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UK Government Consultations on the
20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in 2020
and the 2019 UK-Hosted
PSVI International Conference:
Iraq consultation

Sulaymaniyah, 18-19 March 2019

**UK Government Consultations on the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in 2020 and
the 2019 UK-Hosted PSVI International Conference**

Iraq consultation, March 2019

Introduction and background

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) held a national consultation meeting on 18-19 March 2019 in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, in collaboration with ASUDA, a non-governmental organisation that works on combating violence against women (VAW) in Iraq. The event was funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and was attended by 22 women-led and feminist organisations and networks in Iraq. It was held in preparation for the UK-hosted international conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict, scheduled for November 2019, and ahead of the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in October 2020.

The consultation brought together experts from women-led and feminist civil society in Iraq, to draft practical recommendations for the UK Government and the international community. This report outlines the recommendations and discussion of the participating Iraqi experts. The recommendations bring into focus the main challenges and shortcomings in relevant policies, laws and programmes, and provide frameworks for intervention.

Recommendations

Overarching recommendation

1. **Provide long-term and sustainable technical and financial support to women-led and feminist organisations in Iraq:** The UK Government and the international community should provide long-term, sustainable technical, logistical and financial support to civil society organisations in Iraq, with an emphasis on women-led and feminist organisations and networks, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of their holistic, multi-sectoral intervention approaches aimed at protecting, preventing and combating gender-based violence and enhancing women's meaningful political participation.

Recommendations – Women, Peace and Security

1. **Legislation and rule of law:** The UK Government and the international community should use their position to advocate to the Iraqi Government to reform domestic legislation in line with international norms and conventions on women's rights, especially those Iraq has ratified and is bound by. Such an alignment may be attained through repealing discriminatory provisions that violate women's rights, enacting legislations that protect and support women and, fully implementing the 67 recommendations stated in the Concluding Observations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in 2014.
2. **Mechanisms and processes to implement national strategies and plans:** The UK Government and the international community should provide technical and financial support to the Iraqi Government to enable the creation of necessary tools and procedures to update national strategies and action plans, ensure they are implemented over a set timeframe, funded, monitored and evaluated. The UK Government and the international community should encourage the Iraqi Government to set up an official women and girls' rights body to oversee this process from design to evaluation.
3. **Update the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security:** The UK Government and the international community should fund the development and implementation of second Iraqi National Action Plan (NAP). This should include technical support and funding for participatory consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as advocacy to ensure the Iraqi Government allocates governmental budgets that are gender-sensitive.
4. **Support women's meaningful political participation:** The UK Government and the international community should monitor the Iraqi Government's implementation of its commitments to the international conventions and resolutions that support the meaningful participation of women in all decision-making processes, in all sectors and at all levels – international, national and local – in a manner that leads to sustainable feminist peace.
5. **Women's access to justice:** The UK Government should maximise its diplomacy to urge the Iraqi Government to accelerate the enactment of the draft Protection Against Domestic Violence law, which guarantees

women's unimpeded access to justice, building on the positive example from the Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq (KRI). The UK Government should also provide financial and technical support to ensure the law is enforced, including through the establishment of a special court to consider cases of gender-based violence (including sexual violence) and alternative law enforcement bodies that provide women with safe and confidential reporting mechanisms.

Recommendations – reducing, preventing and responding to gender-based violence and sexual violence in conflict

