

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iraq-death-threats-and-targeted-28-02-2011,39637.html>

Spate of incidents

Death threats and targeted physical attacks in journalists on Iraqi Kurdistan

28 February 2011

Reporters Without Borders wrote today to Massoud Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, voicing deep concern about the deterioration in the situation of journalists in his autonomous region since 17 February.

The letter:

HE Massoud Barzani
President of the Kurdistan Regional Government
Office of the President
Erbil

Paris, 28 February 2011

Dear President Barzani,

In a [report released on 3 November](#), Reporters Without Borders said there was more press freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan than in surrounding regions and that the situation had improved considerably in the past 10 years. However we would now like to share with you our deep concern about the deterioration in the situation of journalists in your autonomous region since 17 February.

During the past 10 days, our organization has registered many physical attacks by the security forces on journalists covering the current demonstrations. Many journalists have also told us that they have received explicit death threats. Please find enclosed a list of these incidents, which is not exhaustive.

As president of the autonomous regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan, Reporters Without Borders urges you to do everything in your power to end these media freedom violations and to ensure that the safety of all journalists is guaranteed. We would also like these incidents to be investigated, especially the arson attack on the privately-owned TV station *NRT* on 20 February.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our request.

Sincerely,

Jean-François Julliard
Reporters Without Borders secretary-general

A non-exhaustive list of incidents targeting media personnel during the past 10 days

* 27 February – incidents at Erbil

► **Allan Sahebqrran**, a reporter for the newspaper *Hawlati*, was attacked by men in civilian dress, who slashed his face.

"I was outside the headquarters of the Erbil governorate with other journalists," he said. "People in civilian dress ordered us to leave. At first they said they were police. Then they said they worked for the Asayesh [intelligence services]. We also saw their cards. We were then followed by 12 plainclothes members of the security forces. When we got to the centre of Erbil, they hit me. Some of them filmed what was happening while the others kept on hitting me. I filed a complaint and was able to recover my camera from the Asayesh a bit later but I did not get my mobile phone back. My neck still hurts."

► **Shwan Sidiq**, a reporter for **Civil Magazine**, told Reporters Without Borders that a man in civilian dress prevented him from taking photos of a demonstrator who had been injured in Erbil.

► **Garmiyani Hamay Pur**, a journalist with the satellite TV station *KNN*, said *KNN* cameraman **Rahman Nariman** was attacked in Kalar by members of the security forces of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), one of the two main parties that form the coalition government. His camera was taken and shots were fired at him.

► **Hemn Karim**, the editor of *Fshar*, and **Salman Kochari**, a reporter for *Standard Magazine*, told Reporters Without Borders they had received death threats.

*** 26 February, a series of incidents, above all at Kalar (100 km south of Sulaymaniyah)**

► **Garmiyani Hamay Pur**, a *KNN* journalist based in Kalar, told Reporters Without Borders that the security forces banned him from filming. *"I was told that the security forces had been ordered to hit journalists who covered the demonstrations. As a result, now only the partisan media can film during marches."*

► **Kawa Garmiyani**, a reporter for the newspaper *Awene*, was physically attacked by masked gunmen who seized his camera and recorder while covering clashes between police and demonstrators earlier in the day in Kalar.

► *Speda TV* journalist **Sarkawt Salam** and a photographer, **Sangar Hamid**, were attacked by gunmen. *"We were attacked without any reason while covering the demonstration,"* Salam told Reporters Without Borders.

► *Hawlati* reporter **Soran Ahmed** was accosted in Sulaymaniyah by members of the counter-terrorist forces led by Pavel Talabani, the son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who heads the other main ruling party in Kurdistan, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). *"They confiscated my camera and mobile phone,"* he told Reporters Without Borders. *"They also took my press card and the card issued by the Union of Journalists."*

► **Irfan Ahmed**, **Anwar Arab**, **Salam Haji** and **Nasih Abdulrahim** were arrested by security forces while covering a demonstration in Halabja (80 km east of Sulaymaniyah). They were taken to the mayor's office and were released an hour and a half later.

► Freelance journalist and writer **Soran Omar** said he had received many threatening SMS messages from different phone numbers after giving an interview on the TV station Payam. *"I think even Sulaymaniyah is not a place for independent journalists,"* he told Reporters Without Borders. He requested protection from the authorities and contacted the mobile phone company Asia Cell to request the identity of the owners of the SIM cards from which the threats were sent.

► **Bestun Jallayi**, the *Speda TV* bureau chief in Kalar, said he received a threatening SMS message in the evening. *"Wait for death's flood,"* the SMS said.

► Someone hacked into the Facebook pages of two influential writers and intellectuals, **Mariwan**

Wrya Qani and **Aras Fatah**, after they voiced support for the demonstrations. The Kurdistanpost.info news website was also blocked.

***25 February, many journalists report receiving death threats**

► **Niyaz Abdulla**, an Erbil-based reporter for *Radio Nawa*, told Reporters Without Borders she was threatened by security forces while outside the Erbil governorate's headquarters to cover a demonstration by young people in support of the Sulaymaniyah demonstrators. KDP supporters insulted her and threatened her with violence. When she left, she was followed by plainclothes officers until she found a taxi.

"Nowadays there is no point filing a complaint against the security forces," she said. She also said that security forces confiscated a camera from a journalist working for the newspaper *Rudaw*.

