



Society for Defending Press Freedom Again Challenges Iraq's "Journalist Protection Law"

On the 26th of April 2012, the Society for Defending Press Freedom will again file a case at the Federal Supreme Court seeking to strike down the so-called "Journalist Protection Law." The Society had been working for repeal of the law in January 2012, but the court refused to hear its arguments on the grounds that "the Society hadn't completed its legal registration."

The Society is demanding repeal of the law because it violates at least four articles of the Iraqi Constitution that protect freedom of the press. It also preserves five laws of the former regime that were enacted to place the media under the control of the state and prevent the activities of independent media. The law could lead to a return to practices that were common under the previous dictatorship when all media was dominated by the government, in particular the executive.

Mr. Oday Hatem, the head of the Society for Defending Press Freedom, thanks all the journalists, press organizations, activists, national and international organizations that supported the Society in its earlier court appeal. He asks them to also support this current challenge, since the Journalist Protection Law will totally undermine freedom of the press in Iraq, which is one of the fundamental foundations of freedom of expression. These rights and freedoms are guaranteed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that were signed by the Iraqi state.

Also Mr. Hatem warns that the Journalist Protection Law retains dangerous laws that specify ways in which journalists may be punished. These include articles of the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969, of the Publications Law number 206 of 1968, the Media Ministry Law of 2001, the Law on Control of Cinema films number 64 of 1973, the Journalists Union Law of 1969, and order 14 of the Coalition Provisional Authority of 2003 that described banned media activity and gave the prime minister authority to shut down any media enterprise, confiscate its material and equipments, and imprison its workers.

Mr. Hatem insists, "We will never give up on this case. We will pursue all legal methods to repeal this law that aims to give government authorities control over the press and power to interfere in the policies of media establishments. This is spreading a spirit of dictatorship. Hundreds of Iraqi journalists and international activists have signed a petition supporting the repeal of this law." The Society for Defending Press Freedom calls upon the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Osama Al-Najafi, to remember that he has taken an oath to protect democracy and democratic freedoms in Iraq and that allowing provisions of the Journalist Protection Law to remain in force would constitute a violation of his oath and his constitutional duties.