United Nations Calls for the protection of children born of sexual violence in conflict

Baghdad, 27 June 2018 – The United Nations family, the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict by organizing two events in Erbil and Baghdad on 25 and 26 June respectively. This was the third annual event and the first to be observed since the Iraqi government’s recapture of areas formerly under the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The theme of the event was “The Plight and Rights of Children Born of War.”

Speaking from Baghdad, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance (DSRSG), Alice Walpole, called for the protection of children born out of rape.

“Women and children usually suffer the brunt of armed conflicts. For those that lived under ISIL however, the suffering was unprecedented. This suffering unfortunately continues as they are often rejected by the society and viewed as affiliates rather than victims,” she said.

“I, therefore, urge the Government to ensure that children born of rape grow up in dignity, with official legal status, so as not to be perpetually marginalised and stigmatised”, DSRSG Walpole added.

She further added that the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), renewed on 14 June in UN Security Council resolution 2421, explicitly instructs UNAMI to assist the Iraqi Government’s efforts, and those of the United Nations Country Team, to strengthen child protection, including the rehabilitation and reintegration of children into Iraqi society.

“Despite a legal framework that provides children with an avenue to obtain identity documents, in practice obtaining such documents is exceptionally difficult and requires women to publicly expose what they have survived – experiences that their families, culture, tribe and religion consider to be deeply shameful,” said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF’s Representative in Iraq.

The denial of identity violates one of the fundamental provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has long-term impacts, as children cannot access health care, education, or other benefits without an identity and documentation, he added.
On his part, speaking from the Kurdistan Region, Nestor Owomuhangi, Deputy Representative of UNFPA in Iraq, said: “Children born out of rape and forced marriages are currently in a legal limbo, and susceptible to radicalization, trafficking and exploitation, with wider negative implications for peace and security. Yet, the paramount principle of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child is that the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children must always come first.”

“Within this context, there are some initiatives that need to be commended. The Bayan Dini and Fatwa that were respectively issued by Baba Sheikh in 2015 and the Sunni Endowment leadership in 2017 on accepting survivors of sexual violence are positive steps that could be replicated to promote the acceptance of children of born of sexual violence in conflict,” he concluded.

In 2016, the Government of Iraq and the United Nations signed an agreement of cooperation, also known as the “Joint Communiqué”, on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq. This Communiqué lists six priority areas that the UN family and Government of Iraq committed themselves to. The third priority area calls for “Ensuring the provision of services, livelihood support and reparations for survivors and children born of rape. To this end, the Joint Communiqué provides a platform to work collectively with different stakeholders including religious and tribal leaders and civil society to foster an environment for prevention and mitigation of conflict-related sexual violence.

The United Nations family in Iraq stands ready to provide the necessary support to ensure a comprehensive implementation of the Joint Communiqué including protection of the rights of children born out of rape and strengthen child protection, including the rehabilitation and reintegration of children into Iraqi society.

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