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Breaking the wall of silence surrounding violence against women in Iraq



UN DSRSG/RC/HC McNab delivers her speech, highlighting the plight of Iraqi women and girls victims of gender-based violence, at the campaign launch ceremony in Erbil, Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO / Salar BRIFKANI

Violence against women continues unabated across the world, much of it hidden, ignored or silenced, said Navy Pillay the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, citing recent UN figures which note that in some countries close to 60 per cent of women may be subjected to physical violence at least once in their lifetime. The top UN human rights official stressed that no country has come close to eliminating this grave human rights violation, while urging every member of society to act to stop it.

In Iraq, while violence has taken a heavy toll on the entire society, women and girls remain the forgotten and silent victims of the ongoing violence. One in five women in Iraq has suffered domestic physical violence. Some 14 per cent of women who suffered physical violence were pregnant at the time and 33 per cent have suffered emotional violence as a result of insults, threats and public humiliation.

Acknowledging the need for scaled-up action, Iraq, in partnership with the United Nations, has for the first time participated in the global 16 Days of Activism to End

Violence Against Women Campaign which runs from 25 November, globally observed as the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women, through to 10 December, the International Human Rights Day.

In Erbil, Iraq's Kurdistan Region, the campaign was launched in the presence of Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Prime Minister, Dr. Barham Salih and the United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Resident Coordinator Ms. Christine McNab. A number of ministers, senior government officials, representatives from the international community and Iraqi civil society attended the ceremony.

"I hope the Kurdistan Parliament will soon adopt the draft law on eliminating violence against women and ban female genital mutilation", said Prime Minister Salih, while announcing the establishment of 'The Council of Women Affairs' in an effort to address women issues in a comprehensive manner.

Ms. McNab said: "Crimes against women occur every day in Iraq. Women have been



“ We must unite. Violence against women **cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government ”**

**Secretary General
BAN KI-MOON**

shot, strangled, and beaten to death. In cities across Iraq, women are targeted for engaging in their professions, wearing clothes deemed inappropriate, or simply stepping out of their homes. Kidnappings, murder and rape are all too common in Iraq, and those responsible are rarely caught or brought to justice”.

In Baghdad, the 16-day campaign was marked on 2 December in the presence of former Prime Minister, Mr. Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, the State Minister of Women’s Affairs, Dr. Kholoud Sami and Ms. McNab.

“This campaign also marks the launch of a four-year national strategy to eliminate violence against women supported through the

legislation of a Family Protection Law”, said Minister Sami.

Under the slogan UNiTE to End Violence Against Women in Iraq, Iraq’s first national campaign promoted increased awareness on gender-based violence among Iraqi citizens and called for Iraq to put in place necessary laws, action plans, and preventive measures to address violence against women and girls in the country.

“The United Nations is proud to support the Government of Iraq and civil society leading this campaign to break the wall of silence surrounding all forms of violence against women and girls in Iraq”, concluded Ms. McNab.■

International Efforts to end violence against women

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is celebrated worldwide on 25 November 2010. By resolution 54/134 of 17 December 1999, the General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and invited governments, international organizations and NGOs to organize activities designated to raise public awareness of the problem on that day.

16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence is celebrated worldwide from 25 November through to 10 December 2010. The “16 Days Campaign” originated from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute in 1991. Participants chose the dates, November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and December 10, International Human Rights Day, to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. The 16 Days Campaign has been adopted as an organising strategy by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

UNiTE to End Violence against Women is the United Nations Secretary-General’s Campaign to End Violence Against Women. Ban Ki-moon’s campaign aims to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in all parts of the world.

UNiTE brings together a host of UN agencies and offices to galvanize action across the UN system to prevent and punish violence against women. Through UNiTE, the UN is joining forces with individuals, civil society and governments to put an end to violence against women in all its forms.■

Photo Gallery



Banner highlighting Iraq’s 16-day campaign to End Violence Against Women at the launch ceremony on 25 November in Erbil, Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO / Salar Brifkani



DSRSG/RC McNab delivering a speech in Baghdad event, 2 December 2010



Observing a minute of silence in honour of women and girls who have suffered at the hands of gender-based violence. Launch of the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women campaign, Erbil, Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO/ Salar BRIFKANI