- 1. Protection of women human rights defenders:** The UK Government and the international community should act urgently to protect the lives of women human rights activists and defenders in Iraq by establishing and funding direct protection measures, such as emergency evacuations and transfers to safe locations, and pressuring the Iraqi Government to create and implement policies that protect feminist activists and women's rights defenders.
- 2. Gender mainstreaming in the executive and judicial institutional structures:** The UK Government and the international community should provide the Iraqi Government and women-led and feminist civil society in Iraq with technical and financial support to enhance the effectiveness and gender-sensitivity of official responses to sexual and gender-based violence. This should include gender sections or departments in executive and judicial institutions and training to staff case response.
- 3. Long term and sustainable funding for rights-based organisations that adopt survivor-centred and gender transformative approaches:** The UK Government and the international community should provide sustainable and long-term support to women-led and feminist organisations working to combat and prevent gender-based violence and those which apply rights-based approaches to strengthen the reintegration of female survivors into society.
- 4. Coordinated and multi-sectoral support to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence:** The UK Government and the international community should support programmes that identify and address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. This should include support to a coordinated, multisectoral Iraqi Government strategy to address violence that includes: legal and legislative reforms (*see WPS recommendation 1*); community protection approaches; awareness raising in institutions (*see PSVI recommendation 2*) and society; women's empowerment; and including men and boys in preventing and addressing sexual violence.
- 5. Support coordinated and multi-sectoral referral programmes:** The UK Government and the international community should support multi-sectoral coordination for referral programmes based on protection frameworks. This should be achieved through the provision of technical support, training materials and financial resources to mobilise and institutionalise protection frameworks for survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, in accordance with international standards.
- 6. Combating impunity and ensuring accountability of perpetrators of sexual violence:** The UK Government and the international community should advocate to the Iraqi Government to implement UN Security Council resolutions on accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence, considering such transgressions as war crimes and referring perpetrators to international tribunals in accordance with UNSCR 2331 (2016) and UNSCR 1820 (2008). The UK Government and international community should also urge the Iraqi Government to monitor and ensure the disarmament of warring parties, armed groups and factions, which will limit the possession of weapons which further escalate gender-based violence.

Discussion

Discussion – overarching recommendation

- 1. Provide long-term and sustainable technical and financial support to women-led and feminist organisations in Iraq:** The UK Government and the international community should provide long-term, sustainable technical, logistical and financial support to civil society organisations in Iraq, with an emphasis on women-led and feminist organisations and networks, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of their holistic, multi-sectoral intervention approaches aimed at protecting, preventing and combating gender-based violence and enhancing women's meaningful political participation.

The UK Government and the international community should institutionalise technical and financial support to civil society organisations, especially women-led and feminist organisations. Local organisations in Iraq play a key role in

service provision and in supporting accountability and transparency in government performance by undertaking continuous and participatory monitoring of the situation for women in Iraq, and by monitoring and assessing the implementation of government national strategies and action plans on women and girls' rights. These advocacy efforts stem from holistic, multi-sectoral, and participatory approaches that include women and members of local communities, working from the bottom up to ensure women are protected from gender-based violence and to enhance their political and active participation in decision making at all levels.

Women-led civil society organisations are well placed to identify gaps in services provided to survivors of gender-based and sexual violence and to highlight the most effective response mechanisms, since these organisations are the first responders to the needs of gender-based or sexual violence survivors. They provide shelter, care and multi-sectoral services (in particular legal, psychological, social and economic services) to ensure the integration of women in society, especially in liberated areas.¹ Since the scope of work of women-led organisations covers a large geographical area, they are best placed to gauge the prevailing cultural and social contexts in and among different regions. They are also the most effect deliverers of culturally appropriate gender programming, as well as ensuring that men and boys are included, to safeguard the sustainability of efforts and to mitigate community resistance.

Therefore, the UK Government and the international community should consider women and feminist organisations as central partners to achieve the desired goals of eliminating violence and supporting political inclusion in an effective and sustainable manner. This should happen on three levels: the first is the consistent inclusion of women-led organisations and networks in any setting and future planning frameworks. The second is strengthening the capacities of organisations and institutionalising efforts to support not only strategic response frameworks in accordance with geographical scope, but also the implementation of programmes that build and implement feminist peace away from religious extremism, thus achieving the sustainability and accumulation of organisations' feminist efforts. The third and last is ensuring the provision of sufficient, sustainable, just and transparent support and funding to enhance all intervention and response frameworks, thus guaranteeing balance and integration across the different response frameworks and providing the tools to measure their impact among sectors and regions, while avoiding duplication and lack of sustainability, which decreases their effectiveness. To ensure that resources available to support the Women, Peace and Security agenda are allocated transparently and effectively, the UK Government should recommend the establishment of an official website where funding to support Women, Peace and Security in Iraq is publicly announced and made available in Arabic and Kurdish, allowing civil society organisations to monitor these funds and assess their impact and effectiveness. As a result, women and feminist organisations should be provided with long-term, sustainable, flexible funding to allow them to implement their self-defined priorities. Without such funding, they are unable to fulfil their full potential.

