Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	**1602**
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Front Line Defenders
Titel:	UPR Session: 46th Session of UPR Working Group
Udgivet:	5. december 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	3. april 2025

DUBLIN
Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS
Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

Submission by: Front Line Defenders – the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Related to: Iraq
UPR Session: 46th Session of UPR Working Group

Submitted:

Front Line Defenders (www.frontlinedefenders.org) is an international NGO based in Ireland with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Founded in 2001, Front Line Defenders has particular expertise on the issue of security and protection of human rights defenders and works to promote the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) adopted by General Assembly resolution 53/144 of 9 December 1998.

The following submission has been prepared by Front Line Defenders based on research carried out by this organisation and information received from independent human rights defenders in Iraq from November 2019 to June 2024.

Contact person: Sarah de Roure, Head of Protection sderoure@frontlinedefenders.org

Introduction

1. This submission examines Iraq's compliance with its international human right obligations to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for defenders, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). It draws attention to the difficult situation of HRDs in Iraq since the previous UPR session in November 2019. Iraqi HRDs and journalists work in an increasingly hostile environment.

Context impacting the situation of human rights defenders in Iraq

2. The Tishreen protests that took place between 2019 and 2021 in Iraq started on 1 October 2019 and focused on the high level of corruption and unemployment, and poor public service delivery. The protests started in central Iraq, and through social media, spread quickly to the southern provinces. As the intensity of the demonstrations peaked in late October 2019, protesters' called not only for a complete overhaul of the Iraqi government but also for Iranian authorities influence to be driven out, including the Iranian-aligned militias and parties.
3. In response, the Iraqi government responded with wide scale arrests and violent crackdown reportedly using live bullets, hot water, gas and tear gas against peaceful protesters. State and government-affiliated non-state actors' systematic use of lethal force led to the suppression of most protests movements in Iraq and the restriction of the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.
4. As will be demonstrated in the sections below, HRDs including journalists who organised, covered, or simply participated in the demonstrations were targeted. They were killed, abducted or arbitrarily arrested by State and government-affiliated non-state actors. Human rights reports indicate that almost 500 demonstrators were killed during the peaceful Tishreen protests and approximately 2,800 arrested. These numbers include HRDs and journalists. It is also important to note that since the Tishreen protests, various intimidation tactics continue to be used against HRDs and journalists.
5. Over the 5 year UPR reporting period since 2019, the government of Iraq has not only failed to ensure accountability for the extra-judicial killings of HRDs, including journalists, that took place between 2019-2021, it also actively continued to target HRDs , notably by building and using legal files against them.
6. Militias and armed groups affiliated with Iran responsible for violence against protesters in 2019 were subsequently elected in the 2021 elections and are now part of the Iraqi parliament. As a result of the rise and legitimisation of these groups, the Iraqi government is even less willing to tolerate dissent or criticism than prior to the elections, which in turn has created a more challenging environment for HRDs.
7. In the last year, the environment for civil society further deteriorated as the parliament re-introduced draft laws which, if passed, would curtail freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. This includes draft laws on Cybercrimes, on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly and on Access of Information.
8. Furthermore, an anti-gender/LGBTQI+ campaign that started during 2023 has impacted the work of HRDs, and especially women's right organisations. A directive issued by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission banned the use of the word "gender" and prohibited any activities or events related to the concept. Influential forces in the Iraqi government also issued statements calling for Iraq's withdrawal from relevant international conventions that it had previously ratified. Gender was presented as a serious moral threat to society, and incorrectly linked to homosexuality, perversion and the destruction of society.
9. Amendments passed in April 2024 to the "Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law" have criminalised LGBTQI+ people by increasing the penalties for those engaging in same-sex relations, and who undergo and perform gender-affirming surgery. It also made it impossible for local organisations to continue their work supporting the LGBTQI+ community as it bans any organisation that promotes "sexual deviancy", imposing a sentence of at least seven years and a fine of no less than 10m dinars (about 7,000 euros).