DSRSG McNab honours the Governor of Erbil, Nawzad Hadi, for his contribution towards supporting the plight of gender-based violence survivors, at the campaign launch ceremony in Erbil, Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO/ Salar BRIFKANI



KRG Prime Minister, Dr. Salih and DSRSG McNab view the exhibition of handmade artifacts produced by inmates at reformatories in Erbil and Sulaymaniya, after the campaign launch ceremony. Photo: UNAMI PIO / Salar BRIFKANI



Participants in the 16-Day campaign event in Baghdad included former PM Al-Jaafari, DSRSG/RC McNab, State Minister of Women Affairs, Dr. Kholoud Samii and several women parliamentarians

Violence against women in Iraq: Facts & Figures*

Domestic Violence: Violence against women in the home is a major problem that prevents women's full participation in society. One in five women (21%) in Iraq aged between 15-49 has suffered physical violence at the hands of her husband. 14% of women who suffered physical violence were pregnant at the time. And 33% women have suffered emotional violence while 83% have been subjected to controlling behaviour by their husbands.

Early marriages: Early marriages still occur, but are decreasing. 4% of young women aged between 15-19 were married before they turned 15, compared to 11% among those aged between 15-49 years. Marriage under the age of 15 is illegal in Iraq, and marriage between the ages of 15-18 requires special authorization from a judge.

Trafficking: Anecdotal evidence suggests that many women are being kidnapped and sold into prostitution. Victims are trafficked internally and to neighbouring countries including Syria and the Gulf states.

Female genital mutilation: Reports have indicated that female genital mutilation affects many women and girls in northern Iraq, though the exact extent is unclear. There is an ongoing

campaign among civil society organizations and the General Directorate of tracing violence against women in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to outlaw the practice.

Women's awareness of their rights: Evidence shows that many Iraqi women and girls are not fully aware of their rights. Some 59% of women aged 15-49 believe that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife under certain circumstances. This figure is higher in rural areas (70%) and among women with no formal education (71%). Women and girls aged between 15-24 years are just as likely to tolerate abuse as older generations.

Eradicating violence against women: Young Iraqi women and men cited family upbringing (40%), the law (35%) and religion (37%) as the major factors that would help prevent violence against women. Little confidence was expressed in the power of the media (6%) or schools (3%). Men and boys play an important role in eradicating violence against women. 57% of young Iraqi men believe that, in general, violence should not be used to solve problems. 63% believe that a woman is no less than a man, rising to 75% among those with a university education. However, 68% believe it is acceptable to kill a girl for damaging a family's

honour and 50% believe wife beating is acceptable.

Access to care and justice: The capacities of the state authorities to prevent, protect and prosecute are limited. Medical and police authorities lack adequate training on caring for and protecting survivors of violence, leaving women vulnerable to stigmatization and reprisals from family members for reporting their case. Few shelters exist to provide a safe haven for victims. Women victims of violence are forced to take refuge in detention centres due to the lack of shelters. The lack of a strong legal framework for prosecuting perpetrators and supporting victims means that mediation between the victim and her family is often preferred to prosecution of the perpetrator. Women's rights activists and shelters have been threatened and attacked by armed groups and family members of those they seek to protect.

*References for the above-mentioned facts and figures are available in the campaign brochure that was prepared by the Information and Analysis Unit of the United Nations Country Team in Iraq.■

<http://www.iauiraq.org/documents/1150/Brochure.pdf>

Supporting Iraq's efforts to address violence against women



Exhibition of handmade artifacts produced by inmates at reformatories in Erbil and Sulaymaniya, after the campaign launch ceremony. Photo: UNAMI PIO / Salar Brifkani

Violence against women and girls is a grave violation of their human rights, causing them physical, sexual and psychological suffering. It also limits their ability to exercise their legal, social, political and economic rights and participate in Iraq's development.

Addressing violence against women is part of Iraq's efforts to promote gender equality, empower women in all spheres of life and to provide impetus to Iraq's efforts to achieve all of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Government of Iraq is taking several

measures to address violence against women starting with the introduction of a domestic violence bill that is being developed both at the national level and in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

During the launch of the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women Campaign in Erbil, KRG Prime Minister announced the establishment of the Council of Women Affairs' in an effort to address the issue in a comprehensive manner and called on the Kurdistan Parliament to adopt the draft law on eliminating violence against women and ban female genital mutilation.

