

30 June 2021

Iraq: Judicial harassment against Rasan Organisation staff members including Director Tanya Darwish

On 16 June 2021, woman human rights defender **Tanya Darwish** received a call from the police informing her that she, her staff and other ex-employees of Rasan Organisation were under investigation, due to a complaint submitted against them by the Department of Non-Governmental Organisations. They are being accused of ‘spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions’, a charge which if they were found guilty could lead to a sentence of up to two years’ imprisonment.

[Tanya Darwish](#) is a woman human rights defender, that works on promoting women and LGBTQI+ rights in Iraq. She is the Director of [Rasan Organisation](#), which is a human rights organisation based in Kurdistan, Iraq, that works on promoting women and LGBTQI+ rights in Iraq, through supporting them with legal, social and psychological support. They also work on raising awareness campaigns.

On 16 June 2021, Tanya Darwish, the Director of Rasan Organisation received a call from the police, telling her that she and other staff and ex employees of the organisation are expected at the police station for interrogation, as the police had received a complaint regarding their work with Rasan Organisation from the Department of Non-Governmental Organisation. The Department accused Tanya Darwish and previous employees of ‘spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions’ according to Article 403 of the Iraqi Penal Code. Rasan’s lawyer advised Tanya and the others not to attend the interrogation as they might be detained. On 17 June 2021, the lawyer asked the police to postpone the interrogation because of Tanya Darwish’s health condition. According to the lawyer, if Tanya Darwish and the ex-employees were found guilty, they could be sentenced to up to two years’ imprisonment.

This is the third time that the staff of Rasan Organisation have received a complaint. In April 2019, a petition with 530 signatures accused the staff of the same charges – ‘spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions’. In February 2021, a parliament member also submitted a complaint against the organisation’s staff using the same Article of the Iraqi Penal Code.

Woman human rights defender Tanya Darwish has been frequently harassed. She was subjected to an online sexualised defamation campaign, where she was attacked due to her human rights work. Sexualised defamation campaigns are a specific challenge that women human rights defenders are subjected to.

In the last few months, human rights defenders and human rights organisations have been subjected to crackdowns in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as human rights defender [Sherwan Sherwani](#), who was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment as a result of his human rights work.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the judicial harassment against woman human rights defender Tanya Darwish and previous employees of the organisation. Front Line Defenders believes that this judicial harassment is solely as a result of the legitimate human rights work of Rasan Organisation.

Front Line Defenders urges the Kurdish authorities to:

1. Immediately withdraw the complaints against Tanya Darwish and other previous staff members of Rasan Organisation, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the defamation campaign against Tanya Darwish, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kurdistan Iraq are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions [including judicial harassment].