

Fourth session of the Forum on Minority Issues

ORGANIZATION: International Kurdish Union

AGENDA ITEM:

SPEAKER: Parvanah Heidari

Madam Chair,

We are deeply concerned at the ongoing legal, economic, social, political and cultural discrimination against Iranian women in general and Kurdish, Azeri, Ahwazi Arab, Baloch and Turkoman women in particular. Millions of women living in the Islamic Republic of Iran face systematic legal discrimination, violence, constant insults and humiliation.

Some of the Islamic Republic of Iran's discriminatory legal provisions regarding women are as follows: Women are not legally allowed to be elected to important government positions, including the presidency. A man's testimony in all legal matters is worth the testimony of two women. Women are deprived of the right to divorce; only the husband has the power of divorce.

Women must have the husband's permission to work or to travel abroad. Women's share of inheritance is half of the share of their male siblings and married women inherit only one-eighth of the husband's assets. Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men. Men have the right to polygamy. The savage punishment of stoning is practised for adultery for both women

and men, but most victims are women. Women are obliged by law to obey the husband's sexual demand. The age of legal responsibility for women is 9 years.

Despite the fact that all women in the Islamic Republic of Iran face these legal, political, social and economical problems, Kurdish women face them to a much greater extent and frequency. Kurdish women in Iran face double-discrimination – as women, they face the extreme gender discrimination that is enshrined in Iranian law. As Kurds, they are even more likely to be socially, economically and politically marginalized. As activists, Kurdish women in Iran are also more likely to be targeted for speaking out on behalf of minority and women's rights – they arouse more hostility from state authorities because they defy norms about the status of women and because they advocate for the rights of minorities. In turn, state authorities often respond by levelling false accusations of separatism against minority women advocating for the rights of minorities and women.

Based upon the experience of Kurdish, Azeri, Ahwazi Arab, Baloch and Turkoman women in Iran, we recommend the following points be included in the recommendations made by the Independent Expert to governments:

- (1) Remove all signs of discrimination against women in all civil laws, including family law, criminal law, etc.