the capital city of Norway, Bahar Monzir representative of OWFI in Norway gave a speech in which she pointed out the struggle of women in Iraq against the resolution 137 and the defeat of Ruling Council, as well as the role of OWFI against political Islam in Iraq.

This event was organized to celebrate 8 March, International Women's day, on 13.03.2004, was organized by both committees of Worker-communist Parties of Iraq and Iran, and was attended by more than 100 people. Kamil Ahmed who is responsible for the committee of Norway gave a speech in which he stressed the point that Worker communist party in Iraq have had a major impact on the struggle for freedom and secularism in Iraq.

#### **Fredrick stad: Shirin Mohsen OWFI activist took part in 8 March event**

On 12/03/2004 Committee to Defend Women's Rights in Iraq and Worker-communist Party of Iraq organized an event to celebrate 8<sup>th</sup> March. This was attended by more than 100 people. At this event Shirin Mohsen who is responsible for Committee to Defend Women's Rights in Iraq and is one of the activists of OWFI gave a speech about women's rights in Iraq and she read the message of OWFI in regard to 8 March in Iraq.

### Sweden

#### **Rega Rauf, an activist of OWFI in Sweden, took part in different events in Stockholm**



Rega Rauf took an active part in a debate entitled 'Are women's rights universal?' In this debate she spoke about the activities, aims and objectives of OWFI in Iraq, and the struggle of women for liberation in other regions and their demands and slogans, which are all proof of the universality of women's rights.

This event took place on 6 March 2004, and was organized by Mahin Alipoor representative of Committee to Defend Women's Rights in Iran. The event entitled 'Equality day in Stockholm' consisted of different activities such as theatre, debates, and showing a documentary film by Hala Taheri about the women's situation in Kurdistan, Iraq. In this event Rega Rauf also introduced her book, "A thirty year old woman" - women behind the family walls, which is a story of her own life as a girl, and then as a woman in a Middle Eastern family, which was warmly welcomed by the attendees.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> March, Rega Rauf presented a speech on behalf of OWFI in Iraq during a demonstration in Stockholm in Normalmtorg that was organized by both Worker-communist Parties of Iran and Iraq. She spoke about the situation of women in Iraq and the role of OWFI in organizing women to demand their rights and she asked people for their support for OWFI. There were other speakers such as Mahin Alippor on behalf of Committee to Defend Women's Rights in Iran, Sara Mohammed - Never forget Pela, and Fadima as well as Hala Taheri on behalf of WPI.

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## 8 March OWFI activities abroad

### Germany-Cologne

On the 12<sup>th</sup> August 2004 OWFI-Germany Branch organized an event to celebrate 8<sup>th</sup> March in co-operation with WCPI-Germany Organization. The event was attended by many people, and a variety of speeches were given. Among these was a speech given by **Gahasw Mohammed**, who is the representative of OWFI in Cologne. She greeted the people and spoke about the situation in Iraq, and the role of OWFI in organizing women in Iraq. **Shara Aziz** who is an activist of OWFI and a women's rights campaigner from Iraq gave a speech in which she pointed out the negative outcomes of the war and occupation of Iraq. She spoke about the women's movement in Iraq and the celebration of 8<sup>th</sup> March in Baghdad by OWFI.

## Activities of OWFI abroad Houzan Mahmoud- UK representative

\* On the 29/02/004 Houzan was invited by Amnesty International – French section - to participate in their launch of the 'international campaign against violence against women' press conference.

In this press conference the campaign was launched and there were four women from different countries to speak about the violations of women's rights in their own countries. Houzan Mahmoud spoke about the appalling situation and violations of women's rights in Iraq. She spoke about the recent attack on women's rights in Iraq by the Ruling Council and their attempt to pass resolution 137, which supports Sharia Law instead of Previous Personal Status law. Houzan also spoke about the threats of Islamic groups and assassination threats they have made against Yanar Mohammed and OWFI for defending secularism and exposing Sharia Law.

\* On 5/03/2004 in Turin-Italy inchiesta operaia, a workers Association, with

## Meeting in UK Parliament against Resolution 137



On 11/02/2004, Houzan Mahmoud, UK representative of OWFI, organized a meeting in UK Parliament against Resolution 137, which was passed by the Ruling Council in January 2004.

This meeting was supported and chaired by Miss Alice Mahon Labour MP; it was attended by many people, different organizations and individuals also another five Members of Parliament.

This was part of OWFI campaign against this resolution. Naida Mahmood representative abroad of OWFI and coordinator of the campaign against Sharia Law spoke in detail about the nature of Sharia Law, and the dangerous of implementing it in Iraq. She also stressed the need for a secular constitution in Iraq to guarantee women's rights. Houzan Mahmoud spoke about the whole situation of women in Iraq since the war and the violations of their rights that this resolution will add to it; she presented an appeal in support of a secular constitution and against Resolution 137 to Miss Mahon to be supported by other MP's in Parliament. Margaret Owen a human rights lawyer and Rend Shakir have spoken about the this resolution and in support of a secular constitution they presented their speeches.

participation of Women in Black, and Humanist Party organized a seminar for Houzan Mahmoud. In this seminar she spoke about the women's movement for equality and liberation in Iraq, as well as the working class struggle. She pointed out the obstacles and problems that women are faced with due to occupation and the imposition of Ruling Council, which is a creature of America in Iraq.

