

# The Children of Iraq: “Was the Price Worth It?”

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“...Line up the bodies of the children, the thousands of children — the infants, the toddlers, the schoolkids — whose bodies were torn to pieces, burned alive or riddled with bullets during the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. Line them up in the desert sand, walk past them, mile after mile, all those twisted corpses, those scraps of torn flesh and seeping viscera, those blank faces, those staring eyes fixed forever on nothingness.

This is the reality of what happened in Iraq; there is no other reality....”

Chris Floyd, December 17, 2011[1]

*I am more an aid worker than a politician or an analyst. But by following and monitoring the situation of the Iraqi children I became more and more convinced of the fact that both must be linked.*

*Behind all these data, figures and numbers that I will present to you, are children with a name, a personality, they are sisters, brothers, daughters, a son, a grandchild, a friend. I regret to have to put them in tables and categories, each of them, so vulnerable and fragile, they became the victim of the greed and lust for power and oil, they didn't deserved this treatment.*

For two decades, Iraqi children, along with the rest of the population, have been subjected to grave human rights violations, caused by decades of war, foreign occupation and international sanctions.

Iraq has turned into one of the worst places for children in the Middle East and North Africa with around 3.5 million living in poverty, 1.5 million under the age of five undernourished and 100 infants dying every day.

This report will focus on the violations by the occupying forces and the Iraqi government of the Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Geneva, 12 August 1949[2], and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since the invasion in 2003, the Anglo-American occupation forces and the Iraqi government grossly failed to fulfil their most basic duties towards the children of Iraq in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Resolution 25/ Session 44, November

1989.[3]

Principles of the CRC emphasizes the need to protect children's rights' to life and physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development in a safe environment.

The Occupying powers bear full responsibility for the violations of these provisions and Conventions related to children. They should be held fully accountable for the harm they have inflicted upon the Iraqi children. They have deliberately changed the social fabric of the country, used ethnic cleansing to break up the unity of the country, destroyed water purification systems, health and educational facilities and indiscriminately bombed dense populated areas, leaving the children extremely vulnerable on all levels. Living in a country at war also causes mental disturbance to virtually all children, and acute anxiety and depression if not psychosis in a considerable number.

The Iraqi institutions and mechanisms that should ensure physical, social and legal protection for women, children and youth are dysfunctional and unreliable. As a result, the most vulnerable are exposed to exploitation and abuse, such as killing and maiming, kidnapping, gender based violence, human trafficking, recruitment and use by armed groups, child labour and deprivation of liberty.[4]

The international community and international Human Rights bodies also bear considerable responsibility for this alarming situation because they failed to adequately address the grave violations inflicted upon the young and vulnerable in the Iraqi society and failed to identify the real culprits.

Article 6 (Survival and development)[5]

#### Direct Killings

Official figures and media-based estimates in Iraq, such as Iraq Bodycount, have missed 70-95% of all deaths. The most realistic and scientific estimate of war-related deaths comes from justForeignPolicy.org, claiming 1.455.590 victims in January 2011[6].

Analysis[7] carried out for the research group Iraq Body Count found that 39% of those killed in air raids by the US-led coalition were children. Fatalities caused by mortars, used by American and Iraqi government forces as well as insurgents, were 42% children.[8]

Of the 45,779 violent deaths for which IBC was able to obtain age data, 3,911 (8.54%) were children under age 18. Of the civilian victims killed by the US-led coalition forces for whom age data was available, 29% were children. [9]

#### Indirect killings

Many more children have been indirect victims, falling prey to disease, malnutrition or starvation.

Widespread poverty, economic stagnation, lack of opportunities, environmental degradation and an absence of basic services, constitute 'silent' human rights violations that affect large sectors of the population". a UN report released on 08 August 2011 concludes.[10]

The WHO, the United Nations environment program, The British Royal Society, and the U.S. National Academy of sciences have published some general studies on the health effects of

DU that suggested that the greatest health risks are found among children in post conflict zones (Harper 2007), such as Iraq[11].

