



July 23, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Amnesty International urges President Biden to raise rights abuses against press, protesters, religious minorities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi

Dear President Biden,

We write to you today to urge you to address and call for accountability by the Iraqi government for the ongoing, systematic violations of human rights - and the impunity around them - against peaceful protesters, journalists, IDPs, and minorities by authorities and state-affiliated armed groups in Iraq in your upcoming meeting with Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on July 26th.

Assuming office in May 2020, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi presented himself as a human rights reformer committed to fixing systemic wrongs, following the massive nationwide protest movement denouncing government corruption and failures that rose in October 2019. Since then, rather than addressing the demands of the people, authorities have violently cracked down on protesters and activists, killing at least [600](#) protesters in the demonstrations - including minors. Since October 2019, Amnesty has reported on security forces' brutal repression of demonstrations across the country through the use of unlawful lethal force against protesters, and [documented the targeting](#) of human rights defenders and activists in series of deliberate killings and enforced disappearances by armed men believed to be members of state-affiliated Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) armed groups.

Al-Kadhimi ostensibly supported calls for accountability for the hundreds killed, disappeared, and injured in the 2019 uprising, ordering investigations and promising compensation for their families. Yet he has insofar failed or refused to use his power to uphold any accountability; no such promises or public investigations have been fulfilled, and violent repression of peaceful protesters by both authorities and the PMU persists. Security forces [reportedly killed two protesters](#) shot with tear gas canisters in Baghdad in July; after firing upon and [killing at least six demonstrators](#) and injuring dozens more in Nasiriyah in February, where nine were killed last November. In March 2020, [Amnesty confirmed](#) that security forces intentionally killed or maimed dozens of protesters with military-style grenades. Still, no accountability.

[Death sentences](#) continue to abound under al-Kadhimi, with authorities [executing at least](#) 50 men on terrorism charges - including a mass execution of [21 individuals](#) just months into his tenure and [five more this February](#) - based on "confessions" of IS-affiliation extracted via torture. Thousands more activists and protesters continue to be forcibly disappeared by Iraqi security forces and PMU - many still [missing](#). In one prominent case, human rights lawyer Ali Jaseb Hattab remains [missing](#) following abduction by PMU members in late 2019, with unknown gunmen killing his outspoken father in March. Throughout 2020 and 2021, unknown gunmen and PMU members continually targeted activists for assassination or abduction with impunity and little action from authorities, killing at least 30 and injuring 30 more in failed attempts. [PMU militias also remain responsible for the enforced disappearance](#) of at least 643 Iraqi men and boys during military operations in Falluja over five years ago. Iraqi officials refuse to publicly reveal their whereabouts or hold the PMU accountable, leaving families in perpetual limbo.

The ongoing crackdown on press freedom under al-Kadhimi's watch is also troubling. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) security forces raided and shut down media outlets, confiscating equipment and beating and arresting journalists; authorities also restricted the internet and banned press coverage of the protests. Demonstrators have been met with unlawful force by police, [killing at least nine](#) and injuring 60 in December. Security forces further arrested at least 167 protesters and journalists; with [several cases](#) of torture and enforced disappearances. At least 30 in Dohuk governorate remain arbitrarily

detained - with activists and journalists [Sherwan Sherwani, Guhdar Zebari, Hariwan Issa, Ayaz Karan and Shvan Saeed](#) sentenced to six years in prison in an unfair trial on false charges of “destabilizing security.”

Minority communities, refugees, and displaced Iraqis [continue to suffer](#) from systemic abuses and failures of the government. Authorities have failed to fulfill their obligations under international law to ensure Yezidi survivors’ rights to health, education, legal identity, and family unity. Many child survivors have struggled to return to school, or obtain documents required to access basic services - including psychosocial and other health services. In a helpful step, officials adopted a [new law](#) to assist Yezidis and other survivors of IS crimes in March. But the law still harmfully fails to address the needs of children born as a result of rape by IS members, or that of their mothers. These Yezidi women have been [forced to separate from their children because of societal pressures](#) - with no help in and little prospect of reuniting with or even contacting their children - which authorities have actively either ignored or failed to redress.

In October 2020, authorities began a wave of unjustified closures or consolidations of well over a dozen IDP camps, putting thousands of IDPs at risk through forced returns to areas of origin, secondary displacement, and lack of adequate shelter in clear violation of international law. In federal Iraq, all but two IDP camps were closed. IDPs – mostly female-headed families – also continually face obstruction, confiscations, and evictions or destruction of their homes due to perceived IS affiliation. Further, security forces have forcibly disappeared IDPs, including children. Due to the [camp closures and COVID-19 movement restrictions](#), many IDPs faced barriers in accessing aid and public services and lost their jobs.

Violent repression and violations against protesters, vulnerable persons, journalists, and activists continue unabated. al-Kadhimi’s early claims of human rights reform and accountability prove hollow.

As such, in his meeting with Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, Amnesty International urges President Biden to:

- Push for true accountability and an end for impunity for those responsible for violations, including arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearance and the deliberate killing of protesters, activists, journalists, lawyers, and other civil society members.
- Call for an end to the systemic violations - and the impunity around them - including arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, and deliberate killings of hundreds of protesters, activists, journalists, and lawyers; and for true accountability for those responsible.
- Stand up for Yezidi survivors by urging swift implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law, with enough funding and support for its reparation measures to reach all survivors, including children.
- Work to ensure that Yezidi women with children born of sexual violence can reunite - if separated - or remain with their children via safe resettlement in the U.S. and other countries.
- Uphold the rights of Iraqi IDPs by insisting authorities cease enforced disappearances and forced returns to areas of origin; and ensure IDPs have unobstructed access to their documentation, public services, and aid and adequate shelter.
- Push the KRG to protect the right to fair trial and immediately release all those arbitrarily detained including Sherwan Sherwani, Guhdar Zebari, Hariwan Issa, Ayaz Karan, and Shvan Saeed.
- Call for an end to the brutal crackdown on freedom of press as authorities shut down and restrict media outlets and arrest, unfairly sentence, torture and otherwise abuse journalists.
- Demand authorities reveal the fate of the 643 Iraqis forcibly disappeared by PMU five years ago, publicly disclose findings of all official investigations, and hold those responsible to account.

Sincerely, on behalf of Amnesty International USA,

Philippe Nassif
*Advocacy Director, Middle East
and North Africa*
PNassif@aiusa.org

Amit Dadon
*Mustafa Kassem Fellow for Human Rights,
Middle East and North Africa*
ADadon@aiusa.org