

Iraq: Women raped, sold, killed as US Forces Fail at Security

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"The kidnappers took turns raping me, and I don't remember how long they kept me until they threw me out on the street," she said, dazed and high on glue, trying to blot out her miserable existence. She uses any drug she can get her hands on, "so I don't feel what's going on around me or who is raping me again."

□ Iraqi Women Paying the Price

Islam Online By Dahr Jamail, January 25, 2005

Kidnapping has become the crime of choice amongst Iraqi criminal gangs. With 70% unemployment in "liberated" Iraq, crime is running rampant, with organized crime enjoying a free hand amidst the terrible security situation.

The families of the kidnapped are at times forced to pay up to several million dollars ransom "unless they want to receive pieces of their loved ones, or even their dead bodies.

While media attention has focused heavily on the kidnapping of Westerners, the kidnapping of Iraqis, in particular Iraqi women, is much more common.

As far back as July 2003, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that "the poor security situation in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities is causing women and girls to severely restrict their movements for fear of rape and abduction."

HRW blames the huge increase in kidnappings and sexual assaults on the collapse of the security forces of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein and the US occupation's slow reorganization of Iraq's police force.

Within three months of the fall of Baghdad, HRW had documented 70 cases of rape and

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abduction of Iraqi women. As brutal as the regime of Saddam Hussein was, violent crime against women averaged only one case every three months under Hussein's rule, whereas in July 2003, there were several per week. And the situation is far, far worse today.

On December 4, 2004, Inji, a 29-year-old veterinarian, was in her clinic near Kirkuk.

She and Mohamed, her assistant, were asked to accompany a man who needed help inoculating some cattle.

They drove down a small dirt road to where the man said the cattle would be located.

"I didn't expect anything bad to happen," she says wearily. "The roads to the nearby villages are all unpaved and deserted. Then another car stops. It has three passengers, people I expect to be his relatives or friends."

But that wasn't the case.

"One of the passengers walked up and hit me on the head with his gun," she said, still processing the horrible events, "I saw them hit Mohamed when they pulled me into the car. After 15 minutes I tried to speak and they hit me again."

They drove along dirt roads for two hours. Then Inji was dragged out of the car, while other men pulled Mohamed from a second car.

"The men ordered me to take off my jewelry, then beat me so much I could no longer feel pain," she says quietly.

The kidnappers then used her mobile phone to call her husband, Turhan. He was told that his

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wife was kidnapped, and that he had 24 hours to pay \$20,000 in ransom. Otherwise, he was told, she would be sold.

?I was kept in a dark room on a bare floor with a dirty blanket,? she explained. ?They made me call my husband and tell him to prepare the money, and I swore to them that my family could not afford this money.? One of the kidnappers responded ?Let the democracy that you call for collect the money for you.?

?I called my husband and begged him to save me,? she said, ?but then the man grabbed my phone and told my husband not to call the police or they would kill me.?

?I thought the only people being kidnapped were those who were dealing with the Americans or were rich,? she explained, her hands held up in confusion. Inji has no affiliation with the occupiers or with any political party, nor does she work for the government.

Miraculously, her husband managed to raise the money and ransom Inji.

But it does not always end well for the victims and their families.

Abdulla Hamid, a 50 year-old Baghdad resident, related how his neighbor?s son was kidnapped. The family managed to raise and pay the \$15,000 ransom. They were then contacted by the kidnappers, who told them to pick their son up at the morgue.

Or take for example Seif, a student at the Baghdad Medical School. After he was abducted, his family, incapable of producing the \$40,000 demanded by his captors, made the mistake of contacting the police, who tracked down the kidnappers. Seif was killed during the exchange of gunfire between the police and his captors.

While Iraqi government officials continue to blame the kidnappings on various Iraqi resistance groups, the groups themselves deny any involvement.

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With Iraq's borders left virtually wide open during the first 6 months of the occupation, terrorist groups and criminal gangs alike flowed into the lawless country.

Not all criminal gangs were satisfied with ransom money. Twenty-three-year-old Sajidah and her 17-year-old sister-in-law Hanan were kidnapped just weeks after Sajidah's wedding. The two women were taken to Yemen, where they found 130 other Iraqi women who had been kidnapped and forced into prostitution by their captors.

Miraculously, they were able to contact family members, who managed to make their way to Yemen and free the two women.

Fakhriyah is around 20-years-old, but she doesn't know for sure. In fact, she can no longer recall her father's name, as she is now a drug addict.

'I was living in an orphanage and was kidnapped the day Baghdad fell,' said Fakhriyah. She described how an American tank was stationed near the orphanage due to its proximity to an airport, and how the US troops allowed the orphanage to be looted.

'The kidnapers took turns raping me, and I don't remember how long they kept me until they threw me out on the street,' she said, dazed and high on glue, trying to blot out her miserable existence. She uses any drug she can get her hands on, 'so I don't feel what's going on around me or who is raping me again.'

As horrific as the regime of former dictator Saddam Hussein was, Iraqis now long for the security it provided. Rape was uncommon then; now, kidnapping and rape are everyday occurrences.

Just three weeks ago the Al-Zaman newspaper reported that 11 children had been abducted in Baghdad in a single day.

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These stories are commonplace, and they have caused widespread fear in Baghdad and other cities, scaring many women and girls off the streets. Women now go out only when necessary, and are generally accompanied by male relatives.

"I don't go anywhere at night, and only go to school and places close to my home," said Intisar, a 21 year-old physics student at Baghdad University, citing her fear of being kidnapped.

Layla, a 52 year-old pharmacist in the al-Adhamiya district of Baghdad said that she lives in constant fear of being kidnapped, or having one of her children kidnapped.

"We are all afraid and I cannot go alone anywhere," she said. "Even my older daughters, I fear for them. This is not a normal life we are living anymore."

Who bears the responsibility for this state of affairs? Aside from those directly committing these crimes, the responsibility lies with the occupation. According to international humanitarian law, the occupying power has the duty to restore and maintain public order and safety, and to respect the fundamental rights of the occupied territory's inhabitants.

Despite the facade of an independent "interim Iraqi government," the US occupation effectively controls Iraq to this day. The occupation set up the "laws" which are currently in effect in Iraq, and it is primarily responsible for the atrocious security situation that has allowed crimes of this kind to become commonplace in occupied Iraq.

Additionally, the Fourth Geneva Convention states that "women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault."

It is yet another example of the occupation forces violating international law. As usual, it is the people of Iraq, and particularly women, in this case, who are paying the heaviest price.