



**National Platform for Women**



# National Platform for Women

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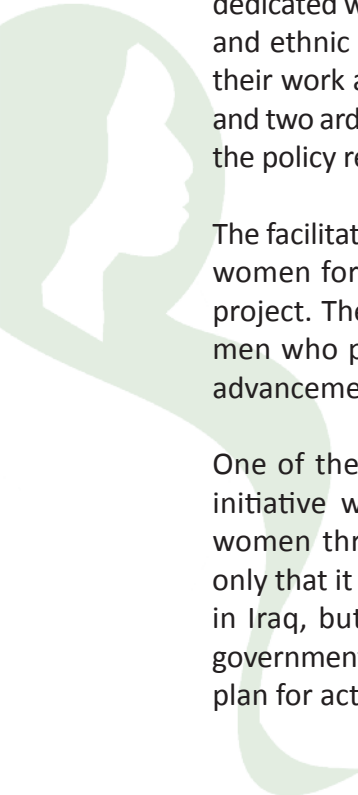
# National Platform for Women

## A Unified Vision for a New Path

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## Acknowledgements



The National Platform for Women was written by a group of dedicated women who represent the diverse regional, political, and ethnic fabric of Iraq. These women took time away from their work and their families to attend a three-day conference and two arduous working group meetings, events that produced the policy recommendations contained in this document.

The facilitators of this process would like to acknowledge these women for their focus, hard work, and commitment to the project. The facilitators would also like to recognize the Iraqi men who participated in this process and who support the advancement of women's priorities in Iraq.

One of the objectives of the National Platform for Women initiative was to reach a consensus on priority issues for women throughout Iraq. This document demonstrates not only that it is possible to create a united vision for a new path in Iraq, but also that civil society, political parties, and the government are able to come together to support a responsive plan for action.

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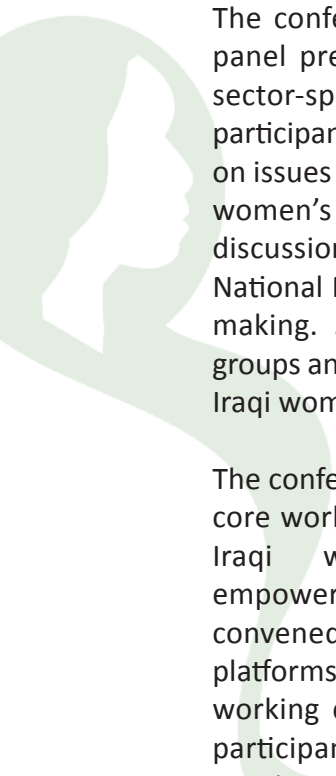
## Introduction

Iraqi women are slowly increasing their involvement in government, political parties, and civil society, but they are still largely absent from the decision-making processes within these bodies. Women constitute 54 percent of Iraq's population, yet their voices are not reflected in the current political discourse. In conjunction with the upcoming national elections, the National Platform for Women provides an opportunity to alter this trend by encouraging debate on a common set of policy priorities.

After elections, the National Platform for Women will become a tool for newly-elected parliamentarians as they seek to respond to their constituents' priority issues. It will also serve as the point of reference for politicians and civil society representatives to continuously engage in policy debates and to hold government and political parties accountable to their promises.

Politically-active women have been talking for years about building consensus on priority issues and, in October 2009, they began the process of creating the National Platform for Women. A delegation of more than 200 Iraqi women and men representing a variety of sectors came together in Erbil for a working conference. This event provided a unique opportunity for direct collaboration among political party members, civil society activists, and government officials. The purpose of the conference was for participants to evaluate women's needs on

local and national levels, analyze the environment for change and political action in various provinces, and determine the most urgent priorities for political debate in the upcoming national elections.



