

Mr Mick Cash

General Secretary- National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers RMT

Unity House, 39 Chalton Street

London NW1 1JD

Date: 08/12/2015

Dear Mr Cash

On behalf of KMEWO's management committee, Director and myself, I would like to express our deepest gratitude and pride in receiving your support letter dated 24th November 2015, thank you very much. We would also like to pass our deepest regards to all members of RMT and in particular those who passed and supported the resolution to support KMEWO.

Although based in the UK, KMEWO has for many years been an active participant in the campaign for women's equality in Iraqi Kurdistan. KMEWO has Lobbied Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Kurdistan Parliament and the Kurdistan President to uphold to their responsibilities in combating violence against women and girls. KMEWO has Demanded that the KRG make positive changes in legislation, polices and the allocating of reasonable budgets to support and protect women survivors of violence.

As a result of many years of continuous struggle and pressure by women's organisations, The KRG has been forced to take steps towards tackling violence against women (VAW). The KRG have been pushed to make several changes in law: such as abolishing article 406 in Personal Status Law that gave reduced punishment to the crimes committed to restore families' "honour", they have also rectified the Anti- Domestic Violence Law in 2011, and earlier made a few amendments to Personal Statues Law in 2008. KRG also established General Directorate of Combating VAW to collect data .

However, in Iraqi Kurdistan VAW still escalates year after year. [According to official data](#) provided by the General Directorate for Combating Violence against Women of the [Kurdistan Regional Government](#) (KRG), around 2,600 cases of violence against women were recorded in the first six months of 2013. In the same period in 2014, the violations jumped to over 3,500 cases, marking an increase of about 30%. Statistics of VAW for 2015 is no better than the two previous years: " <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/iraq-kurdistan-draft-amendment-violence-women-law.html#ixzz3szF2hEQV> "

KMEWO and other active women's organizations in the region have been alerting KRG about the gaps in their legislation, policies and practices that stands as barriers to any real changes in the situation for women, but KRG has not given any attention.

Your support for our demands will help make a great shift in our struggle for equality and human rights for women. There are four areas that RMT could support women's organisation and KMEWO in their struggle and demands from KRG:

1-Legislation: To abolish all discriminatory articles in both Personal Status Law 2008 and Iraqi Penal Code 1969. These two pieces of legislation are full of discriminatory articles that are all based on religious and traditional values and keeps women vulnerable to violence, treats them as second class citizens and un-equal to men . Articles especially discriminating against women in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance and custody of children. Some articles punishes women for "Adultery" and "abortion under any circumstances" , others allow for a reduced punishment for rapists who are willing to marry their victims and least but not last to an article allows for Polygamy.

Our demand is to call KRG to ensure Equality between men and women in all Law, legislation and the draft constitution, to abolish all discriminative articles in Law, and announce full equality based on equal citizenship rights.

2-Protection: The prevalence of violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan is very high, KRG need to respond to this high scale of violence by providing adequate protection. Currently there are a very small number of shelters funded by KRG with no other means of protection or progress to a better life for women. A number of women were murdered by their families after they have decided to leave the refuge because of its bad conditions. Some residents described the Refuge as prisons. Police and justice systems are more sympathetic with perpetrators rather than the victims, women who try to get protection from court against the violence of their family members get abused and are sent back home by judges . KRG officials and political parties are still encouraging families to make "tribal deals" instead of using law and justice systems to solve problems, in these deals women are always victimised again.

We demand that KRG do more to protect women and girls by:

-Funding enough Refuge, DV helplines, and resettlement programs for women exiting DV and their children.

-Provide free legal advice, independent mediation services and financial support for women and their children survivors of DV.

-Imposing strict policies, guidance and training for police, health and justice system staff on the front line to focus on protecting women rather than supporting perpetrators and their social positions.

3- Prosecution: In the last two decades thousands of women and young girls are killed by members of their families as part of a phenomenon called "honour killing". Up to today thousands of perpetrators are still free and have not been prosecuted, over years this was one of the reasons that honour killing has escalated because there is no punishment. Although KRG has a law that supposed to treat killing of women as any other murder crimes but in practice there are many barriers that prevent justice for women. For example families do not make complaints against their other family members for killing a woman, women are usually blamed for their behaviours and their murder justified by family members and or community, so it is very hard to get people to witness even though they know the truth, those who do, become under great pressure to withdraw. The KRG general attorney dose not takes responsibility to prosecute perpetrators regardless of family complaint or not. There is always one way or another for criminals to get away from justice.

We demand that KRG open an independent investigation to all cases of murders that are deemed "Honour Killing" and to bring all perpetrators to justice.

4-Promotion the principles of Equality and human rights:

The using of religious institutions such as Friday prayers to promote reactionary and conservative values especially in relation to personal freedoms and controlling of women by families. Many Imams have been given the freedom to promote and justify practices such as forced marriages, deprivation of education and employment of females and justification of a range of harmful practices including different forms of domestic violence (DV). This has gone as far as shaping public opinion towards accepting DV, "Honour Killing" and victim blaming as part of society's norms. The education system, media (visual, digital and social) are all contributing to a culture of violence towards women that creates a discriminatory society against women.

We demand that KRG make teaching of Equality and Human rights compulsory in schools and make it part of the main curriculum. We demand that KRG ban any hatred speeches that lead to promotion and justification of VAWG, religious or non-religious.

There are other demands by KMEWO and women's organisations in regard to supporting women to empower themselves such as providing free child care for women workers and employees , weight restrictions on areas of employment for women, more opportunities in higher education etc.

The highlighted demands are the most urgent and fundamental steps that the KRG need to take in order to create an environment where women can flourish and fully participate in all areas of society. We ask you to please write to KRG – UK high Representative with the highlighted demands and please do keep us informed of the replies you receive.

Once again thank you very much for supporting KMEWO's struggle for full equality.

Yours truly



Gona Saed

Domestic Abuse Service's Development Manager