

# Iraqi Judges Trained on International Law and Crimes of Sexual Violence

BY OLIVIA KRAUS

From November 13-15, 2006, the Global Justice Center (GJC), a new INGO based in New York, provided the first training on international law and gender for women leaders from Iraq and judges of the Iraq High Tribunal (IHT). The training was requested by the IHT judges to provide them with information on international law regarding crimes of sexual violence. It was organized in conjunction with the Women's Alliance for A Democratic Iraqi (WAFDI). Trainers who spoke at the conference included Kelly Askin, from the Justice Initiative at the Open Society Institute; Simone Monasebian, former prosecutor at the ICTR; and retired NY State Supreme Court Judge Mary McGowan Davis. GJC's president and renowned reproductive rights lawyer Janet Benshoof headed up the training team.

Twenty judges from the IHT, the body which tried Saddam Hussein and members of his regime for crimes against humanity and genocide, and over 15 women leaders arrived at the Dead Sea in Jordan to attend the training. At the eleventh hour, women civil society leaders were provided with a grant by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office to participate in the conference. To our knowledge, it was the first time ever in the Middle East that a group of judges and a group of women leaders had come together to discuss, for three days, such sensitive topics as gender violence, honor killings, and women's rights. Their interactions were astounding. Many of the judges had lived their whole lives in Iraq and never before considered issues such as state-sponsored rape or honor killings as an impediment to women's access to justice.

One key theme of the training was United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which ensures women equal access to transitional justice and other transitional bodies. The GJC discussed how 1325 applies to the Iraqi tribunal, referencing issues such as honor killings as an impediment to women's access to justice in Iraq, and encouraged the Tribunal judges to take affirmative measures to enable and encourage women to come forward to testify. An example of a fatwa issued by Islamic leaders



Judge Mohammed Orabi (one of the few judges whose name and image is public) and Iraqi women activists.

in Bosnia was provided during the training to demonstrate how the religious leadership can help in reaching out to women and encouraging them to seek justice.

Political contention over Iraq has resulted in the near complete isolation of this Tribunal from the UN which, by contrast, provided over USD \$500 million to the war crimes tribunals in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Therefore, while those tribunals employed a full-time gender officer and other measures to ensure that women took part in the tribunal proceedings, no such measures have been taken in Iraq to ensure gender justice aside from the Global Justice Center training last month.

We feel confident that this training has already had a profound impact on the way that the Iraqi judges view gender crimes, and that we will see this reflected in the opinions that come out of the IHT. Moreover, the judges acknowledged at the closing dinner that it was

their duty to reach out to women, take positive steps to ensure the Tribunal reflects current trends in international law, and give women equal access to justice. We have been told, in a letter to the GJC from one of the women leaders at the training, that since the group convened in Jordan, the women leaders and judges who attended the conference have continued conversations on the topics covered. The outcome was far more successful than we could have ever been imagined!

Due to security concerns, we were not able to publicize this training before hand. We believe that the training is critical to ensuring that Iraqi women receive reparations and redress equal to their male counterparts. A full report will be forthcoming on our website at [www.globaljusticecenter.net](http://www.globaljusticecenter.net).

*The author is a next generation NLG-member who, along with Andrea Friedman, assisted Janet Benshoof run the training described.*

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