



DAYS OF RAGE

PROTESTS AND REPRESSION
IN IRAQ

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Cover photo: Riot police disperse protesters during a demonstration in front of the provincial council building in Basra, 4 March 2011. © Private

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1. INTRODUCTION

“If you don’t stop your political opposition activities we will kidnap you, rape you and videotape the rape.”

Fatima Ahmed, a political activist, describing to Amnesty International the threats made against her by armed men at her home on the “Day of Rage”, 25 February 2011

Tens of thousands of Iraqis have taken to the streets since early February 2011 to protest against the lack of water, electricity and other basic services, rising prices, unemployment and endemic corruption, and to demand greater civil and political rights. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, demonstrators have also protested against the two main parties that have dominated local politics for decades and monopolized state resources.

Protests initially erupted in Iraq in mid-2010 over the government’s failure to provide basic services, but then stalled. For example, on 19 June thousands of people protested in Basra against the frequent power cuts. According to reports, at least one person was killed in front of the provincial council building when police fired on stone-throwing demonstrators.¹ In response to this and other protests, the Electricity Minister resigned and on 25 June the Interior Ministry issued new regulations that make it extremely difficult to obtain official authorization to hold protest meetings or demonstrations.



Protesters carrying a banner with the slogan “Iraqi Rage” at a demonstration on 25 February in Mosul calling for better services and an end to corruption © Private

The successful popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011 encouraged Iraqis to defy the restrictions and resume demonstrations. Many protesters widened their calls to demand the resignation of local and central government representatives, or to protest against restrictions of civil and political rights. Protests built up until 25 February, when tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in

cities across Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, in support of what they termed a “Day of Rage”.

The various forces under the control of the authorities and political parties, including security guards, armed forces and security forces, responded from the start with excessive force, killing and injuring protesters, and with frequent arrests. The first fatalities were on 16 February in the eastern city of Kut in Wasit province, and on 17 February in Sulaimaniya in the Kurdistan region. Activists told Amnesty International that the ferocity of the crackdown following the “Day of Rage” led to a decline in the number of protests in subsequent weeks, although protests have continued.

On several occasions, however, protestors have used violence - mainly by throwing stones at members of the security forces or public buildings, or on rare occasions by setting fire to public buildings. As a result, members of the security forces have been injured. On most such occasions, it appears that demonstrators only resorted to violence after security forces had used force against them, including sound bombs and live ammunition.

An Amnesty International fact-finding team visited the Kurdistan region of Iraq from 5-15 March 2011 to obtain first-hand information on recent human rights violations, especially in relation to pro-democracy demonstrations. Based mainly in Erbil and Sulaimaniya, the Amnesty International team collected testimonies from victims and witnesses. They also met pro-democracy activists, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), as well as activists from elsewhere in Iraq.

Amnesty International’s researchers obtained much valuable information about the protests and the security forces’ response to them in both the Kurdistan region and elsewhere in Iraq. However, in many cases they could not obtain sufficient information to confirm how people were killed or injured during protests, including two members of the security forces who were shot dead. Nevertheless, Amnesty International has been able to establish that on several occasions the armed forces, security forces or security guards used excessive force during protests, particularly when they fired live ammunition that killed and injured protesters and bystanders. On 30 March, in a belated but welcome development, the Iraqi authorities announced that their security forces are now under orders not to use firearms against demonstrators except where this is necessary for self defence.²

Amnesty International also found disturbing evidence of targeted attacks on political activists, torture and other ill-treatment of people arrested in connection with the protests, and attacks or threats against journalists, media outlets, government critics, academics and students.

Up to now, the Iraqi authorities in both Baghdad and the Kurdistan region have sought to crack down on peaceful protestors. This must change. They should be cracking down on the use of excessive force and torture by their own largely unaccountable security forces, not on the right of people to peacefully protest. The Iraqi authorities should be upholding the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including the right to protest, not trying to suppress them. It is high time to do so.

HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

The Iraqi authorities have failed to respect their constitutional and international obligations to uphold the rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

Article 38 of the Iraqi Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration “in a way that does not violate public order or morality”. However, the new regulations introduced on 25 June 2010 impede Iraqis from staging lawful protests as they require organizers to obtain “written approval of both the Interior Minister and the provincial Governor” before submitting an application to the relevant police department, not less than 72 hours before a planned event. The regulations do not state what standards the Interior Ministry, governors or police should apply when approving or denying demonstration permits, effectively giving the government unlimited powers to decide who may or may not hold a demonstration.³ On 3 November 2010, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) passed a law regulating demonstrations, requiring an application for authorization to be submitted to the authorities 48 hours before the event. Authorities may refuse permission, if a demonstration is considered to violate public order or morals. A refusal is subject to appeal before the courts.⁴

Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Iraq has ratified, states that any restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly must be strictly necessary to preserve national security or public safety, public order, public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Any such restrictions must be proportionate to a legitimate purpose and without recourse to discrimination, including on grounds of political opinion.

