Reporters Without Borders

Middle East & North Africa - Iraq

Journalists attacked
Resumption of physical attacks on reporters
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Many journalists have been the target of deliberate physical attacks in the past week as police officers and members of the security forces of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two main parties that form the government in Iraqi Kurdistan, looked on without intervening.

In one incident, reporters were attacked by gunmen in civilian dress while covering a fire in a building near the Family Mall, a leading shopping centre, in Erbil on 13 July. Police made no attempt to help the journalists.

Farman Muhammad, who coordinates reporting for *NTR* in Erbil, told Reporters Without Borders: "The crew we sent to cover the fire consisted for a reporter, **Nebez Shwani**, and a cameraman, **Ibrahim Adnan**. The mall's guards and employees attacked and beat them violently, to the point that one of the photographer's hands was broken and his camera was damaged."

He added: "Dozens of policemen were there. Nebez and Ibrahim asked them to intervene. But they did not lift a finger while these people were taking it out on our two reporters. They even destroyed the cassette showing the incident."

A crew from *Gali Kurdistan* (a TV station operated by the PUK), consisting of reporter **Miran Bakr** and cameraman **Hawkar Hassan**, was also attacked while **Hemn Muhamad** of *Kurdsat* (another PUK television station), was threatened with being beaten if he continued filming.

The Erbil police later said they had been told of the incidents and urged journalists to file a complaint against their attackers.

Bakr told Reporters Without Borders he filed a complaint but no arrests were made. "I gave the *Asayesh* [intelligence services] video and photos of those who beat us. Our assailants even identified themselves as Asayesh members. But the *Asayesh* denied any involvement."

When anti-government demonstrations resumed in Sulaymaniyah on 15 July, PUK security forces attacked journalists who went to cover the protest. **Rahman Ghareeb**, a reporter for *Sumariya News* and coordinator of the Metro Centre for Press Freedom, was briefly detained and beaten.

"No journalist was allowed to take photos," Ghareeb said. "Some defied the ban but most of them went there without their cameras because they knew the security forces were liable to smash them.

"Someone told me: 'Come with me. You are our enemy.' I resisted, but he pushed me, helped by others. They began to beat me in front of hundreds of people. They released me 15 minutes later. What is most serious is that, when they discover you are a journalist, they beat you without giving any explanation."

Hawzhin Gharib, who coordinates reporting for the newspaper *Chatr*, said: "I was with friends on Saray Square to cover the protest. Suddenly, an officer asked us to follow him. He gave us no choice. We left the square and were led around the back of a building. Once we were on the other side, a dozen people began to hit us just because we were journalists."

Ahmed Qadr and Chenar Yasseen of *Chatr* and **Bestun Muhammad** of the news website *Sbey.com* were also the targets of physical attacks by PUK security forces.

From mid-February to mid-May, during the height of pro-democracy protests in Kurdistan, Reporters Without Borders registered:

• 40 physical attacks on journalists

• 23 brief arrests

• 2 abduction attempts

• 5 cases of journalists being seriously injured

• 3 prosecutions

• 4 physical attacks on media (Hawlati, NRT, KNN and Payam TV)

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