The conference proceedings were divided into two parts: panel presentations and plenary discussions, followed by sector-specific working group meetings. On the first day, participants heard a variety of Iraqi and international opinions on issues related to healthcare, education, employment, and women's political participation. The second day included a discussion of approaches for using a document such as the National Platform for Women to influence political decision-making. Subsequently, participants divided into working groups and began the process of identifying priority issues for Iraqi women.

The conference was followed by the formal establishment of core working groups for each policy area of significance to Iraqi women: healthcare, education, economic empowerment, and political participation. Working groups convened in November and December to draft policy platforms that reflect the unified vision articulated during the working conference. Through a consensus-based process, participants produced this National Platform for Women, a concise and persuasive document that identifies priority issues for Iraqi women and provides sound recommendations for government policy and political party action.

The National Platform for Women represents a common vision of the society in which Iraqi women seek to live. They want a

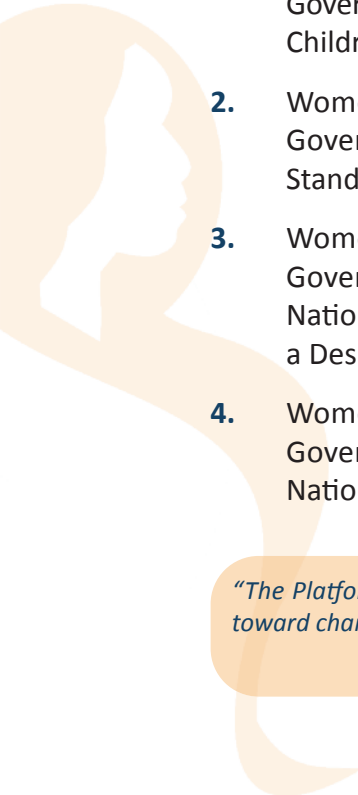
country in which children and the elderly have quality healthcare, in which clean drinking water is available to everyone, and in which women participate as equals in decision-making processes that will inform the country's future. The National Platform for Women provides government, civil society, and political parties with practical recommendations for action that will build the foundation for the stable, productive, and compassionate society envisioned by the women of Iraq.







## Healthcare

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1. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Healthcare Services for Women, Children, the Elderly, and People with Disabilities.
  2. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education and Employment Standards for Medical Professionals.
  3. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Establish Guaranteed Access to a National Preventive Health Program, with Oversight by a Designated Committee of Integrity.
  4. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Support an Appropriately-Funded National Breast and Cervical Cancers Program.

*"The Platform is the first step in the long stairway toward change in society."*

Participant

*"It is important to see women from all regions and ethnicities of Iraq coming together to reach a consensus and network. The Platform is a unique opportunity for us."*

Sundus Alkhayat, Chair of the Women's Office,  
National Reform Trend

## Education

1. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education Infrastructure.
2. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve and Reward Professionalism in the Education Sector.
3. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education Programming.
4. Women of Iraq Call Upon the Government to Improve the Education System by Implementing the following Legislative and Budgetary Changes.


*"I consider the Platform to be one of the most important programs in Iraq, dealing with sensitive issues and important concerns not only for women but also for society as a whole."*

El Al Kaabi, Iraqi Women's League

*"It's important that the Platform process gathered women from the north to the south of Iraq, and as such, women from different provinces shared problems and found mutual solutions."*

Participant

## Economic Empowerment

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1. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Increase Investment and Ensure Inclusion of Women in Iraq's Economic Development.
  2. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Implement Article 29 of the Constitution of Iraq and Increase the Standard of Living for all Iraqis.
  3. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Social Support for Unemployed Women, Children, and the Elderly.
  4. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Amend and Enforce Labor Legislation to Protect Women Employed in the Public and Private Sectors and their Children.

*"The Platform opens doors for women to defend their rights, to prove themselves at all levels, to overcome challenges, to reach the decision-makers, and to achieve their goals."*

Participant

*"The Platform will encourage women to participate in all facets of life."*

Participant

## Political Participation

1. Women of Iraq Call Upon Political Parties to Achieve Equality for Women.
2. Women of Iraq Call Upon Civil Society Organizations to Promote Women's Rights and Greater Political Participation.
3. Women of Iraq Call Upon the Council of Representatives to Increase Women's Participation.
4. Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Achieve a Greater Role for Women.

