



IRAQ
Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review
36th session of the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council

RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN IRAQ

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RIGHTS WATCH TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL. IRAQ 2019

Introduction:

Iraqi society has witnessed during the last four years many significant changes, where the fundamental rights and freedoms were subject of violations by the special security and intelligence agencies, and also by different armed groups.

And while Iraqi society did not know the real participation in the political life, economic and cultural life, adding to this the economic fall down caused by wars, which made life more difficult for citizens because of poor flow of oil supplies and poor public services in the country... which led to an increased sense that the new federal government, whether appointed or elected have not been able to meet the needs of the Iraqi people.

The biggest challenge now in Iraq is that there are good texts in the constitution that guarantee rights and freedom, but the question of citizens and civil society organizations is **(To what extend these rights and freedom will be implemented or translated into real practices)**

The political process continues during (2014 to 2018) despite the difficulties and ISIS war in Iraq, and we in COF coalition of freedoms¹ continued observing and monitoring of human rights violations especially fundamental rights and freedoms in Iraq.

Therefore, our report specifically addresses the rights and freedoms stated in the ICCPR International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights² with focus on public freedoms.

¹ Below list of partner NGOs in the coalition.

² Iraq has ratified ICCPR in 1976.



1. LIMITATIONS OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS.

In 2014 to 2018, limitations and restrictions on rights and freedoms increased by the Iraqi government and contentious implementation of emergency law in some Iraqi provinces under the justification of war against ISIS and security situation and arresting many citizens in detention centers without judicial decision, this is an absolute violation of the right that can not be restricted which is “The right to a fair trial”, and executing many civilians by government backed militias PMF, and also restricting the right of movement and action, the right of access to information, and many restrictions on rights and fundamental freedoms.

Iraqi government bases on a constitutional defect found in article 46 of the Iraqi Constitution to restrict rights and freedoms, article 46 states: *((Restricting or limiting any of the freedoms and liberties stated in this constitution may only happen by, or according to, law and as long as this restriction or limitation does not undermine the essence of the right or freedom))*

The problem:

- In the Iraqi constitution, the formulation of the limitations clause which is article 46 seeks to protect rights from being violated by robust regulatory legislation by insisting that no such law could violate the 'essence' of the right.
- The problem is that this formulation is now subjected to stinging criticism because it is contrary to the ICCPR- article 4 and also contradicts with international human rights criteria, Iraqi constitution grants rights and freedoms to Iraqi citizens in more than thirty articles, but then the constitution robs all these rights and freedoms in one article which enables the parliament or the government to restrict these rights and freedoms without adequate conditions.
- Put simply, protecting the essence of a right is not always what is required of a limitation. Sometimes a limitation must remove the essence of a right, but for a purpose, or a class of persons, or for time, or subject to certain procedural guarantees.
- The second problem with the 'essence' test is that it may be difficult to establish what the 'essence' of a right is.
- A consideration of the Iraqi constitution reveals that:
 - There is no list of non-derogable rights.
 - There is no limitation or framework within which the emergency measures can be assessed or limited by reference to their necessity or the rationality of their purpose: e.g., the text does not specify the conditions for the declaration; or the purposes for which emergency measures maybe promulgated.
- **Guarantees to protect rights against restriction mechanism.**

In order to protect human rights from being violated by regulations that restricts rights and freedoms, the European Court of Human Rights and the Canadian Supreme Court and Constitutional Court of South Africa (along with the related constitutional and international instruments) have preferred the following guarantees : --



1 – Presence of logical link between the restriction and the damage we want to prevent, to justify the restriction of the right.

2 - Test of proportionality which requires no restriction on the right only to the extent that is "necessary" to protect the public interest or to prevent greater damages.

3 – Setup values or criteria can be tested by the restriction, as appropriate.

Recommendation:

- Amending the article 46 of Iraqi constitution.

Alternative proposed article ((The rights under this constitution can not be limited only in terms of a law and to the extent that the limitation is necessary in a democratic society based on human rights taking into account the nature of the right, the importance of the purpose of the limitation, the nature of the limitation, the extent and duration of limitation, and less restricted means to achieve its purpose))³

2.