Even when restrictions on the right to protest are justifiable under international law, the policing of demonstrations, whether or not they have been authorized, must be carried out in accordance with international standards. These standards prohibit the use of force by law enforcement officials unless strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty and to use firearms only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

In policing and responding to the protests in February and March 2011, Iraqi armed forces and security forces contravened international standards, most notably the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (Basic Principles) and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials. The Basic Principles state: “The development and deployment of non-lethal incapacitating weapons should be carefully evaluated in order to minimize the risk of endangering uninvolved persons, and the use of such weapons should be carefully controlled”.⁵ They also state that whenever the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, law enforcement officials shall: “exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved” and “minimize damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life”.⁶ Article 9 states that law enforcement officials may only use firearms against people in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury.



Riot police stand guard during a demonstration in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad, 18 March 2011 © AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed

The cases highlighted below and other evidence gathered by Amnesty International show that on several occasions Iraqi armed forces and security forces breached these standards and used excessive force, in some cases leading to deaths. They also violated the right to life as enshrined in Article 6 of the ICCPR. The UN Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 6, noted that the right to life is non-derogable even in cases of “public emergencies”. The Committee added: “States should take measures not only to prevent and punish deprivation of life by criminal acts, but also prevent arbitrary killings by their own security forces.” The prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is also non-derogable.

When these and other human rights are violated, international law obliges governments to provide victims of human rights abuses with an effective remedy. This obligation includes three elements: truth (establishing the facts about violations of human rights); justice (investigating past violations and, if enough admissible evidence is gathered, prosecuting the suspected perpetrators); and reparation (providing full and effective reparation to the victims and their families, in its five forms: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition).

Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that all Iraqis can exercise without fear of injury or punishment their rights to freedom of expression and assembly by instructing the armed forces, security forces and security guards not to use excessive force against protesters, and by investigating properly all reported incidents of human rights violations and bringing to justice those found responsible.

2. SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL IRAQ

Protests began to gather pace in southern and central Iraq in early February 2011. On 10 February, for instance, Iraqi lawyers led a demonstration of several hundred people in Baghdad protesting against failures of the judicial system, the abuse of prisoners and widespread corruption.⁷ Similar protests took place that day in Basra and Mosul.

Demonstrations have continued intermittently since then, with the peak on the “Day of Rage” on 25 February. On 19 March, for example, activists organized demonstrations for a “Day of the Prisoners” when relatives of prisoners and others protested against prison conditions, including restricted access to detainees. Iraqi journalists have protested against restrictions imposed on media covering the demonstrations, including a ban on the transmission of live satellite TV broadcasting in Baghdad on 25 February which was lifted the following week.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE AGAINST PROTESTERS

Since mid-February 2011, many people have been killed or injured in violent clashes between demonstrators and forces under the control of the Iraqi authorities, and several demonstrators have been shot dead by armed forces, security forces or security guards in circumstances where the use of live ammunition constituted excessive force.



A fire lit outside the Provincial Council building in Mosul on a day of protests, 25 February 2011 © Private

On 16 February, a teenage boy was among those killed in the city of Kut in Wasit province, some 160km south-east of Baghdad, during peaceful protests by around 2,000 people against poor services, particularly the lack of electricity and water supplies. Security guards employed by the local authorities reportedly shot live ammunition at demonstrators who attempted to enter the provincial council building. A senior police official in Kut told journalists that “measures will be taken against the private guards but after the situation has calmed down”.⁸

On 25 February, violent clashes in some of the many mass protests held on the “Day of Rage” across the country led to deaths, including in the cities of Mosul and Basra, and the provinces of Salahuddin and Kirkuk. In Mosul, five people were reported to have been shot dead. One of them was **Mu’ataz Muwafaq Waissi**, married with one child. His brother was reported to have stated that he was shot in the head by a sniper.⁹ Witnesses told Amnesty International that security forces used deafening sound bombs and fired shots in the air in an attempt to disperse demonstrators outside the provincial council building in the morning. The situation deteriorated at around noon when at least two demonstrators were shot dead.¹⁰ The witnesses said that local and national security forces were using live ammunition. Further casualties occurred after demonstrators entered the provincial council building at about 12.30pm and set fire to part

of it. The Mosul-based commander of the 2nd Army Division was reported as saying that shots were fired at demonstrators from within the building and from rooftops of neighbouring buildings, indicating that that security guards and security forces were responsible for the casualties.¹¹

The same day in Basra, a protester, **Salim Farooq**, was killed and scores of demonstrators and police officers were injured, mainly by stones and batons, after violent clashes erupted in front of the provincial council building. An eyewitness told Amnesty International that security forces used sound bombs and fired live ammunition in the air to disperse demonstrators. The circumstances of Salim Farooq's death were not clear.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Many people have been detained in connection with the protests including those who were tortured or ill-treated in custody.

