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Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Iraq - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 22 and 23 April 2010

Information on how the current situation in Iraq - the breakdown of law and order, societal changes, growing Islamisation - since the international invasion has affected the lives of women regarding economic, social freedoms et al.

A report issued in March 2010 by *Amnesty International* states:

“Women and girls in Iraq have been particularly affected by the ongoing violence that has torn the country apart since the US-led invasion in March 2003. They continue to suffer domestic and societal violence, indignity and discrimination. Very little has been done by the Iraqi authorities with regards to the provision of adequate protection against violence, including by other family members. Women and girls are being attacked in the street by men with different political agendas but who all want to impose veiling, gender segregation and discrimination. Islamist armed groups, including Shi’a militias, have claimed responsibility for and justified violent attacks on women for not complying with their views.” (Amnesty International (1 March 2010) *Iraq: Human Rights Briefing*, p.12)

This report also states:

“Women are also suffering violence at the hands of their fathers, brothers and other relatives, particularly if they try to choose how to lead their own lives. Many face terrible retribution if they refuse to be forcibly married or dare to associate with men not selected by their families even though Iraqi legislation specifically prohibits forced marriage, and the right to choose spouse is guaranteed under international law applicable in all parts of Iraq. Some women are reported to have been killed by male relatives who the authorities have then failed to bring to justice.” (Ibid)

A report published in March 2010 by *Freedom House* states:

“Although some of the laws enacted by Iraq’s successive 20th-century governments were relatively ambitious and progressive with respect to women’s rights, the prevailing instability and frequent policy reversals—particularly under Saddam Hussein—often put women in severe danger. Iraqi women seized the opportunity after 2003 to form NGOs and demand protection from the violence, tribal traditions, and social norms that constrained their lives and prevented them from contributing to their country’s development. Women have succeeded in blocking implementation of a potentially harmful constitutional provision on personal status issues, but the last five years have largely been characterized by a stark contrast between constitutional guarantees and women’s inability to

exercise these rights in the face of widespread violence. Under the pressures of displacement and poverty, women have increasingly fallen victim to human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and a controversial form of temporary marriage." (Freedom House (3 March 2010) *Women's Rights In The Middle East And North Africa, Iraq*,p.10)

This report also states: "After the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, women's living conditions worsened on a variety of levels, particularly because the daily violence left many women widowed, displaced, or unemployed. The security situation has interrupted many girls' schooling, adding to the gender gap in educational attainment, and the distribution of government ministries to Islamist parties has made it more difficult for women to obtain public-sector jobs." (*Ibid*,p.17) This publication also reports:

"The lack of security has had a profoundly negative impact on women's economic participation, as many female professionals including doctors, engineers, politicians, teachers, and civil servants were exposed to violence. Growing killings and kidnappings have been orchestrated by extreme religious militias in an effort to dissuade women from working. In some instances, women were allegedly attacked out of envy or hatred by their male counterparts, who would hire gangs to carry out the crimes. The more general violence in the streets caused many people, both men and women, to flee to safer areas at the cost of their livelihoods." (*Ibid*,p.18)

A report published in March 2010 by the *United States Department of State* reviewing events of the preceding year states: "The constitution provides for equal treatment before the law without discrimination based on gender; in practice, discrimination existed, and enforcement of equal treatment was uneven. The general lack of security in the country and increasingly conservative societal tendencies had a serious negative impact on women." (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Iraq*, Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons, Women)

The *Inter Press Service* in March 2010 states:

"Under Saddam Hussein, women in government got a year's maternity leave; that is now cut to six months. Under the Personal Status Law in force since Jul. 14, 1958, when Iraqis overthrew the British-installed monarchy, Iraqi women had most of the rights that Western women do. Now they have Article 2 of the Constitution: "Islam is the official religion of the state and is a basic source of legislation." Sub-head A says "No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam." Under this Article the interpretation of women's rights is left to religious leaders – and many of them are under Iranian influence. "The U.S. occupation has decided to let go of women's rights," Yanar Mohammed who campaigns for women's rights in Iraq says. "Political Islamic groups have taken southern Iraq, are fully in power there, and are using the financial support of Iran to recruit troops and allies. The financial and political support from Iran is why the Iraqis in the south accept this, not because the Iraqi people want Islamic law." " (Inter Press Service (12 March 2010) *Iraq: Women Miss Saddam*)

