



AOO
Conference Report

*Strengthening
the Role of Women in the
Political Process in the
Kurdistan Region*

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday, July 28, 2022, Accepting Others Organization (AOO) held a conference entitled "Strengthening the Role of Women in the Political Process in the Kurdistan Region" at Divan Hotel in Erbil. Nearly 130 people were in attendance from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), national and international non-governmental organizations, civil society, UN agencies, and other entities. Several Kurdish news outlets also covered this event to report on the challenges which women in the Kurdistan Region face when it comes to participation and raising their voices in the political atmosphere.

This conference brought a successful conclusion to AOO's contribution to "Women's Voices First – Women Leading the Way to Inclusive Peace in Iraq", a program that was carried out in collaboration with Cordaid Organization, the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund (CSSF - Iraq), and UKAID. Throughout the implementation of this project, AOO achieved several important activities in Duhok Governorate in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), including the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the second Iraqi National Action Plan (INAP) 2020-2024.



BACKGROUND

One of the main challenges in Iraq is that women and female youth face unacceptable levels of discrimination and abuse, which prevent them from being strong actors within general society, and particularly in decision-making roles within local and national governance. This boils down to the gender bias, that is still deeply embedded in political, social, and economic institutions in the country. Moreover, women and girls also face different forms of gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse at all levels of society, including political, social, economic, and domestic levels.

Despite the efforts of UN agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations, the society, and many members of the government, parliament, political parties, religious and tribal leaders, and even some members of civil society organizations are not yet aware of or know very little about UNSCR 1325, the WPS, or the INAP 2020-2024, which are vital to women's rights and protection. UNSCR 1325 is also important in strengthening the role and participation of women in peacebuilding, as they call for the adoption of a gender perspective in considering their needs during the conflict, repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Iraq, being a patriarch and conservative society, lacks understanding, or rather is unwilling to understand - mainly men in government and political parties as well as religious and tribal leaders - the fact that women's participation as change-makers is not a threat, but on the contrary, is imperative to the development and advancement of society. Women do not have fair and equal opportunities and participation in the political, social, economic, and peacebuilding processes throughout Iraq. AOO's aim through this project was to work on improving women's participation in peacebuilding, protection, governance, and decision-making roles.

What is UNSCR 1325, the WPS Agenda, and the second INAP?

UNSCR 1325 was the first formal and legal document that required parties involved in armed conflict to prevent any violation of women's rights, prevent sexual violence against women and girls during the conflict and support women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction at a national and community level. This resolution has since become the foundation of advancing the WPS agenda, focusing on advancing the components of UNSCR 1325. Two years after UNSCR 1325 was adopted, the Security Council started encouraging countries to establish National Action Plans. Iraq was the first country in the MENA region to formally adopt UNSCR 1325 and the Iraqi National Action Plan (INAP) in 2014 (2014-2018). The second INAP (2020-2024) was adopted in 2020, which was facilitated and developed by UN Women and includes three main pillars; Participation, Protection, and Prevention.

AOO's Focus in Duhok Governorate

AOO's overall objective through our project, "Strengthening the Role of Women in the Political Process in the Kurdistan Region" was to develop and strengthen the position of women, mainly in the sectors of politics, governance, and civil society organizations as well as protection and peace processes in Iraq. UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda, and the second INAP were therefore the foundation of this project and all activities.

AOO's contributions through this project included activities such as informational and awareness-raising sessions for women from different political parties, parliament, and other governmental institutions, religious and tribal leaders, members of civil society organizations, activists, and feminists. Additional activities included educating female and male teenagers and youth on how to use communication devices with a particular focus on cybersecurity



AOO's Project Activities

There were four main components of AOO's project. This project was carried out from April 1, 2022 – July 31, 2022.

First Activity:

Ensure increased representation of women in parliament, other governmental institutions, and decision-making roles. This was done through developing the knowledge and skills of members of eight different political parties, including the five main parties in Duhok Governorate, through awareness-raising sessions on UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda, and the second INAP.

Second Activity:

Raising awareness on UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda, and the second INAP for CSOs/WROs, women's groups, activists, feminists, religious, tribal, and community leaders to encourage participation and protection of women. The project further developed the knowledge and capacity of women activists working with women's rights and feminist NGOs through Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions. The ToT trained women activists, in turn, delivered their training sessions to raise awareness of the community, civil society organizations, religious, and tribal leaders.

Third Activity:

Digital/Cybersecurity awareness for teenagers and youth aged 15-24. The other component of the project was to protect teenagers and youth aged 15-24, mainly females, against cyber-attacks, harassment, and abuse via the internet. This was carried out by providing training and raising awareness on how to safely use the internet and how youth can protect themselves from such attacks and threats online. These sessions also guided what youth can do in the event that their electronic devices are hacked or if they receive any form of cyber-attacks or threats.

Fourth and Final Activity:

Conference on "Strengthening the Role of Women in the Political Process in the Kurdistan Region" for main stakeholders of this project. Finally, to bring together the project's main stakeholders in one forum, the project successfully ended with the one-day conference highlighting the challenges women face in Iraqi society and how to overcome barriers to become leaders and change-makers within the KRI. The main purpose behind this conference was to create stronger ties and relations between relevant political parties, governmental, national and international non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, civil society, media, and other stakeholders to further raise awareness of the public about the project and, more importantly, about the importance of women's participation in governance, leadership, and peace processes.

The three activities implemented in the Duhok Governorate between April and July of 2022 included a diverse group of communities, including Muslims, Christians, and Yezidis who were



either IDPs, refugees, or host communities (including ISIS survivors). The number of people who benefited directly from AOO's activities, those who received awareness raising or training sessions, included a total of 1,158 people in Duhok, with nearly half of those being youth.

AOO is anticipating that through the media coverage of the conference by news and media outlets, we were very likely able to reach over two million people across the Kurdistan Region.

About Accepting Others Organization (AOO)



Accepting Others Organization (AOO) is a *woman and youth-based non-governmental, non-profit, non-religious organization founded in 2014 that operates across Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Our team works diligently to enforce human rights, with a particular focus on enhancing and protecting women's rights and empowerment, and preventing violence against women across the country.*

AOO advocates for peaceful coexistence by promoting tolerance and collaboration between the diverse components of society, with a concentration on livelihood sustainability, peacebuilding, and social cohesion. We also support governmental and non-governmental organizations in developing policies that guarantee freedom, gender equality, and social justice in accordance with international standards.

AOO uses UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda, and the Iraqi NAP as the foundation for all of our work related to women's rights.

CONTACT AOO:

Any inquiries related to AOO, including information about our programs and activities.

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AOO would like to share a special thanks to all stakeholders who were a part of implementing this successful project in Duhok, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and everyone who took part in and attended our final conference in Erbil on July 28, 2022. Your support is greatly appreciated by the entire AOO team.