Oday Alzaidy, an activist involved in organizing a demonstration, told Amnesty International that on the morning of 13 February protesters were met at al-Firdaus Square in Baghdad by armed forces who ordered them to move to a different location. He said that he agreed to go in an army vehicle to the Abu Nu'as area to look at the alternative location. When they reached the area, however, an officer ordered him out of the vehicle and then drove away. A few moments later men in plain clothes forced Oday Alzaidy into another vehicle, where he was beaten and blindfolded. He said he was then driven to an unknown location about 15 minutes away and held there for five days and again tortured and otherwise ill-treated. He said:

"They came to me every day and they attacked me with beatings and gave me electric shocks. They told me to confess that I was sent by the Ba'ath party [the party led by former President Saddam Hussain, executed in December 2006]. When I denied this, they beat me even harder with batons and they shocked me with electric prods."

After his release he needed hospital treatment for two days. Undeterred, on 25 February, he participated in the "Day of Rage" demonstration in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. He said he was again detained by security forces, held for several days at a police building in al-Baladiyat district, and severely beaten.

Another activist, **'Abdel-Jabbar Shaloub Hammadi**, who helped to organize the "Day of Rage" protests in Baghdad, told Amnesty International that on 24 February he was stopped in the street in Baghdad by about 30 armed police. He was subsequently beaten, blindfolded and transported to a police building in al-Baladiyat district. There, he was tortured, including by being suspended from the ceiling by his wrists, being suspended from the ceiling with his legs and arms tied together, and by having icy water thrown over him. After five days he was transferred to the Intelligence Department in Sahat al-Nussur district in Baghdad. He was released without charge on the morning of 8 March.



Hadi al-Mahdi, a radio talk show host at Demouzy Radio Station, in his Baghdad studio © Joao Silva/ NYTimes Syndicate/eyevine

Hadi al-Mehdi, a journalist and writer, joined the protests on 25 February in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. He told Amnesty International that after the demonstration he was having lunch with three other journalists – Hussam Sara'i, Ali Abdul Sada and Ali al-Mussawi – when at least 15 soldiers stormed the restaurant, beat him and his three friends with rifles and forced them into vehicles. He said that they were taken to a detention centre run by the 11th Army Division, later identified as

the former building of the Defence Ministry, and interrogated. He said he was frequently beaten during the interrogation, twice given electric shocks to his feet, and threatened with rape. He was released without charge in the early hours of 26 February.

Other detainees abused by the security forces do not want their names to be published for fear of reprisals. An 18-year-old high school student, for example, told Amnesty International that he was detained together with other young protesters by armed forces following a demonstration in March in Baghdad. He reported that he and several fellow detainees were beaten with a cable on their back while blindfolded. During his interrogation the officer slapped his face several times. The officer asked how he had learned about the demonstration and accused him of being a member of the Ba'ath or Communist party. Before their release after four days in detention, he and his fellow detainees were forced to write and sign a note stating that they would not participate in future demonstrations.

TARGETING OF ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS

Organizers of and participants in demonstrations have been threatened, attacked and detained by security forces solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. For example, video footage taken on 25 February in Kerbala shows several members of the security forces – including a member of the anti-riot police – surrounding a man and beating him with batons. He continues to be beaten with batons by other members of the security forces as he is running away with his bare hands over his head.¹²

Many activists have been threatened or attacked by unidentified people. An activist in Basra told Amnesty International that he was threatened by telephone because he had participated in a demonstration in late February. The unidentified person warned him that he would “face harm” if he continued to protest. He said that two of his work colleagues who had joined demonstrations received similar threats.

On 20 February at about noon, protesters who had set up tents in Tahrir Square in Baghdad were attacked and injured by unidentified assailants using knives and sticks. Security forces had reportedly withdrawn from the area shortly before the attack.

