***HRC res 44/2 on needs assessment for HR response to pandemic and other health emergencies – input on Iraq***

1. **human rights challenges experienced by countries in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic**, including in relation to the measures taken as part of the health response;

**Overall Protection assessment / situation of conflict related sexual violence survivors**

From March through September, Iraqi authorities instituted curfews within and between governorates, and both inter-governorate and international borders were closed for extended periods for all persons in Iraq. Such closures deepened income insecurity among **IDPs and other vulnerable groups including refugees and asylum-seekers,** many of whom are reliant on daily labour economies heavily impacted by lockdown measures. Additional measures implemented included closure of services and centers with all persons ordered to work from home. COVID-19 prevention measures prevented most contact and in-person activities such as protection case management, emergency cash distribution, and protection mainstreaming and first responder training. In April and May, 87 % of service providers reported severe movement restrictions in their areas of intervention; and all service providers stated that they needed to apply for approval letters from the government for movement across checkpoints and to enter into camps. It must be noted that humanitarian access to some parts of the country was already a problem even before COVID-19 with humanitarian actors having to seek and obtain approval letters for every movement.

Between 28 June to 19 July 2020, the National Protection Cluster conducted the fourth round of data collection as part of a joint protection monitoring exercise at the community level to determine how COVID-19 was affecting communities. 78 % of respondents in camps reported that protection issues affecting **women and girls** had significantly or very significantly increased since the beginning of the pandemic, compared to 63 % out-of-camp. Trauma, stress and anxiety were identified as the first main protection concern affecting women and girls, reported by 67 % of respondents in camps and 63 % out-of-camp. The second main protection concern affecting women and girls was identified as lack of specialized services for women reported by 59 % of respondents in camps and 39 % out-of-camp. The third main protection concern affecting women and girls was identified as the lack of space and privacy reported by 39 % of respondents in camps and 35 % out-of-camp. The findings of the monitoring in response to COVID-19 continue to raise concerns on how survivors of CRSV are coping. The online services which are being provided by some service providers while helpful, were insufficient and could not replace the face-to-face meetings. Many survivors were unable to access these in any event due to a lack of access to the Internet or devices allowing such access or the money to pay for data to be able to access these services.

COVID-19 has also had a negative impact on the livelihoods of **CRSV survivors**. Prior to COVID-related movement restrictions within and between governorates, income vulnerability among all vulnerable groups was already high. Many IDPs, for example, were not able to go out to look for employment from their homes like they did before the restrictions. Many survivors reportedly became worse off economically as their ability to work and some of their small businesses collapsed. There was an increase of households turning to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labour and/or selling household items to generate funds. This has led to increased levels of trauma with the suicide rate reportedly having gone up as well. Civil society organizations providing support to CRSV survivors have had to increase their support to survivor’s basic needs to cover food and clothing. The effect of COVID-19 has been to deepen poverty and increase mental health problems for survivors due to increased trauma.

The curfews and movement restrictions confined survivors in their homes. Out of the 30 incidents recorded by the GBVIMS, 21 were perpetrated in survivor’s homes. The confinement at home increased both the stress and the risk of CRSV for women and girls. Progressively, authorities relaxed the measures put in place to address the COVID-19 pandemic. By September 2020, these measures were more relaxed compared to the period between March to August 2020. The more flexible measures have created the possibility for some limited level of access by survivors to essential services. In the third quarter of the reporting period, the GBVIMS reported an increase in gender-based violence incidents. The increasing trend was attributed to the reopening of the majority of community centres in camps and non-camps following the easing of movement restrictions. However, some key services, including person-to-person counselling, household level assessments, and group awareness raising remain suspended and/or extremely limited. Some of these remain delivered only through remote means.

**IDP camp closure**

During the last quarter of 2020, the Government of Iraq prematurely and unexpectedly closed sixteen IDP camps under a new camp closure process - in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Karbala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. Almost half of the 42,449 persons affected are children, and a third of those affected form part of female-headed households. The majority of the affected population, one third of whom have now experienced secondary displacement, moved to locations in Ninewa, Anbar, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorates. This process raised serious concerns over lack of, or limited access to, social services, adequate shelter, security and personal safety, and risks exacerbating incomplete reconciliation and social cohesion efforts, rendering an already marginalized population more vulnerable. COVID-19 compounded the situation making an at-risk population more vulnerable.

**Places of detention**

The Government of Iraq took measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in places of detention, including releases of detainees. At the same time, security forces in Baghdad reported more than 41,000 arrests for breaking the curfew between 17 March and 10 May 2020. Most were released within 24-hours of arrest.

