



United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)
بعثة الأمم المتحدة لمساعدة العراق (يونامي)

Iraq: UN details ordeal of abducted protesters, welcomes Government's promise to investigate and compensate

BAGHDAD (23 May 2020) – A United Nations report published today on the abduction of protesters in Iraq since last October details their ordeals from the time of abduction through interrogation to acts of torture.

In its fourth report on the protests, the UN Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) documented cases involving 123 people who disappeared between 1 October 2019 and 21 March 2020. Of these, 98 people were located, but 25 remain missing or are in an unknown status.

Since the protests erupted at the start of October, the UN has verified 490 deaths of activists and 7,783 injured. Most of the protesters are young and unemployed, and have been demanding that their economic and social rights be respected. The demonstrations have continued even after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

The report found that the “absence of accountability for these acts continues to contribute to the pervasive environment of impunity in relation to demonstration-linked reports of violations and abuses”.

“The establishment of a high-level fact-finding committee by the new Government to investigate casualties and related harm is a crucial step toward justice and accountability,” said Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq. “The Government’s commitment to provide medical treatment for injured demonstrators and compensation to the families of victims is encouraging.”

The report notes that the abductions and disappearances occurred amid numerous incidents involving additional violations and abuses targeting activists and protesters, including deliberate killings, shooting and knife attacks, threats and intimidation, and excessive and unlawful use of force at demonstration sites.

None of those interviewed knew the identity of those responsible for their abduction, although most speculated the involvement of ‘militia’. They added that they did not believe official Iraqi Security Forces were directly responsible, nor that ordinary criminal gangs were to blame.

The report does not speculate on who might be behind the abductions, points to “the involvement of armed actors with substantial levels of organisation and access to resources”.

The report provides concrete recommendations to the Government of Iraq, including:

- Make immediate efforts to comply with its obligations under international law, including by making all efforts to locate those demonstrators and activists who remain missing.
- Take immediate action to protect protesters and activists from abduction.
- Take immediate action to investigate all alleged cases of abduction, disappearance and torture/ill-treatment, and to prosecute those responsible.
- Publicly identify the so-called unidentified force, armed group or ‘militia’, behind the abductions.

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