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Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good afternoon.

I would like to thank you first for inviting me to participate as speaker to this important event. Being women from Iraq working for longtime for the peace and women empowerment makes this participation is more relevant than ever.

I strongly believe that empowering all women including IDPs, refugees will contribute to peace building through:

- Empowering women in making decisions will help women take on effective roles relating to peace decision process.
- Women's economic contribution to increasing their family income helps protect their children from joining terrorist groups, which destroy peace building.
- Empowering & employing IDPs, divorcees, and widows reduces social violence.
- Disabled Persons, homelessness, and trafficking of victims should be put in our planning for empowerment, employment and peace.

As you know, Iraq is a high risk area with protracted crises, facing a number of challenges, both internally and externally. Women's access to decent employment has been very difficult, before, during and after the Covid 19 pandemic.

Some of the main challenges facing Iraqi women in terms of empowerment and employment in general before the Covid -19 pandemic include:

- 1- Working under GBV in all sectors mostly as a result of extremist religious parties.
- 2- Working under a system of socially unfair laws with regard to discrimination at work
- 3- The pressure of tribal customs and traditions
- 4- The high number of widows due to wars & ISIS (reaching nearly 3 million), and leading to an increase in the need for employment
- 5- The high number of IDP women returning back to their liberated area are also in need of economic empowerment & employment
- 6- The need to amend the Iraqi labour law relating that can better support women
- 7- The peace building process is under high risk of conflict resolution because of religious parties. The situation for women since the COVID -19 pandemic

According to the Rapid Assessment on the impact of Covid-19 on labour markets in Iraq conducted by ILO in July 2020 :

- Only 34 per cent of surveyed women were found to be economically active in the labour market prior to the March 2020 lockdown.
- A total of 19 per cent of all surveyed respondents were unemployed, with unemployment being highest among women (at 28 per cent) and youth (at 42 per cent).
- Thirty-five per cent of surveyed workers were found to be self-employed (own-account workers). Among those, 15 per cent were women, 42 per cent were construction workers, 41 per cent were employed in transportation and 65 per cent were involved in home-based businesses.
- Fourteen per cent of respondents were government workers and 27 per cent were employed in the private sector (including 17 per cent in private companies and 10 per cent in family-run businesses).
- Prior to the lockdown, only 34 per cent of worker had written contracts with their employers, including 28 per cent of agriculture workers. Half (50 per cent) of tourism workers were working without a written or verbal contract.
- Around one-third of respondents had a permanent contract, and two-thirds were in temporary, seasonal and irregular employment. A total of 61 per cent of workers who had permanent contracts were 65 years of age or older.
- The majority of respondents indicated that they had no social insurance coverage (95 per cent), or health insurance coverage (97 per cent).
- Only 16 per cent of surveyed households had savings, with 50 per cent indicating that their savings would last less than one month.

We are not here to only talk about challenges but also to propose solutions and innovative initiatives such as:

- Support the Iraqi business women council which we established recently & enhancing investment with the private sector.
- promote women active participation in the labour market through technical skills, life skills, financial & digital skills
- Reform the legal environment by amending the Iraqi labour law, especially articles related to women rights through working with MOLSA & NGOS.
- Support job creation and decent work in agriculture sector by introducing green technology and support small businesses.
- Support the transition from informal to formal work through enhancing/guaranteeing workers' rights and social protection coverage under the Iraqi labour law.
- Legalize the existing national committee for crises & emergency which our ICWRE works on for the future to protect workers' rights and improve working conditions in private sector.