3. DISBELIEVING INDICTMENT DUE TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHTS, RELIGION AND CONVERSION OF FAITH.

The international covenant of the civil and political rights in article (18) ensures the freedom of thoughts , conscience and religion , and as the article is clear in terms of structure and content especially regarding the freedom of thoughts and religion so it is considered as one of the major elements to build a society that is identified as an educated and thoughts matured based on a fact that human being enjoy natural rights to be free to believe and there is no power that can control the way that human being thinks in a way that ensures the creativity and continuity of the human being, based on a fact that religions are considered as intellectual and spiritual approaches then for the human being to have the freedom to adopt the religion that will exist the harmony and peace in life without pressuring or repressing the human being to adopt an intellectual approach or religion rather than another .

In the reality of Iraq, the problem is occurred starting from the legislations reaching the procedures (from the identity to disbelieving indictment).

- **Right to convert religion:** in Iraq people can convert from any religion to Islam, but it's not allowed to convert from Islam to any religion, and this is discrimination for the favor of Islam (religion of majority) against other religions (minority religions). If someone decided to convert from Islam to any other religion he/she will be prohibited by law, and considered (out of nation)

³ The alternate article been submitted by COF to constitutional review committee officially in 2007 by signatures of 162 Iraqi NGOs.



in the community, and also will be considered as disbeliever according to Sharia law.

- Profanation of symbols of other religions: In Iraq there are official bodies under religious mask of Islam they fight symbols of other religions (non Muslim symbols), for example, Shiite Diwan demolished the holy house of “Bahaa Allah/prophet of Bahaiis” in Baghdad/ Alkarkh, and Zoroastrians are not been protected by law, because constitution of Iraq does not recognize Zoroastrian as a religion.

The identity in Iraq :

1- Iraq witnessed conflicts on religious , sectarian , terrorism, nationalism ,race and political basis in the years between 2014-2018, and the experiences proved that as much the identity is narrowed to the mentioned identities the base of conflict and the negative diversity is to be existed , and from this point the first spark of conflict and losing the national identity is to start.

2-The modern Iraqi experience went through such conflicts , the major element in those conflicts was lack of national belonging of the Iraqi citizen due to the inclination of the Iraqi people identities to be more sectarian ,religious and race identities more than being national identities that achieves the Iraqi population interest in all its diversities and adaptations which will then achieve stability ,coexisting and development in Iraq , this is in one hand , in the other hand the absence of the political regime and the political will for the state to promote for national identity for the Iraqi citizen which requires legislating laws and regulations which is to limit the narrow ditching and punishes who contributes in this ditching through executive regulations and procedures coming from this political will in Iraq.

3- Based on this fact and other facts the civil society associations believe that one of the major reasons of conflicts is that the political regime and the legal framework in Iraq adopts policies that are created due to sectarian ,religious and race basis. This negatively effected and as a logical result the legislations and regulations which touches the citizen lives , interests and their national belonging , for an example on that , the sectarian and race division in the main three presidential committees in Iraq , (the presidential committee is contained from the president (Kurdish) , the two deputies (one Shia ,one Sunni)), and the same for the parliament presidential committee and the council of ministers committee),even in what is so called independent committees like the independent higher commission for elections in Iraq as the board members are divided sectarian and upon race basis.

Problem :

One of the procedures that need to be reviewed and reformed is existing the (religion field) in the Iraqi civilian identity , and arguing constitutionally upon the sectarian approach ,so it is believed by the civil society associations that identifying the citizens religion or if the state recognizes the Iraqi citizen religion through the most important civilian ID card which is existed to interpret the nationality it is believed that it is illegal and contradicting with the federal constitution of Iraq and plus not necessary , while the Iraq state does not distinguish between the citizens upon religious basis according to the constitution , so it is not seen as a necessary action but opposite to that , it has became a dangerous issue as it has caused killing and displacement of millions of citizens that belong to religious minorities in Iraq by ISIS and by militias which most



of them are belong to political parties and religious associations which represent the legislation and executive authorities that practiced violence against the citizens .

