

## Erbil Declaration

### Regional Women's Security Forum on Resolution UNSCR 1325

The Women's Security Forum on Resolution No 1325 for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region concluded its work in Erbil on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The theme of the Forum organized by Iraqi Al-Amal Association (IAA) was:

**"Women's Resistance to Extremism and Terrorism, and their Struggle for Their Rights, Peace and Security."**

The event was held in collaboration with:

- Iraqi Women's Network
- The Supreme Council for Women's Affairs in the Kurdistan Region
- The High Commission for Human Rights
- The Ministry of Interior in the Kurdistan Region
- KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation in Lebanon
- International Network for the Civil Society Activity (ICAN)
- Gender Unit in UNAMI

The Forum 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. The delegates participated, over two days, in several panel discussions and working groups, in a free exchange of views, experiences and expression of solidarity.

The Forum began with a minute silence in honor of the women martyrs throughout (MENA), including the victims of terrorism and extremism. The Forum's work focused on the situation of women during and after armed conflicts, in light of the spread of extremism and terrorism, particularly after the control of Da'ish (ISIS) on large areas of Iraq and Syria, and its extension in Libya. The testimonies conveyed at the Forum reflected the systematic inhumane practices perpetrated against women and girls, including killing, abduction, trafficking, violence, sexual slavery as well as being forced to change their religions. Other testimonies reflected on the tragedies of the displaced

women and refugees in Iraq and (MENA) region. The Forum also, focused on the attacks and challenges facing women activists and the violation of their rights.

Stories of women defying violent extremism and terrorism emerged in the testimonies courageous women. 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 delegates expressed the need to raise awareness and disseminate information in the fight against sectarianism, narrow mindedness and all practices of discrimination and exclusion against the citizens, and to expose extremist's fatwas and religious practices which target the dignity of women and degrade their rights. Those extremists were taking advantages of the ignorance, poverty and rampant violent tendencies amongst a wide range of the population. The delegates also stressed the importance of separating religion from the state to ensure building a civil state based on the principles of equality, justice and rule of law. They noted also that the continued worsening of the armed conflicts in a number of countries in (MENA) region, has led to dismantling of state institutions, the destruction of communities, and threatening world security and peace. At the same time, it highlighted the failure of the international mechanisms in finding solutions to stop the armed conflicts, as well as in safeguarding the lives of civilians and providing security, particularly for women and girls.

The delegates discussed in depth the cases of sexual violence against women and girls during conflicts by armed groups and security forces, in addition to the risks to civilians, especially women and children during the military operations, the growing phenomenon of mass exodus, the extreme violence against minorities, particularly against women and girls, and the unknown fate of many female defenders of human rights. The Forum called for pressure to be exerted and advocacy campaigns at the national, regional and global level to condemn such practices as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. They called, at the same time, for the application of transitional justice in the prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes to punish them and compensate the victims, and bringing the countries and supporting institutions that provide funds to terrorist groups to account.

They also highlighted the role of the international community in providing solidarity with women and girls who are victims of armed conflicts, as emphasized by Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the General Recommendation No. (30) of the CEDAW Committee, the International Protocol for the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence Crimes in Conflict Situations, with the importance to include this within the documents of Resolution 1325 +15 and Beijing +20.

The discussion at the Forum focused on the need to strengthen the role of civil society organizations and the coordination among them in documenting violations and crimes, and in advocacy and lobbying campaigns, as well as monitoring governments in the implementation of their commitments to the establishment and the implementation of the National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, and the application of the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee and the UPR.

The delegates agreed to coordinate with United Nations agencies and international organizations to send a delegation to the Security Council in New York to present the recommendations of the Forum and gain international support for them. They also agreed on the need to reconvene the Forum on a regular basis, in order to maintain coordination and networking among civil society organizations in (MENA) region to resist terrorism and extremism, strengthen solidarity among women, seek to develop regional strategy for resolution No 1325 to strengthen the role of women in operations to keep peace, security and reconciliation, and empower them to prohibit violence and discrimination against them, and win the support of the international community and the support of international agencies for these initiatives.

**As a matter of priority, the Forum recommended the following demands:**

- 1. To free the Yazidi women and girls, as well as women from other components imprisoned by ISIS, and provide protection, medical and psychological treatment, and rehabilitation for those who escape from ISIS survivors of them.**
- 2. To release the women detainees and prisoners under Israeli occupation, as well as in Syria, Libya and Egypt, and disclose information on those whose fate is still unknown**
- 3. To secure the protection of women and children from the dangers of military operations and the use of excessive force by security forces and armed groups**

- 4. To provide basic services for the displaced and refugee women including shelter, food, education and medical and psychological treatment, and involve them in the management of the camps, monitor and follow up on cases of harassment and sexual violence, and to allow victims the access to justice**
- 5. To provide training for employees of the judiciary and security institutions on how to deal with women survivors of sexual violence, and victims of human trafficking, as well as how to reduce the phenomenon of impunity for the perpetrators of crimes of violence and women trafficking**
- 6. To ensure the safe return of the displaced women to their homes and to rehabilitate them in order for them to participate in the reconstruction of the affected areas**
- 7. To provide the protection of women and girls from ethnic and religious minorities from the risks of physical elimination, displacement and demographic change to their communities**
- 8. To provide protection to the returnees, internally displaced, and refugee women through long-term strategies in support of their socioeconomic rights and livelihood opportunities, as well as enhanced leadership and participation, with a view to empowering them to choose durable solutions that suit their needs**
- 9. To organize solidarity and advocacy campaigns for the threatened female defenders of human rights, and work to create networks or support groups at the local / national / regional level to protect them, and campaign for the support of the international community to finance the activities and programmes for the protection of female defenders and create safety centres for them**
- 10. To empower women to participate in the decision-making positions, in the negotiations for conflict resolutions and national reconciliation, in the operation of peacekeeping, security and building a State of equal citizenship, and to disseminate the culture of non-violence and tolerance**
- 11. To seek the adoption/implementation of the National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 at the local and national community levels, this must be included within the annual State budget**

- 12. To strengthen the role and position of the civil society organizations in monitoring and documenting violations and in providing legal, psychological and social services to victims of sexual violence**
- 13. To carry out advocacy campaign for a special resolution to be issued by the Council of Representatives and the Iraqi Government as well as another resolution by the United Nations, to consider the crimes of sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls and women from other components as crimes against humanity**
- 14. To amend the laws, regulations and instructions which perpetuate the marginalization, exclusion, discrimination and violence against women, and in particular the Personal Status, the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Rules**
- 15. To change school curricula and adopt open educational policy on the principles of human rights, women rights, diversity, peaceful co-existence and social cohesion between different social components**
- 16. To stress the importance of public awareness campaigns to the media, the staff of educational institutions, and religious and community leaders, to counter violence and extremism against women and girls, to combat harmful practices and stereotypes, which spread during conflicts and displacement, particularly early marriages of young girls, forced marriages and temporary marriages, and the so-called “honor” crimes.**
- 17. To put pressure to bear on the governments in the (MENA) region to join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.**