Killings and physical attacks of HRDs, including journalists, involved in protests

10. Under Iraq's previous UPR examination in 2019, the government received a number of recommendations that relate to the protection of HRDs, journalists and media professionals as well as the investigation of all instances of disappearances and death of protesters, HRDs and journalists that took place during the protests. However, as documented below, the government has failed to implement these recommendations.
11. Between 2019 and 2021, HRDs including WHRDs, who organised or participated in peaceful demonstrations, and journalists who covered them were subjected to killing and killing attempts, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance. The environment for HRDswas endangered in 2019 and onward by the proliferation of armed groups affiliated with government institutions or political parties. To date, HRDs continue to be subjected to intimidation and judicial harassment for their participation in the protests.
12. The cases of killing and attempted killings of defenders documented by Front Line Defenders hereunder demonstrate a climate of insecurity, inadequate protection and impunity for the killing of HRDs in Iraq. This unsafe environment creates a chilling effect on other HRDs who legitimately fears for their life and their families' lives. Family members that have spoken openly about the abduction and disappearance of their family members have also put their life at risk by doing so.
13. On 9 May 2021, Ihab Alwazny, a prominent HRD and one of the heads of the coordination committee of the protests in Karbala was killed by an unknown armed group in front of his house in Karbalaa, Iraq. Ihab Alwazny received many death threats from militant groups because of his leading role. After his death, his mother and brother, the lawyer Marwan Alwazny, accused a leading figure in the Popular Mobilization Forces of killing Ihab Alwazny and presented evidence that supported this accusation. As a consequence, a special investigation committee was formed to examine the assassination case. The committee heard the evidence presented by Ihab's family and decided to refer the case to the judiciary which issued an arrest order against the accused. But the intervention of the armed group which the accused belonged to led to his release. The case was then referred to another investigation committee that acquitted the accused. Ihab Alwazny's family continued demanding justice for him without getting any result.
14. On 10 March 2021, Jaseb Hatteb, father of HRD Ali Jaseb Hatteb, was assassinated by an unknown militant in the city of Amarah. The family of the human rights defender believes that Jaseb Hatteb was assassinated as result of his efforts to find his son Ali Jaseb Hatteb who was abducted by a militant group in the city of Maysan on 8 October 2019. Ali Jaseb Hattab is a human rights lawyer, as well as a member of the Advocates for the Protesters Rights Commission. His work consisted in documenting human rights violations in Iraq. The HRD's whereabouts remain unknown.
15. HRDs Abd Alqudous Alhelfy and Karar Adel were fatally shot by armed persons on 10 March 2020 while they were going home. Both HRDs received death threats from militant groups during their participation in the Tishreen protests. Abd Alqudous Alhelfy was an actor and director who set up theatre productions on human rights themes. Karar Adel worked as a human rights lawyer and defended protesters who were detained during the peaceful demonstrations. In addition, he was one of the leading voices that demanded justice for the killing of HRD Majeed Al Dahami (also known as Amjad Al Dahamat) who was also killed.
16. On 6 November 2019, HRD Majeed Al Dahami was assassinated by an unknown group 500 meters away from the Maysan police station after attending a meeting with the Director of the Maysan Police. Majeed Al Dahami was an English language teacher, was chosen as peace ambassador by the youth of Maysan in 2014, and was an active member in the Teachers ans Musicians Union. Prior to his death, Majeed Al Dahami received many death threats. He also faced many defamation campaigns on social media.
17. Some HRDs, such as Jawad Alhreshawi, have survived more than one killing attempt but as a consequence, had to leave the country. Jawad Alhershawi was one of the coordinators of the protest movements in Maysan Governorate. He faced two killing attempts by unknown persons, the first on 17 November 2019 in Al-Maimouna District, and the second on 22 November 2019 in Maysan Governorate. Furthermore, militant groups published Jawad Alhrehawi's name and pictures as a wanted person on social media. In June and November 2021 Jawad was summoned to appear in court, and in 2023 an arrest warrant was issued against him.
18. On 22 December 2019, HRD Hasan Albahadly, a prominent human rights defender and human right advocate that documented and participated to the protests in Maysan, was chased and shot by a car

while travelling to his workplace which caused him severe injury. He was left paralysed for the rest of his life. The investigation around the incident did not lead to any findings nor ensure accountability.

