

**Hanaa Edwar intervention to the Open briefing on “the Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism”**

**UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), New York 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

**Ladies & Gentlemen,**

Good afternoon

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Counter-Terrorism Committee for this opportunity to present my intervention in this important Open briefing on “the Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism”.

My name is Hanaa Edwar. For the last fifty years; I have been working as Human Rights, Women’s Rights and Democracy activist. I am the co-founder and board member of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association which was formed in 1992 with a mandate to combat all forms of violence and discrimination and the promotion of the culture of Human Rights, gender equality, tolerance and social peace. Al-Amal activities and services are provided throughout Iraq engaging directly in conflict zones by providing humanitarian aids and rehabilitation of IDPs, education and caring for IDPs children, training widows in income generation projects, and empowering judges and judiciary staff on Human rights and Gender and Gender based Violence. In addition Al-Amal provides research and analysis, such as the studies on the status of Iraqi women in law, the burden of the human disasters on Iraqi women, on IDPs as well as carrying out two conflict analyses on Security, Religion, and Gender at Anbar and Nineveh provinces.

Al-Amal works within the framework of the Iraqi Women Network, which is composed of more than 90 women’s organizations and groups from all over the country. Al-Amal also works within the Civil Initiative for NGOs. In both of these networks, effective actions and successful advocacy campaigns have been carried out. Recently the campaigns focused on the question of law reform which included a number of draft legislations such as the Protection from Domestic Violence Law, Political Parties Law, Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly Law, and Protection of Diversity Law.

In my intervention I want to speak about the challenges that are encountered in Iraq, and the role of women and CSOs in countering terrorism and violent extremism in Iraq.

## Ladies & Gentlemen,

I come from Iraq, where people suffered for decades from the scourge of wars, tyranny, unjust international embargo and occupation. We continue to date to live without security and stability. As one of the international reports indicated, about 14 thousand women in Iraq were killed during the period of 2003-2014.

After 9<sup>th</sup> June last year, Iraq witnessed dramatic events when the militants of the so-called ISIS invaded large areas of Iraq, occupying Mosul the second largest City in Iraq, and later extended their occupation to the whole of Nineveh and other provinces of Salahadeen and Anbar. Most heinous crimes of genocide and ethnic and religious cleansing were committed by ISIS terrorists, including the displacement of more than 3.2 million civilians, most of whom are from minorities including Christians, Yezidis, Turkmen and Shebaks. The displaced people live under harsh and inhumane conditions, with a sense of desperation and trauma which is driving them to seek immigration outside Iraq. **All women** are repressed by these groups and stripped of their rights, however depending on religion or ethnicity that ISIS seeks to destroy; those crimes can amount to genocide. Genocide can occur in many forms, including through rape and the forced transfer of children.

The morning of August, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 is marked by Yezidi people as the black Sunday, when the terrorists ISIS occupied the district of Shingal; 120 kilometers west of Mosul. They perpetrated carnage, destruction, plundering of possessions, destruction of religious and historical monuments, and abduction of more than 5000 Yezidi women and girls and the recruitment of children for military service.

The abducted women and girls were assaulted in practices reminiscent to practices in previous era of history, such as the sale of women into sexual slavery, rape, torture, murder, not to mention the psychological violence of humiliation, threats and forcing them to convert to Islam. At least more than 3000 of the abducted women and girls are still being held, according to community leaders, and the destiny of most of them is still unknown.

The escalation of very scary gender-based violence practiced by ISIS terrorists, using of sexual violence systematically and brutalization of women and girls has emerged as a central aspect of its ideology and practices, especially against women and girls from the Yezidi community because they were considered “infidels” according to ISIS.

Here, I refer to some quotations appeared in ISIS publications, which explains their ideology on sexual slavery.

“We have indeed raided and captured the infidel women and drove them like sheep by the edge of the sword”.

“Slaves belong to the estate of the fighter who bought them and therefore can be willed to another man and disposed of just like any other property after his death”.

Beyond that, there appears to be no bound to what is sexually permissible. Child rape is explicitly condoned: “It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn’t reached puberty, if she is fit for intercourse”.