#### \*Toxic environment

The wartime destruction of military and industrial infrastructure has released heavy metals and other hazardous substances into the air, soil, and groundwater. Sites , where municipal and medical wastes have accumulated , carry the risk of disease epidemics. Contamination from Depleted Uranium (DU) and other military-related pollution is strongly suspected of causing a sharp rise in congenital birth defects and cancer cases in Iraq[12] and makes the country unliveable. Low water levels in lakes and rivers have spelt disaster for water sewage systems and simultaneous poisoning of water rendering it unfit for human and animal consumption. Water supply from Euphrates and Tigris has dramatically dwindled, affecting Iraq's fertile agricultural lands and the underground water supplies that have depleted with no signs of recovery. Consequently, drought has become a national issue[13]. "

Doctors in Fallujah are witnessing (2010) unprecedented numbers of birth defects, miscarriages and cancer cases. According to gynaecologists, paediatricians and neurologists in Fallujah the numbers of these cases have been increasing rapidly since 2005 - less than 1 year after the bombing campaign by the occupying forces in 2004.[14][15][16]

#### \*Malformed new-borns

Preliminary Data based on cases documented in 2010 show the rate of heart defects in Fallujah to be 13 times the rate found in Europe. And for birth defects involving the Nervous System the rate was calculated to be 33 times that found in Europe for the same number of births.[17]

Japanese doctors believe birth defect rates are of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Birth defect incidence rates there are between 1-2 per cent. Cases of birth defects related to radiation from the US nuclear bombings amounts to a rate of 14.7 per cent of all babies born in Fallujah, more than 14 times the rate in the affected areas of Japan.[18]

#### \*Cancer

Increases in cancer, leukaemia and congenital birth anomalies in Iraq (2010) have been blamed on mutagenic and carcinogenic agents (like depleted uranium) employed in the wars of 1991 and 2003. Increases in childhood leukaemia in Basra have recently been investigated (Busby, Hamdam, Ariabi 2010) and the findings confirm that there has indeed been a significant increase since 1991[19].

The increases in cancer and infant mortality, are alarmingly high. The remarkable reduction in the sex ratio in the cohort born one year after the fighting in 2004 identifies that year as the time of the environmental contamination.”[20]

The enriched Uranium exposure is either a primary cause or related to the cause of the congenital anomaly and cancer increases. Questions are thus raised about the characteristics and composition of weapons now being deployed in modern battlefields.”[21]

A study published by the University of Washington and the University of Basra concluded that Basra's childhood leukaemia rates more than doubled over a 15-year period. The study noted that the incidence of cancer was significantly higher in Basra province than in other

parts of Iraq[22].

#### \*Clusters and landmines

Landmines and explosive remnants of war have a devastating impact on Iraq's children with around 25 per cent of all victims being children under the age of 14 years (2011).[23]

Casualties from failed cluster sub munitions rose between 1991 and 2007 from 5,500 to 80,000, 45.7% between the age of 15 and 29 years of age, and 23.9% were children under the age of 14. Both UNICEF and UNDP believe these figures are an underestimation.[24]

This last decade the Al Munthanna and Basra provinces of Iraq have challenged Angola for the highest proportion to total population of children amputees.[25]

Doctors insist that it's the responsibility of the US to try undoing part of the damage it has caused. "The US government has spent billions on this war but none to revert the problems caused by its dangerous weapons," fumes Dr. Bashier Mazim, another doctor in Baghdad University. "I can say that those new-born are the result of the American disaster that befell our land." [26]

Mounting evidence of the radiological and chemical toxic effect of the use of uranium weapons forces us to speak out and ask our national governments and the international organizations to protect their civilians and soldiers, and to apply the precautionary principle. This means that when the health of humans and the environment is at stake, it may not be necessary to wait for scientific certainty to take protective action. The principle applies to human health and the environment. The ethical assumption behind the precautionary principle is that humans are responsible to protect, preserve, and restore the global ecosystems on which all life, including our own, depends.[27]

#### Article 24 (Health and health services)

The breakdown of health and community infrastructures has led to the death of children from avoidable causes.

