

PUBLIC

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UA 159/08 Enforced disappearance/Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

IRAQ Rezgar Raza Chouchani (m), aged 31, journalist

Journalist Rezgar Raza Chouchani has not been seen since 3 June, when he was summoned to the headquarters of the Zeravani intelligence agency in the region of Iraqi Kurdistan. He had written about corruption in the agency, and its officials had apparently threatened him.

The Zeravani intelligence agency is part of the Peshmergas, who provide security in Iraqi Kurdistan for the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). They summoned Rezgar Raza Chouchani to their offices in the town of Masief Salah al-Din, just outside Erbil, on 3 June. His brother went with him; the Zeravani officials told him to leave, and said that Rezgar Raza Chouchani would be fine. No one has seen or heard from Rezgar Raza Chouchani since then.

Rezgar Raza Chouchani wrote for a magazine owned by Zeravani, the *Zeravani Kurdistan* until mid-May, when he resigned to write for the newspaper *Berzan* and also became the editor of a website called Horakurd. According to other journalists he has published several articles critical of corruption in the KDP administration, including the Zeravani intelligence agency. He has apparently received threats from Zeravani officials telling him to stop writing about this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Opponents of the authorities in the Kurdish region of Iraq are routinely arrested and sometimes tortured. Journalists are at particular risk.

Journalist Mohammad Siyassi Ashkani was arrested in January 2007 and held him without charge for almost six months. He spent the first 55 days in solitary confinement. He was then allowed weekly family visits, but never had access to a lawyer.

Former prisoners have reported being tortured by methods including beatings, electric shocks to various parts of the body and *falaqa* (beating on the soles of the feet).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, Kurdish, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that journalist Rezgar Raza Chouchani has not been seen since 3 June, when he went to the headquarters of Zeravani, where he had been summoned;
- calling on the authorities to tell his family where he is, and to allow them and his lawyer to visit him without delay;
- calling on them to ensure that he is either charged with a recognizably criminal offence or released immediately;
- asking them to ensure that he is treated humanely in custody, and not tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

APPEALS TO:

IMPORTANT: please send appeals to these ministers via the KRG offices overseas (list sent separately). You can also target them directly where contact information is provided.

Prime Minister
Nechirvan Idris Barzani
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister for the Interior
Osman Hajy Mohamood
Email: interior_minister_sul@yahoo.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice
Farooq Jamil Sadiq
Email: dad@mojkurdistan.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister for Peshmerga Affairs
Omar Osman Ibrahim
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Human Rights
Dr Yousif M. Aziz

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 July 2008.