

Brussels, 13 JUL. 2015  
Ares (2015) 02928669

Dear Ms Teitelbaum,

Thank you for your letter from March in which you raised the issue of the violations of human rights, especially women's and girls' rights, carried out by the Islamic State and other armed groups in Iraq and Syria. Commissioner Hahn and I fully share your deep concern about these violent crimes, which are in many cases gender-specific. Let us also assure you of the Commission's firm commitment and comprehensive action towards finding peaceful and non-violent solutions for this region's very complex and dire situation.

On 6 February 2015, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission released a Joint Communication on 'Elements of an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat' (which covers some of the Kurdish territories). This Joint Communication foresees diplomatic engagement, counter-terrorism measures, short-term humanitarian aid and long-term support for political and socio-economic reforms with a view to restoring peace and security in the region. EUR 1 billion will be mobilised to ensure the effectiveness of this EU response.

This regional strategy also includes women's empowerment and their full and effective participation as a key objective in all efforts, in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. It pays special attention to the violence and insecurity faced by women and girls in the area, and calls for an immediate end to all sexual and gender-based violence.

We are convinced that sustainable political solutions, as a basis for effective strategies against terrorism and violent extremism, cannot be pursued without women's active participation. This is why projects financed by the EU in the affected region include various activities specifically targeting the empowerment of women and their inclusion in the political processes or are required to mainstream gender as a cross-cutting issue into their implementation.

In Iraq, the EU development cooperation assistance aims to tackle the roots of the current violence and bolster long-term structural stability. We are helping the Government of Iraq and Iraqi national institutions in their efforts to solve the current crisis and to deliver on their duty of care and protection vis-à-vis all Iraqi citizens and refugees.

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The Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-17 for Iraq foresees EUR 78 million to be allocated in 3 areas: 1) Support to Human Rights and Rule of Law (EUR 30.6 million); 2) Capacity Building in Primary and Secondary Education (EUR 23 million); 3) Sustainable Energy for All (EUR 23 million). This Programme applies to Kurdistan region as well.

With regard to the Syria crisis, assistance to Syrians has amounted to commitments of EUR 550 million of EU funds since the start of the crisis, in complementarity to humanitarian assistance. This has contributed to addressing the needs of Internally Displaced People, refugees and host communities in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in various sectors (education, vocational training, health, support to livelihoods and income generation, capacity-building of CSOs, support to independent media, and protection of cultural heritage). All funded activities have a very strong focus on women empowerment and in many cases attendance of capacity-building trainings by women exceeds 50%.

In addition, a new EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syria crisis (the Madad Fund) was launched in December 2014. EUR 10 million of the Fund's initial funding has already been committed for a particular programme focusing on women and youth.

Gender equality is also addressed in a horizontal manner through projects implemented in Iraq and Syria. For example, the EU's support under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights includes projects that focus on advocacy and on the strengthening of structures for the protection of people who suffered terrible human rights violations, many of which are women.

At a global scale, the EU is pushing for a strong focus on the empowerment of women and combating of all forms of violence against women and girls in the global post-2015 development agenda to be agreed later this year. We expect to see it highlighting women's contribution in peace building and security, also in view of the 15th Anniversary of the Resolution 1325. The EU's recent statement at the UN Security Council reaffirms our full commitment in this regard.

We continue to support the capacity of civil society and women's organisations as key partners in implementing Resolution 1325, through regular dialogue and by funding specific programmes to empower women in post-conflict or fragile countries.

In line with the May Council conclusions on gender in development, we also intend to maintain our commitment to increasing women's participation in peace negotiations and peace-building, particularly through supporting the role of women's organisations.

Finally, let me stress that in the years to come we intend to do even more for women's empowerment and in a more targeted and results-oriented way. We are currently preparing a new Gender Action Plan 2016-20, which will set out an ambitious and comprehensive framework for development cooperation and all EU external action in this area, with a view to ensuring that girls and women of all ages, wherever they are, can live a life free from violence. In this context, we look forward to our future cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Cc: Johannes Hahn, Member of the Commission