



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 15, 2024

Iraq Set to Legalize Marriages to Nine-year-old Girls

Iraq is on the verge of passing a law that would allow men to marry girls as young as nine years old, which opponents charge “legalizes child rape.”

Robbing the Cradle

The proposed law would amend Law 188, which “was heralded as one of the most progressive in the Middle East when it was introduced in 1959 and provides an overarching set of rules governing the affairs of Iraqi families, regardless of their religious sect,” reported the [Telegraph](#).

Law 188 requires women to be 18 before they can legally marry, though, with judicial approval, they can wed as young as 15. [UNICEF](#) found that 28 percent of Iraqi girls marry before they are 18.

However, a loophole in the law allows religious leaders to officiate marriages for younger girls with the consent of their fathers. According to the [UN Assistance Mission in Iraq \(UNAMI\)](#), 22 percent of these unions involve girls under 14.

The proposed amendment “would legitimize these religious marriages, putting young girls at increased risk of sexual and physical violence, as well as being denied access to education and employment,” wrote the [Telegraph](#).

It would also revoke women’s rights to divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

“The amendment would not just undermine these rights,” Human Rights Watch’s Sarah Sanbar told the [Telegraph](#). “It would erase them.”

[Musawah](#), which describes itself as “a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family,” condemned the amendment, saying:

The potential ramifications of this bill are dire and far-reaching, as it endangers the lives and bodies of women and girls, impacting generations to come. By opening the door to child marriage, it places children at risk of severe emotional and physical harm.

(The group also claimed that child marriage is an affront to Islam, which would surely come as a surprise to its founder, who [married a six-year-old girl](#) and consummated the marriage three years later.)

They Call the Law Sharia

Law 188, imperfect as it is, remained secure for more than four decades. Then, in 2003, the United States illegally invaded Iraq and drove Saddam Hussein from power. Since then, Baghdad has come increasingly under the sway of Iran’s Shiite regime. Parliament tried twice before to amend the law and



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failed. But this time, a Shiite coalition commands a large majority and thus stands a good chance of passing the amendment.

“It’s the closest it’s ever been,” Renad Mansour, senior research fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House, told the *Telegraph*. “It has more momentum than it’s ever had, primarily because of the Shia parties.”

Not all Iraqi women are standing idly by as their rights are threatened. A coalition of activist groups organized protests across the country in August. Their coordinator, Raya Faiq, told the [Guardian](#) the amendment is “a catastrophe for women.”

She explained:

My husband and my family oppose child marriage. But imagine if my daughter gets married and my daughter’s husband wants to marry off my granddaughter as a child. The new law would allow him to do so. I would not be allowed to object. This law legalizes child rape.

Opponents contend that the law stems from two factors: men’s carnal desires and religious sectarianism.

Female Iraqi MP Alia Nassif told the *Guardian*:

Unfortunately, male MPs who support this law speak in a masculine way, asking what’s wrong with marrying a minor? Their thinking is narrow-minded. They don’t take into consideration that they are the legislators that determine people’s fate ... but rather follow their masculine thinking to authorize all this.

Similarly, Iraqi feminist Athraa Al-Hassan told the *Telegraph*, “What they aspire to in parliament is not in the interest of society, but their personal interest.”

Sects and Violence

She, along with others, fears that the amendment would increase sectarian strife.

“We are defending the rights of women and girls [and] protecting Iraqi society from disintegration and the establishment of sectarianism among the social fabric,” she said.

Mansour agreed, saying, “It would bring everything back to the sect.”

According to the *Telegraph*:

The proposed amendments would give Muslim citizens the option of selecting either the current, largely secular personal status law, or religious law — depending on their sect — as the basis for governing their personal affairs.

But, ultimately, this decision lies solely with the men.

“It’s explicitly written in the draft that when there’s a dispute between the couple, the sect of the husband takes priority,” said Ms. Sanbar. “This is going to remove a lot of protections for women ... it will undermine the principle of equality before the law.”

It might also grant legal privileges to women of certain sects while disadvantaging others.



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The amendment has been read twice in parliament. The next time, which “could come at any moment,” it will be put to a vote, noted the *Telegraph*.

The U.S. government bears no small measure of blame for the situation. Besides having toppled Saddam’s secular state, thereby inviting Iranian influence, it continues to unconstitutionally shovel billions of taxpayer dollars to Baghdad. Yet, as the [Daily Caller](#) observed:

No amount of cash will ever get Iraqi women to burn their bras or Iraqi men to reckon with their “toxic masculinity.” Liberals — both of the progressive left and neoconservative right — must accept that Baghdad will never be Berkeley. All they’re doing is funding the exploitation of women and children, the very thing they claim to stand against.

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