*"This conference is especially important since Members of Parliament and government representatives came together and discussed issues related to women with us."*

Participant

*"The Platform will allow the voice of women to reach the highest levels."*

Participant

# **National Platform for Women**

## **Platform Priorities and Recommendations**

## Healthcare

The people of Iraq are entitled to quality healthcare. A clean environment, well-trained medical professionals, quality preventive health programs, and investment in healthcare infrastructure will guarantee a healthy society for the future.

*"Your health is your future; you are an infinite resource for Iraq."*

Dr. Nada Mohammed Ebrahim Al Jebouri, Member  
of Parliament (Iraqi Front for National Dialogue)

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Healthcare Services for Women, Children, the Elderly, and People with Disabilities by:**

1. Improving the healthcare infrastructure, quality of care, and access to health services through enforceable legislation.
2. Implementing better information coordination between healthcare centers, thereby providing all citizens with better access to quality medical facilities in all provinces.
3. Ensuring improved quality control of drugs, food, and medical equipment.
4. Addressing environmental health issues by ensuring that citizens have access to clean water, air, and land.

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education and Employment Standards for Medical Professionals by:**

1. Increasing financial resources to recruit and educate more medical professionals dedicated to women's health issues, and adequately supporting training and services at health centers—with special attention to those that serve rural populations.
2. Providing professional development opportunities to advance skills of medical professionals, devising incentives to retain medical professionals, and recruiting an increased number of medical students from rural communities.
3. Improving Ministry of Health human resources management to ensure quality education for medical staff and equal opportunities for training.
4. Implementing enforceable legislation and regulations to ensure best practices and professionalism among healthcare providers.



**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Establish Guaranteed Access to a National Preventive Health Program, with Oversight by a Designated Committee of Integrity by:**

1. Establishing and implementing a health card system to ensure access to healthcare services.
2. Increasing the number of maternity units in each hospital.
3. Providing appropriate, specialized care for women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
4. Establishing and implementing an appropriately-funded national program dedicated to women's health issues, including services for conducting compulsory premarital testing.<sup>1</sup>

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Support an Appropriately-Funded National Breast and Cervical Cancers Program by:**

1. Establishing partnerships with Iraqi CSOs to offer support programs provided by women for individuals impacted by breast cancer and cervical cancer.
2. Making a substantial financial commitment to develop and deliver effective breast cancer and cervical cancer care services.
3. Creating and broadcasting educational programs on television about breast cancer prevention, treatment, and support programs.
4. Creating well-equipped rehabilitation and cancer care facilities in all provinces.

## Education

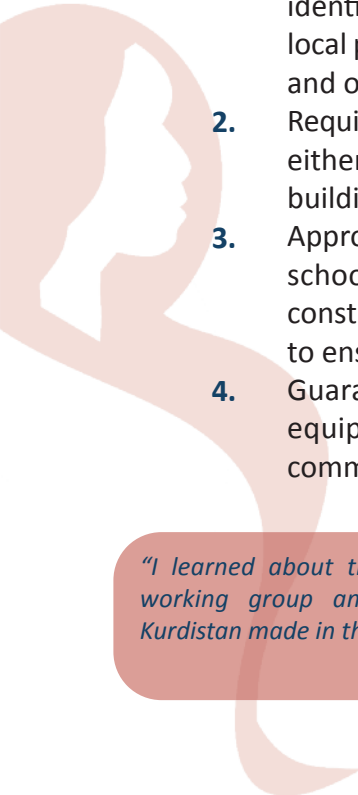
Education is a basic right of all citizens. The women of Iraq call upon the government to provide opportunities for all women to obtain education of the highest quality and at the highest levels. A new Iraq, looking forward to a bright and hopeful future, must identify obstacles and solutions for developing an education system that meets international standards.