Journalists covering the demonstrations have been attacked and injured by armed forces or security forces. Several have had their equipment and footage seized or destroyed and some have been detained. On 23 February in the morning, security forces raided the office of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory in Baghdad confiscating IT equipment and its archive. The organization has been campaigning for media freedom in Iraq for several years, including protesting restrictions on media coverage of recent demonstrations in Iraq.



Journalist Mohammed al-Rased being detained at a demonstration in Basra on 4 March 2011 © AP Photo/Nabil al-Jurani

The Iraqi NGO Journalistic Freedoms Observatory as well as the Paris-based press freedom organization Reporters Sans Frontieres have documented numerous such incidents. For instance, on 25 February armed forces raided the Baghdad office of the TV station Al-Diyar, preventing further broadcasts of the demonstration. At least seven staff members were arrested. The same day in Kerbala, Reuters correspondent **Mushtaq Muhammad** was hospitalized with serious head injuries after security forces beat him with batons, and in Mosul, **Ahmed Hiyali** of Radio Sawa was beaten by police and prevented from covering the demonstration.

Other forms of intimidation have been reported. For example, an activist in Baghdad told Amnesty International that on 19 March armed men in plain clothes were stationed in a vehicle outside a building where a newsletter in support of the protests had been produced.

3. KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

At least six people have died as a result of excessive force by the security forces during protests that have gripped the Kurdistan region since mid-February 2011, and dozens have been injured. Several people have been briefly detained; some were tortured or otherwise ill-treated. A number of protesters, independent journalists and opposition activists, have been threatened, and repressive action has been taken against students and academics.

Protesters in their thousands have been calling for an end to corruption, unemployment and poor government services, and for the introduction of political reforms, social justice and respect for human rights and freedoms. They have complained about the political and economic control wielded by the two political parties that have been in power since the Kurdistan region of Iraq became semi-autonomous in 1991 at a time when Saddam Hussain remained in power over the rest of Iraq. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by KRG President Mas'ud Barzani, controls the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, controls Sulaimaniya governorate. Kurdish security agencies (Asayish) and the armed forces (Peshmerga) are directly or indirectly controlled by the two parties, both of which also retain their own powerful and largely unaccountable party intelligence agencies, respectively the Parastin and the Dezgay Zanyari.

Since 17 February, when the first demonstration was organized, there have been daily sit-ins in Sulaimaniya's central Sara Square – now referred to by protesters as Azady (Freedom) Square. Attempts to stage protests in Erbil, however, have failed because organizers were denied authorization and when people tried to protest in the city's main square, they were violently dispersed. On two occasions when people tried to demonstrate, the square was virtually occupied – on 25 February by security personnel wearing civilian clothes; and on 11 March by pro-KDP supporters staging a rally to mark the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Erbil from Ba'ath control.

It appears clear that the two main political parties in the Kurdistan region have sought to mobilize their own security agencies and party militants to undermine and weaken the protest movement and are prepared to use extreme means, including excessive force, arbitrary arrests, torture and threats, to achieve their objective.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE AGAINST PROTESTERS

At least six civilians have been killed by Kurdish security forces using excessive force, including live ammunition, to quell protests in Sulaimaniya and Kalar. Evidence of the methods used by the security forces has been captured in video footage taken by protesters and journalists. In some cases, protesters resorted to violent means, particularly stone-throwing, but the security forces failed to take adequate care to protect lives and in some cases used firearms when there was no imminent threat of death or serious injury.

On 17 February, thousands of people demonstrated in Sulaimaniya's Sara Square. Organizers

had obtained authorization to hold a sit-in from the city council (governorate). Following the protest, hundreds of people marched to the KDP headquarters and started throwing stones at the guards, some of whom were on top of the building. KDP security forces then fired live ammunition at the protesters. A 15-year-old boy, **Rezhwan 'Ali**, was shot in the head and died instantly. At least 50 people were injured.

On 19 February, when protests in Sara Square ended at around 4pm, hundreds of protesters started to walk towards the KDP headquarters to protest against the 17 February events. They were stopped a few hundred metres away, at Khanqa Square, by security forces. Video clips clearly show security forces, including some wearing plain clothes, shooting at demonstrators. Weapons used included Kalashnikov rifles and pistols. Two protesters, **Surkew Zahid**, aged 16, and **Sherzad Taha**, aged 28, were seriously injured and died the following day in hospital. At least 14 other people were injured.

On 23 February in Halabja, a 23-year-old policeman, **Sarkar Sa'eed**, was killed during a demonstration in unclear circumstances. Officials, including the KRG Interior Minister, asserted that protesters had shot him, but protesters denied that any of them had been armed with guns. Witnesses said that the policeman was killed apparently by a bullet shot into the air by anti-riot police.