19. HRD Nawaf Al Badri was one of the participants of the 2019 protests. He advocated for human rights, equality, and freedoms. He received direct threats from militias during his participation to the Tishrin protest tent was attacked and burned. Nawaf Al Badri's name was published on social media as wanted by many militias. On 2 December 2020, Nawaf Al Badri's house was targeted with an explosive bomb, which forced him to relocate to Kurdistan. On 8 December 2020, Nawaf Al Badri's house was raided by a militia without a judicial warrant and his brother was arrested and tortured.
20. On 4 October 2019, HRD Hamza Aldarajy was chased by a car that he assumed wanted to kidnap him. Hamza Aldarajy's name was included in two investigative documents issued in November 2019 by the Ministry of Interior targeting human right activists in Maysan Governorate. Moreover, many militant groups sent threatening letters to Hamza Aldarajy's father warning him about his son's human right work. These threats led Hamza Aldarajy to leave the country.
21. HRD journalists who tried to covered the protests also faced intense harassment as a result of this work. Following the October 2019 protests in Iraq, HRD Wala Jabbar established an online radio broadcast which focused on covering the protests and documenting violations against demonstrators. Consequently, Wala Jabbar received many direct death threats by the Militia "Saraia AL Salam" telling him to close the radio and stop covering the protests. In December 2019, Wala Jabbar was chased by a car carrying armed persons who threatened to kill him. On 27 November 2020, the militias destroyed the caravan in which the radio and its equipment were located. Until today, Wala Jabbar who left Dhi Qar still receives death threats, despite leaving Dhi Qar.

Continuous judicial harassment of journalists and HRDs, including WHRDs

22. In addition to the lack of accountability for the many extra-judicial killings and physical attacks against HRDs particularly between 2019 and 2021, the government is judicially harassing HRDs to silence them. Countless lawsuits and legal complaints have been lodged against HRDs in all governorates by representatives of government institutions to intimidate them and ultimately stop them from doing their work. These cases are used to silence dissent and suppress freedom of expression. HRDs are often charged with defamation of state institutions, breaching public order and public morals, and communicating with foreign actors. An example of this trend is the case of HRD and journalist Yasser Al Hamdani, who was charged with "slander" and "defamation" after drawing attention to administrative and financial corruption in a government agency on social media and in interviews he was conducting. Fortunately, the Court ruled to dismiss the charges on the basis that there was not sufficient evidence to support the crime in accordance with Article 433 of the Iraqi Penal Code Law No. 111 of 1969.

Legal harassment takes a toll on the work and morale of HRDs, and there are concerns that this will likely happen again. A number of HRDs that Front Line Defenders have spoken to have reported that the government is monitoring their actions and is preparing files that can be activated and lead to more legal actions when needed. This tactic is also illustrated in the cases of HRD Jawad Alhershawi (see para. 17) and HRD Hamza Aldarajy (see para. 20).

Specific impacts on women human rights defenders (WHRDs)

24. WHRDs are constantly subjected to social stigma and direct threats that affect them and their families. They live in a context of conflict and insecurity as a result of discriminatory laws, tribal and patriarchal customs and traditions. Some of them told us that they were expelled together with their families from the clan and from the area in which they lived as a result of their participation in the demonstrations which began in October 2019.
25. WHRDs have been subjected to smear campaigns on social media due to their participation in protests and have been specifically targeted for abduction and killing, particularly in the southern city of Basra. On 17 August 2020, a WHRD working for Al Firdaws was the victim of an

assassination attempt outside her home in Basra. She was shot at by several unknown men in a car and sustained injuries to her leg.

26. Another WHRD told Front Line Defenders that on 26 November 2019, two persons tried to kidnap her son while he was with her attending protests in Al Nasiriyah, Iraq. She asked the court to allow access to surveillance cameras at the location of the incident but the court denied her request.
27. All WHRDs who contributed information for this UPR submission asked to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Recommendations

The government of Iraq should prioritise the protection of HRDs by :

a) Ensuring all perpetrators of violence against HRDs are held accountable, and ensure the relevant judicial mechanisms remain impartial and uphold the rule of law;
b) Cease the criminalization of HRDs, including HRD journalists, for their peaceful campaigns for justice and reform and ensure the right to peacefully assemble and protest;
c) Strengthen the legal framework by improving draft national legislation to ensure greater protection for HRDs, including HRD journalists, including by amending laws such as the draft laws on Cybercrimes, freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly and Access of Information;
d) Ensure that national legislation is in line with international human rights standards and obligations, and amend laws to bring them into compliance as necessary;
e) Strengthen cooperation between civil society and the government to enhance protection and ensure a safe and enabling environment for HRDs;
f) Cease judicial harassment of HRDs, including HRD journalists;
g) Guarantee freedom of expression and assembly, and call on the authorities to end repressive practices against demonstrators, HRDs, including HRD journalists, and to guarantee their right to peaceful demonstration;
h) Adopt and implement policies and laws that protect WHRDs from all forms of violence and discrimination;
i) Reverse the media ban on the terms “homosexuality” and “gender” with a view to enabling HRDs working for gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights to continue their work without stigma;
j) Repeal the “Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law”, with a view to enabling HRDs working for gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights to continue their work safely.

