

Women's Rights Advocates Join Government Reps in Call to Implement Domestic Violence Law

By Heidi Diedrich

Sulaimani, Iraq – In a call to honor the spirit of *Law No. 8: the Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (KRG), more than 50 people gathered in Sulaimani, Iraq on Tuesday, May 8 to discuss a serious plan for the law's implementation. According to event organizers, the domestic violence law is paramount to advancing human rights in the KRG.

The meeting was one of the first of its kind since the domestic violence law was published in August 2011, bringing together a diverse group of individuals representing government agencies, human rights organizations, and community leaders. The two-hour session included a discussion and debate about the law and the most effective approach to developing a plan of action.

The meeting, "Lobbying for the Implementation of Domestic Violence Law No. 8 2011," was sponsored by Wadi, an international human right's NGO with headquarters in Sulaimani; WOLA, a Women's Legal Assistance organization based in Sulaimani; and the KRG Department of Domestic Violence – Sulaimani Office.

Violence against women remains a global concern, with the United Nations reporting that the [most common form of violence experienced by women](#) around the world is physical violence inflicted by an intimate partner.¹ In the KRG, 'honor' killings, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriages are of particular concern. Research shows, for example, that a vast [majority of women in Iraqi-Kurdistan have undergone FGM](#), with some regions reaching a ratio of more than 80 percent.²

The KRG took an important step forward in addressing such violence in June 2011 when its Parliament passed *Law No. 8: the Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* after several years of lobbying by human rights activities. The law became official when it was published in August of that same year. Since that time, however, a general lack of awareness about the law has hindered its implementation.

Widely considered one of the most advanced domestic violence laws in the Middle East, *Law No. 8* also is said to be one the most modern concerning women's rights. Organizers of the event noted that, while the law is not perfect, lawmakers handled critical issues very sensitively, including many religious, cultural, and community issues that arose while drafting the legislation.

As part of the discussion, event organizers urged government agencies, the NGO community, academics, community leaders, news media, and other organizations to work together on a plan of action. Participants insisted on increasing legal awareness, especially in rural areas by not only engaging government officials and human rights organizations, but also entire communities in cities, towns, and villages throughout the KRG.

“We think working toward implementation of the law is 1,000 times more important than issuing the law,” said meeting organizers. “We hope that together we can design a plan that can be easily implemented in close collaboration with the Special High Court, Women’s Shelters, the Department of Domestic Violence, and the High Council of Women in the KRG.”

Event participants said they welcomed the opportunity to meet with the diverse group of individuals interested in women’s rights. The gathering also served as a platform for identifying groups and community leaders with a serious interest in working to implement the domestic violence law. Key highlights of the event include:

- Sir Serwan Ahmad Saleh, the first judge of the KRG’s special court against domestic violence, said that the court is busy with more than 200 cases. He was pleased to participate in the meeting, he said, noting that this was the first opportunity to meet with the community since he was appointed to the special court in fall 2011. Created under Article III of the domestic violence law, the special court includes family mediation as part of its effort to resolve domestic disputes. Sr. Serwan said one of the biggest challenges confronting the court, however, is a lack of designated and private space for these mediation sessions, which are offered by independent non-governmental organizations.
- Pshdar Rashid Amin, vice director of the KRG Department of Domestic Violence, recognized event organizers for putting together such an important meeting, stating that, since the law was passed there has been very little discussion or debate about its implementation. He said that the department would like to continue with a key role in meetings, seminars, and other trainings in the future.
- Aamal Jala of the High Council of Women’s Affairs also recognized the importance of holding such a meeting. She stated that the Council is monitoring implementation of the domestic violence law, coordinating with UNDP and other governmental departments on a strategic plan for women’s issues. The plan includes increasing awareness of the *Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*. Event participants had an opportunity to ask about the plan and discussed ways in which organizations that are involved in similar efforts can coordinate activities for greatest impact.

Other event speakers included:

- Shanga Rahim, an attorney with WOLA, the Women’s Legal Assistance group based in Sulaimani
- Attorney Shokan Hama, who discussed the domestic violence law and monitoring process
- Thomas v. der Osten-Sacken and Falah Morakhin of Wadi. The team discussed the importance of the domestic violence law and its role in advancing human rights in the region
- Atta Mohamad of CDO, explored opportunities and challenges related to the domestic violence law

As a next step, a subgroup of will be formed to develop a strategic action plan for implementation of *Law No. 8*.

Raising Awareness through Media Coverage

Recognizing that news media is one of the most important and effective means of educating the general public about the domestic violence law, organizers also invited news media to the event. The following media attended:

- *Satellite Television*
Zagros, GK, KNN, NRT, Speda
- *Radio*
NINA, NAWA, Peyamner, Goran, Dangi new
- *Newspapers/Online Media*
www.hawlati.co, www.radionawxo.org, www.sbeiy.com, www.peyamner.com

Media coverage of the event includes:

<http://www.peyamner.com/PNAnews.aspx?ID=275370>

<http://www.chatrpess.com/Detail.aspx?id=8436&LinkID=3>

http://www.radionawxo.org/kurdi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35464:2012-05-08-16-35-58&catid=3:kurdistan&Itemid=27



Sir Serwan Ahmad Saleh, left, the first judge of the KRG's special court against domestic violence said that 200 cases are currently before the special court. Shanga Rahim, right, is an attorney with WOLA, the Women's Legal Assistance group based in Sulaimani that handles domestic violence cases.



Pshdar Rashid Amin, vice director of the KRG Department of Domestic Violence, participated in a May 8, 2012 event that included government representatives, human rights advocates, and community leaders. The group met to discuss a plan for implementation of the KRG's domestic violence.



A May 8 event in Sulaimani, Iraq included government representatives, human rights advocates, and community members in a discussion about implementing Law No.8: the Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The law became official in August 2011.



Falah Morakhin, left, and Thomas v. der Osten-Sacken, right, of Wadi discussed the importance of the domestic violence law and its role in advancing human rights in the KRG.

Photos by Heidi Diedrich

¹ UNITED NATIONS DEP'T PUBLIC INFORMATION, U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL'S CAMPAIGN, UNITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, FACTSHEET, DPI/2498 (Feb. 2008), available at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf>.

¹ *Female Genital Multilation in Iraqi-Kurdistan: An Empirical Study by Wadi*, 2010, www.stopfgmkurdistan.org