► **Latif Fatih Faraj**, a journalist with PUK links who heads the Journalists Union in Kirkuk said: *"I had just returned home after taking part in a live KNN programme on the demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah and other cities when I got a phone call. Describing himself as an important politician, the caller said he was going to kill me for criticising the KDP, which is led by Massoud Barzani, the autonomous Kurdistan region's president. His number? 0770 39 705 98."*

The head of the KDP in Kirkuk denied that his party could be responsible for such threats. *"So I called the PUK, the Asayesh and the police,"* Faraj added. *"The police offered to put me under the protection of bodyguards but I refused. My brothers and cousins are with me, to protect me if anything happens to me."*

► Members of a group of journalists based in Erbil were threatened after expressing support for the demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah. One of them, writer and political analyst **Salah Mazen**, wrote on Facebook: *"Someone called me last night and clearly advised me not to participate in the demonstrations organized in Erbil. He said if I wanted to demonstrate, I should just go to Sulaymaniyah. He said, word for word: 'If you value your life and love your children, stay quietly at home or leave Erbil for Sulaymaniyah.'"*

► **Shawqi Kanabi**, the head of the *KNN* bureau in Erbil, told Reporters Without Borders he had been warned that the station's bureau could be attacked if it filmed the demonstrations in Erbil.

► Freelance journalist **Barzan Ali Hama** was forced to leave Erbil after organizing a petition signed by a number of journalists that urged the region's parliament to find a solution to the current crisis and to ensure that those responsible for shooting on demonstrators were brought to justice. Several of the signatories, who asked not to be identified, withdrew their support after receiving threats from KDP supporters.

► **Kaywan Hawrani**, a freelance journalist based in Halabja, has also had to flee. One of his friends said: *"Kaywan was one of the organizers of the 23 February demonstration in Halabja during which a policeman was injured. Soon after the demonstration, the police began to arrest the organizers. Kaywan fled the town. The police are looking for him."*

► Meanwhile, a representative of the opposition party Goran said during a special parliamentary session on 23 February that six Peshmergas [Kurdish fighters] who were responsible for the arson attack on the [privately-owned TV station NRT](#) on 20 February were currently hospitalised because of the burns they sustained during the attack.

"We now know the people who were responsible for this attack but we have obtained no clear response from the interior ministry and intelligence services." He said. According some rumours, two of the Peshmergas involved were sent to Turkey for treatment because of the gravity of their burns.

[* Incidents already mentioned in a previous release](#)

* 21 February

- ▶ **Ageed Saleem**, an *NRT* reporter in Duhok, said he was threatened by a leading KDP member.

* 20 February

- ▶ Criminal raid of *Naliya Radio and Television (NRT)*, a new satellite TV station based in Sulaymaniyah.
- ▶ *KNN* reporter **Bryar Namiq** was badly injured by police and members of the *Asayesh*.
- ▶ *KURDIU* reporter **Balen Othman** was attacked and his camera was destroyed.
- ▶ **Goran Othman**, a journalist with the Islamic Group news website, was attacked.
- ▶ **Shaswar Mama**, an *NRT* reporter in Raniya, was accosted by members of the security forces.
- ▶ *KURDIU* reporter **Mukhlis Ahmed** was attacked in Raniya.
- ▶ Following its coverage of the previous day's events in Sulaymaniyah, staff at the newspaper *Hawlati* received a threatening phone call saying they should evacuate their Erbil office.

* 19 February

Police prevented many journalists from covering protests at the University of Sulaymaniyah.

- ▶ *Asayesh* beat *Hawlati* reporter **Ara Ibrahim** using batons.
- ▶ Police attacked a *KNN TV* crew.
- ▶ **Aras Muhammad**, the head of *Arasta magazine* and *Sound Radio*, was injured by members of the *Asayesh*.
- ▶ **Hardi Salami**, a reporter for the satellite TV station *Gali Kurdistan*, sustained a leg injury.
- ▶ *Payam* reporter **Wrya Ahmed** sustained injuries to the hands and legs when he was attacked by police.
- ▶ The Sulaymaniyah security committee also demanded university academic and intellectual Faruq Rafeeq's arrest after he said, while taking part in a demonstration in Sulaymaniyah on 17 February: "*Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, should apologize for the incidents and deaths caused by members of his party. Those who fired the fatal shots and those who gave them their orders should be arrested and brought to justice. And finally, the Peshmargas should leave the city.*"

* 18 February

- ▶ **Lutfi Doski**, a Duhok-based *KNN* reporter, was prevented from filming the premises of the Gorran party in Duhok.
- ▶ An *NRT* team was prevented from filming demonstrations.
- ▶ Reporters for the newspaper *Chatr* were forced to delete the photos they had taken of the demonstrations.
- ▶ Reporters for the newspaper *Hawlati* were prevented from filming incidents taking place in Sulaymaniyah.

* 17 February

- ▶ *Radio Gorran* was prevented from broadcasting.

- ▶ Police prevented *KNN* reporters from filming the incidents.
 - ▶ **Shwan Muhammad**, the editor of the newspaper *Awene*, was insulted by Peshmergas.
 - ▶ **Rahman Gharib**, the head of the press freedom organization METRO and a reporter for *Sumariya News*, was attacked.
 - ▶ *KNN* programme director **Namo Namiq** was detained for several hours.
 - ▶ *Radio Nawa* reporter **Bilal Muhammad** was attacked and prevented from covering the incidents.
 - ▶ **Saman Majed** and **Bwar Jalal**, reporters for the PUK's satellite TV station *Gali Kurdistan*, were attacked.
 - ▶ **Sherko Salayi**, a reporter for *CNN* in Arabic, was attacked.
 - ▶ **Hemin Abdul Latif**, reporter for the *Destur* news website, was badly injured while photographing demonstrators attacking the local headquarters of the KDP.
 - ▶ The Erbil headquarters of the *KNN* TV and radio station were set on fire.
 - ▶ **Ari Muhammad**, a photographer with the *Metrography* agency, was injured.
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