“There is international support, but it doesn't correspond to the size of existing violence and the real need to combat this phenomenon” (an organisation participating in the national consultations).

Discussion – Women, Peace and Security

- 1. Legislation and rule of law:** The UK Government and the international community should use their position to advocate to the Iraqi Government to reform domestic legislation in line with international norms and conventions on women's rights, especially those Iraq has ratified and is bound by. Such an alignment may be attained through repealing discriminatory provisions that violate women's rights, enacting legislations that protect and support women and, fully implementing the 67 recommendations stated in the Concluding Observations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in 2014.

The Iraqi legal framework² is marred by multiple provisions that discriminate against women and girls, undermining their status and reducing them to second-class citizens. The absence of equality between men and women before

¹ Organisations pointed out that the social setting in liberated areas deserves special attention, especially in light of violations women and girls were subjected to, such as forced marriages, preventing girls from continuing their education and the trafficking of women. This is due to the prevalence of a clan-based mode of thought, sectarian division, the proliferation of weapons among young men and the resulting rise in crimes and militarisation of society.

² The main conventions signed by the Iraqi Central Government:

- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

the law creates an imbalance in gender dynamics, weakens the social and economic standing of women, limits their meaningful political participation in key decision-making positions and increases the likelihood of women and girls being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. Personal status laws contain a myriad of articles that discriminate against women and girls, such as legalising child marriage and polygamy as well as in rights and duties in matters related to divorce, guardianship and custody. The Penal Code grants a husband the right to “discipline his wife” (article 41(1)). What is more, articles 128(1) and 409 of the same law provide reduced sentences for violent acts, including murder, if they were committed in the name of “honour” (repealed in KRI), or if a man finds out that his wife or female relative is involved in an extra-marital sexual relationship. Article 398 of the Penal Code relieves perpetrators of rape and sexual assault from prosecution or lifts the sentence if they marry the victim. In addition to these discriminatory provisions, there is a notable absence of legislation that protects women and girls from domestic and sexual violence in conflict. The same is true for children, since there are no laws to protect survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict and help reintegrate them into society (such as the case of underage mothers and children born to rape survivors). Therefore, the UK Government must use its diplomatic efforts to work with the Iraqi Government to reform laws and legislation that discriminate against women and girls and enact laws that protect women and girls and enable them to fully participate in society, especially in the aftermath of conflicts. This should be implemented in line with international conventions to optimise legal protection from sexual and gender-based violence (see *PSVI recommendation 5*) and ensure women’s access to justice (see *WPS recommendation 5*).

2. Mechanisms and processes to implement national strategies and plans: The UK Government and the international community should provide technical and financial support to the Iraqi Government to enable the creation of necessary tools and procedures to update national strategies and action plans, ensure they are implemented over a set timeframe, funded, monitored and evaluated. The UK Government and the international community should encourage the Iraqi Government to set up an official women and girls’ rights body to oversee this process from design to evaluation.

Since 2014, the Iraqi central government has issued a number of strategies and national action plans such as the National Strategy to Support Women in Iraq (2014 – 2018), the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 (2014 – 2018), the Emergency Plan aimed at fulfilling the basic requirements of displaced women and following up on the issue of women abductees (2015), the National Action Plan Against Violence on Women (2013 – 2017), the National Development Plan (2018 – 2022), and the Poverty Alleviation Strategy (2018 – 2022). However, these action plans are not implemented due to the lack of official implementation frameworks and mechanisms, such as an official women and girls’ rights body that oversees implementation of the action plans and strategies. In the KRI, the Higher Council for Women’s Affairs fulfils this role. An additional challenge is the absence of an official national fund or budget allocated for the implementation of such action plans and strategies. Given the importance of these action plans and strategies within a wider national regulatory and binding framework that can support women and enhance their status in Iraqi society, the Iraqi Government should commit to the implementation of these action plans and strategies. This will require significant technical and financial support from the international community to ensure commitments made are implemented, monitored and evaluated.

