

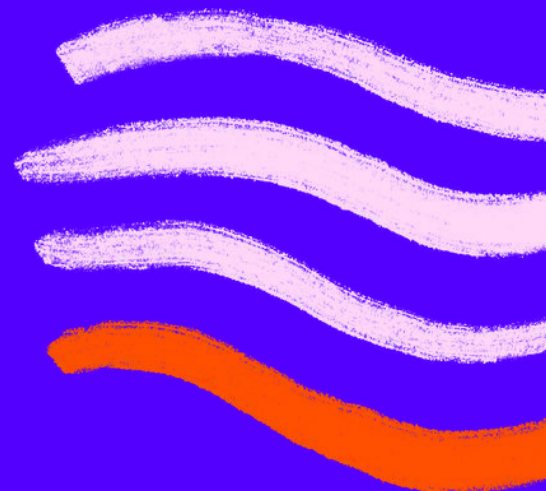


UN
TRUST
FUND TO END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS



LIZA HIDO

Baghdad Women
Association
(Iraq)





“ We are still here.

I trained as a computer engineer and worked at Iraq’s Ministry of Finance. I could have stayed on that path. But I had seen women around me live through poverty, violence, conflict and displacement – realities I knew firsthand - and I wanted my work to be part of changing that. Something I believed in, not simply a career.

In 2004, I was one of eleven women who founded the Baghdad Women Association. We wanted women who were discouraged or even threatened into silence to have somewhere safe to speak, find counselling and legal support, and see a way forward.

It was not just difficult. It was very, very difficult.

After 2003, a women’s organization was something new in our community. People said we were destroying families, telling women to divorce their husbands and leave home. We learned that before we could support women, we had to earn their trust. We opened listening and counselling centres staffed by women from the communities themselves, who understood their religions, traditions and realities, and we engaged people who had opposed us. Slowly, those centres became trusted spaces. At one point, BWA had nine across Iraq.

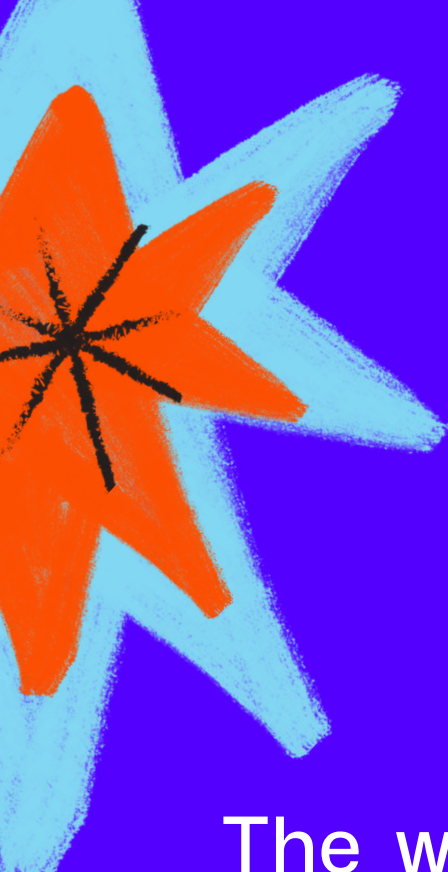


When ISIS took control of large parts of Iraq, thousands of women and girls were displaced and communities faced escalating and increasingly complex forms of sexual and gender-based violence. We were working in an environment where conflict and displacement were changing both the risks women and girls faced and the kind of support they needed.

In 2021, amid the continuing aftermath of ISIS and COVID-19, we partnered with the UN Trust Fund. Many grants lasted six months or a year. At a time when much of the funding available to organizations like ours was short term, the UN Trust Fund provided US\$1 million over more than three years.

That gave us something especially valuable in crisis: time to stay alongside women and communities, and flexibility to adapt as circumstances changed. When new emergencies emerged, including the devastating wedding fire in the Nineveh Plain, we were able to adapt and respond without losing sight of the longer-term work.



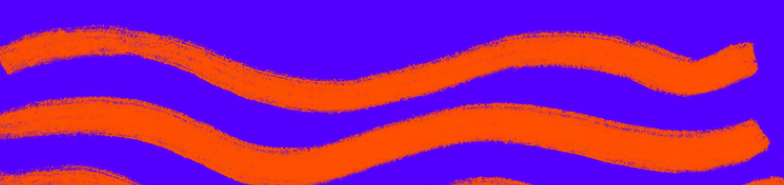


Across Anbar and the Nineveh Plain, we reached around 3,600 women and girls with counselling, psychosocial and legal support, case management, livelihoods training and small grants that helped women become financially independent. By bringing these services together, we could support women through the different challenges they were facing at once rather than addressing one need at a time.

The work in the Nineveh Plain was also personal for me: many families from my Christian community had been displaced by ISIS. Standing with those women as they rebuilt their lives meant everything to me.

Twenty-two years after we started, what makes me proudest is that we are still here – and younger women are carrying the work forward. Women who joined us as fresh graduates have become leaders in organizations and communities; some have gone on to positions in parliament and government.

I love Iraq. I believe Iraqi women deserve to live in dignity, to be educated and independent, and to lead. Thirty years from now, I hope we have not stopped – until we see women leading the country.



Liza Hido is a co-founder of the Baghdad Women Association, established in June 2004 to support survivors of violence and advance women's rights in Iraq. She has led the organization for more than two decades, building it from a handful of listening and counseling centers into a nationwide network reaching women across the country.