Intentional killing and forced migration of medical doctors and health care personnel[28]

Up to 75 per cent of Iraq's doctors, pharmacists and nurses have left their jobs since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Almost 70% of critically injured patients with violence-related wounds, die in emergency and intensive care units due to a shortage of competent staff and a lack of drugs and equipment.[29] Without healthcare, more people died including children, women and the elderly.

The Red Crescent Society warns that child malnutrition rates have risen from 19 per cent before the US-led invasion in 2003 to 28 per cent. Only one in three Iraqi children under five has access to safe drinking water, and one in four is chronically malnourished.[30]

Pollution and lack of sanitation including drinking water shortages for up to 70% of the population[31], caused the death of "one in eight Iraqi children" before their fifth birthday. Death of young children in Iraq has been attributed to water borne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, etc.[32] The Government of Iraq, in cooperation with UNICEF and the European Union, findings show that 79% of the population has access to the drinking water distribution network, leaving one in every five Iraqis without access to safe

drinking water. In rural areas, those without access to safe drinking water doubles to two in every five Iraqis.[33]

Half of Iraqi schools expose children to an unhealthy environment. Half of all schools in Iraq do not fulfil minimum standards to ensure a safe and healthy environment for students, and 63% do not have chlorine testing for drinking water, putting children at risk for waterborne diseases.[34]

Article 26 (Social security): Children have the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need

A report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) placed Iraq among the 22 countries that suffer from acute poverty and lack of food security because of war and the failure of government institutions to provide the necessary sustenance[35].

The impact of conflict is reflected in the increased proportion of slum dwellers in Iraq. There, the proportion of urban residents living in slums has more than tripled—from 17 per cent in 2000 (2.9 million people) to an estimated 53 per cent in 2010 (10.7 million people).[36]

Poverty due to economic collapse and corruption caused acute malnutrition among Iraqi children. As was reported by Oxfam in July 2007, up to eight million Iraqis required immediate emergency aid, with nearly half the population living in “absolute poverty”.

Starving whole cities as collective punishment by blocking the delivery of food, aid, and sustenance before raiding them increased the suffering of the young children and added more casualties among them.[37]

Parents also often ask their children particularly boys- to help to financially support the family instead of going to school. UNICEF estimates that 1 in 9 children aged 5 to 14 years old work. Children are polishing shoes; selling in streets, pushing carriages.[38]

The financial status of most of these families is much below the average standard of living, even though the majority of the children’s parents are university level degree holders (i.e. teachers, engineers, etc.).

We can also conclude that most of these families cannot afford the most basic of necessities like quality food, medical care, and a safe, healthy residence[39]

In December 2007 the Iraqi government announced to cut food rations and subsidies by almost 50 per cent as part of its overall 2008 budget because of insufficient funds and rising inflation. Nearly 10 million Iraqis living in poverty depend heavily on the rationing system. Children are the first and worst victims of the reduction of the food rationing system.

In 2010, lack of donor funding has forced the United Nations to cut back on its humanitarian efforts in Iraq, with its food aid agency halting distributions to hundreds of thousands of women and children. The halt in food aid will affect some 800,000 pregnant and nursing women and malnourished children, as well as up to 960,000 schoolchildren, according to Edward Kallon, the U.N. World Food Program’s representative for Iraq.[40]

Article 28: (Right to education), Article 29 (Goals of education): All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free.

The destruction or closing of schools and universities, the displacement of the population and the fact that teachers are members of the professional class who were killed or forced to leave Iraq, resulted in loss of schooling for children and young people, and therefore loss of life opportunities. Many children were displaced during the occupation due to sectarian policies imposed by the occupiers, with no adequate facilities for their schooling. Loss of schooling is very hard to make up. Not only did the children and young people have their opportunities in later life reduced, but the community and ultimately the state also loses from inadequate education.

## Enrolment

Statistics released by the Ministry of Education in October 2006 indicated that only 30% of the 3.5 million students were actually attending schools. Prior to the US invasion, UNESCO indicated that school attendance was nearly 100%[41].