Introduction

1. This submission examines Iraq's compliance with its international human right obligations to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for defenders, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). It draws attention to the difficult situation of HRDs in Iraq since the previous UPR session in November 2019. Iraqi HRDs and journalists work in an increasingly hostile environment.

Context impacting the situation of human rights defenders in Iraq

2. The Tishreen protests that took place between 2019 and 2021 in Iraq started on 1 October 2019 and focused on the high level of corruption and unemployment, and poor public service delivery. The protests started in central Iraq, and through social media, spread quickly to the southern provinces. As the intensity of the demonstrations peaked in late October 2019, protesters' called not only for a complete overhaul of the Iraqi government but also for Iranian authorities influence to be driven out, including the Iranian-aligned militias and parties.
3. In response, the Iraqi government responded with wide scale arrests and violent crackdown reportedly using live bullets, hot water, gas and tear gas against peaceful protesters. State and government-affiliated non-state actors' systematic use of lethal force led to the suppression of most protests movements in Iraq and the restriction of the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.
4. As will be demonstrated in the sections below, HRDs including journalists who organised, covered, or simply participated in the demonstrations were targeted. They were killed, abducted or arbitrarily arrested by State and government-affiliated non-state actors. Human rights reports indicate that almost 500 demonstrators were killed during the peaceful Tishreen protests and approximately 2,800 arrested. These numbers include HRDs and journalists. It is also important to note that since the Tishreen protests, various intimidation tactics continue to be used against HRDs and journalists.
5. Over the 5 year UPR reporting period since 2019, the government of Iraq has not only failed to ensure accountability for the extra-judicial killings of HRDs, including journalists, that took place between 2019-2021, it also actively continued to target HRDs , notably by building and using legal files against them.
6. Militias and armed groups affiliated with Iran responsible for violence against protesters in 2019 were subsequently elected in the 2021 elections and are now part of the Iraqi parliament. As a result of the rise and legitimisation of these groups, the Iraqi government is even less willing to tolerate dissent or criticism than prior to the elections, which in turn has created a more challenging environment for HRDs.
7. In the last year, the environment for civil society further deteriorated as the parliament re-introduced draft laws which, if passed, would curtail freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. This includes draft laws on Cybercrimes, on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly and on Access of Information.
8. Furthermore, an anti-gender/LGBTQI+ campaign that started during 2023 has impacted the work of HRDs, and especially women's right organisations. A directive issued by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission banned the use of the word "gender" and prohibited any activities or events related to the concept. Influential forces in the Iraqi government also issued statements calling for Iraq's withdrawal from relevant international conventions that it had previously ratified. Gender was presented as a serious moral threat to society, and incorrectly linked to homosexuality, perversion and the destruction of society.
9. Amendments passed in April 2024 to the "Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law" have criminalised LGBTQI+ people by increasing the penalties for those engaging in same-sex relations, and who undergo and perform gender-affirming surgery. It also made it impossible for local organisations to continue their work supporting the LGBTQI+ community as it bans any organisation that promotes "sexual deviancy", imposing a sentence of at least seven years and a fine of no less than 10m dinars (about 7,000 euros).

Killings and physical attacks of HRDs, including journalists, involved in protests

