

Equal Rights Now!

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Untold stories of the rape scandal in Abo-Gharib prison in Iraq

By Houzan Mahmoud, and Nadia Mahmood

Many Iraqis believe that sexual abuse of women in Abo-Gharib prison has been rampant.

There have been a lot of photos and talk about women being raped by coalition soldiers. Sometimes the US/UK authorities claimed that these were fake photos, but the live evidence of their crimes is now emerging.

Recently the news from women prisoners who have been released from jail and have either committed suicide or were killed by their own relatives have shocked us. Rape is considered as a shame on "family's honour". These women have been impregnated in prison after been raped by US soldiers.

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Islamic Sharia Law implemented by Falluja's Mujahideen

The very first manifestation of the adoption of Islamic Sharia Law in the Iraqi city of Falluja was seen when masked militiamen paraded men half naked with clear signs of flogging on their bodies. This medieval action by the "resistance" came after a 48 hour time-limit was given to the people of Falluja to get rid of all pornographic CDs and liquor.

At the end of 48 hours, the "Mujahideens" conducted night raids on shops and homes and arrested at least four men, reportedly after finding alcohol in their possession. Hundreds of men gathered in a square in the heart of Falluja waiting to see the four victims paraded in the city.

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On the first anniversary of publishing Equal Rights Now!

By Houzan Mahmoud



The first time I thought of producing a publication to reflect the cry, pain, and miseries that women in Iraq are faced with was in May 2003 just one month after the occupation started. At that time we had established the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition which was a coalition of different women and men, activists from Iraq, Iran, and other countries, to provide a progressive agenda for defending women's rights in Iraq.

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Untold stories of the rape scandal in Abo-Gharib prison in Iraq

By Houzan Mahmoud, and Nadia Mahmood

The voluntarily killing of women after their release informs us that there is no space for a raped women in a society that is been destroyed. The most backward and inhumane values once again are reborn with the emergence of the occupation, which has provided the platform for the Islamists to inflict and impose the most misogynist ideas and norms on people. They look at rape as a "shame" not only on family "honour" but on the nation's honour too. So they have yet another excuse to exploit the situation and yet carry out much more terrorism, and locate big sums of money to award those who can kidnap US and the allied women soldiers so they can take revenge.

USA's and Islamist's methods are both sadistic, oppressive and are both the two sides of one coin, both of them are crimes against women and they should be stopped.

These raped women did not want to live the resentful life in social exclusion and denial even by their own closest relatives in a society that been driven back into the dark ages by the forces of political Islam, and US occupation.

These women appear to have been arrested - not because of any crimes they have committed, but purely because of whom they are married to, and their impending intelligence value. US officials have previously acknowledged that they detain Iraqi women in the hope of convincing male relatives to provide information, and confess; when US soldiers raid a house and fail to find a male suspect, they will often take away his wife, sister or daughter instead.

This is exactly the same method that was used during Saddam's regime and is been repeated now by different totalitarian forces. On invading Iraq,

George W, Bush said now people in Iraq will be free from Saddam's prison, torture and persecution, What has been happening in the prisons of Iraq is again showing the hypocrisy of the US government and its false and inhumane justification for occupying Iraq, and that actually they have just the same methods as the oppressive regime of Ba'ath and are inflicting the same rules and persecution on the Iraqi masses.

This shows us that actually abuse; rape and violent attitudes have always been part of the culture of the imperialist army whenever they have been invading any country.

Hearing about cases of women been raped by soldiers has shocked us, and it is a matter of fact that the occupation has been a reason for the enslavement of women in Iraq and the unleashing of a host of reactionary norms and values. As a result, female prisoners face a solemn future after their released: rejection, ostracism or killing by committing suicide or killings by member of family in order to clear the "shame" that has been brought to the family's "honour".

In societies that still consider woman the honour of family and nation, rape in itself represents a death sentence for women.

What is happening to women in Iraq is unacceptable and is to be condemned. The US officials must be brought to justice for their crimes against women and what they have been doing to women in Iraq. Any women who are arrested, for whatever reason, should be treated with dignity and have all rights to defend herself. These women deserve all kinds of protection, physical and psychological treatment. The Iraqi police of the Puppet Government and the US forces should be held responsible for these crimes, these sadistic crimes against women in Iraq.