Information on pre-school indicates extremely low provision and an extremely low take-up rate, confirming the lack of Early Childhood Development programmes within the formal educational system. Only 3.7% of children aged from 36-to 59 months enlisted in nurseries or kindergartens (MICS 2000). 5% of children enrolled are between 48-59 months as compared to 2.6% of younger children . Pre-school enrolment is 5.2% urban against 0.9% in rural.[42]

Today (2011), at around 87 per cent, the primary school enrolment rate is far below Iraq's 2015 national Millennium Development Goal target of 98 per cent, a difference of Around 700,000 new primary school-age children never attend primary school every year. In addition, over 600,000 pupils are repeating their primary school grade of study the following year, including many who drop out of school altogether. Less than 50 per cent of all children who originally enrol in primary school go on to enrol in intermediate and secondary school during their adolescent years.[43].

Primary & Secondary School Attendance. The UNESCO and UNICEF 2008 findings that 1 in 5 primary school-aged children were unable to go to school (Relief-Web/UCHO 2008) is consistent with the MICS 2006 attendance figures of 5 in 6 (or 83%) (MICS 2006). The urban/rural attendance ratio is 89% to 75% (MICS 2006).[44]

## Facilities and quality

Poor school stock is having an increasingly negative impact on the quality of education and attendance rates. A 2004 Ministry of Health (MoH) report concluded that 80% of school buildings required significant reconstruction, over 1,000 required a total rebuild and a further 4,600 major repair (MoH 2004 'Health in Iraq').

These figures were confirmed in 2007 by UNESCO and UNICEF found that 70% of school buildings were suffering from war damage or neglect (cf. Relief-Web/UCHO 2008).[45]

According to UNICEF (2011), more than one in six schools have been vandalized, damaged or destroyed during the past years of violence, and there are severe shortfalls in facilities.

Lack of infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms force one third of schools to deliver lessons in two or even three shifts, coupled with acute shortages of essential teaching/learning materials.



Most schools lack potable water, toilets or refuse bins – the lack of access to sanitary facilities places particular burdens on girls.[46]

Moreover, repetition rates have been forcing students with as much as 6 years of age difference remain in the same classroom and in some areas there are not enough schools that can provide adequate instruction in the language required by displaced children from other areas, (for instance: Arabic-speaking children in Northern Iraq).[47]

In addition school buildings are often used for military purposes, in violation of The Hague IV Convention on Laws and Customs of War on Land[48]. “MNF-I, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police units occupied more than 70 school buildings for military purposes in the Diyala governorate alone”, according to a UNESCO report in 2010.[49]

## Security and Sectarianism

The UNESCO National Education Support Strategy released in 2008 estimated that 2 million children of primary school age did not attend school largely due to the security situation. While the situation has improved during 2010, children’s access to education remains compromised by the security situation. “Many threats against schools continue to come from (the so called) “insurgent groups” demanding a change in the curriculum or attempting to deny students from certain targeted groups access to education. The punishment for failing to comply with these demands is often violence”, according to the UNAMI HR 2010 report.[50] Who are these “certain targeted groups”, and what does the report exactly mean by “insurgent groups”?

Sectarian policies of the Maliki government hamper the right to education of Iraqi children in predominantly sunni areas. Attacks on educational institutions by the Iraqi Army and government militias, to intimidate, frighten, kidnap, arrest and kill students occur on a regular basis. As a consequence school attendance has decreased dramatically. A few examples will make this clear.

On 3 February 2011 the Muthanna Brigade of the Iraqi army prevented students of the Isra school for boys and from the Ascension High School for Girls in Haswa area of the district of Abu Ghraib, from going to school to perform their mid-term exams.[51]

On Wednesday afternoon, Jan 25, 2012, in the sunni-area east of the city of Yathrib, Tikrit, Iraqi Government security forces belonging to the LEWA [17] of the Fourth Division in the Iraqi Army broke into the Medina Secondary mixed high school, raided and searched the pupils, then arrested during this raid seven school pupils – eight and Ninth grade students between the ages of 13 and 14 years – in a brutal way. The school was raided during the performance of students for their mid- year exams. The government forces didn’t give any reason or motive for this raid.

