



KVINNA TILL KVINNA

**Iraqi women demand participation in Iraq's future,  
seminar on the situation of women in Iraq,**  
Opening speech by Lena Ag, Secretary General,  
the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 28 May 2008

My name is Lena Ag, I am the Secretary general of Kvinna till Kvinna (Swedish for: Women to Woman), an organization that support women's groups in conflict ridden areas around the world.

I would like to welcome you all to this seminar with the title "Iraqi women demand participation in Iraq's future".

The title speak for itself but I would like to say a few opening remarks to give you a brief background of why this seminar is taken place.

But first I would like to say a special warm Welcome to Kvinna till Kvinna's guest from the Iraqi Women's network, representing over 85 different women's organizations all over Iraq. Ms Hana Edwar, Mrs Basma Al Khateeb and Mrs Pakhshan Zangana. They have - after long waiting hours on airports not knowing if visas were able to be granted or not - finally arrived in Stockholm.

I am also grateful to The Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation, Mrs Gunilla Carlsson, recently back from Burma, for her support with everything from the venue, visas and some financial help - to her active participation in this event.

We have other prominent guest as well – The UN Special Representative for Iraq Mr Staffan De Mistura. Let me assure you that we do not underestimate the importance of your presence here.

And we are very pleased that Ms Dina Zorba, UNIFEM Gender Advisor for Iraq, will be participating in the panel to give her expert opinion on this subject.

Lastly our moderator is Mrs Maria Leissner, Ambassador for Democracy with the Swedish Foreign Ministry. We are grateful that she has offered her assistance today. I will soon give you the floor.

Just a point of practical information to the representatives of the media. Directly following the seminar 11.30 there will be a press conference with the participants.

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So...Why is this seminar in close conjunction with the governmental ICI conference tomorrow important?

It is important because all too often the perspectives and the voices of women and of civil society is lacking when governments sit together on the issues of peace, security and development.

The UN Security Council resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security plays an important role in further deepening the understanding of the

concept of human security, highlighting the forgotten or hidden part of the security concept - women's role for peace and security

The resolution consists of two important parts, one is about the protection of women and girls and the other is about the necessity to involve women on all levels of decision-making from the beginning to the end in peace – and reconstruction processes

The prospect of actually be successful with these to aims is that women are made visible, and that their voices are heard.

How will governments otherwise know what kind of protection they need and what they have to contribute to reconciliation, peace and development in their country? And how can there ever be a just and lasting peace if half of the population is excluded from taking part in formulating the future?

That is why Kvinna till Kvinna initiated this seminar and was readily supported by the Swedish Government.

To make women's voices heard.

Let me in this context also underline that Kvinna till Kvinna consider the war as a breach of international law and demand that the United States take a large responsibility for the reconstruction of the country.

Since the US occupation we have seen a deterioration of women's rights, women has practically disappeared from the public realm and their rights have been subject for negotiations. Neither the United States nor the international community have done enough to protect and safeguard women's rights. This is unacceptable and it is shameful abandonment of the Iraqi women.

That is why it is promising that the ICI documents are quite clear on the issue of the importance of women's rights, it says and I quote:

"Reduce gender discrimination, increase participation of women in public life and economic activity. Increase women participation in politics at decision making levels and their involvement in the democratization process. Protect women from violence and mobilize their potential to promote peace."

These are challenging words! What need to happen in order for the words to translate into deeds, into realities on the ground?

That is what we will talk about today.

Thank you and please Maria Leissner – the floor is yours.