3. Update the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: The UK Government and the international community should fund the development and implementation of second Iraqi National Action Plan (NAP). This should include technical support and funding for participatory consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as advocacy to ensure the Iraqi Government allocates governmental budgets that are gender-sensitive.

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- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013)
 - The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) (2011)
 - The International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) (2010)
 - The optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) (2008)
 - The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2008), and its supplementary protocols to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2009), and against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2009).

Although Iraq was the first country in the MENA region to put in place a Women, Peace and Security NAP, it has been inadequately implemented. This is partly due to the security, political and military challenges that have confronted Iraq, which have created instability and increased the marginalisation of women and girls. Since the UK Government has played a major role in developing and drafting the initial Iraqi NAP, it should ensure it continues supporting the new Iraqi NAP and provides the necessary funding to overcome the shortcomings of the first NAP. The new NAP should address the gender-specific needs of women and girls in the diverse settings and at different stages of the conflict cycle. This is fundamental to ensuring women's active participation in decision making. This would pave the way towards civil cohesion, feminist peace and the urgently required prevention of conflict-related violence and protection of female survivors. The new NAP development must be based on participatory, meaningful consultation with women and girls, have a budget for implementation, and be monitored and evaluated.

- 4. Support women's meaningful political participation:** The UK Government and the international community should monitor the Iraqi Government's implementation of its commitments to the international conventions and resolutions that support the meaningful participation of women in all decision-making processes, in all sectors and at all levels – international, national and local – in a manner that leads to sustainable feminist peace.

Political representation of women in Iraq, especially at national level is still reduced to a rigid formality. Women occupy 25% of parliamentary seats, yet women have never been assigned decision-making roles, whether at the level of presidency, vice presidency or chairing parliamentary committees, including the Security and Defence Committee. Despite the recorded active participation of Iraqi women at local level, especially in managing camps and taking part in municipal councils (especially in Kirkuk and Hawija), women's representation in the legislative system remains nominal, with women parliamentarians remaining silent on feminist demands, and instead reproducing patriarchal structures. Weak political participation of women comes as a result of the dominant hypermasculine and patriarchal social norms which produce stereotypical expectations and roles for women, in addition to the discriminatory legislative context (*see WPS recommendation 1*). This is exacerbated by the lack of a national body that acts as an umbrella institution to enhance women and girls' rights and foster their meaningful participation. The UK Government and international community should therefore keep its commitment to women's participation³ by urging the Iraqi Government to set a 50% quota for women, including in leading roles in political parties, provided the quality of women's participation in all decision-making positions (executive, legislative and judicial institutes), in all sectors (economic, security, judicial and social) and across all national and local levels is guaranteed by activating and implementing the 1325 NAP (*see WPS recommendation 3*).

- 5. Women's access to justice:** The UK Government should maximise its diplomacy to urge the Iraqi Government to accelerate the enactment of the draft Protection Against Domestic Violence law, which guarantees women's unimpeded access to justice, building on the positive example from the Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq (KRI). The UK Government should also provide financial and technical support to ensure the law is enforced, including through the establishment of a special court to consider cases of gender-based violence (including sexual violence) and alternative law enforcement bodies that provide women with safe and confidential reporting mechanisms.

Women and girls in Iraq suffer from restricted access to justice in cases related to domestic and gender-based violence, including sexual violence. This is a result of a nexus of legal, cultural, social and institutional factors that combined represent serious obstacles preventing women and girls from reporting violence and therefore enjoying full access to justice. Institutionally, the judicial system is still heavily underpinned by patriarchal cultural structures, which dictates that violence against women and girls should be considered a private matter. For instance, prosecution does not launch investigations on gender-based violence, placing onus on women and girls to report, nor do public prosecutors accept gender-based violence reports by a third party⁴. However, due to the complex legal

³ One of the organisations stated that the UN is "not serious" in terms of the promises it made before forming the government to pressure central government to set a 50% quota. When the government was formed, not a single woman was appointed as a Minister, not even the women-designated Ministry of Education.