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Islamic Sharia Law implemented by Falluja's Mujahideen

The first car moved very slowly carrying masked men holding machine guns and RPGs. Members of the Iraqi police surrounded two men half naked and blindfolded with their heads shaved, bearing signs of flogging on their backs. The second car was carrying "Mujahideens" shouting, "Allah is the Greatest!" and "This is the punishment for infidels!" This action came after a search campaign, hunting for "Islamic forbiddens," alcohol and pornographic CDs. These raids came after Islamic groups set a 48 hour time-limit through a statement put on walls in public places. The statement read, "We, the Mujahideens of Falluja, prohibit the selling of porn CDs, alcohol and numbing drugs. We give you 48 hours to get rid of all these items."

Many residents of Falluja talk about another campaign carried out by these "Mujahideens" to eliminate all those who have dealt with the Americans in one way or another. Recently a body was found on one of the streets with a piece of paper attached to his chest reading, "This is the punishment of a spy and traitor." The body was bearing clear signs of torture.

Many people expressed their disgust not only for the cruelty of the punishments but also because most of the victims are punished on the basis of suspicions and not clear evidence.



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NYC ACTIVISTS RALLY IN SUPPORT OF OWFI!!



By Priya Reddy

On March 3, 2004, we, *Solidarity with the Organization for Women's Freedom In Iraq (SOWFI)* held a solidarity rally and demonstration in front of the Federal Building in NYC to show our support for the struggle of Iraqi women and their demands for equal rights and a secular government, one which recognizes and respects the dignity and humanity of women in Iraq. As American women and men and US residents, we demanded an end to the US governments continued assault on Iraqi women's rights.

The rally was MC'd by three SOWFI members: Fran Luck, founder of the Joy of Resistance Feminist Multicultural Radio Program at WBAI radio in NYC; Allison Guttu, member of Redstockings Allies and Veterans and the Street Harassment Project; and Priya Reddy Independent Media Producer, Organizer and Activist. Speakers included:

Khayal Ibrahim from OWFI-in Toronto Canada; Madhuri Monindar from MADRE, an internationally known Women's Human Rights Organization; Mahmood Ketabchi, founder of the Committee in Solidarity with Iraqi Workers NYC; Anne Jaclard of the Marxist Humanist newspaper News & Letters; Jennifer Fasulo, SOWFI activist and co-founder; Jenny Heinz, of Code-Pink NY, a chapter of the national

women's anti-war organization; Samir Noory, Secretary of the Worker Communist Party- Canada branch; Lorna Salzman, a green party activist and candidate for office in NYC; and Cheryl King, Organizer for V-Day (Vagina Warriors) and Performance Artist. Cheryl performed a dramatic reading from a play about Iraqi women entitled, "Nine Parts of Desire" This play by Iraqi playwright Heather Raffo, was later performed in NYC as a benefit for OWFI.

Many spirited chants were shouted by the demonstrators, such as "Separate the

everywhere, and we will not compromise on protecting such standards under any pressure. True liberation is not something we beg for from those who seek to control us, but rather, something we take and assert for ourselves. It will never come from the oppressor. It must be something we do for ourselves. We are proud to support the brave, strong women of OWFI who stand up to the immense violence of both the U.S occupation and other forces which seek to control the bodies, minds and lives of women. Although there is much clarification to make with an uninformed, shallow American Left, we



church and state in US and Iraq/ Theocracy destroys our rights and women won't go back!" "Women's Rights are Universal/We Won't Tolerate Reversal!" "From New York to Iraq/ Women Will Keep Fighting Back!" We were interviewed by reporters, and many passersby took information from us and asked questions. We were most proud to hear Iraqi and Iranian voices at our rally – speaking out against the oppression and brutality they are forced to live with. There was some argument and debate with a conservative Muslim man who disagreed with our view on Shar'ia, but we only became more determined to expose and stand up to the horror that disguises itself as cultural norm and religious practice. There is only one universal standard for human rights – for women and girls

will never cease from making visible the fight of Iraqi women and men working for a true freedom.



The youngest demonstrator from NYC for women's rights in Iraq!

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Top 5 Reasons to Support Iraqi Women's Struggle for Equality

written by Allison Guttu



1. Women are human beings. Our rights are not up for debate.

As Organization of Women's Freedom declares in their founding statement, "Women's freedom is the measure of freedom and humanity in society. Not only in Iraq, where women endure the most severe types of discrimination and injustice, but also in the more developed countries in the world today. The realization of full equality among women and men still requires continuous struggle and serious and rapid

steps."