\* On the 14/03/2004 the independent socialists of Birmingham organized a seminar titled "Women Against Oppression". The speakers were Houzan Mahmoud - women's rights activist from Iraq, who spoke about the women's movement and Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq and its role in Iraq; Azam Kamguian, writer and women's rights activist who spoke about the Sharia Tribunal in Canada; Ewa, peace activist, who has been in Iraq and Palestine and who spoke about the women's situation in both occupied countries.

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## **Emergency motion – defend feminists in Iraq!**

passed by National Union of Students Women's Conference, 17/3/04

Conference believes

- 1) That Yanar Mohammed is the chairperson of the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq, a women's rights group set up following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.
- 2) That on February 25th, Yanar received an e-mail containing death threats from the Islamist militia group *Jaish Alshaha* (Army of Sahaba).
- 3) That groups like *Jaish Alshaha* have targeted the OWFI because of its campaigns for sexual equality and secularism, and against the Iraqi Governing Council's Law 137 imposing Islamic *sharia* law in Iraq.
- 4) That it is absolutely vital that feminists in Britain support Yanar and the OWFI, both against the death threats and in their struggle for secularism and equality.

Conference further believes

- 1) In the values of democracy, equality and secularism.
- 2) That criticising and opposing religiously-inspired ideologies and movements which come into conflict with these values is in no way incompatible with supporting religious freedom.
- 3) That "fundamentalist" movements including, for instance, Islamism are necessarily anti-secular, anti-democratic and anti-feminist, since they fight for the establishment of a state based on religious law, with society crushed beneath an interpretation version of rules codified in primitive societies hundreds or thousands of years ago.

Conference resolves

- 1) To send a message of support to Yanar and a letter to the IGC and the American occupation authorities expressing our alarm at her situation and our opposition to the imposition of sharia law in Iraq.
- 2) To publicise the situation of and raise support for the OWFI in the UK.
- 3) To continue to campaign against religious fundamentalism and for our positive values of equality, secularism, democracy and human rights.
- 4) To stand in solidarity with our sisters fighting for these values wherever they are in the world, and invite women's movement activists involved in the fight against fundamentalism to speak at Women's Campaign events.
- 5) To organise discussion on these issues at Women's Campaign training.

**To donate money to the Organisation of women's Freedom in Iraq**

**please send it to the following bank account:**

**Middle East Centre for Women's Rights**

**BARCLAY BANK-UK Sort Code: 20- 80- 57 Account No: 80 98 15 67**

**[www.equalityiniraq.com](http://www.equalityiniraq.com)**

**E-mail:[equalrightsnow@hotmail.com](mailto:equalrightsnow@hotmail.com)**

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## Activities of OWFI abroad Houzan Mahmoud- UK representative

\* On 16/03/2004 Houzan Mahmoud was invited by NUS, national union of students in UK -Coventry to give a speech about women's rights in Iraq and their struggle for equality.

This was the annual conference of NUS and there were many delegates of the union who were very interested in the subject and were willing to support OWFI and its work in Iraq. On the next day of their conference they passed an emergency motion in support of OWFI and Yanar Mohammed, who has been threatened by Islamists.

\* On 20/03/2004 Houzan Mahmoud was invited by Solidarity – Iraq, which is a group of activists supporting the work of secular and progressive movements in Iraq, and in particular OWFI. This was organized as part of the one-year anniversary of the occupation of Iraq. In this meeting Houzan spoke about the women's movement for equality, and secularism, which is lead by OWFI. She spoke about the dangers that the forces of political Islam have created in Iraq to the freedom loving people of Iraq.

Also she spoke about the campaigns and work of OWFI in organizing and mobilizing women in Iraq to defend their rights.

## OWFI IN MEDIA

Various media interviewed Houzan Mahmoud UK representative of OWFI on the new constitution and its outcomes for women in Iraq:

BBC World service -World update programme

BBC Radio 4 PM programme.

BBC Asian network.

El Merurio, a main newspaper of Chile.

Swedish newspaper Svenska Bladet.

Saloon.com online magazine

Radio Sound in London

Radio Indy media based in London

Radio Middle East and North Africa in California

Also The Guardian newspaper published an article by Houzan Mahmoud – An empty sort of freedom, which was published on 8March in which Houzan wrote about the current situation of women in Iraq in detail, and also the violations of women's rights by America, Ruling Council, and Islamic groups.

## OWFI's objectives:

Our objective is the unconditional freedom of women and full equality among women and men in Iraq. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq thereby struggles to realize the following demands:

- \*Establishing a humanistic law based upon equality and assurance of broadest liberties for women in addition to the abolition of all discriminatory laws of all kinds.
- \*Separation of religion from state and education.
- \*Stopping of all kinds of violence against women and of honour killings and stressing on punishment of the murderers of women.
- \*Abolition of compulsory veiling, children's veiling and protecting freedom of dress.
- \*Equal participation among women and men in all social, economical, administrative and political realms and at all levels.
- \*Abolition of sexual segregation in schools at all stages.

The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq strives to attract women's masses outside the dark corners of their houses and to organize their ranks along a struggle that develops the status of women and assures their participation in economic, political and social life. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq calls upon all women, men and groups protesting against the abnormal situation of women to join it's ranks and struggle to strengthen and support the emancipatory and egalitarian movement for a better life for women.