⁴ "We met with the head of the Supreme Judicial Council, who pointed out that the Public Prosecutor cannot take any action in relation to violence against women unless the woman comes forth and reports";

system and its lack of structures and bodies to provide women and girls with secure and confidential reporting systems, survivors remain victims of additional marginalisation and inefficient reporting mechanisms, ultimately denying them access to justice.

The judicial system in Iraq is oblivious to the need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach in responding to gender-based violence that would put at its centre the complex nature of both domestic and sexual violence. The judicial system also lacks a structure that follows the requirements of secure and confidential reporting on cases of violence by survivors. For instance, there is no court specialising in cases of violence against women, the role of community police remains limited, and there are no safe and confidential alternatives to the official law enforcement bodies (specialist gender-based violence investigation units or a unit to lead the efforts of protection from domestic violence) through which women and girls could confidentially report cases in full confidence that their privacy is respected and special circumstances are factored. This is exacerbated by an administrative bureaucracy, rigidity and lack of timely and effective response measures by the Public Prosecutor in their capacity as the party assigned with launching investigations into cases of violence, including cases reported by a third party. Instead, the role of the Public Prosecutor is limited to launching investigations into certain criminal offenses and does not extend to gender-based violence. In addition, cases involving sexual violence are typically not considered urgent. As such, women bear the sole responsibility of reporting that they have been subjected to gender-based violence, which itself can involve a high degree of risk.

Patriarchal and clan-based norms and traditions still prevail in many communities in Iraq, where women and girl survivors of violence are subjected to various forms of harassment and blackmail by male religious and clan leaders, to deter them from reporting violence. The weak stature of the rule of law is one of the main reasons that Iraq has yet to enact the Protection Against Domestic Violence, of which the original draft has been rejected after the latest round of Parliamentary elections. The UK Government should use diplomatic measures to urge the Iraqi Government to accelerate the enactment of the law to protect women from domestic violence, which would ensure women's full access to justice. The Iraqi Government should also form a special court to address cases of gender-based violence (including sexual violence) which ensures secure reporting and respects survivors. This may be achieved by establishing alternatives to official law enforcement bodies, as well as through enacting a new law for public prosecution as part of judicial reforms, which would grant the Public Prosecutor the authority to initiate proceedings in cases related to gender-based and sexual violence, in order to uphold women's rights effectively.

Discussion – reducing, preventing and responding to gender-based violence and sexual violence in conflict

- 1. Protection of women human rights defenders:** The UK Government and the international community should act urgently to protect the lives of women human rights activists and defenders in Iraq by establishing and funding direct protection measures, such as emergency evacuations and transfers to safe locations, and pressuring the Iraqi Government to create and implement policies that protect feminist activists and women's rights defenders.

Women human rights defenders in Iraq face a range of life-threatening challenges, which include defamation, attacks, assaults and arbitrary detention. They also face obstacles in recourse to justice for fear of retaliation. This comes as a result of the dominant patriarchal cultural and social norms, the proliferation of weapons, increasing religious extremism, and the absence of a legal framework that protects women's rights, resulting in law enforcement bodies not providing protection or justice to women. The proliferation of arms and increasing religious extremism are regarded as both a cause and a result of a sharp rise in the mainstreaming of patriarchal norms and traditions, which in turn promote a view of women as subordinate. Such attitudes are typically strengthened as a reaction to deter the unwavering feminist resistance that champions improving women's status and conditions and challenging unjust norms and traditions in Iraq. The Iraqi Government must therefore urgently draft policies for and train officials in all government institutions around the challenges and obstacles faced by activists and organisations that respond to and combat gender-based and sexual violence. Further, the Iraqi Government must put in place a legal and

“The Public Prosecution in Iraq is rigid and reactive, the Public Prosecutor only initiates in criminal proceedings, while they should have a role in personal status cases as well” (organisations that participated in the consultation meeting)

legislative framework to regulate clan-based customs and traditions to ensure that women's rights defenders and activists are adequately protected. International advocacy for this is essential to ensure women's rights defenders are better protected.

- 2. Gender mainstreaming in the executive and judicial institutional structures:** The UK Government and the international community should provide the Iraqi Government and women-led and feminist civil society in Iraq with technical and financial support to enhance the effectiveness and gender-sensitivity of official responses to sexual and gender-based violence. This should include gender sections or departments in executive and judicial institutions and training to staff case response.