The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* in December 2009 states: "Activists and government experts say women's unemployment is impoverishing hundreds of thousands of families in Iraq." (Institute for War and Peace Reporting (24 December 2009) *Iraqi Crisis Report: Women Struggle to Find Work*)

In December 2009 the *United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI)* states: "Research conducted by UNAMI on the situation of women indicates that gender-based violence is prevalent in many Iraqi communities, and that, due to the nature of the crime, it is treated as a family affair and rarely reported to the authorities." (United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (14 December 2009) *Human Rights Report, 01 Jan – 30 Jun 2009*, p.13)

Research carried out on displaced Iraqi women by *Refugees International* in July 2009 states: "Some fear rising conservatism would restrict their ability to participate in civic and professional life. Women seeking to resume their former roles and lifestyles in high profile professions, such as journalists or doctors, believe current circumstances in Iraq put them at risk." (Refugees International (15 July 2009) *Iraqi Refugees: Women's Rights and Security Critical to Returns*, p.1)

Published in April 2009 the *UNHCR* notes that: "Women in Iraq are victims of societal, legal and economic discrimination, abductions and killings for political, sectarian or criminal reasons, rape, forced displacement, domestic violence, including "honour killings" and other harmful traditional practices, (sex) trafficking, prostitution and forced recruitment by armed groups" (UNHCR (30 April 2009) *UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of Iraqi asylum-seekers*, p.144). This report also states: "Women, who make up 60% of the Iraqi population, have been particularly affected by the dire humanitarian conditions after years of conflict. Women without a breadwinner are increasingly lacking the means to provide for themselves as access to the labour market is generally difficult, partly due to the increasing pressure for conservative behaviour in parts of Iraq." (*Ibid*, p.149)

In March 2009 a survey published on women in Iraq by *Oxfam* states: "The women revealed that their families' everyday lives had worsened in many cases since Oxfam released its humanitarian report – and despite the improved overall security situation in Iraq that began in mid-2007. Not only did a large proportion of women say that access to basic services had grown more difficult, but they also told surveyors that they had become more and more impoverished over the past six years, and that their own personal safety remained a pressing concern." (Oxfam (8 March 2009) *In Her Own Words: Iraqi women talk about their greatest concerns and challenges*, p.2)

Published in March 2009 a survey by the *Inter Agency Information and Analysis Unit* and *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* states: "Only 18% of women participate in the labour force, compared to 81% of

men. This is a low figure compared to other countries in the region.” (Inter Agency Information and Analysis Unit & United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (8 March 2009) *Iraqi women: Facts & figures*)

In March 2009 a report published by *Amnesty International* notes: “Women and girls are being attacked in the street by men with different political agendas but who all want to impose veiling, ender segregation and discrimination” (Amnesty International (1 March 2009) *Trapped by violence, Women in Iraq*, p.2). This report also states: “Women and girls have borne the brunt of the violence that has permeated so much of Iraqi society in recent years. Many have been targeted by Islamist armed groups in connection with their profession – as politicians, journalists or civil servants – or because of their religious affiliation or ethnic origin” (*Ibid*, p.3). The report goes on to note: “Many women are trapped indoors as they fear the risks of stepping out of their homes.” (*ibid*) This report also states:

“Girls in Iraq remain less likely than boys to obtain a school education – in particular beyond primary school – and other qualifications, and so are less likely to fulfil their potential in all areas of employment. This is in part a result of girls’ and women’s lack of safety and security in education and work environments. Disparities in access to education and the labour market, as well as other factors that restrict women’s choices, increase their vulnerability to violence by men. Disempowered and subordinated, women become dependent, often trapped and unable to escape abusive relationships.” (*Ibid*, p.6)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any

particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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