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**Joint written statement* submitted by Association Ma'onah
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special consultative status, International Educational
Development, Inc., World Peace Council, non-governmental
organizations on the roster**

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

[02 June 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Iraq's Fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

Introduction:

In January 2025, Iraq participated in its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) before the United Nations Human Rights Council. While the state submitted a professionally composed and rhetorically optimistic report outlining alleged progress, this narrative sharply diverges from the lived experiences of Iraqi citizens. Most of the recommendations from the previous UPR cycles have not been implemented, thus they were repeated in the fourth Cycle. The non-implementation of the recommendations has left numerous systemic human rights violations persist.

Overall, the Iraqi government's presentation of its human rights progress in the UPR process fails to reflect the serious and ongoing violations occurring on the ground. There is a glaring disconnect between policy rhetoric and implementation.

1. Overview of Implementation (2019–2025)

During the 2019 UPR cycle, Iraq received 298 recommendations, particularly in the areas of civil liberties, women's rights, rule of law, accountability, torture prevention, death penalty abolition, the treatment of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and minorities. While the government has made broad claims of progress, these statements often lack detail, accountability, and measurable results. All these recommendations were repeated, in a way or another, in the fourth Cycle review, January 2025, as follow:

Civil Liberties: Iraq was urged to protect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. In its 2025 report, the government claimed to have undertaken legal reforms to safeguard these rights. However, these reforms have been largely cosmetic. In practice, journalists, activists, and demonstrators continue to face censorship, harassment, and violence. The use of vague legal provisions to criminalize criticism of state institutions is common, and security forces have repeatedly used excessive force to disperse protests.

Women's Rights: Iraq committed to combating gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting gender equality. The government cited the development of a national strategy on women's rights. Yet, on the reality, the said strategy is nothing than nice words on paper. Iraqi women are subjected to grave human rights violations, with no real effort from the government to end these violations. Patriarchal norms, weak enforcement, and social stigma continue to undermine women's rights.

Rule of Law: Iraq was advised to strengthen the rule of law and reform its judiciary. The government reported that judicial trainings have been implemented. However, the judiciary remains plagued by sectarian and political interference. Many judicial appointments are influenced by party loyalties rather than merit, leading to public mistrust and unfair trial practices. This undermines any perceived progress.

Accountability: The state claimed to have established various committees to investigate human rights abuses, particularly those perpetrated by security forces. Nevertheless, these bodies lack independence, because they are dominated by representatives from the accused bodies. They also lack transparency, and enforcement power. Virtually no senior officials or militia leaders have been held accountable for serious abuses, perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Torture Prevention: Iraq reiterated its intention to prevent torture and referred to enhanced prison oversight mechanisms. In reality, torture and ill-treatment in detention remain widespread. Practices such as beatings, electric shocks, and forced confessions are common in facilities under the Ministry of Interior and intelligence services and the Ministry of Justice. Iraq has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), and there is no independent body monitoring detention centres. This is a repeated recommendation from previous review.

Death in Custody: During the review period tens of prisoners or detainees died in custody due to the severe torture. Many of them died after hours of their detention, the following just a few of recent examples:

- On May 19, 2025, citizen Omar Eid Al-Rufae'i died under mysterious circumstances inside a police detention center in Salah al-Din Governorate.
- April 17, 2025: The death of detainee Aysar Jamal Abdul Hamadi Al-Farraji due to a stab wound inside Al-Taji Prison in Baghdad.
- April 7, 2025: The death of engineer Basheer Khaled Latif Al-Sattouri Al-Hiti, who endured three separate assaults, the most brutal of which occurred on March 31 in Al-Karkh Central Prison.
- December 1, 2024: The death of Hassan Naseer Abdul Hassan Al-Silawi under torture in the Anti-Narcotics Division in Najaf.

IDPs: Iraq claimed that the closure of several IDP camps marked a successful reintegration effort. However, these closures were often premature and coercive. Many returnees have faced unsafe conditions, lack of access to basic services, and administrative hurdles such as denial of civil documentation.

