

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iraq-journalists-and-media-threatened-18-04-2015,47787.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iraq

Threats

Journalists and media threatened on all sides

18 April 2015

Reporters Without Borders is concerned about journalists in Iraq being hounded in connection with their reporting after Reuters Baghdad bureau chief Ned Parker had to flee the country because of threats by Shiite armed groups over his coverage of their behaviour in the newly liberated city of Tikrit.

Parker was [threatened](#) on Facebook and on *Al-Ahd TV* – a TV station owned by Asaib Ahl al-Haq, an armed group backed by Iran – in connection with a 3 April article about human rights violations by Iraqi police and allied Shiite militias in Tikrit after its liberation from Islamic State.

[It](#) described a climate of violence, looting and impunity, with police torturing a suspected Islamic State member to death and Shiite militiamen dragging a man's body behind their car, and suggested that this would have dire consequences for the government's strategy for combatting the jihadists.

Reporters Without Borders urges the government to guarantee better protection for journalists who are targeted either by Islamic State or radical Shiite militias.

"The Iraqi authorities must not allow crimes against journalists to go unpunished," Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said. *"When journalists are the targets of threats and violence, investigations must be carried out to identify and punish those responsible. The authorities have a duty to protect journalists, who are not safe anywhere in Iraq."*

Reacting to the Reuters bureau chief's departure, Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi [reaffirmed](#) his support for journalists and the news media and claimed that the police did everything possible to protect Parker after the threats. He also [ordered](#) government forces to end the looting and arrest those responsible.

Two-fold pressure

As violence and impunity continue to reign in Iraq, journalists are still being harassed by officials who refuse to accept criticism and do not hesitate to bring judicial proceedings against them.

According to the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a Reporters Without Borders partner organization, the authorities in the southern province of Basra are [prosecuting](#) freelance journalist **Nasser Al-Hajjaj** for criticizing the governor on social networks. The head of the Supreme Islamic Council has [asked](#) the governor to withdraw his complaint. Al-Hajjaj is currently in Lebanon.

Reporters Without Borders and JFO wrote a [joint letter](#) to the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, the Baghdad Court of Appeal and the Court for Press and Publication Cases in February 2014 drawing attention to the way many government officials and politicians abuse the possibility of bringing legal proceedings in order to sabotage the work of journalists.

Iraq is ranked 156th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