10. Under Iraq's previous UPR examination in 2019, the government received a number of recommendations that relate to the protection of HRDs, journalists and media professionals as well as the investigation of all instances of disappearances and death of protesters, HRDs and journalists that took place during the protests. However, as documented below, the government has failed to implement these recommendations.
11. Between 2019 and 2021, HRDs including WHRDs, who organised or participated in peaceful demonstrations, and journalists who covered them were subjected to killing and killing attempts, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance. The environment for HRDswas endangered in 2019 and onward by the proliferation of armed groups affiliated with government institutions or political parties. To date, HRDs continue to be subjected to intimidation and judicial harassment for their participation in the protests.
12. The cases of killing and attempted killings of defenders documented by Front Line Defenders hereunder demonstrate a climate of insecurity, inadequate protection and impunity for the killing of HRDs in Iraq. This unsafe environment creates a chilling effect on other HRDs who legitimately fears for their life and their families' lives. Family members that have spoken openly about the abduction and disappearance of their family members have also put their life at risk by doing so.
13. On 9 May 2021, Ihab Alwazny, a prominent HRD and one of the heads of the coordination committee of the protests in Karbala was killed by an unknown armed group in front of his house in Karbalaa, Iraq. Ihab Alwazny received many death threats from militant groups because of his leading role. After his death, his mother and brother, the lawyer Marwan Alwazny, accused a leading figure in the Popular Mobilization Forces of killing Ihab Alwazny and presented evidence that supported this accusation. As a consequence, a special investigation committee was formed to examine the assassination case. The committee heard the evidence presented by Ihab's family and decided to refer the case to the judiciary which issued an arrest order against the accused. But the intervention of the armed group which the accused belonged to led to his release. The case was then referred to another investigation committee that acquitted the accused. Ihab Alwazny's family continued demanding justice for him without getting any result.
14. On 10 March 2021, Jaseb Hatteb, father of HRD Ali Jaseb Hatteb, was assassinated by an unknown militant in the city of Amarah. The family of the human rights defender believes that Jaseb Hatteb was assassinated as result of his efforts to find his son Ali Jaseb Hatteb who was abducted by a militant group in the city of Maysan on 8 October 2019. Ali Jaseb Hattab is a human rights lawyer, as well as a member of the Advocates for the Protesters Rights Commission. His work consisted in documenting human rights violations in Iraq. The HRD's whereabouts remain unknown.
15. HRDs Abd Alqudous Alhelfy and Karar Adel were fatally shot by armed persons on 10 March 2020 while they were going home. Both HRDs received death threats from militant groups during their participation in the Tishreen protests. Abd Alqudous Alhelfy was an actor and director who set up theatre productions on human rights themes. Karar Adel worked as a human rights lawyer and defended protesters who were detained during the peaceful demonstrations. In addition, he was one of the leading voices that demanded justice for the killing of HRD Majeed Al Dahami (also known as Amjad Al Dahamat) who was also killed.
16. On 6 November 2019, HRD Majeed Al Dahami was assassinated by an unknown group 500 meters away from the Maysan police station after attending a meeting with the Director of the Maysan Police. Majeed Al Dahami was an English language teacher, was chosen as peace ambassador by the youth of Maysan in 2014, and was an active member in the Teachers ans Musicians Union. Prior to his death, Majeed Al Dahami received many death threats. He also faced many defamation campaigns on social media.
17. Some HRDs, such as Jawad Alhreshawi, have survived more than one killing attempt but as a consequence, had to leave the country. Jawad Alhershawi was one of the coordinators of the protest movements in Maysan Governorate. He faced two killing attempts by unknown persons, the first on 17 November 2019 in Al-Maimouna District, and the second on 22 November 2019 in Maysan Governorate. Furthermore, militant groups published Jawad Alhrehawi's name and pictures as a wanted person on social media. In June and November 2021 Jawad was summoned to appear in court, and in 2023 an arrest warrant was issued against him.
18. On 22 December 2019, HRD Hasan Albahadly, a prominent human rights defender and human right advocate that documented and participated to the protests in Maysan, was chased and shot by a car while travelling to his workplace which caused him severe injury. He was left paralysed for the rest of his life. The investigation around the incident did not lead to any findings nor ensure accountability.

19. HRD Nawaf Al Badri was one of the participants of the 2019 protests. He advocated for human rights, equality, and freedoms. He received direct threats from militias during his participation to the Tishrin protest tent was attacked and burned. Nawaf Al Badri's name was published on social media as wanted by many militias. On 2 December 2020, Nawaf Al Badri's house was targeted with an explosive bomb, which forced him to relocate to Kurdistan. On 8 December 2020, Nawaf Al Badri's house was raided by a militia without a judicial warrant and his brother was arrested and tortured.
20. On 4 October 2019, HRD Hamza Aldarajy was chased by a car that he assumed wanted to kidnap him. Hamza Aldarajy's name was included in two investigative documents issued in November 2019 by the Ministry of Interior targeting human right activists in Maysan Governorate. Moreover, many militant groups sent threatening letters to Hamza Aldarajy's father warning him about his son's human right work. These threats led Hamza Aldarajy to leave the country.
21. HRD journalists who tried to covered the protests also faced intense harassment as a result of this work. Following the October 2019 protests in Iraq, HRD Wala Jabbar established an online radio broadcast which focused on covering the protests and documenting violations against demonstrators. Consequently, Wala Jabbar received many direct death threats by the Militia "Saraia AL Salam" telling him to close the radio and stop covering the protests. In December 2019, Wala Jabbar was chased by a car carrying armed persons who threatened to kill him. On 27 November 2020, the militias destroyed the caravan in which the radio and its equipment were located. Until today, Wala Jabbar who left Dhi Qar still receives death threats, despite leaving Dhi Qar.