Addition to that , the civil society associations recognized a religious distinguishing by having the state providing places for praying for a specific religious group in the public offices and departments which has employees from different religious minorities and not providing praying places for the other religious minorities , beside the existence to serve the citizens from all minorities and other intellectual approaches as long as they are Iraqis, also many cases of discrimination been reported especially of employment according to religious basis.

Disbelieving indictment based on identity:

Iraqi citizens were and still major victims of disbelieving indictment, it had multi curves like religious disbelieving indictment , political ,sectarian and race , that led to disbelieving indictment and killing of thousands of citizens based on identity especially minorities of Christians and Saibians.

The raised point here is the religious disbelieving indictment which is related to the civilian identity card which appears the religion identity of the citizen which will make the citizen able to be a disbelieving indictment victim , addition to that the personal status law which bounds the citizen in terms of mixed marriages , the surprising issue is that the state and its political regime is combating disbelieving indictment in one hand and in another hand practicing it against the citizens and this is another contradiction with what the government and decision makers are stating that they are to protect and ensure the freedoms and particularly freedom of thought and faith.

This opened the doors for random interpretations which are practiced by armed groups related to religious and political associations many of them are related to the government and the state to practice violence and commit crimes against the citizens upon thoughts adoption basis.

Recommendations :

- 1- Reviewing the existence of the (religion field) in the Iraqi civilian identity card and removing it .**
- 2- Legislating a civilian law that ensures the freedom from different religions to have mixed marriages and securing their rights according to the law and with no distinguishing upon religious basis.**
- 3- Removing the praying spaces in the public and governmental divisions and departments considering the public divisions not representing a religion rather than another and doesn't provide service for citizens of a religion rather than another.**
- 4- Protect who convert their religions and believes.**
- 5- Issuing laws and regulations to protect followers of minority religions in Iraq and protect their symbols.**



THE REALITY OF THE IRAQI MEDIA AND WAYS TO IMPROVE IT.

According to Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights ((everyone has the right to freedom of expression)) Of course, any talk on freedom of expression and media can not be addressed in isolation from the overall situation of society, This unrestrained media freedoms resulted in conflicting directions among journalists, and on the other hand other directions and ideologies of political parties and potential radicalism that led to many victims of this conflict.

In this context, the government, and to a lesser extent the judiciary authority, and a much lesser extent the legislative authority, are disabling media from accessing their information even sometimes, but the essential problem is the absence of legislation that protects the right of press access to information.

The government usually uses media when it wants make propaganda for the "great achievements of the government", but when media seeks to detect failure or corruption of the government it is been treated as enemy! and in the past 4 years the office of prime minister controlled (Iraqi media network) that is funded by public budget and many other media agencies been bought by prime minister's office that is abuse of public funds.

Recommendations:

From this standpoint, in Iraq there is critical need for:

1. Amending the article 38 of the constitution in a way that guarantees the right of media access to information and dissemination without obstacles of a variety of pretexts, especially the national security pretexts.
2. Activate laws and regulations that ensure protection journalists and the courts should not depend on criminal law to punish journalists such as law number 111 of year 1969.
3. Adoption of media charter by all political and social blocks that ensures journalist's personal safety as a representative of public opinion and not a tool of any party.

4. THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY.

It is generally recognized around the world today that the right of assembly and association is one of the fundamental human rights. These rights are protected by international charters such as the United Nations' 1948 *Universal Declaration of*



Human Rights (UDHR)- Article 20 and International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) article 22.

In Iraq, today there are two regulations for civil society, applicable depending upon the location in which the CSO is registered:

1. **NGO law number 12 of 2010.** Issued by the Iraqi council of representatives, this law is applicable in the center and south regions of Iraq. More specifically, it applies in all Iraqi governorates, except Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaimaniya (the Kurdistan region) — as is the case with most Iraqi laws and regulations that are not included in the exclusive powers of the federal authorities.
2. **NGO law in Kurdistan region number 1 of 2011.** Issued by Kurdistan parliament in April 2011, this law is applicable in the entire Kurdistan region which means Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimania governorates. It is often referred to as the “Kurdistan NGOs law.”