The survivors depicted their situation as heartbreaking, mind-boggling, and heinous. I quote to you the cry of one of the victims, a young Yezidi woman of 18 years old: “Who will save me from the nightmare of terror, rape and oblivion that I experienced with so called Islamic State? Who will save me from the stigma which will live deeply inside me forever? I feel it even through the words of sympathy and compassion that try to console me? I want to die as a balsam for salvation”.

A number of abducted young women resorted to committing suicide in order to escape the heinous practices and the torture they were exposed to.

### **Ladies & Gentlemen,**

In the areas occupied by ISIS, the terrorists are promoting extremely intolerant views of women which are included in their “City Charter”, in gross violation of international human rights and laws. Amongst these are:

- **Execution, murder, arrest and torturing**

ISIS targets all women: Many Muslim women were killed including physicians like Ghada Shafeeq, Maha Sabhan and Lamia Ismael. Lawyers, academia, candidates in elections, government employees and CS activists had been executed or assassinated, amongst them: Zina Al-Anzi, Najlaa Al-Omari, Nada Abdullah, Hind Maayoof, Samira Al-Nuaimi, Eman Mohammed Yuonis, Ebtihal Ali Al-Hayali, and Hanaa Mohamed Fakhri Al-Baghdadi. There are many other women beheaded because they were accused of adultery.

During July and August 2015, ISIS announced the lists of 2070 citizen who were executed in Mosul among them some 300 women. Their bodies were not handed over to their families. Some bodies were burned and others blown up alive.

Recently, on 6 August 2015, three female lawyers were executed. They were arrested in mid-February. Their names are: Nihal Ibrahim, Zainab Wa'ad and Rana Abdul Sattar, who worked together in the Court of appeal of Nineveh located in the center of Mosul.

Many women have been detained in several prisons and were exposed to the utmost torture of whipping and beatings.

- **Confiscating the rights to personal privacy, movement, work and education**

ISIS imposed strict guidance for women and girls to wear heavy veil and cover their hands and legs. Women are prevented from going out of the house unless accompanied by a man and for urgent reasons only, depriving them from work outside the house except female obstetricians and women working in the field of nursing at hospitals. Whipping is imposed on women violating these rules, and it is carried out in public, in particular in the city of Mosul. A special formation of ISIS women militants are scattered in the streets, watching and attacking women whom they consider violating the rules bitten them monstrously in several parts of the body. This situation led huge number of families to stop sending their girls to schools and universities.

- **Deterioration of health situation**

Our sisters in these areas suffer from the lack of medicine and a serious shortage of health services such as shortage in maternity hospitals or threads and anesthetic for operations, resulting in reduced acute caesarean operations. During one year after ISIS invaded Mosul, 147 disabled children with chronic diseases died. People are suffering badly from power and water cuts in the severe hot summer season and the harsh economic conditions we are witnessing in Iraq at the moment.

### **Ladies & Gentlemen,**

Women stand ready to engage on many levels to combat extremism. I want to give some examples: Last May, we initiated in Erbil the Women Security Forum for Middle East and North Africa on Resolution 1325 under the slogan: "*Women's Resistance to Extremism and Terrorism, and their Struggle for Their Rights, Peace and Security*". It was attended by more than 180 delegates, including activists from civil society organizations, specialists in law, media, and researchers from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Libya and Tunisia. Representatives of official departments from the

Kurdistan Region and the federal government, in addition to a number of international organizations and United Nations agencies also attended the Forum.

Testimonies were presented at the Forum from women victims of terrorism and displacement. Stories of women defying violent extremism and terrorism emerged in the testimonies of the courageous women. The Forum remembered Ms. Omayya Naji Jbara; the advisor for Women's Affairs of Salahadeen Governor who was killed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014, while resisting ISIS attack against her town. Others saved lives of a number of young soldiers wanted by ISIS. They displayed great model of leadership to strengthen the bonds of social cohesion and solidarity among different segments of society, regardless of risks and sacrifices.

The outcome of the rich debates among participants that lasted for two days reflected in the Erbil Declaration which emphasized the solidarity with the plight of women captive at ISIS, and the role of women in conflict resolution and negotiations to build civic peace and social cohesion, combating the culture of violence and discrimination, extremism and sectarian hatred. The Forum demanded the protection of survivors and the need for proper care and rehabilitation for the internally displaced women as part of a list of prioritized actions.

