



Iraqi P.M. Says Medical Report Show Iraqi Woman's Rape Claims Were False

Sunni Leaders Speak Out in Woman's Defense

By ZUNAIRA ZAKI

Feb. 21 2007— - The office of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki today released a medical report that it said proved a young Sunni woman had not been raped by Iraqi police officers, as she had claimed. But Sunni leaders in Iraq continued to speak out in defense of the woman.

The 20-year-old Sunni woman, who identified herself as Sabreen al Janabi, said she was sexually assaulted Feb. 18 at an Iraqi police garrison, where she was taken on suspicion of helping Sunni insurgents.

The government and the police in Iraq are predominantly Shiite.

Iraqi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Qassim Atta al-Moussawi denied the rape allegations, claiming that Americans were present during the alleged victim's questioning. Moussawi said a U.S. Army commander who was embedded with the Iraqis, Maj. Tom Talley, was present during all interrogations. ABC News has not been able to verify this claim.

Moussawi also referred to a medical report which he said proves that the alleged victim was not raped. The medical report, however, does not name the patient.

Moussawi went on to accuse al Janabi of lying about the rape and assisting and collaborating with terrorists. He alleged that the story was fabricated to disrupt Iraq's new security plan.

Meanwhile, members of the Iraqi Accordance Front, the largest Sunni political bloc in Iraq, questioned Prime Minister Maliki's investigation of the rape case wondering, how the prime minister was able to conduct an investigation and establish the innocence of the defendants within hours.

Accordance Front members Abdul Nasir al Janabi and Saleem al Juburi held a separate press conference, posing the question of who exactly conducted the investigation into the woman's rape claims. They said they have asked the Iraqi defense minister to look into allegations that several other women had been sexually assaulted by security forces, but nothing has come of these requests.

The Stigma of Rape

In Iraq's conservative Islamic society, rape carries a huge stigma, often leading both the raped woman and her family to be ostracized and shamed. It is rare for women ever to go public with such allegations of rape.

Iraq's social structure and this case have "poured fuel on a raging fire of sectarian tensions," said Fawaz

Gerges, an ABC News Consultant and Professor of International Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence College.

Gerges said he found Maliki's decision to dismiss the charges without a thorough investigation particularly troubling. He said that Iraqi police have been known for human rights violations. Regardless of the facts in the case, Gerges said, this incident is "horrible news for attempts at reconciliation in Iraq."

Zainab Salbi, author of "Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam," says that this is not the first time that a woman's rape allegations were being dismissed and even ridiculed in Iraq.

Salbi said that "it's most unfortunate" that the issue is being considered along sectarian lines. It is not, she said, "a Shiite or Sunni issue, but an issue about violence against women ... It is the women who are being marginalized.

Sunni Official Reportedly Fired

The Associated Press reports today that Maliki fired a top Sunni official who had called for an international investigation into the rape allegations. The fired official, Ahmed Abdul-Ghafour al-Samaraie, had echoed earlier Sunni claims, saying, "many girls are raped but they refuse to appear in the media so as not to tarnish their reputations," according to The AP.

So far al-Maliki's office has offered no reason for al-Samaraie's dismissal.

In his press briefing today, the chief U.S. military spokesman in Iraq, Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell, said that the woman had been admitted to the Ibn-e-Sina hospital in Iraq, a U.S. run facility, and was released the next day. He said that the U.S. military is conducting its own investigation, the results of which will be available to the Iraqi government if they choose to request the information.

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