**Demonstrations**

In Iraq, despite COVID-19 preventive measures and movement restrictions to prevent the spread of the pandemic, demonstrations continued. In Federal Iraq, anti-Government demonstrations that started in October 2019 continued on a smaller scale, demanding accountability for earlier violations against protestors and calling for early elections. Many of the demonstrators involved ceased protesting in order to assist civil society efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic leading to a decrease in the size of protests. The COVID-19 pandemic was not used by the Government to prohibit or interfere with these demonstrations. In Nasiriya city, Dhi Qar governorate in southern Iraq, there were demonstrations by workers against the imposition of measures to restrict movement in response to COVID-19 and the impact on their ability to earn a living. On 3 April, in Nasiriya, Riot Police and a SWAT Force responded a spontaneous protest by labourers that resulted in confrontations between the protestors and the security forces that resulted in the death of one demonstrator, one security force member and the injury of at least 13 people (12 demonstrators and one Riot police). In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, existing demonstrations over unemployment, poor service delivery, and unpaid civil servant wages expanded to include frustrations against restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Casualties arising from clashes between anti-curfew demonstrators and security forces in Nasiriya, Thi Qar governorate: On 3 April, in Nasiriya, Thi Qar governorate, a spontaneous demonstration organized by laborers against the continuation of the curfew and its adverse impact on their livelihood resulted in the deaths of one demonstrator and one security personnel and injuries to at least 13 people (12 demonstrators and one Anti-Riot police). Sources stated that the situation deteriorated when a team of Anti-Riot Police and members of SWAT arrived at the scene and negotiated with protesters to withdraw from the street, but the protesters refused to do so and instead continued to burn more tyres. Clashes erupted with the laborers throwing stones and Molotov cocktails/ petrol bombs at the security forces. In turn, security forces used tear gas to disperse them. According to an eyewitness, there were gun shots fired from the demonstrators at the security forces as well. The security forces reportedly also used live ammunition. Such kind of demonstrations take place regularly and human rights have been restricted in response but are not compounded by COVID-19.

Peaceful demonstrations erupted in March 2020 in the Kurdistan region of Iraq over unemployment, poor service delivery and COVID-19 restrictions. OHCHR Iraq documented arrests and arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance of some demonstration leaders and media workers in addition to restriction of freedom of expression including the closure of the offices of NRT TV, an opposition media outlet.

**c)** **any good or promising practices in these areas, including examples of international cooperation**.

**Detention**

OHCHR Iraq has been monitoring the situation in the detention facilities during the pandemic. As part of measures to reduce overcrowding in detention facilities in response to COVID-19 in Iraq, around 300 adults were released under presidential pardon. The Iraqi High Judicial Council further reported the judicial release of 17,585 detainees between March and August 2020. In addition, 767 children (66 girls) were released from detention since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq. The detention authorities also adopted several precautionary measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 in places of detention, such as suspension of family visits, regular disinfection, creation of isolation areas, regular tests, purchasing of PPE kits and adaptation of guard rotation systems.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, A total number of 241 COVID-19 cases were recorded in detention who all recovered, and one male prisoner died of COVID-19. Prison staff was also affected: 153 male and three female staff recovered, one male staff in the Women and Juvenile Reformatory in Erbil died of COVID-19. In the KRI 1,443 adult detainees and 16 juveniles were released between 10 March and 10 April under normal procedures to decrease overcrowding in places of detention.

To support the protection of detainees, their families and staff working in prisons during the pandemic, OHCHR Iraq together with the Kurdistan Regional Government conducted an information campaign using 3000 posters and nine banners in three languages (Kurdish Badini, Kurdish Sorani and Arabic) describing the measures taken to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in prisons and the rules family members need to adhere to during their visits at the facility. The materials were printed by OHCHR Iraq and distributed to the prisons and reformatories in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by the Directorate of Reformatories.

**COVID-19 awareness raising campaign**

OHCHR Iraq, in consultation with WHO, UNICEF and UNAMI PIO, conceptualized and continues to implement an illustration-based campaign to raise awareness on the human rights impact of COVID-19 and to promote compliance with COVID-19 prevention measures. The campaign is built on several different mutually reinforcing elements, which include rap songs, cartoons, murals, posters, videos and postcards which are disseminated on various social media channels, in person and on information boards. The entire campaign is published in three languages, Arabic, Kurdish and English and has reached over half a million viewers alone on UNAMI social media.