Despite the different organization and terminology used by the regulations mentioned above, both of them are very similar in substance because both of them are enforcing obligatory registration of NGOs, and Several provisions of these laws are disliked by Iraqi CSOs, including the mandatory registration / licensing rules, the fact that the registering agency is controlled by the government, the rules in place for foreign NGOs in Iraq, the detailed intervention of these regulations in internal CSO management issues, provisions legalizing governmental monitoring of audit and accounting of CSOs, and other deficiencies. Beyond simple dislike, these regulations prevent civil society from fulfilling its potential role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Iraq. But worth mentioning that there are many good developments in implementation of the law number 1 of 2011 in Kurdistan region especially in 2014-2018 in terms of registration of NGOs in Kurdistan region.

Generally, the most important legal problems of NGOs in Iraq can be summarized to the following points:

1. **Registration of NGOs:** according to Iraqi laws that are in force currently the registration of non-governmental organizations is mandatory. Even the regulations do not recognize the right of informal civil society groups. And those groups (non-registered officially) forbidden to work or engage in activities without obtaining a pre-license from the State. Moreover, the registration procedures are complicated and require to meet many difficult requirements, which make the process of registration of new civil society organization is extremely difficult or almost impossible especially in federal authorities, because registering under NGOs directorate in Baghdad (federal authority) needs approval of criminal evidences, approval of accountability and justice commission that takes years to get approvals.
2. **Registration authority:** the responsible authority of registration of civil society organizations for most of Iraq is NGOs directorate, which is part of Council of Ministers (in Kurdistan region is NGOs directorate-KRG). But, because of the history of governmental control over civil society in this part of the world in addition to the relatively poor relationship between the government and civil society in Iraq, the question that arises is (why NGOs registration authority should be government agency?) in other words why should NGOs

register under government agencies? this opens the door for government to intervene and control the civil society, and also led many government officials to compete with NGOs by establishing GNGOs (Governmental – Non-Governmental Organizations) !

3. **Financing of NGOs:** The question of how CSOs can be financed in Iraq today has no satisfactory answer. Many CSOs receive funding exclusively from the government and thus consider themselves arms of the government; others are funded exclusively by political parties and they consider themselves political organs. Most CSOs do not have sufficiently diverse funding sources to feel that they are truly independent.
4. **Negative interference of the government and political parties in NGOs issues.** The independence of civil society is at risk in Iraq, where government interventions in the details of civil society issues and try to control civil society, on the other hand many political parties are working to impose their ideological agenda on civil society which is totally different than civil society's objective. Current laws do not set any standards for the protection of the independence of civil society in Iraq.
5. **Foreign organizations in Iraq:** Current regulations in Iraq create many obstacles and put many restrictions on foreign NGOs working in Iraq, but because civil society is so new in this country, local CSOs are in need of international and foreign support. Existing laws do not protect the existence and operation of foreign organizations in Iraq but on the contrary they make obstacles for them, briefly the presence and operation of foreign NGOs in Iraq depends on personal relations of those NGOs with related officials in Iraq.

Recommendation:

* Activate the NGO law number 12 of 2010 in Iraq, and implementing it by government not going further than the law.

- Issuing a new law for financing of NGO in Iraq through competitive project proposals as it's the case in Kurdistan region and most of countries in the world.

5. NGOS PARTICIPATED IN PREPARING OF THIS REPORT:

Kurdistan Human Rights Watch, Public Aid Organization, Kurdistan Youth Empowerment Organization, Kirkuk social and cultural association, Vin Organization for child protection, gender studies center, Human Rights trainers league, Yalla Shabab league, Students association for human rights, Women rehabilitation institute, women for peace association, Babil center for for human rights, Iraqi women and child association, Women human rights center, Al-Rafidain association for human rights,



future women for development organization, Al-Fajr Al-Jadid organization, disables rights association, Kurdish Women forum.

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