

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

The United Nations and EUJUST LEX – Iraq Call for a Renewed Commitment to Promote Education for Girls and Women in Iraq

Baghdad, 8 March 2011 – On the occasion of the 100th year of celebrating International Women’s Day, hosted jointly by the Government of Iraq, the European Union Integrated Rule of Law Mission in Iraq (EUJUST LEX-Iraq) and the United Nations, all keynote speakers spoke on the importance of educating girls as the corner stone of development in any country, especially in a post conflict county like Iraq.

The Head of EUJUST LEX-Iraq, Mr. Francisisco Diaz Alcantud spoke of education as a way to achieve equal partnerships between men and women noting that “all democratic societies are based on balanced and equal footing between men and women alike.” Referring to the “often forgotten role of mothers in the family unit”, he remarked that “women shape new generations of men and women to come, and this is especially true of Iraqi young women who will have the challenging responsibility to educate and shape a modern country.”

Mr. Ad Melkert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to Iraq, noted that the 100th celebration coincides with the first year of existence for UN-Women, the new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and that it “is a historic step in our joint efforts to accelerate global action for women’s empowerment”.

Referring to this year’s theme for International Women’s Day, “*access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work*”, the SRSG said “education is a right that all children should enjoy for their personal development and that all adults should continue to enjoy especially those adults whose education has been disrupted by conflict and war”. Stressing that recent events in the region demonstrate the need to address fundamental human rights, including the rights of women which are of central importance to the stability of societies, SRSG Melkert highlighted that “where women are educated and empowered, economies are more productive and strong, and where women are fully represented, societies are more likely to achieve peace and stability”.

On his part, Dr. Abdulkareem Abdullah Shallal, Deputy Minister for Human Rights highlighted that, “women have a vital role in driving social and political change in Iraq, especially during transition.” He told participants that several mechanisms were already in place to promote human rights, including the soon to be established specialized institute to promote human rights – the first of its kind in Iraq. He concluded that “Women have played a vital role in transition from dictatorship to democracy in Iraq”.

Following the key note address, the event convened a panel discussion featuring representatives from the Iraq civil society, academia, youth leaders, and the State Ministry for Women’s Affairs. Ms Hana Edwar, Secretary General, Iraq Al-Amal

Organization noted that women in Iraq are marginalized in decision making and political processes including those related to the formulation of the government and reconciliation efforts. She called on the International community to support Iraqi women in efforts to achieve equality and women empowerment. Dr. Bushra Obaidi, Professor of Law at Baghdad University highlighted the importance of reviewing and amending the existing laws to ensure gender equality while suggesting the removal of all discriminatory articles specifically in the penal code and the constitution. Ms Safiah Suhail, Member of Parliament spoke on the importance of culture and arts in supporting women advancement in Iraq, while Ms. Dania Ali Abed Alwahed, a university student, spoke on the challenges that youth face in receiving an education in Iraq.

Ms. Juan Amin, on behalf of the State Minister of Women Affairs closed the meeting with an address highlighting the role of the Ministry in leading the Government's efforts in partnering with civil society to develop a law to combat violence against women.

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