On 25 February in Kalar, after a peaceful demonstration at a central square, some of the protesters, mainly youth, went to the KDP office and started throwing stones at it. KDP guards and Asayish officers responded by shooting in the air. Reinforcements from the Peshmerga arrived at the scene. The security forces then started shooting live ammunition at demonstrators. Two protesters were killed: **Bilal Ahmad Saleh**, aged 15, who was shot and later died in hospital; and **Rashid Mohammad**, aged 65, who was apparently a bystander not taking part in the protest. Around 28 people were injured. Five of them, including security men, were injured by stones.

On 26 February, **Omed Jalal**, aged 25, was killed in Sulaimaniya's Sara Square. A sound bomb was reportedly thrown into the crowd by anti-riot police, injuring at least eight people. The police then started shooting in the air to disperse the demonstrators. Omed Jalal, who was a bystander not taking part in the protests, was hit by a stray bullet.

In a meeting with Amnesty International delegates in Erbil on 15 March 2011, the KRG Minister of Interior stated that 122 members of the security forces had been injured during clashes with demonstrators in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, including eight policemen injured by bullets in Halabja.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

A number of pro-democracy activists, including members of opposition political parties such as Goran, were arrested, especially in Sulaimaniya, Erbil, Kalar and Halabja. Some of them were held for up to four days during which they allege they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated before being released uncharged. Their "crime" was to speak out against official corruption and the "dictatorship" of the two ruling parties. In Erbil, for example, at least seven people, most of them members of Goran, were arrested on 25 February simply because they gathered in the main square before a planned demonstration was due to start and which the security forces subsequently suppressed.

Sharwan Azad Faqi 'Abdallah, aged 35, married with two children and who works for an NGO, was with a friend in a park in central Erbil on 25 February when he was arrested. He was detained for four days and tortured. Marks of torture were visible on his face when he met Amnesty International delegates in Erbil on 11 March. He said:

“At around 2.30pm as I had just finished a phone conversation with a friend, three men confronted me and asked me to give them the mobile. Other men arrived within seconds, including from behind, and then I received several punches on the head and different parts of the body. I fell to the ground, they kicked me for several minutes, but I managed to stand up. They put one handcuff on my right wrist and attached it to someone else’s left wrist. But I managed with force to pull my arm away and the handcuff was broken. I ran away towards the Citadel but within seconds another group of security men in civilian clothes blocked my way and they started punching me and hitting me. There were now many security men surrounding me and kicking me. There was blood streaming from my nose and from left eye. My head was very painful.”



Sharwan Azad Faqi 'Abdallah after his release. Erbil © Private

“They put me in a car... One security man told me I was one of the troublemakers. I was taken to the Asayish Gishti in Erbil. I was first asked to go to the bathroom to wash my face which was covered in blood. I was then interrogated in the evening and the person interrogating me kept asking about why I was in the park and kept accusing me of being a troublemaker. I was asked to sign a written testimony. When I said I needed to see what is on the paper he hit me hard. Then I signed the paper without reading it. I stayed there for two nights sharing a room with around 60 people. Then on the third day I was taken to a police station where I stayed for one night before I was released. I was not tortured in the Asayish Prison or in the police station.”

Kamran 'Ali Khwaraham, a 37-year-old imam from Sulaimaniya, married with four children, joined the protests in Sara

Square on 27 February when he addressed the crowd. He criticized corruption and called on the Kurdish authorities to listen to people’s demands. Later that day, four armed men in military uniform, believed to be PUK Peshmerga, went to his house and asked him to go with them. He asked if they had an arrest warrant and they said they did not, but took him away anyway. They blindfolded him and tied his hands behind his back. After a short drive, the car stopped and he was transferred to another car. After another short drive he was taken to a room. He told Amnesty International:

“I was left on my own for about half an hour and then two men came in the room and they were hooded. They started beating me. They punched me several times on the face and they also kicked me. They started insulting me. They threatened to kill me and said I was not leaving there alive...”¹³

Kamran ‘Ali Khwaraham was held in the room until 1 March, when he was released after being warned not to join future demonstrations. He has ignored the warning. On 29 March he was detained at the Sara Police Station in Sulaimaniya and the following day transferred to the custody of the Asayish reportedly to be questioned in connection with speeches he had given at demonstrations in Sulaimaniya’s Sara Square. He was held in incommunicado detention for five days. He was released on 6 April 2011.