*"Education for women is very important at this time in Iraq's history, because women are raising future generations of Iraqis."*

Participant

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education Infrastructure by:**

1. Conducting an assessment in each community throughout the country to determine which areas have a sufficient number of primary and intermediate schools, identify locations that require more schools to serve the local population, and review the state of existing schools and outline necessary repairs.
2. Requiring each provincial council to identify and dedicate either land for the construction of a school or a suitable building to be used as a school.
3. Approaching international donors to fund and construct schools where required, employing local people with construction jobs, and supervising construction projects to ensure appropriate building standards.
4. Guaranteeing the availability of textbooks and school equipment for every student, in both rural and urban communities.



*"I learned about the Kurdish experience in the working group and about the progress that Kurdistan made in the field of education."*

Arab Participant

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve and Reward Professionalism in the Education Sector by:**

1. Providing training to current teachers and student teachers to assist them in developing skills to guide and instruct children without the use of violence.
2. Working in concert with the Ministry of Education and international NGOs to assist Iraqi teachers in evaluating and improving their skills and their overall standards of professionalism.
3. Developing and implementing a system to compensate teachers for security risks, transportation costs, and professional allowances.
4. Developing and implementing health insurance and life insurance systems for teachers.

*“The next generation of Iraq will build the civilization and bring the country back to progress and development. This generation will be raised by Iraqi women. For this reason, the education of Iraqi women is a strategic issue and ultimate priority in building the Iraqi state.”*

Alaa Makki, Member of Parliament (Tajdeed List),  
Chair of the CoR Committee on Education

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Education Programming by:**

1. Establishing a task force composed of Iraqi teachers, Ministry of Education representatives, and international CSO representatives with curriculum expertise to consult with stakeholders, review school programming, identify areas for improvement, establish priorities, and make recommendations to the government for education curriculum development.
2. Increasing the quality and availability of training in both official languages and providing conversational English education for students beginning in primary school.
3. Standardizing class time for all primary and secondary school students at 30 hours per week.
4. Increasing access to graduate programs for women by eliminating restrictions on age and previous grades, and increasing the availability of bachelor's degree programs for graduates of vocational schools.

**Women of Iraq Call Upon the Government to Improve the Education System by Implementing the following Legislative and Budgetary Changes:**

1. Eliminating Paragraph 41.1<sup>2</sup> of the Iraqi Penal Code and imposing penalties on teachers who use corporal punishment to discipline children.
2. Developing legislation to prohibit political party interference in the education system.
3. Implementing existing transportation allowances for university students who must travel long distances to attend university.
4. Amending the Constitution of Iraq to make education compulsory for all children 16 years of age and younger.

## Economic Empowerment

It is the right of all women in Iraq to live with freedom, dignity, and economic empowerment. Increased investment in manufacturing and productivity, the development of resources, an increased monthly income, and the availability of suitable housing will create an economic environment in which women participate as equal citizens.



**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Increase Investment and Ensure Inclusion of Women in Iraq's Economic Development by:**

1. Implementing Article 25<sup>3</sup> of the Constitution of Iraq to allow women, particularly widows and other women without family support, to access local and international grants and loans for new business projects.
2. Supporting the establishment of professional associations for business women that provide training programs in managing small investments, trade, and commercial projects.
3. Ensuring a greater role for ministries' gender liaison officers by improving their access to information, enhancing their ability to contribute to decision-making processes, and increasing their coordination with the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs.
4. Increasing available job opportunities for women by rebuilding public industries and factories, and providing security to preserve industry and infrastructure reconstruction.

