Delegate of Iraq

Commission on the Status of Women

9 November, 2016

*Women in Iraq: Correcting Mistakes*

The Republic of Iraq firmly believes in the role of the Commission of the Status of Women and the role it has to play in the creation of a better future for women. In the 1970’s women in Iraq were given equal rights including the right to vote, have an education, own property and run for political office. But since that time the UN has instituted economic sanctions, such as one in the 1990’s resulting in a negative impact on the Iraq economy. The negative impact on the Iraqi economy led to the weakening of the ability of women to have access to food, health care, and education. Currently 24% of Iraqi women are illiterate that is more than double the rate for Iraqi men. Despite these harsh economic realities, the Iraq government is firmly committed to respecting the role of women as they contribute to society.

Women play an integral part of our society in Iraq. Without them, our society would be wholly unproductive. They feed our men, look after their wellbeing, raise the children, and make the society more successful. During these sessions, the delegation of Iraq implores this commission to examine furthering the role and status of women in Iraq in industries where their skills can be put to the best use and move to a future where we work in partnership with the UN for the sake of not just our women but the economic and cultural wellbeing of society.

Regarding the topic of Women and Sustainability, it is important to remember that Iraq has experienced the ravages of war for the past many years. The violence and uncertainty has weakened our economy and our society. We have suffered great violence and destruction as a victim of indiscriminate attacks on innocent citizens including women and children. As an ancient and resilient nation, Iraq is looking to find the good coming out of this period of evil. We are rebuilding and we know that it is essential that we rebuild and experience a regrowth with and for our women citizens. As we rebuild our economy and our society it is essential that rebuild with and for the women of Iraq. We know that is is essential for our women be involved in the rebirth of our economy to the long term sustainability of our culture. We know that our women lead 1 in 10 households and carry a huge responsibility both financially and culturally in caring for their families. Therefore we believe our women are our most effective and active agents of change. Our women leaders have helped us to identify the critical areas we need to work on and ensure safety and security within a democratically governed society. We are working with them towards enhanced economic rights and empowerment for women as well as making important infrastructure changes to revise our laws and to work towards a just and civil society. We are giving our women an opportunity to change the past and create a new future in which there will be equality in jobs, in food supply, in economics, in health issues and in contributing effectively to our society.

Regarding the topic of eliminating gender based violence, there has been much speculation and international outrage over the recent proposed laws regarding age of consent for marriage in Iraq. To this, the delegation of Iraq would like to clarify that our society in Iraq is one that is based on centuries of religious tradition and strong beliefs. After a society and individuals have been doing something for so many centuries, it becomes imprinted on the individuals, the families and the society itself. These beliefs guide actions and become embedded in the infrastructure and even legal identity of Iraqi society. Therefore It becomes increasingly challenging to induce change and does not happen overnight. Iraq has been built upon and rooted in religion for centuries. As our society evolves we struggle with the tension between a democratic and a secular society. To move towards a strong and just democratic society, Iraq needs to hear and engage all voices in our society from the most religious ones to the most progressive. Since coming out of the recent violent wars, we are trying to rebuild our society. The conflict with our western nations created a situation where our most religious and militant factions had the opportunity to become a stronger voice in backlash against the violence that our country and citizens were experiencing from attacks from other countries. Now that we are rebuilding towards peace we need to find the balance between these more religious and extreme voices and move our culture, society and laws towards a more progressive, democratic society. The recent war provided a fertile ground for our religious extremists to revert to polarizing views on marriage and other elements such as sharia law. The delegation of the Republic of Iraq firmly believes that as we move into a more peaceful and stable time, that we will be able to move our society and our laws towards more progressive beliefs and protective laws for our women. We believe that we can move towards legislation and a society that is committed to the elimination of gender-based violence and that protects the rights and safety of our women in work, in marriage and in the greater society. We believe that working with the United Nations we can make these important gains for the women of Iraq and therefore the greater good of all people in Iraq.

Iraq in the 1970s was a model of educational and employment opportunities for women. The economic sanctions of the 1990s changed this dramatically for Iraqi women. In two short decades we have seen a dramatic decrease in opportunities and economic status of our women. Women who are at the bottom of the food chain suddenly have no ladder to climb upon. Due to the economic sanctions and lack of resources, there are less jobs and less opportunities for women and women who are at the bottom of the job chain become the lowest paid and most disadvantaged. As we know, educational opportunity is linked very closely with employment security. Sadly, currently 24% of Iraqi women are illiterate, more than double the rate for Iraqi men. As one can imagine, when women lose educational opportunities in Iraq, they also begin to suffer economically and in the job market. Currently in Iraq only 18% of Iraqi women participate in the labour force compared to 81% of men. We believe this is a vicious cycle that will require much time and opportunity to rectify.

The Republic of Iraq is honoured to have the opportunity to take part in this United Nations forum. We recognize that we have much work to do to improve our society for all our people but especially for our girls and women. We believe that only if we strengthen the position and role of our women can we continue to grow and improve as a society. We are proud that in the 1970’s Iraq was a leader in providing equal opportunities and fostering a just and respectful society. In 1982 Iraq received the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) award for eradicating illiteracy. We have had many setbacks in our country these past few years. We believe that with the support of the United Nations we can bring our country back to its past glories and accomplishments. We thank the United Nations and in particulate the Commission on the Status of Women for this opportunity to learn, share and reaffirm our commitment to improving equality for all people in our society.