In Baghdad, the State Minister of Women's Affairs, Dr. Kholoud Sami, announced the Ministry's decision to launch, in cooperation with UNFPA, a four-year national strategy to eliminate violence against women which will focus on the provision of services to gender-based violence survivors.

Through several entities, the United Nations is helping Iraq address this pressing issue. UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO and UNAMI Human Rights Office are cooperating to strengthen Iraq's capacity to develop

national plans and programmes to combat violence against women and children, increase knowledge among Iraqis on gender issues and deal with violence survivors.

As part of the campaign, UNIFEM organised two conferences on violence against women for civil society organisations as well as community and religious leaders in both Al-Basra, on 28 November, and in Al-Najaf Al-Shraf on 29 November. Both events featured a panel discussion that opened up a public debate on all aspects of violence against women and the need for a national strategy to address the issue and a legislative framework that is able to prevent gender-violence, protect women and girls against gender-violence and prosecute gender-violence perpetrators.

In Iraq, the first national campaign was led by UNFPA, and supported by the following United Nations agencies operating in Iraq and IOM: UNIFEM, UNAMI, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, WFP and WHO. ■

Campaign materials (PSA in Arabic & English, Brochure, Posters and Fact Sheet) are available in the UN Country Team Iraq website: <http://iq.one.un.org/end-violence-against-women-campaign>

1- The full list of acronyms is available in page (9)

Violence against women: Iraq's international obligations and national response

In addition to having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 and other international human rights treaties, Iraq has adopted in 1993 the Declaration on Elimination of Violence

Against Women, the only instrument that defines gender violence.

As a Member State of the United Nations, Iraq is committed to the Millennium Development Goals and is bound by UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820, and 1888 which address women's participation in reconciliation processes and the understanding of rape as a tactic of war.

Against this background, the Government of Iraq (GoI) is taking steps to address violence against women starting with the introduction of a domestic violence bill that is being developed both at the national level and in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

At the national level, the State Ministry of Women's Affairs (SMWA), despite its limited capacities, has played a key role in promoting gender equality through direct interventions, inter-ministerial coordination and a dialogue with civil society actors

and organisations. One of its major interventions is the establishment of Committee 80 which consists of

representatives of different line ministries who, under the leadership of, SMWA are joining forces to address violence against women (VAW) in a strategic and coordinated manner.

In Iraq's Kurdistan region, a ministerial group has been established to address violence against women. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has developed a national strategy for VAW which is expected to become an integral part of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women that aims to address the priority areas for intervention to ensure gender equality in a broader sense.

To facilitate access to justice for female survivors of violence, Iraq has established both at the national level and in the KRG, special units, known as either Directorates for Tracing Violence Against Women or Family Protection Directorates aiming to

develop a national database for cases of violence against women which are expected to address the current gap in information gathering.

The protection for survivors of violence is being strengthened through the development of a shelter policy which is expected to lead to the development of a coherent strategic plan of action. These shelters are essential to supporting female survivors who need additional economic

support while they are separated from the violence perpetrators.

At the same time the biggest emphasis is on the prevention of violence which is being supported by ongoing awareness programs targeting all sections of society. Legal aid is increasingly being provided to help women better understand their rights within the formal justice sector, both for civil and criminal matters.

The most difficult task will be to successfully advocate for the review and passing of legislation that supports the gender equality commitment. A number of stakeholders, including civil society, have been actively lobbying the government and parliament to change the laws within the penal code and the personal status law resulting in some successes within the KRG.

The next step is to translate those successes in effective policy and institutional provisions within all relevant line ministries. The elimination of VAW will only be possible through stronger collaboration between governmental and non-governmental

organisations and the allocation of sufficient funding. Further political, economic and legal empowerment of women, youth and men will contribute to a culture of zero tolerance towards violence against women and girls. ■

Ms. McNab: Saying nothing against violence against women, turning the other way is not an option

On behalf of the United Nations agencies operating in Iraq that supported the country's first *16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women Campaign*, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Iraq (DSRSG) and Resident Coordinator Ms. Christine McNab presided over the ceremonies marking the campaign in Erbil, on 25 November, and in Baghdad, on 2 December.

