



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Twenty-seventh session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Al-khoei Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2014]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.14-14815 (E)



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## **A Call to Protect Women and the Girl Child in Iraq and Syria**

The Al-khoei Foundation is making this submission to highlight the affect of violence and conflict on women and children, especially the girl child, in relation to the unfolding events in Syria and Iraq. In particular, the Al-khoei Foundation emphatically denounces any acts of sexual violence and related crimes against families, women and children and in particular in times of conflict

In the longer term, we are also concerned about the ongoing and deeply entrenched harmful practices and gender based violence facing women and girls in Iraq and Syria.

We note with grave concern and sadness the recent coverage of atrocities by jihadi groups like Islamic State against civilians in Iraq and Syria and in particular those committed against and targeting women and girls from Shia Muslim, non-Muslim backgrounds and anyone who opposes their ideology. We believe that IS acts of violence against women spring from the same ideology and contempt for women that is held by groups such as Boko-Haram who kidnapped and imprisoned 230 Nigerian school girls on 13 April of this year.

The Al-khoei Foundation objects in the strongest of terms to the claims that acts of rape, sexual slavery, the trade of women and girls in markets and their mistreatment can be in any way excused by Islam or Shariah law. Terms like 'women as spoils of war' or 'Jihadi Marriage' are a feeble attempt to dignify sexual and gendered violations of women and girls' basic human rights. They are also deeply offensive to all peoples and fuel prejudiced and Islamophobic rhetoric.

At present and rightly so, the international media spotlight and global concern for what is happening in Syria and Iraq has focused on the violence and sensationalist acts of members of jihadi groups like Al-Nusra Front and Islamic State. The destruction and desecration of places of worship such as mosque, churches and temples, places of cultural and civilization interest and the brutal acts of beheadings and crucifixion clearly illustrate how far these jihadi groups have strayed from any tenants of Islam and humanity, but it is only relatively recently that their crimes against women and children, girls in particular have been heightened, for example the kidnapping and imprisonment of Yazidi, Christian and Shia Turkmen women, their transportation to various locations, and their supposed sale in markets in Mosul and Tal Afar.

Furthermore, the statement by Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Nickolay Mladenov, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq highlight the impunity and disregard IS has for the sanctity of life, women and the family. The Senior UN Representatives stated: "Atrocious accounts of abduction and detention of Yazidi, Christian, as well as Turkmen and Shabak women, girls and boys, and reports of savage rapes, are reaching us in an alarming manner."

For the women who survive and who make it back to their communities, the fear and trauma will not end there. They will feel at risk from within their own families, communities, from militant groups and from the wider community who feel that their presence brings shame to society. They will perceive them as 'cheap' and promiscuous rather than victims needing safety and support, for some the only dignified choice is to take their own life or 'marry' their rapists/perpetrator. The tragic example of a 16 year old Syrian refugee girl who sought safety in Iraqi Kurdistan, was kidnapped and raped by 6 men on her way home after work, illustrates the multiple and continuous risk women and girls face in conflict zones and from multiple perpetrators.

Precisely because of the above risks and the fear of sexual violence, as well as poverty harmful and negative coping strategies arise, in the form of forced, child and early marriage as well as child labour, prostitution and stealing.

The UNHCR's recent report, 'Woman Alone: The Fight for Survival by Syria's Refugee Women', details the impact of displacement, lack of security and shelter on women and children and in particular the consequences of this in terms of isolation, the impact on their health, particularly pregnant women and their unborn children as well as the mental and

economic wellbeing of women and children especially in female-only headed families. Similar parallels can be drawn with the situation facing women and girls in Iraq.

The report highlights cases of harassment, insecurity, trafficking and gender based violence against women and young girls including the increased likelihood of forced and child marriage that may already be prevalent culturally but take on particular urgency and frequency in conflict situations.

The Al-khoei Foundation recognises that there are harmful cultural practices in both Iraq and Syria that reinforce the inequality and injustice faced by women and girls. Practices such as early, forced and child marriage, honour-based violence, domestic abuse and the curtailment of basic freedoms such as the right to education and employment are widespread in various sectors of Iraqi and Syrian society. Often cultural and religious justifications are posed to excuse or in some cases reinforce this. We would like to unequivocally state that Islam in no way supports oppressive practices that perpetuate injustice against women. We believe that no religion calls for the subjugation of its female believers or women in general. We also argue that harmful and discriminatory cultural practices should be tackled head and an environment supporting the education of society towards more just and equitable forms of gender equality must be created.

The Al-khoei Foundation calls on all international organisations, all United Nations agencies concerned with the welfare and rights of women and children like UN Women, and in particular the offices of the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict; the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo to:

- Vigorously campaign and bring to the international media's attention abuses against women and girls in all conflict zones including Iraq and Syria.
- Investigate all acts of violence and harm that could be tried in international and national courts under the offence of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by anyone involved in the military conflict in Iraq and Syria which particularly target women and girls.
- To pressure States into condemning these violations and pledge to assist in bringing perpetrators to justice.

In addition the Al-khoei Foundation calls on all states to:

- Work closely with UN bodies and international agencies to support the accountability and due process where war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity particularly affecting women and girls have been shown to take place and where their citizens have been partaking in these acts.
- We ask the Iraqi and Syrian governments to pay particular attention to the welfare and suffering of Iraqi and Syrian women and girls when formulating policies, humanitarian assistance and relief operations. We concur with UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka that psycho-social support that meets the specific needs of women is essential to help them and their families find a way to survive in the highly insecure environments they live in and ask the Iraqi and Syrian governments to provide this specialist support.
- We also urge them to make serious effort to address the issue of violence against women and girls that is endemic in both countries and to ensure that the state or any of its institutions do not inadvertently support and reinforce this form of gendered violence.
- We ask the Iraqi and Syrian governments to make every effort to widely consult and seek the views of a diversity of women and girls on the abuses against them and how their views can remain central to any policies and projects aimed at supporting them and their families.