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Iraq: Woman human rights defender Delsoz Khalaf facing two court cases

On 17 August 2023, an investigating judge in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate referred two criminal complaints against woman human rights defender **Delsoz Khalaf** to the Sulaymaniyah Misdemeanour Court. She had been previously questioned at the Azmar police station on 31 July 2023, after an arrest warrant was issued against her. The two court cases were initiated by the Workers' Union in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate and she could face up to 5 years in prison, in addition to fines for each of the charges.

[Delsoz Khalaf](#) is a woman human rights defender from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. She is the director of the Dabin Organisation for Democratic Development and Human Rights, which is a human rights organisation based in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Her work focuses primarily on women's rights, labour rights and anti-corruption.

On 31 July 2023, Delsoz Khalaf was questioned at the Azmar police station in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A police officer recorded her written statement after informing her of two criminal complaints that were lodged against her by the Workers' Union in Sulaymaniyah. While at the police station, the woman human rights defender was also informed that an arrest warrant had been issued against her. The investigating judge released Delsoz Khalaf on a bail of IQD 2,000,000 (approximately EUR 1,400) on the same day, but declined her request for a copy of the case files and evidence. On 17 August 2023, Delsoz Khalaf was informed that the two criminal complaints will be referred to the Sulaymaniyah Misdemeanour Court. The woman human rights defender plans to contest the decision issued by the investigating judge. Delsoz Khalaf faces up to 5 years in prison.

The first case was filed by the head of the Workers' Union in Sulaymaniyah. In this process, Delsoz Khalaf is accused of defamation according to Article 433 of Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969. It stemmed from a previous case against the head of the Worker's Union in late 2022, accusing him of defaming the Dabin Organisation without evidence through an official letter he sent to the Independent Human Rights Commission in the Kurdistan Region, the Sulaymaniyah office. The letter stated that the Dabin Organisation trades in issues related to workers and does not operate according to human rights principles. This initial lawsuit was closed due to insufficient evidence. Subsequently, the head of the Workers' Union filed a complaint against the woman human rights defender for alleged defamation.

The second case, also filed by the head of the Workers' Union, is based on Delsoz Khalaf's Facebook posts discussing alleged conflicting statistics published by the Workers' Union. In the Facebook posts, the woman human rights defender questions the conflicting data between what was published by the Workers' Union and what was stated by the head of the Workers' Union on TV interviews. She is charged with internet misuse under Article 2 of the Law to Prevent the Misuse of Telecommunications Equipment in the Kurdistan Region No. 6 of 2008. The Workers' Union claims that the woman human rights defender insulted and belittled them.

The closed 2022 case that was brought against the head of the Workers' Union, along with the Facebook posts, are all connected to the human rights work of the Dabin Organisation. The organisation's main focus includes labour rights advocacy, raising awareness, monitoring rights violations, and revealing related misinformation.

The vaguely-worded laws on internet misuse and defamation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have been misused to limit and silence the work of human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and dissenting voices, undermining freedom of opinion and expression. Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the judicial harassment of Delsoz Khalaf as it believes it is solely a result of her legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Delsoz Khalaf;
2. Refrain from bringing criminal charges against human rights defenders based on vague-worded laws that impose limitations on their non-violent and legitimate work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.