2. The U.S. must be held accountable for turning back the clock on Iraqi women's rights.

Since U.S. military occupation in Iraq, women have lost basic human rights which they

struggled for and won 50 years ago. Though Saddam Hussein brutally

repressed the radical movements which achieved these gains, women in Iraq still retained many more rights than other women in the Middle East. The US destruction of Iraqi society and promotion of Islamic forces has emboldened the most reactionary and right wing elements of the society. Men in Iraq are able to walk freely in the streets, but many women are afraid to leave their homes without a close male relative due to the widespread abduction, rape and increased incidence of "honor killings."

3. Iraqi women have risen up in protest to defend and demand their rights; they need our support.

For the past year, Iraqi women, led by the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) have been protesting assaults against women and fighting the US attempts to turn over power to Islamic fundamentalists. The defeat of Resolution 137 (Islamic Shar'ia) by massive women's protests demonstrates that Iraqi women do not want to live under religious rule. OWFI demands a secular constitution that recognizes full equality for women.

4. The U.S. Government covers up its support for theocracy with claims of democracy.

The Bush administration hand-picked the Iraqi Governing Council members, and advocates Islamic law as a "source" for the new constitution in Iraq. This would eliminate women's rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, legal representation, and legalize death by stoning for adultery. As U.S. citizens

and residents, we must hold our government accountable for the escalating human rights crisis facing Iraqi women and support women's struggle for true democracy and liberation.

5. Sexism is not intrinsic to anyone's "culture."

Oppression of women is a tool used in cultures worldwide to control our bodies, our labor and our fundamental right to freedom. We must answer the call of women at home and internationally, to eradicate sexism wherever it exists. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Solidarity with Organization

for Women's Freedom in Iraq

(SOWFI)

For more information,

contact sowfiorg@hotmail.com,

March 3, 2004

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

Bank account:

80 98 15 67

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On the first anniversary of publishing Equal Rights Now!

The first person I spoke to was Nadia Mahmood a prominent political activist from Iraq and she welcomed the idea very much and decided to work on it together. At this time I received an e-mail from a British activist Sheila Mosely: she offered her support to our cause and showed a readiness to help us.

I responded to her and asked her if she could help us with our publication as a proofreader and to check the English for us, as we are not English native speakers. She agreed to work with us on our publication, and as an activist to promote our cause and talk in different events about our movement, and to gather support for it.

On 28th May 2003 we produced the first issue of our publication. We have been working together to reflect the aims, activities, and Iraqi women's progressive demands to the international community. The publication was at first the official paper of Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition but then when the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) was founded we merged into it and the paper is now the official paper of OWFI.

We have opposed the war on Iraq, because we predicted the results for women and the loss of their rights, and we are opposing the occupation and its friend, political Islam. So having a publication which represents the only progressive, secular voice of women in Iraq was vital to our struggle, and we needed to reach our voice to people across the world. We need to tell the world that Iraqi women are not passive recipients, all in black and inactive to defend their rights as has been portrayed in biased capitalist media outlets, but it is the opposite.

Women are very active and are defending their own rights in this chaos that is been created by the occupation.

The response we got after publishing Equal Rights Now was immense and very encouraging to us. Letters from many different countries in the world such as USA, Canada, UK, Europe, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Chile, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, and many other countries were sent to us saluting our work, and offering their support.

Hereby as a founder of this publication I would like to thank Nadia Mahmood, and Sheila Mosely for working together on producing this publication, also many thanks to all those organizations, and individuals that have been supporting us, as without them our struggle would have been difficult to progress.

... and by Sheila Mosley

I offer my congratulations to Houzan in particular, but also Nadia and all those who have contributed to ERN! This newspaper brings first-hand information about the situation in Iraq that we don't find in the mass media. It calls us all to action to defend women's rights and I wish ERN! every success.

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.

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Worker-communist Party of Iraq and Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq Celebrate May Day

The WP Iraq and the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq organized various activities to celebrate May 1st. In Baghdad the party formed many teams who put up posters and wrote slogans on public places. The slogans read: No to America, No to Political Islam, Long live Secularism and Freedom, For a Secular and Non-Nationalist State, Unemployment Benefit for All Unemployed People, No for Sectarian, Tribal and Ethnic Divisions in the Iraqi Society.

On April 29, the first celebration was held in square 55 in al-Thawra suburb in Baghdad where hundreds of workers and toilers gathered and exchanged greetings. The party's literature was distributed among the participants. Sweets were also distributed among the attendees. Party's leaders including Sameh Ashor, Rashid Ismael, Falah Alwan and the UUI president Qasim Hadi addressed the gathering. On April 30th, another celebration was organized at Mutanabi Street where hundreds participated. The gathering was addressed by Zimnako Aziz, the member of political bureau of the party and Halal Rafiaa, the member of Central Committee and UUI president, Qasim Hadi. On the same day another celebration was held at al-Nahtha square. The participants were addressed by the party leaders including Ismail Rashid, Halal Rafiaa and UUI president Qasim Hadi. Various activities were carried out during the celebration.