Dr Pishtewan ‘Abdullah, an Iraqi Kurdish medical doctor with an Australian passport and resident of Australia, was visiting Kurdistan in February when he was arrested and tortured in Erbil. On 25 February, he was wearing a shirt over a T-shirt with “no to corruption, yes to social justice” written on the front and “the demands of people should not be answered by bullets” on the back. In Erbil’s main square he took off his shirt to expose the T-shirt. Two young men approached him and asked him to put his shirt back on. He refused. Around 15 people then attacked him from behind, punching and kicking him while he was on the ground. He told Amnesty International:

“They put the shirt on my face and tied my hands behind my back. There were two police cars and they did not intervene. The [attackers] put me in car and drove away. After 10 minutes drive we stopped outside the Asayish Gishti building. There were many Asayish officers and they started kicking me and beating me. I was taken to a small room. Every five minutes two or three Asayish officers came to the room and beat me. I was kicked and punched for about four hours. There was blood coming from my nose, ears, arms, back, thighs, my right eye. Every five minutes they would have a break and then two different officers would replace them... They were swearing at me, swearing at my wife and kids and Goran...”

Dr Pishtewan spent three days in the Asayish Gishti building before being transferred to a police station, where he was held for 24 hours before being released. He told Amnesty International that he did not lodge a complaint: “I didn’t complain. Complain to whom? The Asayish is everything. The KDP is everything.”

THREATS AGAINST PROTESTERS AND CRITICS

Many people have received threats for their role in the opposition, particularly protest organizers, members and supporters of opposition political parties, and religious figures who have spoken out against corruption or taken part in demonstrations.

Fatima Ahmed, a political opposition activist aged 42 and married with children, has received threats because of her activities.¹⁴ On 25 February at 8am she contacted other women activists to join the planned demonstration in Erbil. That evening, three armed men in plain clothes came to her house. One knocked at the door and told her husband that he wanted to speak to her. She told Amnesty International:

“I asked them what they wanted from me. They said we want your mobile and some

information. I said you have no right to do this. I said I will complain to the local chief, but he took my mobile phone. He started threatening me. He said if you don't stop your political opposition activities we will kidnap you, rape you and videotape the rape. They said with this method you will shut up and you will be begging us. My husband then started arguing with them."

Since then, Fatima Ahmed has been staying in a friend's house and her children are staying with their father in another flat. She refused to lodge a complaint with the courts because she has no faith in the judiciary. Since 25 February she has not gone to work because she fears she may be kidnapped and raped.¹⁵



Demonstration on 8 March, International Women's Day 2011, at Sara Square, Sulaimaniya © Asuda

Othman Mohammad Mahmoud, a 36-year-old imam in Sulaimaniya, married with three children, joined the demonstrations in Sara Square in Sulaimaniya in February and addressed the crowd, urging people to continue the protests until they achieve their demands. The following day at around 9am his wife found an envelope in their courtyard. Inside was a bullet and a letter stating: "You are warned – don't go back to Sara Square". Othman Mohammad Mahmoud went to the Asayish in his neighbourhood and informed them about the threat. He was told that if he wanted guards they could provide them, but he rejected the offer. He went back to the protests in the square, and was not threatened again.

ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS

A number of journalists, in particular those working for independent newspapers, radios and satellite TV channels, have received threats, mostly through SMS messages, in connection with their coverage of demonstrations.¹⁶ Independent or opposition media outlets have also been attacked, including in arson attacks.

The independent Nalya Radio and Television (NRT) station was set ablaze in the early hours of 22 February in Sulaimaniya by a group of nearly 50 armed men in plain clothes. The station had only been broadcasting for three days when the attack happened. The men sprayed bullets at equipment in empty offices and doused the premises with petrol. At least six of the attackers who had gone upstairs were burned and were taken to hospital. A few hours before the incident, the station's Director, **Twana Othman**, received threats by phone. The anonymous caller told him: "If you continue to work in this station we will kill you."¹⁷ A correspondent of the station in Erbil, **Farman Mohammad Fattah**, received threats on his mobile phone. On 10 March, for example, he was warned: "If you go back to your home on your own we will treat you the way your station has been treated."¹⁸

Niaz 'Abdullah, a journalist with Nawa Radio based in Erbil, went to the main square in Erbil on 25 February to cover the planned demonstration there. When she arrived at around 1.30pm, with her journalist badge clearly visible, two men wearing civilian clothes approached her. She told Amnesty International:

"When I went on air and said there was a heavy security presence in the square and that most of the security men were in civilian clothes, one of the men grabbed my mobile by force. He switched off the mobile and asked me why I lied on the phone... He said to me, 'you want to destroy the region'. He returned the mobile, but threatened me with rape."