Sectarianism also comes “through the back door”. It seems that the students in dominantly “Shia” provinces obtained much better results than those in provinces with a predominantly Sunni population. In 2009 protests broke out in three Sunni Muslim cities in which conspicuously low numbers of students passed their national exams, fuelling suspicions that Iraq’s Shiite Muslim-led government is discriminating against Sunnis and others.[52]

## Curriculum

The occupying forces changed the existing curricula, now The Ministry of education is

incapable of reforming the educational curriculum in an appropriate way due to the sectarianism of the Iraqi government, lack of capacity and experience. The whole national education system needs to be considerably strengthened at national, governorate and district levels to ensure access to quality education.[53]

## Skills

Evidence is increasing that it is likely that A large number of children in Iraq suffer from preventable learning difficulties related to lack of early stimulation and learning. This degree of language delay may result from widespread psychosocial consequences of war, including increased poverty and fearfulness. However, psychosocial difficulties and poverty, including, preoccupation with day-to- day survival, amongst adults prevent them from being able to talk to or stimulate their children in the normal way.

In addition to the difficulties caused by lack of stimulation, children's cognitive development is also affected by poor nutrition.[54]

According to a 2007 Oxfam report, some 92 per cent of Iraq's children suffer from learning impediments.[55]

## Girls' education

In primary education girls account for 44.74% of the pupils. Some 75% of girls who start school have dropped out during, or at the end of, primary school and so do not go on , to intermediate education. Many of them will have dropped out after grade 1.[56]

Although U.S. and Iraqi officials believed that the 2007-2008 school year would see a much larger number of new school enrolments, 76.2% of respondents to 'A Women for Women' survey of 1,513 Iraqi women said that girls in their families are not allowed to attend school, and 56.7% of respondents said that girls' ability to attend school has become worse over the last four years. According to Women for Women International Iraq staff, the primary reasons for this are poverty and insecurity.[57]

In 2010, a UNICEF report described the learning environment in Iraq as influenced by poor safety, family poverty and a reluctance to allow adolescent girls to attend school. The report quoted female students referring to their schools as 'unwelcoming, unpleasant, dirty, poorly maintained with filthy lavatories and no drinking water.[58]

The chronic lack of educational and training materials and reduced educational capacity resulted in increased economic vulnerability of families with disabled children who presented an additional financial burden.

Many children living with disabilities live in rural or remote areas that seriously impact on their ability to access available services due to cost, lack of public transport and lack of knowledge about available services. Families from remote and rural areas may never see healthcare professionals. Even if the services are available, the cost of medical care will be prohibitive to most families

## Assassinations and brain drain

Assassinations and death threats against educators drove many out of the country.



According to the UN office for humanitarian affairs 180 teachers have been killed since 2006, up to 100 have been kidnapped and over 3,250 have fled the country, until April 2008.[59][60]

The International Medical Corps reported that populations of teachers in Baghdad have fallen by 80% and medical personnel seem to have left in disproportionate numbers[61]. Roughly 40 per cent of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled by the end of 2006.[62]The brain drain and the destruction of schools and educational system is part of the cultural cleansing of the Iraqi society and identity[63]. Iraq's educated and professional class, including teachers, academics and health professionals in particular, fled in their thousands following the assassination of colleagues as part of a targeted campaign, with devastating effect.

467 university academics[64]have been killed and more than 2000 doctors, hundreds of lawyers and judges, 376 journalists/media workers[65] and thousands of professionals.[66] This, in addition to the outflow of professionals during the UN sanctions years has left Iraq with an enormous task to rebuild not just its educational and health infrastructure but its specialist human capital.[67]

Article 20 (Children deprived of family environment): Children who cannot be looked after by their own family have a right to special care.

