

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iraq-lawsuits-and-violence-by-security-13-07-2011,40634.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Iraq

Disturbing trends

Lawsuits and violence by security forces become daily events for Iraqi journalists

13 July 2011

Iraqi journalists are now often sued by politicians and public figures and, at the same time, are often the targets of physical attacks which, in many cases are carried out by members of the security forces, including the bodyguards of leading politicians.

"These practices, which are designed to intimidate journalists and censor the media, constitute serious violations of freedom of expression and must stop at once," Reporters Without Borders said.

Lawsuits

In one of the latest cases, the local daily *Baghdad Al-Akhbariya* was sued for 250 million dinars (150,000 euros) in damages before a court for media issues in the southeastern Baghdad district of Rusafa in an action brought by the director-general of the industry ministry's Institute of Engineering on 2 July because the paper published a complaint by a group of employees and documents pointing to possible corruption with the institute. A judge dismissed the case in a hearing today.

Many journalists attended a 4 July hearing in a legal action by Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Al-Mawla, the head of the Iraqi organization that arranges Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca, who is suing the journalist **Majid Al-Kaabi** for 2 billion dinars (1.2 million euros) in damages for an article criticizing these pilgrimages.

Kaabi testified that his article did not attack any public figure or political party, and that it was the media's duty to point out errors in the organization of the pilgrimages. The trial was adjourned until 25 July.

Baghdad military command spokesman Gen. Qassem Atta announced on 20 June that he was suing **Fakhri Karim**, the editor of the daily *Al-Mada*, and three of his journalists – Daoud Ali, Ali Hussein and Ali Abdel Sada – for 8 million dinars (4,800 euros) in damages in a libel suit over opinion pieces criticizing the behaviour of the security forces during demonstrations.

Politicians who have brought legal actions designed to gag the media include Chamber of Representatives speaker Osama Al-Nujaifi, who sued *Al-Mada's* editor and two of his journalists, **Daoud Ali** and **Ali Hussein**, for 150 million dinars (90,000 euros) in damages on 2 June for articles criticising the maintenance of quotas in the selection of parliamentarians, bargaining over posts and the shortcomings of a law cutting parliamentarians' pay.

The industry and resources ministry's press office threatened to sue the satellite TV station *Al-Sharqiya* for blaming the ministry on 10 May for the previous week's murder of cement company boss Salam Abdallah, who had threatened, a few days before his death, to release documents proving the existence of corruption within the ministry.

In a 21 May press release, Reporters Without Borders condemned the libel suit that Faraj Haidari, the president of Iraq's electoral commission, brought against **Hashem Hassan** over an article he wrote for the 4 May issue of the newspaper *Al-Mashreq* in which he questioned the commission's legitimacy and professionalism, referred to corruption allegations and accused it of wasting public funds. Haidari announced that he was withdrawing his suit on 2 June.

Reporters Without Borders has also noted new forms of intimidation. **Kadhi Miqdadi** was expelled from the Union of Journalists on 4 July as a result of an article criticizing its effectiveness.

Violence by security forces

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's bodyguards manhandled reporters and photographers in the prime minister's presence in Karbala (150 km southwest of Baghdad) on 3 July during celebrations marking the creation of Karbala province. Journalists with several TV stations including *Al-Sumariyah TV*, *Al-Iraqiya TV*, *Afaq* and *Al-Masar* and news agencies including the Iraqi National News Agency were denied access on the grounds that there were no police dogs to inspect them. The journalists staged a sit-in to demand an apology from the prime minister, who left without meeting with them.

Hassan Salah Al-Talaqani and *Mohamed Saleh Al-Saeedi*, two journalists working for the *Anba' Al-Iraq* news agency, were attacked by the environment minister and his bodyguards in the centre of Baghdad on 15 June when they photographed an altercation between the minister and passers-by. The bodyguards fired in the air to scare away the journalists, who were then beaten. Their camera equipment and mobile phones were also seized.

Reporters Without Borders [urged the Iraqi authorities to ensure respect for the rights of journalists](#) in a letter to the prime minister on 6 June.

"Any action by the security forces that prevents journalists from doing their job is an unacceptable violation of freedom of expression," the letter said. "Press freedom is an essential component of the democratic process to which Iraq is committed. We will be watching closely to see whether the public's right to information is respected."

Despite this appeal, the security forces prevented many journalists from covering the demonstrations that took place in Baghdad two days. Some were beaten or threatened on Tahrir Square and some had their equipment seized.