Ms. McNab noted that gender-based violence directed against women and girls simply because of their gender, is perhaps the most widespread violation of human rights in Iraq and around the world.

"Crimes against women occur every day throughout Iraq. Countless women have been shot, strangled, and beaten to death. In cities across Iraq, women are targeted for engaging in their professions, for wearing

clothes deemed inappropriate, or for simply stepping out of their home. Kidnappings, murder and rape are all too common in Iraq, and those responsible are rarely caught or brought to justice", said Ms. McNab

"These actions threaten families and children, and undermine the honour and fabric of Iraqi society. They are also against international law, as laid out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which Iraq is signatory", she added.

Ms. McNab stressed the inextricable link between gender-based violence and social upheaval, poverty and war and reminded participants in Erbil and Baghdad events that "appalling violence has plagued Iraq for far too long, sparing no city, no group, nor any individual."

Noting that "most men are not, and never

will be perpetrators or such violence", Ms. McNab called on all men to speak out against gender-based violence and become actively engaged in the 16-day campaign. "Saying nothing, turning the other way is not an option", she warned.

"The United Nations is proud to support the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government and civil society leading this campaign to break the wall of silence surrounding all forms of violence against women and girls in Iraq", Ms. McNab concluded.

Iraq's first national 16-day campaign was led by UNFPA, and supported by the following United Nations agencies operating in Iraq and IOM: UNIFEM, UNAMI, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, WFP and WHO.¹

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Safia Al-Souhail Literary Salon: reviving cultural life in Baghdad



From left to right: Safia Al-Souhail, Mohammed Ghani Hikmat and SRSNG Melkert viewing Hikmat's work at Safia's Salon Nov 2010

An important cultural center throughout history, Baghdad has been home to some of the greatest writers, musicians and artists. The city's literary figures such as Abu Tayeb Al-Mutanabi, Al-Jahed, and Abu Nuwas of the Abbasid era are still celebrated as major streets and shops in the capital bear their names and celebrate their legacy.

Baghdad has also been home to literary salons once held by the Abbasid Caliphs, Emirs, and Barmakid Ministers. It is believed that literary salons (Al-Majalis Al-Adabiya) emerged in Baghdad in the ninth-century as a major source of entertainment for the Iraqi society.

For centuries, Baghdadi men and women of different walks of life and religions have been meeting to enjoy poetry, music and discuss current affairs. While some salons are held in the private homes of influential hosts, others take place in social clubs across the city.

During Saddam Hussein's rule, however, the salons tradition almost vanished. As violence

has declined in Iraq, Baghdadis have been reviving the nearly lost tradition of the literary salons. Baghdad has seen a dozen of salons emerge and meet across the city over the past few years. Safia Al-Souhail Literary Salon is one of them.

Safia's Literary Salon stems from a long tradition of women's literary circles in the Arab World. In the pre-Islamic era, Al Khansa (575-664), the eminent female poet, would stand in Mecca's Okaz market to recite elegies for her two brothers, Şakhr and Mu'awiyah, who had died in battle. She would also comment on the merits and demerits of the poetry recited by her fellow poets, inaugurating a long tradition of female literary critic and salons hostesses.

Ms. Safia Al-Souhail, a Member of Parliament, founded her literary salon in April 2009. The salon meets once a month at her residence in Baghdad, bringing together established writers, musicians and artists from different milieus, religions and ethnic backgrounds.

On Friday 26 November, Safia's Salon paid a special tribute to Iraq's most acclaimed sculptor, Mr. Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, and the President of the Writers' Union and admired poet, Mr. Alfred Samaan.

Opening its door to the international community, Safia's Salon received the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSNG) for Iraq, Ad Melkert and a number of ambassadors and representatives of diplomatic missions who were eager to celebrate a cultural day in the Iraqi capital.

"It is good to be here to celebrate culture, art and life with Iraqi people. Life in Iraq has also a beautiful face that deserves to be celebrated in the way it is being done in this literary Salon today", said SRSNG Melkert.

The 81-year old sculptor Hikmat, expressed his pride of being a Baghdadi and stressed his attachment to all 150 sculptures he has created in bronze, stone and wood to celebrate the Iraqi civilisation: "I traveled all over the world and each time I saw paintings that represent Greek or Roman legends, I realized that these legends have Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian or Egyptian origins. That's how, since the 1950s, I decided to sculpt Iraqi legends".

