



Powered by Clickability

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Fighting for women's rights in Iraq

- Yanar Mohammed founded Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq in 2003
- Kidnapping, rape, murder of women in Iraq is up, the United Nations says
- Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq has helped some women out of Iraq

(CNN) -- Yanar Mohammed left the comfort of her Toronto, Canada, home to return to Iraq and fight for a cause she says is overlooked in her native country -- women's rights.

"The upper hand was given to the Islamists and to the tribals," Mohammed said of the formation of Iraq's young democracy. "Nobody listened to us," she said in a recent CNN interview. "To the tribals, to the Islamists, but never to women."

In 2003, Mohammed founded the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, in order to give voice to and seek protection for those women in Iraq who are in need.

"Nobody has the right to tell us that we are second-rate citizens," Mohammed said.

Historically, Iraqi women have enjoyed more freedoms than the women of neighboring countries, according to Human Rights Watch. Under Saddam Hussein's secular Baathist party, citizens were declared equal before the law regardless of sex, blood, language, social origin, or religion, and they were allowed to vote and run for office, the HRW said.

Even after Hussein rolled back women's rights to curry favor with tribal and religious leaders after the first Gulf War, women were spared the level of violence they endure now, according to Amnesty International.

According to a United Nations report, the kidnapping, rape and murder of women is on the rise. Honor killings, or the killing of a woman who brought perceived dishonor to her family, is up also. Women -- Muslims and non-Muslims alike -- are warned to adhere to the strict dress code, the United Nations said.

"You go to the Baghdad morgue, and you find a big number of women who are headless; they have been beheaded, they have been tortured and killed, and this is usually the case in honor killing," Mohammed said. "Nobody can speak about democracy if women are being killed for honor." She added that the current laws in Iraq do not punish the men who carry out honor killings.

And so, Mohammed and her organization are fighting not for equity in wages or reproductive rights, but for freedoms that women in other nations take for granted: The right to not be bought and sold, to not be raped and to not be murdered, to not to have to wear a veil.

"We see over the television hundreds of officials who say that they have given freedoms to women," Mohammed said. "But you look at the streets -- every single woman is veiled, she is veiled in white, in black, in colors; she cannot move freely she cannot go to her education, cannot go to work."

Mohammed said the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq has been able to prevent the honor killing of more than 30 women and has helped usher some women out of Iraq.

But she says that Iraq's current laws hinder their efforts.

"Our only hope is to create a youth movement ... to change the world to a better one," she said.

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/06/26/pysk.mohammed/index.html>

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2007 Cable News Network.