

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST'S FATE REMAINS UNKNOWN

On 2 November 2019, Iraqi activist and medic Saba Mahdawi was abducted by armed and masked men at around 11:20 pm on her way home from Tahrir Square in Baghdad. Saba's family has raised her case with the local authorities, but no progress has been made to date. The Iraqi police and other security personnel involved in the investigation confirmed to her family that her whereabouts remained unknown, with no additional information with regards to the perpetrators' identity.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Dr. Yassin Taher al-Yassiri

Minister of Interior

Al-Kailan neighbourhood behind Al-Shaab Stadium

Website: <https://moi.gov.iq/>

Phone: 00964130

Email: infor@moi.gov.iq

Dear Minister Yassin Taher al-Yassiri,

On 2 November 2019, Iraqi activist and medic **Saba Mahdawi** was abducted by armed and masked men as she was on her way back home from Tahrir Square in Baghdad. Saba Mahdawi had been participating and volunteering as a medic in the protests. At 11:20 pm, while speaking on phone with her employer, Saba began screaming, after which the call ended, and her phone was switched off. Saba's employer then immediately notified the family; her family went to the local police station to report the incident.

Since her abduction on 2 November 2019, Saba's family has been in regular touch with the local authorities. The Iraqi police and other security personnel involved in Saba's case reported that they had launched an investigation, but to date, no further information was relayed to the family and it is unclear what further steps the local authorities are taking. Saba is believed to be in a life-threatening situation.

Since the beginning of the mass protests across the country, many journalists and activists have been threatened and targeted. Authorities have failed to carry out independent and impartial investigations into the abuses committed against activists, journalists and other protesters. Unfortunately, it appears that armed groups may also be involved in the campaign to silence free speech and the freedoms of assembly and movement.

I call on you to urgently take all necessary steps to ensure that all efforts to clarify the whereabouts and wellbeing of Saba Mahdawi are made, including through coordinating the efforts of all police and other agencies; and that the authorities ensure that her immediate family is informed of every step of the investigation on a regular basis in a timely manner.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the beginning of October 2019, mass protests broke out across Iraq fueled by high rates of unemployment and perceptions of widespread corruption. From the very beginning, protesters demanding basic services and an end to corruption have been met with unlawful and excessive force including tear gas, live ammunition and sniper fire. In addition to excessive use of force, [Iraqi security forces have beaten, arrested and disappeared activists, lawyers and journalists](#). So far, 220 documented deaths during the month of October. This is an underestimate as more [deaths were recorded](#) in the first week of November. Amnesty International has been documenting cases of abduction and disappearances of activists and journalists since the beginning of the protests.

In one case, relatives of Ali Jaseb al-Hattab, a 29-year-old lawyer representing arrested protesters, told Amnesty that he was bundled away by what he suspected to be members of a faction of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) on the evening of 8 October 2019. The ambush took place two days after two armed men from the PMU came to his home to warn him to stop being vocal about the killing of protesters. To this date, the whereabouts of al-Hattab remain unknown.

In a similar case, Maytham Mohammed Rahim al-Helo, a 51-year-old doctor and activist was last seen leaving his clinic in Baghdad on the evening of 7 October 2019. His relatives reported his disappearance to local authorities but were told they were unaware of his arrest or whereabouts. According to information made available to Amnesty, members of the security forces stated that this incident was intended to “truly scare him”. Maytham has now been released.

No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction of Saba to date. The local authorities claim that they investigated but have no information as to her whereabouts or the identity of her abductees.

Amnesty has also documented cases in cities other than Baghdad where the security forces have chased protesters down and arrested them during protests in the city of Basra. Protesters were beaten and held for several hours without being given a reason; they were then forced to sign pledges, under threat of imprisonment, that they would not take part in the protests again.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 20 December 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Saba Mahdawi (her/she)