



August 17, 2023

Mr. Naeem Al-Aboudi,
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
(info@moheer.gov.iq)

Mr. Ali Al-Muayed,
Head of the Communication and Media Commission (CMC)
(enquiries@cmc.iq)

Dear Mr. Naeem Al-Aboudi and Mr. Ali Al-Muayed,

The Human Rights Taskforce of the Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS), an affiliate of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), writes in solidarity with our Iraqi feminist scholars and gender activists concerning the unprecedented media and political campaign currently unfolding in Iraq against the use of terms such as "gender," "social sex," and "homosexuality." As an association of feminist academics with expertise in the Middle East and North Africa region, we write to express our concern regarding the current campaign against feminist and gender-related activism in Iraq. This campaign has brought about a climate of collective fear in the country, and it has been followed by real measures sanctioning the use of the terms "gender" and "social sex" in official state documents and institutions, from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to the Communication and Media Commission (CMC) who also recommended imposing the use of "sexual deviance" instead of "homosexuality" in media, businesses, social media, and communication agencies. In provinces such as Basra and Najaf, statements from officials have banned the organization of meetings and gatherings using the terms.

This campaign is an attempt of a character assassination of the progressive forces and the opposition, particularly feminist and civil society networks, organizations, figures, and academics who use analysis on gender, women, and LGBTQ people to further their aims.

As Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa Aya Majzoub said: "The directive from Iraq's official media regulator is the latest in a series of attacks on freedom of expression under the guise of respect for 'public morals.' The CMC's ban of the word 'homosexuality' and insistence that media use 'sexual deviance' instead is a dangerous move that can fuel discrimination and violent attacks against members of the LGBTI community." "Furthermore, its ban and demonization of the word 'gender' demonstrates a callous disregard for combatting gender-based violence at a time when civil society has been reporting an increase in crimes against women and girls, amid widespread impunity."

The AMEWS Human Rights Taskforce stands in solidarity with Iraqi feminist academics and educators who work on issues related to gender and calls upon the Iraqi authorities to immediately cease this deliberate and orchestrated media political campaign against gender-related activism that has induced public moral panic and poses a threat to gender-related programs in Iraq. We strongly condemn this campaign and call upon Iraqi authorities to halt it immediately.

In solidarity,

The AMEWS Board
AMEWS Human Rights Taskforce

Miriam Cooke, Duke University
Hind Ahmed Zaki, University of Connecticut
Yara Abd El Aziz, University of Toronto