

# Equal Rights Now!

Fortnightly paper of the Iraqi women's Rights Coalition

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

## The situation and struggle of Women in Kurdistan!



By Sakar Ahmad

**Sakar Ahmad** is a women's rights activist, and editor of 'Equality' in Kurdish. This is a leading newspaper of the radical women's movements, and the official paper of IWO. She is also a member of **Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition**, and wrote this article about the Kurdish women's situation, and their struggle, for **Equal Rights Now!**

The women's movement in Kurdistan in general was part of the women's movement in Iraq before the 90s. At one time during the struggle they were challenging the central government, which has dictated to people for more than-thirty- years. The Ba'ath regime was like any other national-Islamic regimes. The Dictator was not taking women's rights into consideration as human rights, and was in fact ignoring women's rights. This was supported by the Ba'ath regime and others. It was very obvious in terms of political, economic, social, and legal rights. The best example of the violation of women's rights and not being equal to men comes from Islam. This is the-

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## Supporting a Women's Shelter in Baghdad is a humanitarian task!

By Nadia Mahmood

Dear readers of Equal Rights Now!, as you know the organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq was founded on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2003, and since its formation members have started helping women, and protecting them. There is a Shelter above the Union of Unemployed office-

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## Interview with Layla Mohamad on her return to Iraq.



Layla Mohamad (left) and Nadia Mahmood (right)

**Layla Mohamed:** a women's rights activist from Iraq, living in Australia since 1998. She chairs the Iraqi Women Association in Sydney. She took an active part in the "Committee in Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights" in Sydney, she holds many seminars, and has taken part-

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## Organization of Women's Freedom of Iraq in a meeting with equality seekers in Sulaymania city!

On Sunday and Monday 10-11/08/03, the Organization of Women's Freedom of Iraq held its first public meeting in the North of Iraq, in the centre of the city of Sulaymania and also Saholaka district. Thousands of people attended this public gathering, women's rights activists, and people who believe in equality for women.

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### Editorial Word

Dear Readers,

In the last five issues, we have been reflecting on the appalling situation for women after the war, and on how women are suffering both in the hands of the Islamists and the US/UK troops. This continues, so now we are announcing an international campaign to stop all kinds of atrocities against women in Iraq, and to hold America responsible for creating an unbearable life for people in Iraq, and in particular for women. Your active participation is vital for the success of our campaign. The Women's Movement in Iraq is part of an international women's movement for liberation and freedom from all kind of reactionary chains of Religious, and Cultural values that oppress woman, and deprive them of freedom. Women's rights activists from inside Iraq and abroad are now fighting together to achieve equal rights for women, and a better and safer world to live in.

So read our newspaper and support our cause.

*Houzan Mahmoud*

## International Campaign to End Rape, Abduction and Killing of Women in Iraq.

**HAVE YOU HEARD WHAT IS**

**HAPPENING TO WOMEN IN IRAQ?**

- Raped women are being killed by their own families, to clear the "shame" being brought to their families' "honour" due to the act of rape.

- The perpetrators of these crimes are set free.

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## The situation and...

official religion of the state and the laws, and rules of the country were based on Islamic Sharia law, which is highly discriminative against women. The lack of rights, and treating women as second-class citizens could be clearly seen in the personal status law.

In this law we can see many articles and decrees that discriminate against women, and consider woman to be dependent on men, a commodity. These kinds of laws, and rules resulted in maintaining the most reactionary values, and anti-women behaviours, a backward attitude towards women. Women were killed to protect the "honour" of the family, there were polygamous marriages for men, women were made to be very dependent on men, and there were many other sufferings of women in this society. Due to the situation in Iraq and in the world, the radical movements were effective in putting pressure on a number of religious and nationalist regimes, one after the other, to bring about some reforms in terms of women's rights. It is clear that Kurdish women's movements were part of a wider women's movement in Iraq.