The UK Government and the international community should support the Iraqi Government to establish sections specialising in gender in relevant ministries (notably, the Ministries of Interior and Defence), as well as in the judicial system, including judges and the Supreme Judicial Council, police stations and other law enforcement bodies. This should be supported by extensive training and resources to enable gender departments to be effective. The trainings should focus on international norms related to gender equality, gender-based violence, gender-sensitive reporting and investigating sexual violence cases, as well as performing risk assessments. The Iraqi Government should also employ women within judicial and police structures and other law enforcement bodies. Efforts should also be made to sensitise survivors to their rights, providing them with protective measures and supplementing law enforcement bodies with social centres that are easily accessible to women and girls to report violence in a way that ensures their privacy and confidentiality.

- 3. Long term and sustainable funding for rights-based organisations that adopt survivor-centred and gender transformative approaches:** The UK Government and the international community should provide sustainable and long-term support to women-led and feminist organisations working to combat and prevent gender-based violence and those which apply rights-based approaches to strengthen the reintegration of female survivors into society.

Patriarchal sociocultural behaviours and attitudes towards women and girls that cause gender-based violence require long-term, sustainable responses. The UK Government and the international community should provide flexible, long-term funding that is locally relevant and context specific if they are to support organisations working on reducing and preventing violence, especially those adopting survivor-centred approaches (such as in KRI). The UK Government and international community's support should put survivors at its centre, enabling them to play an active role in identifying needs and designing the framework of social and economic empowerment, thus enhancing their integration into society. In the long term, this could lead to greater equilibrium in gender power dynamics, with the effect of limiting exposure to violence. In addition, support must be given to organisations that adopt social protection and gender transformational approaches through social awareness programmes and the inclusion of men, boys and religious and clan leaders in local communities, providing them with adequate information on UNSCR 1325, violence against women, and women's meaningful political participation.

- 4. Coordinated and multi-sectoral support to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence:** The UK Government and the international community should support programmes that identify and address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. This should include support to a coordinated, multisectoral Iraqi Government strategy to address violence that includes: legal and legislative reforms (*see WPS recommendation 1*); community protection approaches; awareness raising in institutions (*see PSVI recommendation 2*) and society; women's empowerment; and including men and boys in preventing and addressing sexual violence.

In times of conflict, women and girls in Iraq face multiple forms of violations that jeopardise their safety and dignity and subject them to social marginalisation, sexual assault, rape and trafficking for sexual exploitation, in addition to forced displacement and child marriage. In this context, legal and institutional structures to combat and prevent sexual violence are entirely inadequate, despite strategies and action plans to address gender-based violence. Such shortcomings are evident in the presence of discriminatory laws that legitimise violence against women, and in the absence of laws to protect women and children from violence, including sexual violence (*see WPS recommendation 1*), as well as in Iraq's failure to implement UN Security Council resolutions on protecting women and children in

situations of armed conflict. In addition to the inadequate legislative system, which represents the main obstacle in activating official mechanisms for women's protection and the prevention of all types of violence, there are also shortcomings in judicial, security and law enforcement bodies (*see PSVI recommendation 2*). These legislative and institutional failures are accompanied by a dominant patriarchal social and clan-based culture that denies women and girls' rights and normalises violence against them. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the UK Government to provide multisectoral and harmonised support to the Iraqi Government and women-led organisations alike, in order to fully integrate all efforts on awareness and prevention of sexual and gender violence at the institutional level (*see PSVI recommendation 2*), as well as at the societal level (*see PSVI recommendation 3*).

5. **Support coordinated and multi-sectoral referral programmes:** The UK Government and the international community should support multi-sectoral coordination for referral programmes based on protection frameworks. This should be achieved through the provision of technical support, training materials and financial resources to mobilise and institutionalise protection frameworks for survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, in accordance with international standards.

