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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:  
Women Under ISIS Rule: From Brutality to Recruitment  
July 29, 2015

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. I am pleased to announce that this will be the first of several hearings on the status of women around the world. The Committee has worked on a bipartisan basis to promote women in our development efforts, and I believe these hearings will allow us to build on that good work.

Today we look at the brutalization and oppression of women living under ISIS. This violence against women is almost without parallel, from widespread rape and trafficking to forced marriage and murder. Female captives, including thousands of Yazidi women and girls, are sold like cattle in modern-day slave markets. One UN official described meeting with a woman in ISIS-occupied territory who was forced to marry fifteen different men in one year. Some of these so-called “marriages” lasted only three days.

As one witness will testify, much of this seemingly crazed and indiscriminate violence against women is in fact a sinister and calculated strategy that goes to the heart of ISIS’s *survival*. By forcing local women to marry into ISIS, the group expands its demographic base while reducing the population of those diverse communities it seeks to eradicate and *replace*.

Simply put, ISIS *needs* women – *needs* to control them – to establish its “caliphate” and give rise to the next generation of ISIS. That is why ISIS is investing heavily in recruiting foreign women to join its ranks. And with each girl who becomes brainwashed, ISIS has a new poster child for its jihadi girl-power propaganda.

Sometimes it can seem like all we do is look at the worst of humanity. So I appreciate the efforts of Mr. Watts, one of our witnesses, to elevate the voices of those courageous individuals who are working to counter ISIS, often at great personal risk.

For all the horrible atrocities being committed in this region, there are also incredible stories of strength and integrity, many of them from the women and girls with the most to lose.

- From the Kurdish woman on the front lines against ISIS – who declares she fights “to take back the role of women in society,”
- To the female first responders, pulling victims from the rubble in Syria,
- To the captured Yazidi girl described to Mr. Watts, who walked right past her would-be rescuers when she realized ISIS had staged an ambush for them, saving their lives at the expense of her own.

These stories inspire us to act. Credible voices need to be heard, that ISIS-land is not a utopia.

We must prioritize the physical and psychological welfare of those women and girls who have escaped from ISIS, many of whom have been subjected to unbelievable trauma.

And we need to support leaders in the region, who are confronting the stigma of sexual violence head on, and calling on families to welcome back male and female survivors with open arms.

Although we focus today on ISIS, we know full well that Assad's brutality against Syrians includes not only barrel bombs and starvation, but also widespread sexual violence. Ranking Member Engel and I have pressed for the consideration of no-fly or safe zones in the region, and we're pleased to hear of Turkey's recently increased cooperation with the U.S. on this issue.

I now turn to Ranking Member Engel, whose passionate leadership on the crisis in Iraq and Syria has been of great benefit to us all.