On May 1st, a celebration was held at al-Fardos square. The celebration was attended by Ynanar Muhamad, head of the Organization of Women's Freedom

in Iraq and a delegation from the party leadership headed by Rebwar Ahmad, the party leader, Moayad Ahmad, and Zmnako Aziz members of the party's political Bureau. A group of Baath loyalists supported by Islamic groups raised the flag of Baath regime and tried to disturb the celebration, but the members of security committee faced them and forced them to bring the flag down and leave the place.

A delegation from WP Iraq consisted of Samir Adil, head of the Executive Committee of the party and Moyad Ahmad member of the political bureau participate in the celebration held by the Union of Unemployed in Iraq at its office to mark the first founding anniversary of the UUI and May 1st. Samir adil addressed the celebration on behalf of the WP Iraq. Many celebrations and activities were also organized in Kirkuk, Arbil, suleimaniah and other Iraqi cities.

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Activities of OWFI in Baghdad

Layla Mohammed and Halala Rafi



A delegation from OWFI that consisted of Layla Muhammad, Halala Rafii and Samih Ashur visited the dormitory of the girl students in The Fine Art Institute. The delegation met with some teachers in the institute and they talked about the problems they have. They talked about the arbitrary firing of the students by Ba'ath regime.

They also mentioned that the institute had been neglected and the students were deprived of their basic rights. The teachers also said how the situation is now under the occupation power. The delegation also met many students.

The students said that they have many problems but the first and more important is that they are separated from male students. Both Layla Muhammad and Halala Rafii clarified the reactionary and rotten policy used by Ba'ath regime against women as it separated males and females from the primary schools and imposes compulsory veil (Hijab). They said that this is the same policy used by the Governing Council. And also the GC has neglected the ill treatment of some of the headmasters in the schools against those students who do not wear veils. They also clarified the policy of OWFI and its standing against the violations.

One of the teachers, who stood against the 137 resolutions and demonstrated against it pointed to her accession to the ideas and work of OWFI and said that she will work with the organization to help the students to solve their problems. She also said that she would work with them to unify the institute with the male students.

Activities of OWFI in Kerkuk-Iraq

The Kirkuk committee of Worker-Communist Party of Iraq and Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq arranged a series of activities.

In co-operation with 26 progressive artists, OWFI organized a show in Kirkuk school activities hall. Halale Rafi, a member of the central committee of WCPI and in charge of the Campaign of Defending the Iraqi Women Rights in Sweden, began by welcoming everyone and congratulated them. The secretary of the Kirkuk committee of WCPI opened the show. The show contained many tableau and paintings displaying the tragic situation of women and their struggle in Iraq. It was showing for three days and attracted the attention of all who attended it. It is worth mentioning that many mass media broadcast the activities of the show. Among those there was Iraqi TV, New Iraq radio and Alhuriya (Freedom) newspaper. They carried out many interviews about the works and activities of OWFI. The activists that had the interviews were Ajeeba Saeed, Parwin Muhammad and Ramathan Sabir.

The celebration of 8 March-Women's Day was arranged in Kirkuk by both OWFI and WCPI and more than ten other women's organizations and egalitarian people took part. Mosa Hussein and Nihayat Majid introduced the anniversary programme. It started with a one-minute-silence for the victims of equality and freedom and those women who died because of racist mentality. Muhammad Aziz read the appeal of Rebwar Ahmed, the leader of WCPI, and then Ajeeba Saeed read the statement of OWFI. Afterwards Halala Rafii orated a speech about the hard situation of women in Iraq and the ways to get loose from the tragic hardness. She also talked about the activities of OWFI, which has become the forefront of women's struggle. She appealed to all the other women's organizations to cooperate to gain the rights and demands of women.

Zmnaco Aziz, a member of the political bureau of WCPI gave a speech confirming the bad and critical situation of women because of the oppressive scenario. He also talked about the danger of political Islam concerning society as a whole, and especially for the lives of women. He said that in co-operation with other members of the Governing Council, they try to impose their laws and Islamize the society. He asserted that the movement that could withdraw resolution nr.137 could also gain the entire equality between men and women.