Multi-sectoral support for survivors of gender-based and sexual violence in Iraq is inadequate, particularly in areas which should more effectively work together: judicial, security and social services sectors. A coordinated and comprehensive approach is essential for effective referral pathways for survivors. There is a shortage of judges, prosecutors and investigators to investigate sexual violence cases. This is coupled with the inadequate application of investigative procedures and forensics, as procedures are often misapplied. Female survivors of sexual violence are often placed in juvenile prisons due to the lack of adequate shelter and measures to protect women and girls from being killed by their families or clans. Furthermore, there is a shortage in shelters in general, especially those equipped to handle cases of sexual violence, in line with international standards and frameworks. The lack of technical expertise of employees in feminist organisations to provide specialised services, especially in terms of legal and psycho-social support, is a challenge, as well as the provision of social rehabilitation for survivors' effective reintegration into society and to help them build self-confidence and regain trust in society. Providing such support will reduce incidents of suicide, re-victimisation, social exclusion and many other impacts of stigma. Therefore, both government institutions and women-led civil society organisations should enhance cross-sectoral coordination and the exchange of expertise. The UK Government could support this process by signing Memorandums of Understanding with various sector stakeholders and providing expertise and technical and financial resources to ensure the institutionalisation of referral frameworks in a manner that is aligned with standard operational procedures and developed in accordance with international standards, in order to ensure that women and girls who survive sexual violence have full and effective access to services.

6. **Combating impunity and ensuring accountability of perpetrators of sexual violence:** The UK Government and the international community should advocate to the Iraqi Government to implement UN Security Council resolutions on accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence, considering such transgressions as war crimes and referring perpetrators to international tribunals in accordance with UNSCR 2331 (2016) and UNSCR 1820 (2008). The UK Government and international community should also urge the Iraqi Government to monitor and ensure the disarmament of warring parties, armed groups and factions, which will limit the possession of weapons which further escalate gender-based violence.

The presence of political will in Iraq to respond to sexual violence cases has been demonstrated by the formation of a national taskforce to develop a NAP to implement Security Council resolutions on preventing sexual violence, which stipulate the need: to put in place adequate measures to protect survivors from sexual violence in conflict; to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence; and to ensure victims gain access to protection and justice. In spite of this, judicial prosecution and fair trials for perpetrators are still far from being realised in Iraq. Perpetrators enjoy impunity granted by means of social protection provided by clans, whereby leaders of clans and political parties shelter them and facilitate their escape over the borders, helping them evade punishment. The unregulated proliferation of weapons (rather than limiting the possession of arms to government agencies) contributes to the imbalance of gender power relations in society. Indeed, the proliferation of arms increases the likelihood of women being subjected to gender-based and sexual violence in conflict, and hinders the government's ability to enforce security, thus compromising its power and authority. As such, the UK Government and the international community should

urge the Iraqi Government to commit to the joint statement on preventing sexual violence in conflict and related response efforts signed in September 2016, as well as to UN Security Council resolutions on punishing sexual violence perpetrators, considering such transgressions as war crimes and referring perpetrators to international tribunals, in accordance with UNSCR 2331 (2016) and UNSCR 1820 (2008). This is in addition to monitoring and ensuring the disarmament of parties, groups and factions, thus limiting the possession of weapons to government law enforcement agencies.

Organiser details and acknowledgments

<p>The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) with 38 national sections in different parts of the globe, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN). Since its establishment in 1915, it have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace by non-violent means and promoting political, economic and social justice for all. WILPF’s approach is always non-violent, and WILPF uses existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security. WILPF’s strength lies in its ability to link the international and local levels.</p> <p>Telephone: +41 (0) 22 919 70 80 E-mail: secretariat@wilpf.ch Website: http://wilpf.org</p>	<p>About ASUDA organization, combating violence against women in Iraq</p> <p>In 2000, ASUDA opened its first safe shelter for Kurdish women in Kurdistan region. The NGO strives to provide protection and multi-sectoral services to women subjected to violence as well as survivors, in order to provide women with a safe, harmless environment where they can enjoy their full rights and equality before the law, as well as make use of the legal services and empowerment and awareness frames to defend their rights.</p> <p>Telephone: +964 (053) 3183149 E-mail: info@asuda.krd Website: http://asuda.krd/about-us/</p>
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