

Arrests and Torture of Journalists by Iraqi Regime

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On 25 November 2012 The Iraqi News Network published an urgent statement of the Iraqi NGO Journalism Freedoms Observatory(JFO). This Journalist Advocacy group asks Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki to immediately interfere and investigate the circumstances behind the arrest of Sabah Hasan,a journalist arrested on 20 February 2012, almost ten months ago. She used to live and work in Baghdad, but she was transferred to the notorious Tasfirat prison in Tikrit, that witnessed at the end of September the largest prison break in recent history, when over 100 inmates allegedly escaped.

She was brutally tortured in the Major Crimes Directorate, which is located in one of Saddam's palaces. JFO demands that the officers who tortured her should be submitted to interrogations. Some of them are already in jail because of the escape of some prisoners a few weeks ago.Sabah Hasan was accused of crimes she didn't commit. JFO states that the victim's daughter, Shatha Salah, used to work since the last four years with her mother as a photographer for the Free Opinion Newspaper that is issued and distributed in Baghdad and other governorates. Shatha assured that she has medical reports confirming the terrible torture her mother has been facing for months.

They have beaten her mother, burned her with cigarettes all over her body,taking off all her clothes and wrapping her in a blanket to be transferred to Tikrit Prison while everyone was watching. Her daughter added that the injuries covered 85% of her mother's body. Shatha said that Tikrit Operations Leader Kareem Al-Khazraji assisted her to take her mother to Baghdad after they were sure that she didn't commit any crime. Now she is at the headquarters of the Fifth Brigade of the Iraqi Army in Al-Sayidiyah District.

Sabah was arrested last February while she was trying to bring back a car for one of her relatives thatwas taken by the Traffic Office after a traffic violation. Sabah was shocked to find out she was wanted in Tikrit for having a role in the killing of the brother of Nahida Al-Daini, a member of the Iraqi Parliament. Later investigations proved that Sabah had nothing to do with that assassination, but then she was accused of other crimes without any evidence.

Sabah works in Baghdad as a Chief Editor for theFree Opinion Newspaperduring the past four years. She has six children and a handicapped husband. Her daughter told JFO that her mother now experiences terrible conditions in one of the detention centers related to the Ministry of Interior, because there are not enough cells for the female prisoners in Shaab Stadium Tasfirat Prison. This was confirmed by a source in the Ministry of Interior who stated that there are no places available for female prisoners in this detention, called Site 4. He also added that human rights organizations should raid this prison and immediately start an investigation to take serious actions against the brutal prison guards and the forces of the

Ministry of Interior, which are under the command of Maliki.

Shatha is trying to contact some Parliament members and political personalities who could help with her mother's release, and bring to justice the persons who tortured her and caused terrible psychological and physical pain. JFO is making the same demands through the Legal Centre and a team of lawyers who will defend her do their best to get her released, and bring the criminals to the court.

The brutality of Maliki's notorious security forces is well known and very well documented.

Human Rights Watch World Report 2012: Iraq mentioned that "In 2011 Iraq remained one of the most dangerous countries in the world to work as a journalist".

The statement by the Iraq-based Journalism Freedoms Observatory (JFO), issued ahead of World Press Freedom Day on 2 May, voiced concern over what it said were arbitrary arrests, restrictions on movement and reporting and attacks on media workers, including some by security forces. Violence against journalists and restrictions on media have worsened in the past year in Iraq, JFO said, in a country already thought to have among the worst press freedoms in the world.

"JFO has documented a noticeable increase in the rate of violence against journalists/media workers and restrictions imposed on their work. Multiple bills are being introduced by the government, which threaten to severely limit freedom of the press, general freedom of expression and Internet use."

The statement added that Iraq's security deals "with a journalist holding a camera in the same way the way it deals with those they find possessing car bombs or unlicensed weapons."

The JFO said that 31 journalists were beaten by "uniformed and plain-clothes security forces", and 65 were arrested. JFO also voiced alarm over what it argued were vague and far-reaching laws, from a journalists' protection law that contains provisions for authorities to limit information, and a bill that penalizes Internet use that contravenes ill-defined terms such as "public interests. Official security decrees limiting journalists' work have been on the rise in the past year, despite government statements to the contrary," the JFO said.

Iraq regularly ranks near the bottom of global press freedom rankings. It placed 152nd out of 179 countries in media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders' 2011-2012 World Press Freedom Index, down 22 from the year before.

[According to the BRussells Tribunal database of assassinated media professionals](#), 382 media professionals have been killed in Iraq since 2003, among them 332 Iraqis. In 2012 six Iraqi journalists have already been murdered, and there were thirteen journalists killed in Iraq in 2011.

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