*"The Platform will serve as a wake-up call for all women, and it will help the next generation of women to prosper."*

Participant

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Implement Article 29<sup>4</sup> of the Constitution of Iraq and Increase the Standard of Living for all Iraqis by:**

1. Increasing the guaranteed minimum monthly salary for both public and private sector employees.
2. Ensuring that suitable and affordable housing units are available to limited income families in need of housing.
3. Providing allowances for students with limited financial means to encourage and support the completion of their studies.
4. Recognizing the right to quality healthcare by guaranteeing health insurance for all Iraqi families.

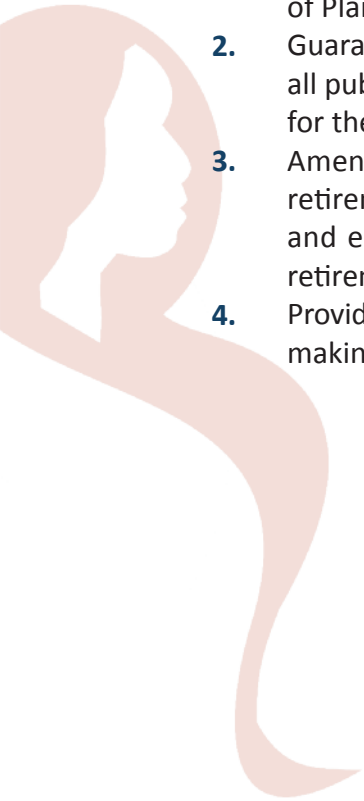
**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Improve Social Support for Unemployed Women, Children, and the Elderly by:**

1. Enforcing legislation that prohibits child labor and exploitation.
2. Guaranteeing women and men equal access to the distribution of agricultural land and equipment.
3. Increasing—based on international standards—the number and quality of services provided in social centers for the elderly, disabled, and orphans, and providing the elderly with a guaranteed income equal to the minimum guaranteed income for employed adults.
4. Supporting unemployed women by providing job opportunities appropriate for their skills and knowledge.



**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Amend and Enforce Labor Legislation to Protect Women Employed in the Public and Private Sectors and their Children by:**

1. Guaranteeing central recruitment through the Ministry of Planning and the Central Body of Statistics.
2. Guaranteeing the establishment of childcare centers at all public and private institutions, to ensure quality care for the children of working women.
3. Amending legislation in order to stipulate that retirement be based on either years of service or age, and ensuring access to quality pension benefits once retirement begins.<sup>5</sup>
4. Providing women equal opportunities to obtain decision-making ministerial positions.

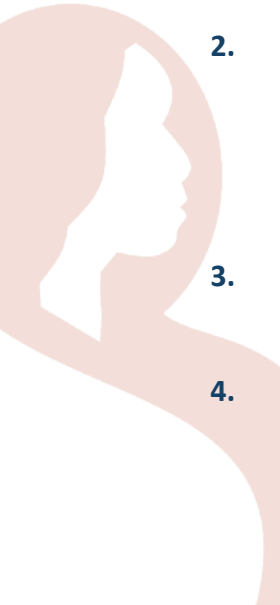


## Political Participation

The women of Iraq aspire to attain their rightful and equal place in society. In order to achieve full equality, they must have equal opportunities to participate at the highest levels of society as true decision-makers and as partners in the Iraq of the future.



### Women of Iraq Call Upon Political Parties to Achieve Equality for Women by:

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1. Increasing the percentage of women in party decision-making bodies to 50 percent and increasing the percentage of women in all other party committees to no less than 25 percent.
  2. Providing quality media training for female party members and mandating each party's media office to actively promote female politicians for interviews and appearances on programs (including television, radio, newspapers, and magazines) in which women are profiled.
  3. Working with national and international CSOs to develop and implement training programs specifically for women and youth.
  4. Increasing the number of highly qualified female candidates by ensuring that candidates nominated by political parties' women's offices have financial, organizational, and personal support before and during the election process.