There was a drastic increase of the number of orphans in Iraq during the war and occupation. There are five million Iraqi orphans as reported by official government statistics, urging the government, parliament, and NGOs to be in constant contact with Iraq's parentless children.[68] About 500,000 of these orphans live on the streets without family or specialized institutions to take care of them.[69]

According to the 'Sponsor Iraqi Children Foundation', an NGO, approximately 1 in 6 Iraqi children under the age of 18 is an orphan. Many orphans beg on the streets or sell water to help poor widowed mothers or siblings. They are very vulnerable to arrest for begging as well as to recruitment or abuse by criminals, extremists and human traffickers.[70]

Article 22 (Refugee children): Children have the right to special protection and help if they are refugees

On average, 75 to 80 per cent of the displaced[71] persons in any crisis are women and children.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society estimates that more than 83 per cent of the displaced persons in Iraq are women and children, and the majority of the children are under the age of 12.[72]

According to figures released on January 22, 2008 by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Iraqi refugees in Syria extremely suffered from trauma, more intense than refugees from other recent conflicts elsewhere. Moreover it is revealed that 89.5 percent suffered from depression, 81.6 percent from anxiety and 67.6 percent from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[73]

The problems of children who were forced to migrate represent a real humanitarian issue because a large number of families had no shelter, no finances, no health care, no education, and no security of any kind.[74]

The study of Dr Souad Al Azzawi shows that in her study group 43.6% of the children's families left Iraq, 12.8% were forced to leave their residential areas, 11.7% of the children in the studied group left the country. All this due to a lack of services, security, and law enforcement and because of the fear for their lives. So 75.5% of the children in the studied group were forced to migrate from their living areas in Iraq.[75]

Furthermore 22.4% of the children could not maintain their education due to extreme financial difficulties. Iraqi refugees in Syria were unable to offer their children the free education. Other children were forced into labour in order to help their families survive.

UNHCR surveys in 2009 stated that 20% of Internally displaced persons ( IDPs) and 5% of returned refugees reported children to be missing. The total internally displaced population as of November 2009 was estimated up to 2.76 million persons or 467.517 families. A simple calculation shows that more than 93,500 children of internally displaced families are missing.[76]

Article 23 (Children with Disability)[77]

The distance to school, the poor state of the buildings, the absence of basic facilities, unsympathetic teachers, and lack help in understanding lessons, family protectiveness and the attitudes of society are likely to be insurmountable blocks for girls with disabilities.[78]

Reliable data on services for children with disabilities in Iraqi is extremely limited. The UN sanction years led to a chronic lack of investment and by late 1991 all four specialised training institutions and national coordinating institutions[79] were closed.

The chronic lack of educational and training materials and reduced educational capacity resulted in increased economic vulnerability of families with disabled children who presented an additional financial burden.

Many children living with disabilities live in rural or remote areas that seriously impact on their ability to access available services due to cost, lack of public transportation and lack of knowledge about available services. Families from remote and rural areas may never see healthcare professionals. Even if the services are available, the cost of medical care will be prohibitive to most families (Cameron 2005).[80]

The ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) is responsible for institutional care and the provision of benefits. Although there is a Central Government allocated budget to cover food, transport and other Social Care Establishment facilities, staff lack training and the units require modern educational facilities. Over 200 social workers are available but their lack of experience makes them largely ineffective.[81]

Article 33 (Drug abuse): Governments should use all means possible to protect children from the use of harmful drugs and from being used in the drug trade.

Nowadays in Iraq, many children do not go to school and don't play in the streets but hide in corners to take drugs or to sell them. Experts say that many children, especially orphans, have fallen prey to drug abuse over the past few years. Prior to the 2003 US-led invasion, drug addiction among children was practically non-existent, according to Ameer Mohammad Bayat, a psychologist working with child addicts. In many cases children turn to drugs to ease the pain and sufferings inflicted by the war.[82]

UNICEF reports have warned that drug addiction is becoming more than a phenomenon amongst Iraqi children. There has been a 30 per cent addiction increase among children since 2005 and a nearly 10% increase during the last year .

But the problem goes far beyond addiction. Many children are trapped in a thriving drugs trade in “new Iraq”, (a local NGO tackling the issue in Baghdad). Gangs usually target children who lost a beloved one or who are working in the streets. “The dealers offer job and relief, easily bringing drug dependence among those innocent kids.”[83]

Experts complain that the children drug plight is ignored by the government.