On the same anniversary, Haitham Ali, the leader of the Union of Unemployed in Iraq - Kirkuk branch mentioned the rate of unemployment among women and the great role of the union in activities to cancel 137 resolutions. In the second part of the anniversary miscellaneous music and songs were presented. It is worth mentioning too, that the correspondents from Al-Iraqia TV, Kurdsat and Kurdistan TV and some local newspapers attended the anniversary and had many interviews with the activists of OWFI and WCPI.



Halala Rafii with the women in Ministry of Work and Social Insurance in Baghdad

Halala Rafii visited the mentioned ministry to get knowledge about the women in general, and especially those who are divorced and widowed. She met with many women in the Family and Social Welfare branch in the ministry. In the recent circumstances of Iraq, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of widows and divorced women and they have no primary rights. Many have lost their spouses in the eight-year-war of Iraq and Iran. Many of them have been unemployed and have become the poorest part of society. In recent circumstances, their situation has not become better and the ministry could not find a real and clear solution to them. Halala clarified the struggle and role of OWFI, and she told those women to organise themselves and to protest, imposing their humane demands upon the GC and the ministry.

Many thanks to Jamal Mohsen who have translated this report from Kurdish into English.

Activities of OWFI abroad

Nadia Mahmood in Naples-Italy



On 26 May 2004 Nadia Mahmood was invited by the Amnesty International Italy branch, Women in Black organization, and the Italian women's association to take part in a meeting. Nadia Mahmood's speech was about the treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Aboghrib prison and the women's situation in Iraq. The meeting lasted for two hours and a half and was attended by different representatives of women's, and human rights organizations, and a representative from the municipality of Naples.

The meeting started with the moderators of the event who pointed out very clearly the situation in Iraq after the war, and the conflict between the poles of terrorism, and the false claims by Berlusconi the prime minister of Italy who talked about "the reality of the way Iraqi people have welcomed the occupying forces"

Then time was given to Nadia Mahmood to present her speech, and speak about the women's situation in Iraq after the war, and the fake justifications of fighting terrorism, or defending human rights in Iraq. She also explained the dangers of Islamic groups in Iraq as a burden on women and their rights.

The representatives of Women in Black spoke about their trip to Baghdad. They also spoke about the attitude of the coalition soldiers towards Iraqis, and stressed the need for more co-ordination between the women's organizations in Iraq and Women in Black in Italy.

Mary Louisa spoke on behalf of the Italian women's association. She stressed the point of the withdrawal of Italian forces from Iraq and strengthening the relations between people and organizations in both countries.

Amnesty International's representative spoke about their international campaign against violence against women, and appealed to the attendees to support their campaign.

In the end there were interviews with Nadia Mahmood in several newspapers of Naples about the political situation in Iraq and the position of OWFI.

Houzan Mahmoud in two seminars in France

On an invitation by Iraq-Solidarity campaign in France Houzan Mahmoud took part in two seminars organized by the activists of this campaign, in the cities of **Paris**, and **Lyon**.

On the **20th May 2004** in Paris an alternative festival was organized by Iraq-Solidarity campaign to highlight the issues around women's struggle in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Houzan spoke about the women's struggle for equality and freedom in Iraq and pointed out the miseries that women are faced with as a result of the one-year of occupation of Iraq. In this event there was Azar Majedi from Iran who is a chairperson of Organization of Women's Liberation in Iran, she spoke about women's struggle

and its relation to socialism in Iran. After this meeting "Rouge" a paper of the Revolutionary Communist league interviewed Houzan about the current women and workers' movements in Iraq.

On the **22nd May 2004** Houzan gave a speech in a seminar about the women's struggle during the Iraq occupation, and the rise of Political Islam as a burden on women's liberation. She also spoke about the role of OWFI, its visions and aims in fighting for women's rights in Iraq. Houzan explained to the audience the progressive movements in Iraq and their difference with the so-called Islamic "resistance". In both seminars Houzan stressed the need and importance of international solidarity with the progressive secular movements in Iraq as a way forward to establish an egalitarian social system.

Houzan Mahmoud was invited to give a talk at Amnesty International's meeting in Shrewsbury, UK.

On 25 May 2004 Houzan took part in a meeting organized by Amnesty International in Shrewsbury for its activists across West Midlands. The meeting was about the Amnesty's International campaign against violence against women and one part of it focused on violence against women in Iraq.

Houzan spoke about all aspects of women's rights violation in Iraq and in particular after America's "regime change" in Iraq, which has, clearly lead to more violence and terror against women. Janet Hague was there on behalf of Amnesty to talk about the campaign itself.