*"To influence change, we need to put forward a common vision. Civil society will be able to refer to the Platform as a reflection of what issues women want debated. With 54 percent of the Iraqi population being female, it is time we had a means for influencing how decisions are made."*

Susan Arif, Chair of the Women's Empowerment Organization

**Women of Iraq Call Upon Civil Society Organizations to Promote Women's Rights and Greater Political Participation by:**

1. Working in cooperation with government and educational institutions, with the assistance of highly-educated women, to develop professional expertise among female government officials.
2. Developing and delivering programs to raise awareness among women about the importance of politics, women's political rights, and political processes.
3. Lobbying media outlets of all types (including newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and magazines) to increase the coverage of women involved in politics as well as issues and events of importance to Iraqi women.
4. Working together with Iraqi CSOs to lobby decision-makers to ensure policy changes, including those that encourage increased women's political participation as voters, party activists, and candidates.

*"Having men as equal contributors in the Platform process is good because it educates them to support women's participation in political life."*

Participant

**Women of Iraq Call Upon the Council of Representatives to Increase Women's Participation by:**

1. Striving to achieve women's equality by increasing the percentage of female representatives in the CoR beyond the minimum 25 percent quota.<sup>6</sup>
2. Increasing the size of the CoR Women's Committee to at least 15 members and empowering the committee, in concert with CSOs, to focus the public's attention on issues of importance to women and their families.
3. Increasing the percentage of women in all parliamentary committees to 25 percent, and ensuring that each committee has a woman as either the chairperson or the vice chairperson.
4. Enforcing Articles 14, 16, 20, 46, and 49 of the Constitution of Iraq<sup>7</sup> as they relate to the rights of women and accord with international conventions and agreements.


**Women of Iraq Call Upon Appropriate Levels of Government to Achieve a Greater Role for Women by:**

1. Establishing a Ministry for Women, led by a highly qualified female minister, functioning with an operational budget and appropriate human resources, and playing an influential role within the government.
2. Increasing the number of women at all decision-making levels of ministries by requiring 25 percent of all senior staff hired to be women and by ensuring that a minimum of 25 percent of the members of all international delegations are women.
3. Establishing within the mandate of the Ministry for Women a commitment to coordinate regular inexpensive networking events for women and to establish committees to work on issues of importance to women.
4. Creating a committee—chaired by an experienced female advocate, with 50 percent female membership and representation from civil society, political parties, the CoR, and the Ministry for Women—to review all laws and legislation, identify clauses that discriminate against women, and amend legislation to eliminate institutional discrimination.

# National Platform for Women

## Feedback From Stakeholders

## Feedback From Stakeholders



The final draft of the National Platform for Women was sent to several ministries, a number of Iraqi NGOs, and all female members of the Council of Representatives (CoR). Recipients were asked to identify areas of the Platform that might be in contradiction with their views of Iraq, the current reality in the sectors discussed, or their political and religious beliefs.

Those who reviewed the National Platform for Women responded unanimously that the document is in compliance with their views and beliefs. Most importantly, they noted that the Platform does not violate any of their moral, religious, or political values.

*"The women of Iraq have proven that, through all the difficult days, they are the backbones of the economy, administration, culture, and education. Iraqi women are pillars of the future."*

Maysoon Damaluji, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chair of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs

*"Iraqi women first need support from other Iraqi women, then from the government and Council of Representatives."*

Participant



Stakeholders were also asked to highlight other issues of importance that require attention but that are not detailed in the National Platform for Women. Respondents from the government and the NGO community identified the following as outstanding priorities that need to be addressed by Iraqi society in the future:

### Healthcare


1. Providing basic healthcare for pregnant women and newborns, and developing a routine house visit check-up system.
2. Supporting women by establishing more nursing schools, providing economic and moral support for women to enroll in nursing schools, and continuing the education of existing female nurses.
3. Establishing centers for the diagnosis and treatment of infertility, and providing the equipment and expertise to operate these centers.
4. Developing a law or administrative regulation to encourage women to specialize in all fields of surgery, especially anesthesiology—not only in surgeries related to women's health.