“The problem is worsened as the government neglects the chaotic situation children are living in,” said Bayat, the psychologist. He notes that the only help children get , comes from independent aid agencies and volunteers, who usually face a tough, sometimes dangerous, mission. “Security issues make it harder for volunteers to reach dependent children and offer help, as armed drug dealers can anytime take revenge against aid agents who try take children off the streets.”[84]

Article 34 (Sexual exploitation): Governments should protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Organization for Women’s Freedom in Iraq, an Iraqi NGO, estimates that about 4,000 women, one fifth of them aged under 18, disappeared in the first seven years after the war.

Innocent girls who should still be enjoying childhood under the protection of their mothers were being incarcerated for the crime of prostitution, an ordeal in which they were modern-day slaves. At this point, we even do not know if the numbers of Iraqi teenaged trafficking victims of the recent years amount in the thousands, or tens of thousands.[85]

The OWW reports that minors girls among the prostituted females are up to 65%.[86]

Violence used against prostituted women and girls is mainly targeted to the pregnant. Many reports state that they were aborted by kicks and beating. Women and girls who had an abortion were forced to work immediately. Some of the girls are victims of torture in case of gang- rape. Children of prostituted women are sold or raped by pedophile customers and are condemned to a vicious cycle of imprisonment because of forced prostitution and thereafter driven back to prostitution. In a few cases some girls are even selling organs.[87]

The younger the girl, the more lucrative the profits—the highest demand is for girls under the age of 16. Traffickers reportedly sell girls as young as 11 and 12, for as much as \$30,000, while older “used” girls and women can be bought for as little as \$2,000. The traffickers are aided by sophisticated criminal networks that are able to forge documents and pay corrupt officials to remove impediments.[88] In some cases, women and girls request to remain in detention centers even after a sentence is complete, fearful that their families will kill them.[89]

A report[90] released by the London-based non-governmental group Social Change for Education in the Middle East (SCEME)[91] highlights the plight of Girls as young as 10 or 12 have been trafficked from post-war Iraq into countries including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia for sexual exploitation. Other victims trafficked within Iraq end up in nightclubs or brothels, often in Baghdad.. Some of those brothels “have been established purely to meet the demand created by United States service personnel,” it

adds.

While sexual exploitation existed in Iraq, as anywhere, long before the war began in 2003, “the invasion and instability that followed led to an environment where young women and girls became much more vulnerable to trafficking”.

Some young victims are tricked into thinking a marriage proposal is genuine, Abou-Atta said — and then after being sexually exploited are swiftly divorced and dumped in the streets, all honor gone in the eyes of conservative Arab society. They are then easy targets for further abuse.

Another cruel practice, particularly in Shi’a ‘ holy cities Najaf and Karbala and in Syria, is the “mut’a” marriage, in which a girl is married off in the presence of a religious figure, for a price to a man for an agreed period of time ranging from one hour to couple of months.[92]

No responsibility of the government

When raising this issue with the Iman Abou-Atta, a clinical researcher also encountered resistance.[93]

The government and the British and U.S. authorities ,whose forces’ presence in Iraq were a contributing factor to the problem , has done little to combat trafficking in girls and women: there have been no successful prosecutions of criminals engaged in human trafficking, no comprehensive program to tackle the problem, and negligible support for victims, as noted above.[94]

Women’s rights groups told Human Rights Watch that trafficked women (and victims of sexual violence) often find themselves in jail. The government provides no assistance to victims repatriated from abroad. Iraqi authorities prosecute and convict trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a result of being trafficked. Victims are also jailed for prostitution, while authorities ignore their abusers.[95]

Article 38 (War and armed conflicts): Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war (Psychological problems)

