

IRAQ: Bride's killing shows new law needed

Iraq's new parliament should prioritize passage of domestic violence law

By Belkis Wille

HRW (08.08.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2B0o5Td>– The horrific case of an Iraqi woman apparently murdered at home should prompt Iraq's new parliament, once formed, to finally pass a draft domestic violence law which has been pending since 2015.

According to Iraqi media and BBC Arabic, one day last week a bridegroom returned his bride to her parents the day after their wedding, complaining that she was not a virgin. Media reports claim that upon hearing the accusation, a family member beat her to death. Media reports say that police have arrested a male relative.

While the man will likely now face trial for murder, it is possible that he may benefit from a reduced sentence under a provision in Iraq's penal code allowing for shorter sentences for violent acts – including murder – for so-called “honorable motives.” But there is no “honor” in such brutal and needless killing. Moreover, the murdered bride would be just one of hundreds of women and children who suffer violence at the hands of their families in Iraq each year.

If passed, Iraq's new domestic violence law would oblige the government to protect domestic violence survivors, including

with restraining orders and penalties for breaching them, and the creation of a cross-ministerial committee to combat domestic violence. It would also require the government to provide shelters so women at risk of violence have a safe place to go if they are forced to flee their home.

The draft law is not perfect. It contains several flaws, including a preference for families to address violence through “reconciliation committees” rather than prosecution, and could be improved. Iraqi authorities should also set clear penalties for the crime of domestic violence, and close the loophole that lets abusers receive reduced punishments for so-called “honor” crimes, both not addressed in the draft law.

If improved, this draft law is the best chance Iraq’s new parliament has to tackle the scourge of violence in the home, fulfill its international legal obligations on domestic violence, and save the lives of countless Iraqi women and children.

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