



ISSUES OF DISCRIMINATION IN WIDOWHOOD IN IRAQ THAT REQUIRE ADDRESSING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CEDAW

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WPD hopes that this report will assist the Committee in its examination of the Government of Iraq's report on its implementation and compliance with the articles of the Convention.

Article 1 of the CEDAW states that "the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, **irrespective of their marital status**, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".

As in many countries, especially those in conflict and post conflict situations, the status of their widows – and wives of those forcibly disappeared or missing – is often ignored. Yet it is widows and their children, particularly their daughters, who so often suffer the most discrimination, direct and indirect, from state and non-state actors, and this discrimination, resulting in extreme poverty, marginalisation, and exposure to violence, requires visibility so that it can be addressed by governments.

There are no reliable statistics on the numbers and ages of Iraqi widows and wives of the missing. A UN report in 2006 estimated that at the peak of the violence in 2006, over 100 women were widowed every day. This last year, 2013, is considered to be even more violent, claiming even more civilian deaths, and creating further widows.

WPD hopes that this brief submission will assist the Committee in its consideration of Iraq's State Report during its 57th^h Session.

1. Possible estimates on numbers of widows in Iraq range between one million to four million, or 10% of all adult women, excluding child widows. The Iraq-Iran war, the invasion and occupation following the fall of Saddam Hussein, and since then, the continuing sectarian violence, suicide bombings, general violence, have hugely increased the numbers. Significantly, in 2009, one of the grounds for the Minister for Women's Affairs resignation was that she had no resources to register and address the needs of what she called "*an army of widows*". Nothing has changed since then, and Iraqi widows are living in extreme poverty, fear and vulnerability to violence, sexual violence, abductions, forced remarriage, honour killings and trafficking. Few widows actually are able to access the pensions, which in any case are derisory in value and inadequate to support minimal living costs.

→ The Government should be required to take all available means, including working with women's and widows' NGOs, to fill this gap in **statistics**, providing official and reliable data to be used as a basis to design and implement effective policies. Also to reveal, through focused research and interviews, the needs and diverse economic and caring roles of widows, their support systems and coping survival strategies.

2. In Northern Iraq (KRG), as a consequence of the gassing of the Kurds in Anfal and Halabja, there are again many widow survivors of the chemical gassings, living in poor health, and with derisory pensions.

→ The KRG government should ensure that all widows are registered to access **pensions** and are provided, as required by Article 12, adequate **health care** to address both their physical and mental health conditions.

→ Social Security and Pension. The Iraqi Government should take all measures, in accordance with Articles 11 and 13, to ensure that widows receive **adequate pensions, social security, and other benefits that will enable them to live in equality and be protected from violence, forced marriage, and forced prostitution.**

3. Widows in Iraq, across the spectrum of age, class, religious sect, or ethnicity, suffer from **stigma** and are victims of **degrading treatment**.

→ The government should be asked, in the context of Article 5, what they are doing to modify social attitudes and educate families and the community to respect widows, and ensure their dignity and equality.

4. According to **Article 41 of the Iraqi Constitution**, "*Iraqis are free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices, and this shall be regulated by law.*" The personal status issues of women is left to the leaders of each religious sect, some of which allow marriage of underage girl children, thus leading to more child widows. Furthermore, the extreme poverty of widows compels them to give away their young daughters to marry older men, and other not freely chosen and unsatisfactory partners.

→ The government should be asked to report on the incompatibility of Article 41 of the Constitution with the CEDAW.

WPD thanks the Committee for inviting it to submit this report. Please contact us if you require any further information.

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