

PUBLIC

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Incommunicado detention / Fear of torture and ill-treatment

31 May 2006

IRAQ

Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi (m) aged 30

Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi, an Iraqi and Libyan citizen, who works at the Al-Fateh University in Tripoli, Libya, was abducted on 25 February, while on a visit to Irbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. He is reportedly being held incommunicado by members of Peshmerga, the primary security service of the Kurdish regional government. Amnesty International is gravely concerned that he has been tortured and/or ill-treated.

Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi was on a visit to Irbil to see his relatives and get married when he, his mother, and his wife were abducted from in front of their hotel and detained by the Peshmerga forces. They were taken to an unknown location where Zakaria's mother, Khalda Abdel-Qader, was forced to sign a paper relinquishing her rights to property she owned in Mosul to the kidnappers. She and Zakaria's wife Vianne Abdullah were released three days later. Khalda Abdel-Qader was told that her son would be released if a ransom of USD 200,000 is paid. This was the last time she saw him.

Since her return to Libya, the kidnappers have allegedly contacted Khalda Abdel-Qader at least 10 times demanding the money, and threatening her that they will kill her son if they do not receive it. She has at times been allowed to speak to him. The last call she received from the kidnappers was in April 2006. On 29 May she was contacted by an anonymous caller who refused to identify himself, but who told her that her son is reportedly being held in an unofficial detention centre, known as Al-Museef, in Irbil. The caller allegedly also told her that Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi is being beaten and tortured every day.

Khalda Abdel-Qader has contacted Jalal Talabani, President of Iraq, and Mas'ud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan region inquiring about her son's whereabouts. Despite promises from Jalal Talabani that her son would soon be released, Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi's whereabouts remain unknown. A prominent Iraqi Sunni leader, Salah al-Mutlaq, has also been assisting her in her efforts to secure the release of her son.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 1991 some areas of northern Iraq have been controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). These Kurdish-controlled areas enjoyed substantial autonomy even while Saddam Hussein was in power, and have continued to do so after the 30 January 2005 elections in Iraq for both the National Assembly and a Kurdish Assembly. PUK Secretary General Jalal Talabani was selected by the National Assembly as President of Iraq on 22 April, and KDP leader Mas'ud Barzani was selected by the Kurdish Assembly as President of the Kurdistan region.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the torture of Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi who was abducted on 25 February, allegedly by Peshmerga forces;
- expressing concern that Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi remains in incommunicado detention and may be at risk of further torture or ill-treatment;
- seeking clarification of the reasons for his detention;
- requesting information of his current whereabouts and calling for his immediate release unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling for allegations of torture against the Zakaria Yehia Al-Zuhairi to be promptly and fully investigated and for anyone found responsible for abuse to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Please send appeals via the Kurdish Regional Government offices abroad, asking for them to be forwarded to President Mas'ud Barzani and President Jalal Talabani:

The Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil

Fax: +1 651 846 6051

Email: erbil@rp.krg.org

KRG Representation in CIS countries

Moscow, Russian Federation

Fax: +7 095 248 4450

Email: rus@rp.krg.org

KRG Representation in Austria

Vertretung der Regionalregierung Kurdistan-Irak in Österreich

P.O. Box 49

A-1011 Vienna, Austria

Fax: +43 1 544 0305

Email: austria@rp.krg.org

KRG Mission to the European Union

rue de la loi 221

1040 Brussels

BELGIUM

Fax: +32 2 513 3679

Email: eu@rp.krg.org

KRG Representation in France

Fax: +33 1 42 65 1846

Email: france@rp.krg.org

KRG Representation in Germany

Vertretung der Regionalregierung-Kurdistan Irak in Deutschland

P.O. Box 150 101

D-10633 Berlin, Germany

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Email: germany@rp.krg.org

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SE-170 07 Solna

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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Iraq accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 July 2006.