*"Iraqi women took part in the process of valiantly building the Iraqi community and surpassed all the odds to come out victorious."*

Dr. Khulud Sami Izzara al-Majun, Minister of State  
for Provincial Affairs and Acting Minister of State  
for Women's Affairs

*"The Platform conference was a very important and necessary step, and it is important for recommendations produced there to be implemented and not remain only words on paper."*

Hawraz Sheikh Ahmad, Member of the Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq (Kurdistan Islamic Union)

- 
5. Encouraging the development of the private medical sector, especially to provide more birthing facilities and nurseries for newborns.
  6. Establishing well-equipped emergency facilities with well-trained nurses to support women in rural areas during childbirth.

*"In order to have actual change in our country, we must ensure the type of changes that are in the Platform."*

Participant

## Education

1. Fighting the phenomenon of public school teachers giving private lessons to their students.
2. Developing the education system to reflect international trends in curricula, teaching methods, and standards, especially in the field of technology.

*"The Platform is more than just words on paper. It finds practical solutions."*

Participant

## Endnotes

- 1 Premarital testing would reveal the possibility of carrying genetic diseases.
- 2 Paragraph 41 - There is no crime if the act is committed while exercising a legal right. The following are considered to be in exercise of a legal right: (1) The punishment of a wife by her husband, the disciplining by parents and teachers of children under their authority within certain limits prescribed by law or by custom.
- 3 Article 25: The State shall guarantee the reform of the Iraqi economy in accordance with modern economic principles to insure the full investment of its resources, diversification of its sources, and the encouragement and development of the private sector.
- 4 Article 29: First: A. The family is the foundation of society; the State shall preserve it and its religious, moral, and national values. B. The State shall guarantee the protection of motherhood, childhood and old age, shall care for children and youth, and shall provide them with the appropriate conditions to develop their talents and abilities; Second: Children have the right to upbringing, care and education from their parents. Parents have the right to respect and care from their children, especially in times of need, disability, and old age; Third: Economic exploitation of children in all of its forms shall be prohibited, and the State shall take the necessary measures for their protection; Fourth: All forms of violence and abuse in the family, school, and society shall be prohibited.
- 5 First Amendment to the Iraqi Retirement Law No. 69 (2007): Second: It is imperative to refer the employee to retire in one of the following two cases: a. When the employee completes 63 years of age, which is the legal age of retirement regardless of length of service unless the law provides otherwise. b. If the official medical competency commission decides that the employee is unfit for service.
- 6 According to the Constitution of Iraq (Article 49/Fourth), "The elections law shall aim to achieve a percentage of representation for women of not less than one-quarter of the members of the Council of Representatives." According to the Constitution of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, women will comprise 30 percent of all members of the Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq (KPI).

- 7 Article 14: Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief or opinion, or economic or social status.

Article 16: Equal opportunities shall be guaranteed to all Iraqis, and the state shall ensure that the necessary measures to achieve this are taken.

Article 20: Iraqi citizens, men and women, shall have the right to participate in public affairs and to enjoy political rights including the right to vote, elect, and run for office.

Article 46: Restricting or limiting the practice of any of the rights or liberties stipulated in this Constitution is prohibited, except by a law or on the basis of a law, and insofar as that limitation or restriction does not violate the essence of the right or freedom.

Article 49: First: The Council of Representatives shall consist of a number of members, at a ratio of one seat per 100,000 Iraqi persons representing the entire Iraqi people. They shall be elected through a direct secret general ballot. The representation of all components of the people shall be upheld in it; Second: A candidate to the Council of Representatives must be a fully qualified Iraqi; Third: A law shall regulate the requirements for the candidate, the voter, and all that is related to the elections; Fourth: The elections law shall aim to achieve a percentage of representation for women of not less than one-quarter of the members of the Council of Representatives; Fifth: The Council of Representatives shall promulgate a law dealing with the replacement of its members on resignation, dismissal, or death; Sixth: It is not permissible to combine membership in the Council of Representatives with any work or other official position.