"I am happy to be with you today. Allow me to say that I am not here to represent myself in this Majlis. I represent a number of intellectuals, the finest, that are part of the Writers' Union", noted Mr. Samaan whose writings and political positions made him suffer jail and torture under the rule of Saddam Hussein. "I am convinced that each one of us has a story with the previous regime", he added.

In addition to poetry reading, November's session of Safia's Salon included live music, dance, and food in a festive atmosphere. With a growing number of literary salons being revived over the past few years despite continued violence, Iraq's once-vibrant arts culture is slowly but surely coming back to life.■

Development / Agriculture

Iraq Agricultural Growth and Employment Generation Support Programme launched

Iraq's agriculture has the potential to contribute to eradicating hunger by producing food, creating sustainable jobs and providing the basis for growth in other industries. Despite this potential, the Iraqi Agriculture Sector continues to face serious challenges.

Agriculture's share of non-oil Gross Domestic Product decreased from 29 per cent to 8 per cent between 2002 and 2008. The sector continues to suffer especially from low productivity due to poor water management, inadequate infrastructure, poor soil quality and lack of extension services.

To help increase economic growth and the agricultural sector's share of gross domestic product and employment, the Iraq Agricultural Growth and Employment Generation Support Programme (I-AGES) has been launched.

The Programme is being implemented by the

Food and Agriculture Organization in close coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Planning, and other Iraqi ministries through the National Agricultural Policy Working Group and the Inter-Ministerial Task Force for Agriculture.

The I-AGES will be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, the Programme will undertake urgent diagnostic work to inform the development of a National Agricultural Policy (NAP). The second phase will result in the formulation of National Agricultural Investment Strategy (NAIS).

Five diagnostic studies of the Iraqi economy

The I-AGES has been designed as a comprehensive policy development programme with impact on developing evidence-based strategy and sustainable programmes. In order to deliver appropriate policy recommendations, I-AGES will undertake under the first phase five diagnostic studies of the Iraqi economy. The five following studies are also expected to provide a set of data and information that is relevant to policy formulation outside the agricultural sector.

Growth Diagnostic Study: A growth diagnostic study that will identify the top two most binding constraints to economic growth in Iraq. This diagnostic will follow the Hausmann, Rodrik and Velasco framework. By identifying the top two binding constraints, policy-makers will be able to prioritise their actions based on evidence.

Investment Climate Review: Investment climate reviews allow for a rich geographic and sectoral understanding of the investment climate. A firm level survey across Iraq will

identify and investigate in detail how the various investment climate constraints impact on a firm's growth and operation.

Value Chain Work: The analysis of Iraqi agricultural value chains (which relate to the creation of a product or service) allows policy-makers to identify how to increase productivity at each level of the value chain for the selected agricultural products. I-AGES will inform the debate on how to increase the rate of economic growth and agricultural share of Gross Domestic Product and employment.

Labour Market Survey: The labor market plays an important role in the growth of the economy, the sectoral share of economic growth and the generation of employment within each sector. The labor survey will identify entry points for improved agricultural employment through the implementation of relevant policies and programs.

Trade Volume Analysis: Developing traditional and alternative tradable products is necessary for generating increased economic growth and jobs as well as diversifying the economy. Little is known of the volume or value of imports, exports or the internal trade of farm, off farm and non-farm commodities. The I-AGES trade volume analysis will fill this gap in knowledge, providing a real understanding of the true nature of traded agricultural products.



In the marshlands, as a result of war and declining public investment, the entire ecosystem has been degraded threatening livelihoods

These studies have already started and will be managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and I-AGES specialists. In close consultation with the Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology, data will be collected by the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other UN Agencies. Analyses and results will be published in the second half of 2011.

The analytical and diagnostic Phase I will provide the evidence necessary to develop an evidence-based policy, around which public investment priorities can be set and private sector involvement could be outlined. Critical to success of this work be linking a new agricultural policy, to national public investment programmes to drive and diversify growth and create employment. ■

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Urban Development

Iraqi officials participate in World Congress on Urban Development and Sustainability



Iraqi officials visiting the hazardous waste incineration plant in Hamburg

With support from UN-HABITAT, five senior Iraqi government officials participated in the 2010 World Congress on Urban Development and Sustainability which took place on 15-18 November in Hamburg, Germany. Organised by the International Solid Waste Association, this year's Congress addressed major challenges for Waste

Management in the 21st Century.

