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Stop violence against women 'I don't want to die' Domestic violence in Iraq

[photo caption]

Cover photo: Iraqi women walk past a US tank at Al Kadhimiya mosque in Baghdad. © AP

[end caption]

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Even at home, Iraqi women may not be safe

"He was very angry and he took his Kalashnikov... The neighbours said: 'Leave her alone'... But then he didn't stop, he shot my legs, I could not feel them, they were numb, the sun was setting, I was looking at the sky, I said to the men: 'I don't want to die.' They took me to the hospital."

Nineteen-year-old Fatima (not her real name) was shot in the legs by her husband in front of his family and their neighbours on 21 May 2003. Married at the age of 12, she was treated as a servant and regularly beaten in her husband's family home. She tried to run away to her own family, but her husband came and said she should go back. When she refused he became very angry and took a piece of wood to beat her. It broke, so he grew even angrier and took his gun and shot her.

Despite the number of eyewitnesses and the seriousness of the crime, neither the family nor the hospital reported the case to the police and her husband was not arrested. The family said it was a matter to be solved within the tribe. Fatima returned to her father's house after she left hospital. Her husband expressed regret and offered her compensation, seeking reconciliation with her through the mediation of elders of her tribe. However, she is refusing to return to him, despite the pressures.

[photo caption]

Fatima in her hospital bed © AI

[end caption]

Iraqi women have endured severe hardship for decades: loss of male relatives in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war; mass expulsions to Iran of entire families declared by the authorities to be of "Iranian descent"; government repression, including the chemical weapons attack on Kurds in Halabja in 1988; the 1991 Gulf war and the subsequent suppression of the Shi'a uprising; 13 years of UN sanctions from 1990 to 2003; and the US-led military action in 2003. Under the government of Saddam Hussein, women were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, "disappeared" and executed by the authorities on political grounds. In 2000, scores of women accused of prostitution were said to have been beheaded in public by a paramilitary group.

The political and security vacuum following the US-led invasion and occupation in 2003 has led to widespread looting and gun crime. Daily newspaper reports of kidnappings and rape have led many women to give up work or study and they are effectively confined in their homes. An Iraqi women's rights organization, the League of Iraqi Women, reported that more than 400 women had been "kidnapped, raped and occasionally sold" between the end of the war in April and August 2003.

Even in their homes, Iraqi women may not be safe. The breakdown in law and order after the fall of Baghdad, combined with the disbanding of the police force by the occupying powers and the proliferation of firearms, has contributed to a rise in "honour killings" and domestic violence. These crimes are often ignored by the police, as in Fatima's case. Some Islamist leaders have exploited the current instability in Iraq to press for their own agendas, which would entail imposing restrictions on women's freedom of expression and on women's freedom of movement.

[common text]

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.

[end common text]

[box - common text]

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.

[end box]

Take action against domestic violence in Iraq

Call on the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), as occupying forces, and the Iraqi Governing Council to:

- prioritize the personal security of women and the establishment of an independent and impartial agency to monitor and ensure effective judicial responses to acts of violence against women, including kidnapping, rape and murder;
- involve women's rights organizations in the reform of the judicial system, in particular to strengthen women's rights and equality in law and to ensure that "honour crimes" and domestic violence are treated as serious criminal offences.

Send your appeals to the CPA to: Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq, Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Office of the Secretary of Defence, The Pentagon, Washington DC, 20301-2400, USA, e-mail: bremerp@orha.centcom.mil

Send appeals to the Iraqi Governing Council to the Iraqi Embassy in your country.

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What you can do

I would like to join the Stop Violence against Women campaign.

Please send me more information.

I would like to join Amnesty International. Please send me details.

I would like to make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

Credit card number:

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Please send your form to the Amnesty International address in the box below, if there is one:

or to Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 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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