

## Women and War: A First-Hand Perspective

By [Sonia Nettnin](#)

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

At the Chicago-Kent College of Law, Dr. Rashad Zayadan spoke about the situation in Iraq since the US-led invasion over three years ago. She asked a group of lawyers and law students to inform their families and friends about Iraqi suffering because of the war. She talked about justice and peace by ending the military occupation in Iraq.

“We do not want the war to continue,” Zayadan said. “The Iraqi people still suffering and this will not end until all of the good people with hand-in-hand trying hard because it’s just not suffering for my people but suffering for your people.”

Zayadan is a pharmacist in Baghdad, a mother of four children and the head manageress of the [Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society](#). On tour in the US for three weeks, she is a part of an Iraqi women’s delegation promoting the [Women’s Call for Peace](#), which has been signed by more than five million women around the globe. Their call urges that the strategy in Iraq change from a military model to a conflict resolution model by withdrawing all foreign troops from Iraq. Their belief is that women will play an integral role in the peacemaking process. The lawyers and law students attended Zayadan’s lecture for the [National Lawyers Guild Annual Midwest Regional Conference](#). This year’s theme: “Rising to the Challenge: Pursuing Justice in Dangerous Times.”

The National Lawyers Guild has a history of examining the rights of the Middle East’s indigenous people, with a focus on Palestinian rights through published [reports](#) and [press releases](#). Recently, London’s Sunday Times published [an article](#) that explained Israel’s military has planned major military operations against Palestinian militant groups in the Palestinian cities of Bethlehem, Jenin, Hebron, and Ramallah – scheduled to take place after Tuesday’s elections.

The thrust of Zayadan’s lecture was a slide presentation with the preface: “What the words can not say might be cleared by pictures. This is a story of a country – my country Iraq.” Dozens of photographs told thousands and thousands of words about the suffering experienced by Iraqis living with war and occupation.

There were civil buildings bombed and ashes lined the streets. One man, who lost his entire family, stood in front of the rubble of his house. He had burns on his chest. There were pictures of vegetable markets in rubble and streets filled with fire. When a bomb drops on a house, building or public square, cars, water, gas and electricity goes along with it. “We hear about smart bomb but we do not see it,” Zayadan added.

Since the war the telecommunications network of landlines was destroyed, so for the most

part, Iraqis depend on cellular phones for communication. However, wireless communication is expensive and most Iraqi families are large. As a result, they cannot afford cellular phone bills.

One photograph showed women carrying water in pots and buckets on their heads. They have to travel long distances for water while managing their households and children. The Iraqi men are busy looking for work to feed their families. There are approximately 1,200 Iraqi women in prison. Sometimes they are kept in prison because US forces want their husbands or fathers. Iraqi men feel it is their duty to help release the women in their families. Most of the men will turn themselves to get the women out - even if he is innocent.

History has shown that war and violence will use love between people as weapons.

When US soldiers invade Iraqi homes, children are traumatized. Photos showed scared women and children standing or sitting by walls. They cried. Sometimes they escort the women outside in their nightclothes. If the women wear hijabs, head coverings for Muslim women, they may not be allowed to cover their heads.

Some of the photographs showed US soldiers frisking grade-school children on their way to school. The boys and girls have their hands in the air. Some of boys - ages five, six seven, and eight - had to sit on the ground blindfolded with what appeared to be plastic ties around their wrists. I saw the photographs with my own eyes. What kind of psychological effects this abuse will have on the Iraqi children requires further study and research. How international law can be applied should be reviewed also.

Yet, the photos became more graphic. Burned in my memory is the photo of the US female soldier, a young woman in her early twenties with strawberry blonde hair, fair skin, most likely of Irish or Scandinavian descent, smiling at the camera. Her face was next to an Iraqi man's face, so beaten, swollen, bloody, black, and blue that he appeared unconscious.

There were several photos of Iraqi men, groups of men sitting on the floor with their wrists tied behind their backs or in front of their heads on the ground. Some of the men were half-naked and with hoods (some with their shirts) over their heads. One man had a rice bag on his head.

Several photos show Iraqi families living in tents from the UNHCR. The families sleep on pillows and blankets on the dirt ground. They live in these tents during the hot summer months and throughout the cold, desert nights of winter. In Fallujah, one-third of the families lost their homes, house made of stone that took families a long time to build. In a matter of seconds these homes became rubble and human loss. Photos show men screaming into the air. They lost their families and their lives have been destroyed. In fact a couple of Iraqi women who were part of the delegation lost their families also. While traveling to the US with their photos and stories they were told they cannot enter the US for concern "they would immigrate into Iraq permanently."

In Fallujah what used to be an open place for sports is now an open field of tombstones.

For readers interested in additional reading material for extended context that was a lecture topic at the conference, here is an article I wrote about [counter-recruitment in the US](#).

For readers who want to know why they have not seen war coverage described above

should check out film reviews about [the media](#) and [who controls US media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#).

When I thought I had seen the most graphic photos more images followed. Nothing is worse than seeing burned children, armless children, eyeless children, legless children on their backs and in so much pain they cannot cry. Zayadan worked in hospitals where people suffer from the effects of Depleted Uranium (DU). Most of the hospitals in Iraq do not have the costly chemotherapy, which are daily injections, needed to treat the patients. When Iraqis bring their children into the hospitals the staff may not have the medicine needed to treat them. However, the hospital staffs may keep the children as patients to help the families psychologically.

During her tour in the US, Zayadan met with religious leaders – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu – who said they are not for this war.

When the invasion began, Zayadan sold her private pharmacy so she could devote her time to the women’s organization [Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society](#). The Arabic word “Al Maarefa” means “knowledge.” Al-Maarefa is an Islamic-based, humanitarian and women’s life organization. They provide medical, social, educational, and clinical care for Iraqi orphans, widows and families. They give people food, clothing and tents; they train women for professions involving sewing and computers; and they provide family loans for small business development.

Zayadan said she hopes the right bridge will be built between Iraq and America because “war is not the answer and it was never the answer.” Her hope is that there will be peace and love for future generations because there is space in the world for all our religions and values.

Global Exchange and Code Pink sponsored the tour.

*Journalist Sonia Nettnin writes about social, political, economic, and cultural issues. Her focus is the Middle East.*

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