Continuous judicial harassment of journalists and HRDs, including WHRDs

22. In addition to the lack of accountability for the many extra-judicial killings and physical attacks against HRDs particularly between 2019 and 2021, the government is judicially harassing HRDs to silence them. Countless lawsuits and legal complaints have been lodged against HRDs in all governorates by representatives of government institutions to intimidate them and ultimately stop them from doing their work. These cases are used to silence dissent and suppress freedom of expression. HRDs are often charged with defamation of state institutions, breaching public order and public morals, and communicating with foreign actors. An example of this trend is the case of HRD and journalist Yasser Al Hamdani, who was charged with "slander" and "defamation" after drawing attention to administrative and financial corruption in a government agency on social media and in interviews he was conducting. Fortunately, the Court ruled to dismiss the charges on the basis that there was not sufficient evidence to support the crime in accordance with Article 433 of the Iraqi Penal Code Law No. 111 of 1969.
23. Legal harassment takes a toll on the work and morale of HRDs, and there are concerns that this will likely happen again. A number of HRDs that Front Line Defenders have spoken to have reported that the government is monitoring their actions and is preparing files that can be activated and lead to more legal actions when needed. This tactic is also illustrated in the cases of HRD Jawad Alhershawi (see para. 17) and HRD Hamza Aldarajy (see para. 20).

Specific impacts on women human rights defenders (WHRDs)

24. WHRDs are constantly subjected to social stigma and direct threats that affect them and their families. They live in a context of conflict and insecurity as a result of discriminatory laws, tribal and patriarchal customs and traditions. Some of them told us that they were expelled together with their families from the clan and from the area in which they lived as a result of their participation in the demonstrations which began in October 2019.
25. WHRDs have been subjected to smear campaigns on social media due to their participation in protests and have been specifically targeted for abduction and killing, particularly in the southern city of Basra. On 17 August 2020, a WHRD working for Al Firdaws was the victim of an assassination attempt outside her home in Basra. She was shot at by several unknown men in a car and sustained injuries to her leg.
26. Another WHRD told Front Line Defenders that on 26 November 2019, two persons tried to kidnap her son while he was with her attending protests in Al Nasiriyah, Iraq. She asked the court to allow access to surveillance cameras at the location of the incident but the court denied her request.

27. All WHRDs who contributed information for this UPR submission asked to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Recommendations

The government of Iraq should prioritise the protection of HRDs by :

a) Ensuring all perpetrators of violence against HRDs are held accountable, and ensure the relevant judicial mechanisms remain impartial and uphold the rule of law;
b) Cease the criminalization of HRDs, including HRD journalists, for their peaceful campaigns for justice and reform and ensure the right to peacefully assemble and protest;
c) Strengthen the legal framework by improving draft national legislation to ensure greater protection for HRDs, including HRD journalists, including by amending laws such as the draft laws on Cybercrimes, freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly and Access of Information;
d) Ensure that national legislation is in line with international human rights standards and obligations, and amend laws to bring them into compliance as necessary;
e) Strengthen cooperation between civil society and the government to enhance protection and ensure a safe and enabling environment for HRDs;
f) Cease judicial harassment of HRDs, including HRD journalists;
g) Guarantee freedom of expression and assembly, and call on the authorities to end repressive practices against demonstrators, HRDs, including HRD journalists, and to guarantee their right to peaceful demonstration;
h) Adopt and implement policies and laws that protect WHRDs from all forms of violence and discrimination;
i) Reverse the media ban on the terms “homosexuality” and “gender” with a view to enabling HRDs working for gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights to continue their work without stigma;
j) Repeal the “Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law”, with a view to enabling HRDs working for gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights to continue their work safely.