

1 November 2019

Iraq: Human rights defenders targeted amidst ongoing protests

Since anti-corruption demonstrations in Iraq began in early October 2019, human rights defenders have been targeted by the Iraqi authorities and other unknown militant groups. The demonstrations are calling for increased respect for civil and political rights in the country, and an end to corruption and chronic unemployment. The Iraqi authorities and other militant groups have been using excessive force against protesters, resulting in mass killings, arrests, and the disappearance of participants. Human rights defenders in particular have been targeted and several have been forcibly disappeared, detained or killed.

On 28 October 2019, human rights defender [Safaa Al-Saray](#) was killed by the Iraqi authorities during demonstrations at Liberation Square in Baghdad. Safaa Al-Saray was a social media blogger who focused on promoting civil and political rights in Iraq and he had participated in anti-corruption demonstrations in 2011, 2013 and 2015, Safaa Al-Saray was struck on his head by a tear gas cannister shot at him as he participated in demonstrations in Baghdad. He died from his injuries shortly afterwards.

That same day human rights defender [Ahmed Muaffak](#) was located after going missing for 14 days. He was kidnapped on 12 October 2019 from the streets of Baghdad, by an unknown militant group. Ahmed Muaffak promotes political and economic rights in Iraq and has organised several workshops designed to raise awareness of these issues among the population. He was part of the movement in 2016 that called for economic and social reforms in Iraq. He continues to receive frequent threats of further kidnapping or death.

A day earlier, on 27 October 2019, the Iraqi authorities raided [Samer Faraj's](#) house, and confiscated several of his devices. He was arrested and taken to a local police station in the city of Ramadi. He is accused of 'inciting civil disobedience'. He has not been permitted visits by his family or lawyer. Samer Faraj is a blogger on social media who promotes political and civil rights in Iraq. He also documents human rights violations in the country. He is a member of 'Bent Al-Rafedain', an organisation which promotes women's rights in Iraq, He has been frequently targeted by Iraqi authorities for this work and for his social media posts.

There whereabouts of human rights lawyer [Ali Jaseb Hattab](#) remain unknown nearly four weeks after he was abducted by a militant group in the city of Maysan on 8 October. A member of the Advocates for the Protesters Rights Commission, his work consists of advocating for the rights of political prisoners, and against government violations. The human rights defender had previously received several death threats from unknown militant groups, and reported them to the police, though none of these threats were investigated.

Many of the human rights defenders who have been arrested or kidnapped in Iraq have been deprived of their basic right to medical assistance or contact with their families, kept in degrading conditions, and have been physically abused.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the ongoing disappearances, arrests, killings and other violations faced by human rights defenders in Iraq. Front Line Defenders believes that these human rights violations are solely motivated by the human rights defenders' peaceful and legitimate activities.

Front Line Defenders urge the Iraqi Authorities to:

1. Initiate immediate, thorough and impartial investigations into the disappearance of human rights defenders Ali Jaseb Hattab and Ahmed Muaffak, and the death of Safaa Al-Saray, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards.
2. Immediately release Samer Faraj and drop the charges against him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights activities.
3. Ensure that the treatment of human rights defenders in Iraq, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment'*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988.
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Iraq and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (2): *"The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration"* and to Article 18 (2): *"Individuals, groups, and non-governmental organisations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes."*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director