Niaz 'Abdullah was advised by another journalist to leave because the area was full of security officials and she realized that the square was being taken over by supporters of the KDP. Several cameramen in the square that day had their cameras seized by security officials.

On 6 March, armed men attacked the radio station Dang, located in the centre of Kalar. The men destroyed the doors and some equipment, and took away a computer, a laptop and other equipment. A station guard stated that one of the attackers was wearing a uniform which he could not identify. A journalist at the radio told Amnesty International: "The attack on the radio station was aimed to send a threatening message to journalists and their reporting on the demonstrations."¹⁹ A complaint was filed by the radio station with the Asayish and with the courts.

Kamal Raouf, the editor of *Hawlati*, an independent newspaper, received three threatening messages on 8 March. One of the messages hinted that the newspaper's office could be attacked. Kamal Raouf told the police and the office of the Prime Minister. Later, the police visited him, but immediately afterwards he received an anonymous call saying that his contact with the police had been noted.

Hejar Anwar Joher, aged around 29 and married with two children, works as a correspondent with KNN, a Goran TV satellite channel, in Erbil. In the evening of 9 March, he presented on KNN a short report on the Amnesty International delegation visiting Kurdistan and the purpose of the visit. Two days earlier he had interviewed



Journalist Hejar Anwar Joher showing one of the threatening messages © Amnesty International

the delegates about the visit and about the human rights situation in the country. A few minutes after the broadcast his brother received three messages on his mobile threatening Hejar. One of the messages was: "I know you well; you must advise your brother Hejar to stop all anarchical activities in Erbil, otherwise the outcome will be disastrous." Hejar Anwar Joher submitted a complaint to the local police in Iskan neighbourhood in Erbil on 10 March.

THREATS AGAINST STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS

All universities and high education colleges and institutes in Erbil have been closed since 24 February 2011, and several academics have been threatened.

Students had reportedly been planning to stage demonstrations and sit-ins in support of protesters in Sulaimaniya. In the evening of 23 February, members of the Kurdistan Students' Union (KSU), affiliated to the KDP, went to students who live on campus and told them that they had to leave the university and go home the following day. The KSU hired buses to take the students to their homes outside Erbil. Students were told that if they did not leave there would be no electricity and water and that they would be locked in their rooms. All the students left the following day and the university presidency closed all universities until 1 April. The following day, some lecturers contacted the Ministry of Higher Education to ask why universities were being closed. They were told that the Ministry was not aware of the decision.

Samir Rajab,²⁰ a lecturer at Salahuddin University in Erbil, told Amnesty International that he had received threats, including an anonymous phone call, during the evening of 23 February. He said the caller told him: "I will cut your tongue. We are young people from the Kurdistan Democratic Party and we are from Erbil..." A few minutes later another anonymous caller told him: "I am a student in your class, if there is a demonstration here in Erbil I will kill you. I will not want you in the faculty." Samir Rajab believes that the reason he was threatened was because he told students during a lecture on 24 February that people in Erbil would have the same demands as the protesters in Sulaimaniya. That evening, the dean of faculty called him to ask why he had referred to the protests in Sulaimaniya in his lecture. Samir Rajab told Amnesty International that he did not make a complaint about the threats because police stations are controlled by the KDP.

Ayub Anwar Hamad, a 37-year-old lecturer in Salahuddin University, also received threats on his mobile. On 10 March, someone called and told him: "I know you are a university lecturer, you must not get involved in politics, don't destroy Erbil, I have been following you, I know what you wear, we are a group of people from the KDP..."²¹

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Regional Government, to:

- Guarantee and uphold the right to peaceful protest, and protect protesters from excessive force by police or violence by others.
- Conduct full, thorough and transparent investigations into the killings and attacks on protesters and the assaults and threats made against journalists and others, make the results of the investigation public and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Ensure that security forces and other law enforcement officers act at all times in full conformity with the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, by giving clear instructions that force may only be used when strictly necessary and only to the extent required for the performance of their duty, and that lethal force may only be used when strictly unavoidable in order to protect their lives or the lives of others.
- Publicly condemn torture and other ill-treatment, and ensure that these abuses stop.
- Conduct full, thorough and transparent investigations into all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Provide victims of human rights violations with financial compensation and other forms of reparation that are appropriate and proportional to the gravity of the violation and the circumstances of the case.

