

URGENT ACTION

PHOTOGRAPHER ABDUCTED OUTSIDE HIS HOME

On 6 December 2019, 22-year-old Iraqi photographer Zaid Mohammed Abid al-Khafaji was abducted from the doorsteps of his house in Baghdad, Iraq, by four men in civilian clothes who dragged him into a car and drove off. His family raised his case with the local authorities, who told them that they will investigate.

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

Email: infor@moi.gov.iq

Dear Minister Yassin Taher al-Yassiri,

On 6 December, a few minutes after 4am, four men in a 4x4 car abducted 22-year-old photographer Zaid Mohammed Abid al-Khafaji from the doorsteps of his house in Baghdad, Iraq. The four men, dressed in civilian clothes and not masked, were seen on CCTV footage captured from cameras outside Zaid's house. The local authorities have launched an investigation but his whereabouts remain unknown to this day.

Zaid Mohammed Abid al-Khafaji has been going to Baghdad's Tahrir Square to take photographs of the mass protests every day since they broke out on 1 October. Every night/early morning, he is dropped off by his friend at his house in Baghdad's al-Qahera neighborhood after attending the protests. Zaid's family is not aware of him having received any threats prior to his abduction.

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. There is evidence that security forces maybe involved in the campaign to intimidate and silence protesters, activists and journalists.

I call on you to urgently use all resources at your disposal to find Zaid Mohammed Abid al-Khafaji and secure his safe return to his family, immediately investigate his abduction, in accordance with Iraq's obligations under international human rights law, and keep his family informed of developments in the investigation on a regular basis and in a timely manner.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the beginning of October 2019, mass protests have broken out across Iraq, fuelled 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 forcibly disappeared activists, lawyers and journalists. There have been 400 documented deaths and more than 18,000 injured since October. [Amnesty International has been documenting cases of abduction and enforced disappearances of activists and journalists since the beginning of the protests.](#)

In one case, the relatives of Ali Jaseb al-Hattab, a 29-year-old lawyer representing arrested protesters, told Amnesty International that he was bundled away by who they 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 fate and whereabouts of al-Hattab remain unknown.

Outside of Baghdad, in the city of Basra, Amnesty International has also documented cases where the security forces have chased protesters down and arrested them. 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 January 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Zaid Mohammed Abid al-Khafaji (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a