2. Key Areas of Concern

A. Freedom of Expression and Assembly

Iraq continues to violate the fundamental rights to free expression and peaceful assembly. Since the 2019 protest movement ("Tishreen Revolution"), which saw the killing of over 700 peaceful protesters, the government has taken no step to address police and militias brutality or to ensure non-recurrence. Protesters and activists continue to face harassment, detention, and extrajudicial killings.

- Authorities frequently use vague laws such as those prohibiting insults against state institutions, political or religious figures to silence dissent.
- Independent journalists have been subjected to threats, censorship, and arbitrary arrest.
- Internet shutdowns have been systematically used during periods of civil unrest, violating international norms.

B. Rule of Law and Impunity

Iraq's judiciary remains under significant political influence. Judicial appointments are often made based on sectarian or partisan affiliations. This undermines impartiality and public confidence.

- Security personnel, particularly from state-aligned militias, operate above the law and face no judicial consequences for abuses.
- The anti-corruption framework lacks independence and is often used selectively against political opponents.
- There is an absence of effective witness protection, which hampers judicial processes, especially in cases involving state or militia crimes.

C. Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Violence against women remains endemic, and state protection mechanisms are inadequate.

- Iraq has failed to pass a comprehensive domestic violence law despite years of advocacy.
- Honor killings and tribal settlements of GBV cases persist due to weak enforcement and societal norms.

- Women remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles, with many facing workplace discrimination and harassment.

The rise of Hate Speech and Targeted Intimidation in Iraq during the review period:

There is an increased pattern of hate speech and suppression in Iraq, often perpetrated or endorsed by political and governmental entities. Such actions not only violate international human rights standards but also contravene Iraq's constitutional commitments to equality and freedom of expression. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from both national authorities and the international community to uphold the rights of all Iraqi citizens.

1. State-Affiliated Media Promoting Sectarian Narratives

Al Iraqiya, Iraq's state-run broadcaster, has faced criticism for disseminating content with sectarian undertones. The channel's board includes members affiliated with Iran-backed militant groups, influencing its editorial stance. Al Iraqiya has been noted for promoting Shia-centric narratives, particularly during conflicts involving Sunni militants, thereby exacerbating sectarian divisions.

2. Targeting of Human Rights Organizations:

Human Rights NGOs in Iraq, faced legal challenges in a hostile environment where advocacy for basic rights is met with institutional resistance, hate speeches by members of Iraqi government and the Iraqi Parliament.

3. Hate Speech Against Religious Component:

There is an increased hate speech against the Sunny population in Iraq. During the review period, government official, parliamentarians, militia leaders used aggressive hate speech against the governorate where is the Sunny population are concentrated, labelling them as terrorists or cooperative with terrorists organisations while in reality they were victims of the failure of the governmental troops to protect them from terroristic groups.

4. Recommendations

1. Independent Accountability Mechanism: Establish a UN-assisted, independent body to investigate serious violations, especially those by security forces and militias.
2. Domestic Violence Law: Enact and implement a comprehensive law that criminalizes all forms of domestic violence and provides protective services.
3. End Torture in Detention: Grant full access to detention sites for international monitors; prohibit the use of torture-tainted evidence in court.
4. Freedom of Expression: Repeal laws criminalizing criticism of public officials; ensure protection for journalists and civil society actors.
5. Support for IDPs: Develop a national plan for durable solutions, with international support, including restitution, livelihoods, and civil documentation.
6. Judicial Reform: Create an independent judicial oversight body free from political interference; enhance training and anti-corruption measures.
7. Protection of Minorities: Implement land restitution programs, ensure political representation, and protect cultural and linguistic rights.

Conclusion

Despite its polished report at the UPR, Iraq's human rights situation remains alarming. Implementation of previous recommendations has been superficial or non-existent. The

international community must strengthen its engagement and require genuine, measurable progress before accepting official narratives at face value.

Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), Brussels Tribunal, Iraqi Committee for Human Rights (ICHR), Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), Organization for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI),, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.