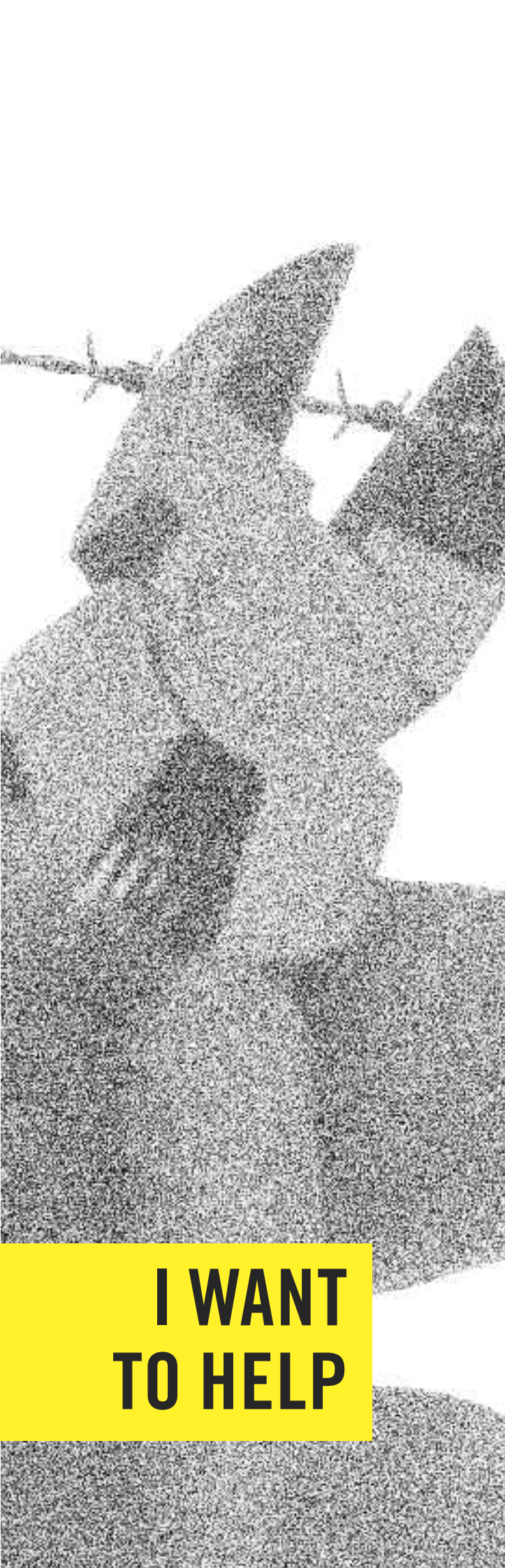
ENDNOTES

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- ¹¹ *Aswat al-Iraq*, 27 February 2011, at http://ar.aswataliraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=273372&l=1 accessed on 7 April 2011.
- ¹² See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkXQ5sYyARl> (credited to al-Jazeera TV Channel) and <http://www.youtube.com/user/IraqiRevolutions#p/u/25/NCgf3zOyM5s> (credited to al-Sharqiya TV Channel), accessed on 7 April 2011.
- ¹³ Interview by Amnesty International, Sulaimaniya, 8 March 2011.
- ¹⁴ Real name withheld.
- ¹⁵ Threats of sexual abuse against women political activists in the Kurdistan Region have been reported to Amnesty International on previous occasions. However, women targeted with sexual abuse or the threat of it often do not report such incidents for fear of social stigmatization.
- ¹⁶ Independent journalists have been targeted in this and other ways by the Kurdish security for years, and two have been murdered in suspicious circumstances.
- ¹⁷ Interview by Amnesty International, Erbil, 11 March 2011.
- ¹⁸ Interview by Amnesty International, Erbil, 11 March 2011.

¹⁹ Interview by Amnesty International, Sulaimaniya, 8 March 2011.

²⁰ Real name withheld.

²¹ Interview by Amnesty International, Erbil, 14 March 2011.



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DAYS OF RAGE

PROTESTS AND REPRESSION IN IRAQ

Tens of thousands of Iraqis, emboldened by the successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, have taken to the streets since early February 2011 to protest against the chronic lack of basic services, rising prices, mass unemployment and endemic corruption, and to demand greater civil and political rights. The security forces have frequently responded with excessive force, using live ammunition, sound bombs and other weapons to forcibly disperse peaceful protesters, particularly during the “Day of Rage” on 25 February when demonstrations were held across Iraq. At least 20 people have been killed. Many of those arrested say they were tortured or ill-treated. Journalists trying to cover the protests as well as political activists have been targeted for attack or threats.

This report, based on a fact-finding visit to Iraq during the unrest, documents patterns of protest and repression across the country, including the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Amnesty International is urging the authorities to crack down on the use of excessive force and torture by their largely unaccountable security forces, not on the right of people to peacefully protest.

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