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PRESS RELEASE

**Iraq: Draft Law on Protection of Journalists Must Meet  
Freedom of Expression Standards**

**London: 04.05.2011: ARTICLE 19 today releases its analyses of the draft “Journalist Protection Law” that is currently being discussed by Iraqi parliamentarians and stakeholders. Over the past two years, legislation on the protection of journalists has been the subject of vigorous discussions in Iraq, and ARTICLE 19 has reviewed an earlier draft. ARTICLE 19 is very concerned about the Draft Law not only because its provisions are contrary to international human rights standards on freedom of expression and freedom of association, but also because they are counterproductive to its apparent objectives of protecting journalists.**

*“ARTICLE 19 believes that several features in the current Iraqi Draft journalist protection law will impact negatively on Iraqi journalists and media because it is not in line with international human right standards. We urge the Iraqi legislature to reject the Draft Law as it is currently presented,”* said Dr Agnes Callamard, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19.

*“If the Iraqi state authorities remain committed to protection of journalists, we urge them to adopt the model Draft Law on the Protection and Regulation of Journalists and Media Workers that ARTICLE 19 drafted last year,”* continued Dr Callamard.

Unfortunately, the current version of the Draft Law does not address any of the fundamental failings of the earlier version of the Draft Law and instead repeats many of the failings of the earlier version in 2009. More specifically, it establishes a *de facto* system of licensing for journalists and a hierarchy in Iraqi law with journalists apparently benefitting from a higher standard of protection than other individuals.

Protection under the Draft Law – including compensation for injured journalists and the children of killed journalists – also depends on whether a particular act is deemed a “terrorist act” and when the victim is a journalist and a member of the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate. ARTICLE 19 had commented on an earlier version of the Draft Law in 2009. In August 2010, together with local partners and the International Federation of Journalists, ARTICLE 19 also developed a model *Draft Law on the Protection and Regulation of Journalists and Media Workers* as a means to comprehensively and coherently protect journalists in accordance with international human rights law.

In the analysis, ARTICLE 19 argues that the Iraqi state authorities could better protect journalists' rights by: implementing their existing international human rights obligations; ensuring that there are enhanced training and resources available for law enforcement officers, prosecutors and the judiciary on the protection of journalists; enacting legislation on the right to information legislation; and repealing all criminal defamation laws.

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- For the *Comment on the Draft Journalist Protection Law of Iraq* (May 2011), including *The Draft law on the Protection and Regulation of Journalists and Media Workers* (August 2010) visit <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/reports/comment-on-draft-journalist-protection-law-of-iraq.pdf>
- For the *Comment on the Draft Journalists Protection Law of Iraq* (August 2009) visit <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/iraq-comment-on-draft-journalists-protection-law.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.