The five Iraqi participants included a representative of the Ministry of Municipality and Public Works, the KRG Ministry of Municipality and Tourism, and three senior municipality managers from Suleiymaniya, Anbar and Thi-Qar governorates.

Under the UN joint Water and Sanitation Master Planning and Capacity Building Programme, the five Iraqi officials were able to participate in the Congress and benefit from the state-of-the-art knowledge of the different technologies in use, as well as the discussion and assessment of the new technologies aimed at addressing the new challenges.

The participants have also been exposed to waste incineration practices through the field visit they conducted to a hazardous waste incineration plant in Hamburg. Being the first high-temperature incineration plant in Germany, the facility is considered a pioneer in the green disposal of industrial waste since 1971. The field visit included a visit to a

second incinerator that converts more than 320,000 tons of municipal and commercial waste annually.■

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Urban Development

Improving the Housing Delivery System in Erbil



UN-HABITAT convenes a workshop entitled "Improving the Housing Delivery System in Erbil on 9-10 November 2010. Photo: UNHABITAT – Iraq Programme

To discuss the implementation of the Erbil Housing Strategy with Erbil's urban housing institutions and to present the newly-drafted national housing policy, UN-HABITAT Iraq held on 9 November a two-day workshop with key stakeholders.

The workshop, entitled "Improving the Housing Delivery System in Erbil", was attended by the Kurdistan Regional Government's Minister of Planning, the Minister of Municipalities and Tourism, the Minister of Construction and Housing, the Governor of Erbil, several Deputy Ministers, Director Generals and other technical staff.

The Deputy Minister of Construction and Housing from Baghdad also attended the event and presented the recently endorsed National Housing Policy in view of future cooperation between KRG and Baghdad housing ministries.

One of the most immediate outcomes of the workshop was the decision to activate a Task Force to review and endorse the Erbil Housing Strategy. Following the participants' agreement on the structure, functions and

membership of the Task Force, UN-HABITAT and UNDP met with the KRG Ministry of Planning to discuss the action points to be undertaken in order to activate it.

The workshop also highlighted several newly-introduced mechanisms of improving underserved and informal settlements as piloted by UN-HABITAT and UNDP under the Improving Access to Adequate Housing in Erbil project.

Funded through the Iraq Trust Fund, this project has established mechanisms that allowed Erbil Governorate to partner with two underserved communities in Erbil to improve physical and social infrastructure, formalise tenure and upgrade housing.

The Erbil Housing Strategy was prepared through the "Strengthening the Capacity of the Housing Sector in Iraq – Phase II" project, an initiative also funded through the United Nations Development Group - Iraq Trust Fund.■

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Civil Society

Drafting of Kurdistan Region NGO law draws on Lebanon's experience

Visiting Lebanon to examine the role of civil society in a democratic state, stakeholders in a new NGO law for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG) agreed in November on formulations for the draft law. Exchanges with Lebanese officials and civil society were concrete and fruitful and inspired further resolution to pass a KRG law facilitating the work of NGOs.

The three-day roundtable meeting was a follow up to a larger conference for KRG and Iraqi national stakeholders on the NGO law in September and provided an opportunity for a smaller group of members of Parliaments and representatives of committees in charge of drafting the law from the Kurdistan Parliament to learn from Lebanon's experience and develop the wording of the draft text.

The visit, which was also attended by representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region and NGOs based in the Kurdistan Region, was organised by the United Nations Office for Project Services in cooperation with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law with funding from the European Union, the Government of Finland and other donors through the UN Development Group - Iraq Trust Fund.

Lebanon enjoys an enabling framework for civil society participation in the public life, and the participants from the Kurdistan Region took a lot of advantages from meeting with the Lebanese counterparts particularly when it comes to learning about its simple and more efficient NGO registration process as well as relations between civil society and authorities.

