

To the UNAMI Presidency,

"Our freedom; our lives are under threat! The brave are the ones who make miracles happen, and challenge the impossible".

Before the global COVID-19 crisis, Iraq witnessed an extraordinary revolution. It began last October and despite the killing, brutality and authoritarian violence the revolution is still alive. Even now, under Corona containment we, Iraqi female protesters, are continuing our struggle towards a more just world for women and all vulnerable people. Gender equality and the realization of women's rights are essential components of global progress in the areas of peace and security and human rights. Only by addressing historical grievances and by promoting rights and dignity, we are able to rebuild trust in institutions and establish global solidarity.

"We are the revolutionaries ... the women of our time, and you are slaves (of your personal interests)." This is what we have repeated to prove our revolution's legitimacy and to demand our rights that were stolen with various weak arguments. In this revolution women worked side by side with men. These women were present, they resisted prejudice, they fed, cleaned, made decisions and perpetuated peace. Women are now more vigilant and stronger.

Our goals however are still far from complete and we are facing an uphill battle. Those against us unleashed a violent, hostile and extremely worrisome reaction among those who are entrenched in traditions. They kidnapped us, arrested us, and the worst was that they kept it a secret from the population. They robbed the real number of victims, and they are trying to steal the size of our social role in change. More than 700 of us have been killed since October, and more than 18,000 have been injured - these were our friends, family and colleagues.

Now that the COVID19 virus has struck the world, it is time for contemplation. The Iraqi government and international bodies must take a step back and reflect on how they responded to the protesters' demands for equality, security and the freedom to protest. We ask (inter)national authorities to respect our rights and take into account our demands:

- We need effective international protection systems. There have been many harassments, kidnappings, killings and arbitrarily assaults on intellectuals and activists. A clear signal to the Iraqi government to respect peaceful dialogue and solidarity with the people of Iraq may save many actors and participants in the continuous struggle for a secure world.
- We hope that you will take a clear stand to defend our freedom. It is essential to achieving peace, justice, sustainable development and human rights. No democracy will ever be complete and coherent without active and effective protection of basic freedoms.
- We ask you to advocate to increase the number of women in the decision-making process, in accordance with UNSCR 1325. It is a vital requirement to challenge stereotypes that limit young girls and women's aspirations and dreams. Therefore we have to redouble our efforts to protect and promote women's rights to participation and dignity and take the lead.

The world will overcome this COVID19 crisis with awareness and our commitment to global health regulations. We, Iraqi female protesters, are living in our tents, holding our grounds, despite the lack of supplies. The international community should take advantage of this time to negotiate and pressure the Iraqi government to listen to our demands. To support this we ask the Dutch Foreign Ministry and Minister Blok to enhance their current solidarity with the Iraqi people by taking a clear stance regarding the violence against all Iraqi demonstrators and to protect especially women from hateful violence.

Sincerely,

Alaa, Yasmin, Rusl and Zahraa