Uncertainty and chaos was created in Kurdistan by the changes in the political situation in Iraq after the first Gulf war, by America's pursuance of a New World Order, also due to the uprising in the Northern part of Iraq which removed it from the Ba'ath regimes authority, and due to the impositions of a group of nationalist, religious, and tribal parties in Kurdistan. The continuation of sanctions for ten years encouraged reactionary movements and the lack of a secular and modern state. It enforced the same laws and rules which were used by the Ba'ath regime creating more problems and violations of women's rights. There were more attacks on women's rights and freedoms because of the rebirth of the most reactionary and backward attitudes, and values towards women. The killings of women, forced marriages and forcing

of women back to their homes have become the norm in Kurdistan. The lack of basic rights, civil and individual rights, the killing of women in daylight and in the knowledge of the Kurdish authorities has led to the loss of the lives of many thousands of women in the last 11 years in Kurdistan. The statistics, which have been collected mainly by Independent Women's Organization, are the best examples of these dark realities.

Some of these statistics were collected from other women's organisations and other institutions, such as hospitals. Women's killings, suicide, and violation of their rights have become a social phenomenon, not only in Kurdistan. Most of the women's organisations and human rights organisations condemned those laws that allow killings and the violations of women rights in Kurdistan. All this pressure on the Kurdish authorities made the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK), and Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) the two major nationalist parties to make some changes in the laws.

Despite the lack of rights and protection of women in Kurdistan, women's organisations and movements existed, and they continue to struggle for the recognition of unconditional equality between women and men in all spheres of life. The Independent Women's Organization was a leading figure in this struggle. We have held many seminars, and conferences in relation to women, and raised public awareness. We also saved many lives of women who were victims of domestic violence.

We have gathered information and statistics to present to international women's rights organizations to gather support for our struggle. Our organization IWO is known as part of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq that was established on 22/06/2033.

The activists across Iraq are working together as one big Iraqi women's organization to achieve unconditional equal rights, and to establish an egalitarian society.

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## Organization of Women's Freedom of...

People who support the OWFI attended with banners, and placards congratulating the establishment of OWFI, and saying that women's freedom is a measurement of the freedom and humanity in the society.

**Nasik Ahmad**, one of the founding members of this organisation gave a speech on both days about the organisation of women's freedom in Iraq, and about the aims, and activities of the OWFI in Baghdad, and Kirkuk. She invited the people to a celebration that will be hosted in the Youth public hall to celebrate the founding of QWFI in Sulaymania on 14/08/2003.

In Sulaymania thousands of people took the statement of foundation of our organisation and membership forms, which were on a bookstall, and they were introduced to the aims and objectives of this organization. This attendance of freedom lovers of Sulaymania, and the level of enthusiasm and interest among people of Sulaymania was a sign of great solidarity and support for our struggle for the liberation of women in Iraq. Long Live Women's Liberation and equality between women, and men! Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq.

### Contact Details of IWRC's Co-ordinators in different countries:

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## Supporting a Women's Shelter ...

that was previously a Bank, but now it has been transformed into offices.

As you know women have been victimized, and brutalized since the "liberation" took place, by both the Islamic groups, and the "liberation forces". The existence of women as human beings is in great danger, women do not seem to have a right to life. It appears that anyone who is armed can kill a woman and not be charged with a crime. The activists of OWFI inside Iraq are the only ones who defend women's rights and dignity, together with activists of Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition abroad, and with other activists and freedom lovers across the world. These are the people who publicise these atrocities and brutal behaviours against women, to raise international awareness and to gather support. I would like to ask for your financial help. We need to raise money to improve the only shelter for women in Baghdad, Iraq. This Shelter is protecting women from being killed for reasons of "honour", and from violence either by gunmen or by their own families.

This Shelter has no resources, and no income to provide women escaping violence with appropriate protection, and money to live on. So therefore I urge you to take action wherever you are to raise donations to help us build Shelters across Iraq, to encourage our activists in their work. We also need to promote activity in society so that we can reach everyone. We need to raise their awareness, and to fight effectively for the achievement of unconditional equal rights for women, and the establishment of an egalitarian, and a just society.

**Nadia Mahmood:** Representative of OWFI abroad.

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Tel: 0044 789 00 65 933

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

Bank account:

BARCLAYBANK

Middle East Centre for Women's Rights

Sort code: 20-80-57

Account No: 80 98 15 67

London-UK

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## International Campaign....

- Islamic groups are taking revenge on each other by raping women.

- Half of Iraqi society is now under daily attack!

- Women cannot walk safely in the streets; they have been threatened by Islamic groups not to go to work or school unless they wear Hejab (Veil).

- Women are being shot dead because of their professions.

- Women who have entered prostitution are under the threat of being killed by the Islamists.

This is just a drop of water in the ocean of the daily suffering of women in Iraq since they have been "liberated!" Women have no protection by the authorities, and even from their own families, because the most reactionary Islamic norms and values are being brought back into force in the society.

To stop all these atrocities and crimes being committed against women, the Organization of Women's Freedom and the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition, their newspapers (Equality, and Equal Rights Now!), and other activists are gathering to stop these violations of women's rights. Let us fight together and end all these atrocities against women in Iraq that have been brought about for the sake of America's New World Order!

We call upon all women's rights organizations, human rights organizations, Members of Parliament of the European countries, trade unions, political parties, and individuals to raise their voices against these barbaric attacks.

To support us in our cause, please sign your name and address on the petition.

**[http://www.ipetitions.com/campaigns/Women\\_in\\_Iraq](http://www.ipetitions.com/campaigns/Women_in_Iraq)**

We, the undersigned, demand that Paul Bremer, Civil Administrator in Iraq, enforce security and protection for women. As head of the Occupying Forces, we hold him responsible for these crimes against women in Iraq.

Contact us:

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**Appeal:**

Women in Iraq were denied their rights for the last 35 years, and even now after the regime change, they are about to face the worst. They need to set up women's organisation to defend their rights, advocacy centres, and refuges for protection, and newspapers to raise their awareness. Women in Iraq need your help and support to be able to combat this difficult time they are going through.

**Join our coalition, membership is free, be part of us to achieve equal rights for Iraqi women.**

**Make a donation to the following bank address:**

BARCLAY BANK-UK

Sort Code: 20- 80- 57

Account No: 80 98 15 67

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## Interview with Layla...

in women's conferences in Australia. She has been interviewed by many members of the Arabic and English press. She launched many campaigns i.e. to defend ex-Independent Women Organisation based in Kurdistan Iraq, to reopen the women's safe Shelter in Kurdistan, to stop beheading sex workers in Iraq 2000. Layla Mohamad joined the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq when it started in June 2003, and she is also a member of the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition. **ERN: You are planning to go to Iraq, what you are planning to do there?**

**Layla Mohamad:** As you know women in Iraq have suffered for 35 years under Saddam's regime. The regime issued many codes and decrees which violated women's rights, for example that killing women is not crime. They use brutal ways to execute women in Iraq. Because of this, women face daily violations of their social, legal and political rights, which takes women back to the middle ages, the dark ages. I was forced to leave Iraq because of these conditions. Once I reached Australia I started a new stage in my struggle to support women in Iraq. I joined the Committee in Defence of Iraqi Women's Rights to make Iraqi women's voices and demands heard by the international community and to get international support to end violations of Iraqi women's rights. Since then I have been involved in many actions to defend women's rights in Iraq. At this time, establishing the Organisation for Women's Freedom is a continuation of our work abroad in the last years, it is the fruit of we Iraqi women's rights activists who left Iraq because of the dictatorship and who now are returning to do our work in Iraq. I will be working with co-activists to organise and empower women in Iraq to get their equal rights. We have a lot to do on our agenda. Veiling is being imposed on women, rape and killing is common, Islamic courts have now begun which means the imposition of Islamic laws. There are many other issues which needs a lot of women and men working together, and many resources. Our concern is that Iraqi women could be entering a new stage in society.