During the first day of the visit, participants met with representatives of the Lebanese Parliament and Civil Society, discussing the role civil society plays in Lebanon, analysing the Lebanese law and practices governing the work of NGOs in the country. The Lebanese counterparts also provided comments on the current draft NGO law for the Kurdistan Region. The two remaining days were dedicated to concrete and detailed legal discussions, moderated by international experts, on principles and formulations of particular provisions.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the participants agreed on modifications to the draft law that will be used during upcoming proceedings at the Kurdistan Parliament. ■

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World AIDS Day: Working to make AIDS response sustainable



Worlds AIDS Day was commemorated in Baghdad through and awareness raising session. Photo: WHO Iraq

Significant progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS has been achieved over the past three decades, but the world must not slow down its efforts to roll back the pandemic, said the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

“Our common goal is clear: universal

access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. We must also work to make the AIDS response sustainable [...] Three decades into this crisis, let us set our sights on achieving the “three zeros” – zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths”, said Ban Ki-Moon in his message to mark World AIDS Day, commemorated

globally on 1 December of each year.

Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), called in her message for the protection of the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS and urged all sectors to combat discrimination against those infected.

In Iraq, WHO Iraq Office along with the Iraqi Ministry of Health marked Worlds AIDS Day by organising several events in Baghdad and at governorate levels under the theme: “Universal Access and Human Rights”. The events focused on improving the awareness of Iraqis on HIV transmission and prevention as well as AIDS treatment.

While the prevalence of HIV in Iraq is estimated at less 0.1 percent of the population, it is believed that the associated vulnerability and risk factors continue to increase. Rising numbers of young people may exacerbate the issue, as liberalised trade relations and opening of borders draw Iraq into global circuits of drug trafficking.■

For more information, please contact Ruba Hikmat: kawafhar@irq.emro.who.int

Alarming HIV/AIDS trends in the Middle East and North Africa



According to the 2010 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, global efforts to stop and roll back the spread of HIV infections are showing significant results, with the number of people newly infected declining and AIDS-related deaths falling, sometimes dramatically.

Produced by the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the report contains basic HIV data from 182 countries. It shows that an estimated 2.6 million people became newly infected with HIV, nearly 20 per cent fewer than the 3.1 million people infected in 1999. In 2009, 1.8

million people died from AIDS-related illnesses, nearly one-fifth lower than the 2.1 million people who died in 2004.

The report also notes that from 2001 to 2009, the rate of new HIV infections was either stabilised or decreased by more than 25 per cent in at least 56 countries around the world, including 34 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

In relation to the report’s findings, the rate of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths in the Middle East and Africa are alarming. An estimated 460 000 people were living with HIV at the end of 2009, up from 180 000 in 2001.

The report shows that the number of people newly infected has also increased over the last decade. There were 75 000 people newly infected in 2009, more than twice the number in 2001. AIDS-

1- UNAIDS/World Health Organization/UNICEF, Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV and AIDS: Core data on epidemiology and response – Iraq (2008)
2- UNICEF/COSIT/KRSO/MoH Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006; UN, Common Country Assessment: Iraq (2009)

related deaths have nearly tripled: from 8300 in 2001 to 23 000 at the end of 2009.

However, reliable data on the pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa remain in short supply, creating difficulty in tracking recent trends with confidence, notes the report. The available evidence points to increases in HIV prevalence, new HIV infections, and AIDS-related deaths.

The HIV prevalence is low, with the exceptions of Djibouti and Southern Sudan, where HIV is spreading in the general population, and pregnant women using antenatal services have a HIV prevalence of more than 1 per cent.

The report also informs that Iran is believed to have the largest number of

people who inject drugs in the region, and its HIV pandemic is centred mainly within this population group. An estimated 14 per cent of people who inject drugs countrywide were living with HIV in 2007.

The extremely high prevalence of hepatitis C virus (80 per cent) found among detained people who inject drugs in Tehran (109) indicates considerable potential for the spread of HIV among and beyond people who inject drugs. It has been estimated that close to half (45 per cent) of the Iranian prison population is incarcerated for drug-related offences.

Exposure to contaminated drug-injecting equipment also features in the epidemics of Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Tunisia, notes

the report.■

The full Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2010 can be downloaded through: http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/Global_report.htm

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16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women Campaign



List of UN Acronyms

There are 16 UN organisations, programmes, agencies and funds working in Iraq. They are the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO).