

6 November 2019

### **Iraq: Abduction of woman human rights defender Saba Al Mahdawi**

On 2 November 2019, woman human rights defender **Saba Al Mahdawi** was abducted by a group of unidentified militants in the city of Baghdad. Her current location remains unknown.

[Saba Al Mahdawi](#) is a volunteer medic and woman human rights defender who has been volunteering at the anti-corruption demonstrations which have swept through Iraq since early October. She helped to provide food and water to the protesters, and offered medical assistance to those who were injured. She has also collected donations for medicines, and assisted those with severe injuries to be transferred abroad for medical attention.

On 2 November 2019, at around 23:20, while Saba Al Mahdawi was leaving Liberation Square in Baghdad, her car was stopped by three other vehicles containing several masked and armed men. They aggressively removed her from her car, confiscated her phones and took her to unknown location. Her family has submitted a complaint to the Iraqi police, but no effective action has been taken.

Human rights defenders continue to be targeted across Iraq, especially in the context of the protests. On 8 October 2019, human rights lawyer Ali Jaseb Hattab was abducted by a group of unidentified militants in the city of Maysan. Almost a month since his disappearance his whereabouts remain unknown.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the abduction of Saba Al Mahdawi, and it believes that it is solely motivated by her peaceful and legitimate human rights work. Front Line Defenders believes the pattern of disappearances of human rights defenders in recent weeks to be harmful to the overall protection of human rights in Iraq.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the Iraqi Authorities to:**

1. Take all necessary measures to determine the whereabouts of Saba Al-Mahdawi and other missing human rights defenders, guaranteeing their physical and psychological security and integrity;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the abduction of Saba Al-Mahdawi, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Iraq and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in*

*association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration” and to Article 18 (2): “Individuals, groups, and non-governmental organisations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director