

Stop violence against women

Iraq - living with fear

Asma (not her real name), a young engineer, was abducted in Baghdad in 2003. She was shopping with her mother, sister and a male relative when six armed men forced her into a car and drove to a farmhouse outside the city. There she was repeatedly raped. A day later, Asma was driven to her neighbourhood and pushed out of the car.

Women in Iraq remain in fear and insecurity as the violence against them has continued. Although kidnapping resulting in rape or sexual abuse of women appears to have decreased since late 2003, the lack of security for women remains a serious threat. Women and girls live in constant fear of being abducted, raped or murdered.

Girls and women are also under threat in their own homes. With growing lawlessness, so-called "honour killings", in which the victims are women or girls killed by male relatives for allegedly immoral behaviour, have continued. Such crimes are known to have been ignored by the police.

"I took the veil, because the security situation now does not allow a girl to go around unveiled or even not fully veiled," a 23-year-old woman student told Amnesty International. More girls and women now feel they have to wear the hijab for security reasons or because of threats by Islamist groups towards women not observing a strict Islamic dress code.

Women political leaders and rights activists have been targeted for attack by armed opposition groups. 'Aqila al-Hashimi, one of only three female members of the US-appointed and now dissolved Iraqi Governing Council, was killed in September 2003, reportedly by armed men opposed to the occupation. Yanar Mohammed, a member of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, was reported to have received several death threats.

Neither the US-led coalition authority nor any of the Iraqi interim governing bodies since the 2003 war has taken effective steps to ensure adequate protection of women and women's rights defenders. Indeed, women detained by the US occupying forces are reported to have been sexually abused, possibly raped. The US military investigation headed by Major General Antonio Taguba found "systemic" and "illegal abuse of detainees" in Abu Ghraib Prison between August 2003 and February 2004. Among abuses documented were the "videotaping and photographing of male and female detainees" and "a male MP guard having sex with a female detainee".

Thousands of men, women and children have been held without charge or trial in detention by occupying forces. Released women detainees, who asked not to be identified, told Amnesty International that they were beaten, threatened, including with rape, and had to endure humiliating treatment during long periods of solitary confinement.

[Photo captions]

Cover photo : A woman stands in her doorway, Basra. © Terry J. Allen
Left : Girls at Gharnata School in Basra, 2004. Many schoolgirls and women college students are accompanied by male guards because of the lack of security. © AI

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Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

- ***Take an interest:***

Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.

- ***Take a stand:***

Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.

- ***Take action:***

Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

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In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

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Together we can make our voices heard

Join our calls on the interim government and the multinational forces in Iraq to fulfil their responsibilities to secure the safety of women in Iraq, and to abolish discriminatory laws and practices that deny them equal justice.

Urge the interim government in Iraq to:

- establish an independent and impartial agency to monitor and ensure effective police and judicial responses to acts of violence against women, in particular kidnapping, murder and rape
- review all legislation, including penal, personal status and nationality law, to eliminate all provisions that discriminate against women and to ensure that "honour crimes" and domestic violence are treated as serious criminal offences
- involve women's rights organizations in legal and judicial reforms, particularly to strengthen women's rights and equality in law; in strengthening women's role in political life and the rebuilding of Iraq; and in awareness-raising campaigns to counter discrimination against

women

Send your appeals to: Dr Iyad 'Allawi, Prime Minister, Interim Government of Iraq, Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh), Baghdad, Iraq

Call on the US government to:

- investigate fully, as potential war crimes, all reports of the torture or ill-treatment, including sexual violence, of women detained by US forces to ensure that there is no impunity for anyone found responsible, regardless of position or rank

Send your appeals to: The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, Office of the Secretary, The Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301, USA. Fax: +1 703 697 8339. E-mail at <http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>

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What you can do

- Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us to make a difference.
- Take action on Amnesty International's website at web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/actnow-index-eng
- Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

Want to know more?

Contact the Amnesty International office in your country at the address in the box (right), if there is one.

Or contact

Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London:

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

Or visit Amnesty International's website at www.amnesty.org/actforwomen

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