In August this year, UNAMI-Gender unit organized a national conference, attended by over 150 delegates, under the theme '*Empowering Women to Address the Impact of Terrorism*'. The Conference also provided a forum to review and build on the recommendations of the previous Regional Forum and convened under the framework of the Special Emergency Plan on the Implementation of SCR 1325, which takes into consideration the impact of the current conflict with ISIS on women, peace and security.

I would also like to mention other initiatives that we have taken as CSOs to counter violent extremism and terrorism. In the frame work of the Civil Initiative of the NGOs, we launched an advocacy campaign for enacting a law on Diversity Protection.

In addition, we consider education to be a fundamental part of the process of combating violence extremism. And therefore, thanks to Mennonite Central Committee, my organization, Iraqi Al-Amal Association has commenced the implementation of a pilot project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The project entails drafting a new civic education curriculum for children in 9 schools located in three provinces. The aim is to ensure the gender balance, and the balance in rural/urban, IDP/host community, and religious/ethnic diversity. The project will last

for the coming six months. This will include conducting capacity building training for 200 teachers and 900 students on tolerance, positive conceptions of the other and increased understanding of what constitutes religious freedom. Later on, we will submit to the Ministry of Education the results of analysis of the baseline and the output data with draft recommendations.

Extremists around the world, whether it's Boko Haram targeting school girls or ISIS deliberately targeting educated women, have tried to deprive women of access to education.

We call on the Security Council to support women in their efforts to combat extremism and ensure safety and stability.

### **Conclusions**

As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, there are clear threads which lead to obvious conclusions which I would summarize as follow:

1. The use of sexual violence in conflicts by terrorists and extremists as the key element in destroying human morality and social fabrics being extended in many countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and America. This represents a noticeable threat to global peace and security and the Security Council has to take atrocities committed against women and girls just serious as any other terrorist act. To combat this threat, there must be inclusive actions at international level to combat terrorism and extremism through building peace and reconciliation and providing the means for a better future for the people of the world. There also needs to be accountability for these crimes. It is this history of impunity for sexual violence and gender based crimes that fuel the targeting of women as a weapon of terror by extremists. The Security Council has the critical role in preventing suppressing and ending impunity for genocide crimes whether they are in the form of killing or sexual violence perpetrated daily on the same abducted victims.
2. Inclusive efforts at national and community levels must also be taken to heal the wounds of the victims and society as a whole. Prompt measures must be undertaken to protect them; including the provision of shelters, comprehensive medical services, and empowering the victims through education and psycho-social and economic support.

3. ISIS may have committed all three of the most serious international crimes – namely war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide as found by the report issued by the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in March 2015. The Report continues to say that the manifest pattern of the attacks against the Yezidis “pointed to the intent of ISIS to destroy the Yezidi as a group”. This “strongly suggests” that ISIS may have perpetrated genocide. Recognitions like this should be the beginning point for the exposure of such crimes and the active follow up for the legal accounting for such actions. No impunity should tolerate. We appeal to the Security Council to adopt a new resolution authorizing the international Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate on this matter.
4. We anticipate and look forward to the high level event of the coming UN General Assembly to adopt a new resolution, as a matter of urgency, to address the protection of women and girls of minority communities; such as Yezidis, from violent extremism and terrorism. We further look forward to the high level event to consider the empowerment of women and youth in countering radicalization as called for in the UN Security Council Resolution 2178 of September 2014.
5. In these difficult circumstances, there is an urgent need to highlight the role of civil society organizations, including women's organizations, in countering terrorism and extremism, and in the process of national reconciliation and social cohesion. We request UN and its specialized agencies to foster the empowerment programs for CSOs on monitoring, and documenting sexual violence during conflicts as well as post conflicts situation, and in rendering psycho-social support to the victims. The UN agencies must take into consideration the active roles played by women’s organizations in exposing the serious consequences inflicted on women and girls as a result of conflicts, such as child marriage, forced marriage and temporary marriages, trafficking and the so-called honor crimes.
6. The situation in Iraq as a whole contributes to the suffering of women and girls due to the internal violence sectarianism, militarization of political parties, failure to enforce the law and general lack of cohesion. In these situations women and girls bear the greatest burden as clearly indicated by the number of physical attacks, domestic violence, and lack of fundamental rights, early and forced marriage and trailing. The emergence of tribal and religious norms and customs and the weaknesses of the justice institutions strengthen the environment of gender based violence.

Thank you!