Total collapse of Iraq’s economy, the sectarian violence, American troop raids on civilians, the killing of family members have deprived the children in Iraq of an innocent, carefree childhood. They have to deal with family breakdowns, poverty, and a complete lack of security. Iraqi children are being forced to assume income-generating roles because their families are suffering from hunger and poverty. They are leaving school and have to deal with adult problems such as unemployment, manual labor, etc. This situation expose them to hardship and many forms of abuse. Exposure to violence on a daily basis has affected their psychological development and behavior[96]. 46.8% of the studied population of children face serious health issues such as psychological and mental disorders.[97]

According to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the fourth leading cause of morbidity among Iraqis older than five years is “mental disorders,” which ranked higher than infectious disease.[98]

A study by the Iraqi Society of Psychiatrists in collaboration with the World Health Organization found that 70% of children (sample 10,000) in the Sha’ab section of North Baghdad is suffering from trauma-related symptoms.[99]

In 2006 some studies on the prevalence of mental disorders of children were completed in Baghdad, Mosul, and Dohuk. In the first study it is found that, 47% of primary school children reported exposure to a major traumatic event during the previous 2 years, 14% had post-traumatic stress disorder( PTSD): boys 9%, girls 17%.[100]

In the second study in Mosul, adolescents were screened for mental disorders. 30% had symptoms of PTSD: boys 26%, girls 32%. There was a higher rate of PTSD in the older adolescents. (92%) of the ill adolescents had not received any treatment.[101]

A study conducted at the child psychiatric department of the general pediatric hospital in Baghdad in 2005 found : anxiety disorders (22%), behavioral problems (hyperkinetic and conduct disorders) (18%), non-organic enuresis (15%), stuttering (14%), epilepsy (10%) and depression (1.3%) (Al-Obaidi et al.).

Children had been exposed to fighting in the streets, passing dead bodies on the way to school, seeing relatives and friends killed or severely injured, and other actions of war and occupation. They didn't just see them once in a while – they saw these things a lot, for years and years.

Almost every child is growing up as a son or daughter to victims of severe human rights violations such as torture, rape or chemical attacks. Most of today's parents have not had the possibility to mourn their losses and recover from their traumatic experiences due to a lack of rehabilitation services and social recognition. Children living in survivor families therefore frequently become victims of aggression, physical and emotional abuse and neglect-effects of intergenerational conflict and dysfunctional family structures produced by collective trauma.

They are exposed to violence outside and inside their house.

As a consequence, they suffer from a wide range of behavioral disturbances and trauma-related stress reactions such as sleep disorders, agitated and hyperactive behavior, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, as well as developmental and eating disorders. As children often have to support their traumatized parents in various ways, their own development in becoming productive members of society is inhibited.

Horrible images of torn dead bodies scattered in streets and the scenes of their fathers or relatives being killed in front of their eyes will remain firm in the children's minds for many years and will leave negative psychological stamps in their future behaviors.

The “relentless bloodshed and the lack of professional help will see Iraq's children growing up either deeply scarred or so habituated to violence that they keep the pattern going as they enter adulthood”.

IbnRushd is the only psychiatric hospital in the capital of 6 million people.[102]. Iraqi psychiatrists, like most medical professionals here, are suffering from training and funding shortages. No psychotherapy or crisis centers exist.

Of all the statistics that describe the devastation wreaked upon Iraq by the illegal war, the figures describing the plight of Iraqi children are the most troubling and heart-wrenching. These children will determine the future Iraq. Their wellbeing, or lack of it, will have impact on the lives of all Iraqis regardless their sect, religion, or ethnicity.[103]

The Anglo-American occupation forces and the Iraqi government grossly failed to fulfil their most basic duties towards the children of Iraq.

The Occupying powers bear full responsibility for the violations of the provisions and Conventions related to children. They should be held fully accountable for the harm they have inflicted upon the Iraqi children.

The Iraqi institutions and mechanisms that should ensure physical, social and legal protection for women, children and youth are dysfunctional and unreliable. As a result, the most vulnerable are exposed to exploitation and abuse, such as killing , kidnapping, gender based violence, human trafficking, recruitment and use by armed groups, child labour and deprivation of liberty.[104]

We ask The international community and international Human Rights bodies to discuss these issues in the council and send a special rapporteur to Iraq.

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