**ERN: It has been said that women who are returning from abroad are carrying Western values and ideas which are not suitable for Iraqi society. Comment on that please.** **Layla:** Civil values and equality are human values, not Western nor Eastern values. It is not just women's demands but these are supported by men. Iraq is a civil

society, we saw that Iraqi society has been and is a modern society, but it has been suppress by a most reactionary regime, in a time when you couldn't speak about women's rights, nor human rights. Look at the situation now in Iraq. You see that rape is happening every day, and there is kidnapping of girls and women who go to schools and university. The families insisted that their girls should go to school, and so they have found new ways to protect their girls' education. Iraqi people are civilised and interested in educating their female members. They consider education is a given right for everybody, girls and boys. The families accompanied their girls to and from schools, and many male members waited in the doors of schools until their daughters and sisters had finished their exams in June and July. They formed groups of parents to guard the school during school time. These rights should be recognised as a basic rights. However, even in the West women have achieved many demands, but still they are fighting to improve their lives. We are women in the West and East. We want to end any kind of violence against women, whether this violence was established in law, by governmental bodies, in the culture as we see in Iraq, or by individual perpetrators. In short, I have to confirm that this allegation that "women's rights are Western values and do not suit women in Iraq" comes from Islamic and nationalist groups rather than from Iraqi people. Those groups have an interest in keeping women as second class citizens, and it is our task to expose this. **ERN: You have left behind a 10 year old daughter, as a mother how could manage to travel and do your activities?** **Layla:** My husband is one of the defenders of women's rights. He helped me in my work to defend women's rights. I have been in different places and he took responsibility for our daughter. This time is the same, he offered me full support and assured me that he will take care of my daughter so I could do my work. **ERN: Is there anything else you want to say to our readers?** **Layla:** First of all I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to Maggie Black who sponsored my journey to Baghdad. I would like to say that our movement in Iraq is just beginning. The violations happen every day. Our task is enormous, we are facing huge challenges, starting with the occupation, and the emergence of Islamic groups in Iraqi cities. We have many obstacles that should be dealt with. I believe strongly that with the support of women's rights organisations, and their press, their activities could help us to promote women's rights in Iraq.

## Letters to Equal Rights Now!

We are receiving waves of supporting letters from Switzerland to US, from Canada to Tunisia and elsewhere. Such great support makes our movement go confidently forward. Here are some letters we have received in the last week:

**Stephanie Hiller, Awakened Woman** wrote: "Dear Women of Iraq, I am writing to let you know that many women here support your fight for equality. How can we help you? I am the editor of the online women's journal, Awakened Woman (link below). I am also director of the new nonprofit Women for a Better World. I belong to a local Women's Council with a sister circle in Kabul. We would like very much to establish contact with a women's circle in Iraq. Here in the US we are not getting much news of women's activities in Iraq. I would like to let my readers know what you are doing and how they can help you. Please send me any articles you would like me to publish at solidarity".

**From Amjad:** "Dear friends and comrades, I just want to congratulate you for this First issue and movement towards the full equality. Keep up with the good work and go forward to the better world, Regards Amjad" **Canada**

**Lucinda Marshall- feminist peace network- wrote:**

Dear Houzan, "Thank you so much for forwarding your excellent newsletter. You are providing critical information that needs to be heard, especially in the US and Britain. In Sisterhood, Lucinda Marshall"

**Mahmood Ketabchi wrote:** "Dear Houzan, You are doing a great work. You are the hope of the Iraqi people and the whole civilized humanity. The world would look pretty grim without people like you. I have a deep admiration for your work, and I would love to do whatever I can to assist you. Yours - Mahmood"