

URGENT ACTION

TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR DISAPPEARED ACTIVIST

On 19 September 2020, a group of armed men abducted Sajjad al-Iraqi, a prominent protester and activist involved in the 2019 *Tishreen* [October] protest movement, from a vehicle he was travelling in with his friends in Nasiriya, Thi Qar governorate, Iraq. More than three years after his abduction, his whereabouts remain unknown, and his family have been subjected to threats as they pursue truth and justice. On 22 March 2023, the Thi Qar Criminal Court sentenced to death in absentia two individuals convicted for kidnapping Sajjad al-Iraqi, but no arrests have been made. The Iraqi authorities must reveal the fate and whereabouts of Sajjad al-Iraqi, ensure his family is protected from reprisals, and hold those found to be responsible to account in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

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

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani

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Your Excellency,

I am alarmed to learn that activist **Sajjad al-Iraqi's** whereabouts remain unknown over three years after he was forcibly disappeared and that his captors have not been arrested or held to account.

On 19 September 2020, a group of armed men abducted Sajjad al-Iraqi (from a vehicle he was travelling in with his friends in Thi Qar, Nasiriya) for his role in the nation-wide anti-government protests known as the "Tishreen" [October] protests, which began in October 2019. Sajjad al-Iraqi is a prominent activist who had been involved in civil society activism for years, including documenting corruption. He was described by one of his friends as having been the "spokesperson for Tishreen since October 2019."

I am also alarmed to learn that Sajjad al-Iraqi's family have been subjected to numerous threats by people believed to be linked to the abductors and to the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), a large network of militias legally considered part of the Iraqi Armed Forces. These individuals have on several occasions pressured Sajjad al-Iraqi's family to drop their court case against Sajjad al-Iraqi's abductors, including by showing up at the family's home at least four times.

On 15 November 2020, the Thi Qar Appeals Court issued arrest warrants for two individuals for the kidnapping of Sajjad al-Iraqi, but neither suspect was arrested. On 22 March 2023, the Thi Qar Criminal Court [sentenced](#) these two individuals to death in absentia for kidnapping Sajjad al-Iraqi, but to date, neither of them have been apprehended.

A family member told Amnesty International that during a meeting with Your Excellency nine months ago, you promised to follow up on Sajjad al-Iraqi's case. However, to date, Sajjad al-Iraqi's whereabouts remain unknown, and no arrests have yet been made in his case. A relative told Amnesty International, "There is no interest in Sajjad's case. It is just false promises and reassurances. It is just ink on paper."

We call on Your Excellency to urgently order investigations to reveal the fate and whereabouts of Sajjad al-Iraqi and to ensure his family members are protected from threats and reprisals. We also call on the authorities to order a re-trial of the defendants in their presence and in a manner that respects international standards without recourse to the death penalty.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During the mass anti-government protests that began in October 2019, known as the *Tishreen* [October] protests, security forces including security forces and members of the [Popular Mobilization Units \(PMU\)](#), a large network of militias legally considered part of the Iraqi Armed Forces, used lethal force against protestors and pursued a sinister campaign of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Very few prosecutions of members of security forces or affiliated militias have taken place for their role in violence against protestors and activists. In a [report](#) released in June 2022, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) was only able to identify the conviction of four “unidentified armed elements” since May 2021 and of six members of the security forces for targeted shootings, killings and abductions. The report added: “UNAMI/OHCHR was unable to identify any other cases that progressed beyond the investigative stage during the reporting period.”

Since 2019, successive Iraqi governments have formed numerous committees to investigate violations committed in the context of the protests at the national and governorate level, but these committees have failed to deliver on truth or justice.

The most notable was the ‘Fact-Finding Committee’, established by Executive Order 293 issued by then-Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on 18 October 2020 with the [goal](#) of gathering evidence, publishing a comprehensive report, and identifying those responsible for the crimes committed. Under the decree, the Committee has the right to refer cases to the judiciary. However there has been no transparency as to whether this has occurred.

In a [letter](#) from Prime Minister Shia al-Sudani’s Office to Amnesty International on 2 April 2023, the Office said that “the Prime Minister ordered in November 2022 the activation of the work of the [Fact-Finding] committee and outreach to representatives from the demonstrators.” The Prime Minister’s Office outlined measures the Fact-Finding Committee had taken, including having looked into “more than 215 cases obtained from the Rusafa Central Investigative Court and reviewed more than 5,375 official documents that included medical reports, victim autopsy forms and reports of forensic experts, and the committee continues to examine documents received from courts of appeal.” The Prime Minister also confirmed that reparations had been paid to the families of those killed, amounting to ten million Iraqi dinars for each victim.

However, reparations are not a substitute for establishing the truth or bringing perpetrators to justice, and nearly three years after it was formed, the Fact-Finding Committee has yet to publish any findings.

Enforced disappearance is currently not a crime under Iraqi law and therefore cannot be prosecuted as a distinct offence. On 6 August 2023, the Iraqi Council of Ministers issued a [draft](#) “Missing Persons Law” and sent it to Parliament. The draft’s stated aim is to help relatives of the missing learn their fate and be given access to reparations, including by setting up a national commission for the missing. Yet, this draft law does not criminalize enforced disappearance or outline penalties for perpetrators. As a state party to the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearance, Iraq has an obligation to criminalize enforced disappearances, investigate, bring perpetrators to justice, and ensure reparation for victims.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 27 December 2023

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Sajjad al-Iraqi (he/him)