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Corona Pandemic: **A Challenge or an Opportunity for the Civil Society Organizations and Freedom of Expression in Iraq and Kurdistan Region**

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About Peace and Freedom Organization:

TPeace and Freedom Organization is a non-profit and non-governmental organization which works in Iraq and Kurdistan Region for the protection of rights and freedoms to ensure the peaceful coexistence through strengthening of trust and cooperation among various social components, supporting and promoting the policy of non-governmental and governmental institutions to guarantee the rights, freedom and social justice according to the international standards.



Executive Summary:

This report is an assessment for the work condition of the organizations and freedom of expression at the time of corona in Iraq and Kurdistan Region. The report focuses on the impact of the spread of coronavirus on how the work and activities of the CSOs are managed, more specifically; it shows the opportunities and barriers that came to the way of the organizations due to the spread of coronavirus. Meanwhile, the report provides the necessary information and data about the situation of freedom of expression and the most prominent violations have committed against journalists, media outlets, and demonstrators. As a result of the assessment found that the spread of coronavirus had an adverse impact of the work of the CSOs in terms of providing the quality of the services the organizations provide to people and the community. The impact of Coronavirus was more evident on the organizations working in the development area. However, due to the government procedures of curfew, the humanitarian organizations were not able, just as before, to work feely, implement their activities and to get to the places in need of help. In relation to the governmental institutions' role of coordination and facilitation for the organizations work, including Erbil and Baghdad NGOs Department, it was found that the institutions generally and NGOs Department particularly could be a good support not just for the running of the organizations' work and activities but demonstrating the role of the organizations and publishing their work and activities. Undoubtedly, this paves the way for the enhancement of trust between the citizens and the organizations as well as getting fame in the community. This assessment shows as well that the crises cell and Corona Confrontation Competent Committees and Councils marginalized to some extent the role of the organizations in taking the decisions and actions during corona era and they did not take into account the competence of the organizations. However, the spread of the virus and the government's limited ability in providing the services led to the demonstration of the role of organizations further. The organizations and volunteer groups, with their limited human and financial resources, were able to have a great role in aiding the poor and low income people, providing medical

and health staff, conducting self-protection and awareness campaigns and even spray and disinfection campaigns for the cleaning of public and private places. Regarding the freedom of expression, this assessment showed that the number and the rate of violations against journalists, media outlets and demonstrators extremely increased which led to the international and local reaction. Meanwhile, the issues of violating the right of access to information and discrimination in providing the journalists with information during corona pandemic was seen more in any other time before. The outcomes of this assessment emphasized on the necessity of implementing the freedom of expression related laws, particularity; access to information law, press law, organizing demonstration law and NGOs operation law. In addition to that, the role of NGOs Department must be focused during the crises that how the department should have more cooperative role with the organizations to facilitate for their operation and execution of their activities. Besides all, it's important for the government and the state institutions to consider the competence of NGOs when taking decisions and procedures as it's possible to benefit from their human and financial resources during the crises.



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Introduction:

Two: The History of Civil Society Organizations in Iraq

The report of the CSOs working condition and freedom of expression under coronavirus is part of the work and activities of Peace and Freedom Organization PFO within the project of “Expanding the Scope of Working of Civil Society Organizations” which is financed and supported by (NPA) Organization. Despite of their similarities in most areas, there is still noticeable difference between Kurdistan Region and other parts of Iraq in relation to the work of CSOs and the scope of freedom of expression, type and the number of violations under coronavirus. Therefore; the report is prepared with two parts, the first part focuses on the organization’s work condition and freedom of expression under the coronavirus in Kurdistan Region, and in the second part the same topic is discussed about the other parts of middle and south of Iraq.

The report is an assessment to the CSOs sector and introducing the consequences that the spread of corona pandemic have left on the organization’s fame, name, work and activity. Meanwhile, this report analyzes the situation of freedom of expression and the violations against the journalists, demonstrators and CSOs. Within this framework, the decisions and procedures by both governments of Iraq and Kurdistan Region are concentrated and the consequence of those decisions and procedures are introduced. Taking benefit from the qualitative method for information and data gathering, 25 semi-open interviews with the activists, CSOs representatives and media outlets have been analyzed. The participants have been purposely selected and they’re people who are aware of the organization’s working condition and freedom of expression in Iraq and Kurdistan Region. Besides, several reports and letter from government and non-governmental institutions utilized as sources of information. In addition to the information that PFO has obtained through its participation in a number of dialogues related to the issues are demonstrated within this report. This assessment is just related to the working condition of organizations and violations against freedom of expression for the period between March and June of 2020.



Time Frame of the Data



At the end of every part of the report, several recommendations and suggestions have been proposed to the relative bodies to improve the working condition of the organizations during crises and expanding the scope of freedom of expression in Iraq and Kurdistan Region.

Chapter 1

The impact of Coronavirus pandemic on the organizations and freedom of expression in Kurdistan Region

Coronavirus Pandemic: A Challenge or an Opportunity for the Organizations?

The spread of coronavirus pandemic in KRI had adverse impact on the CSOs sector, but the good sides and positive outcomes cannot be ignored as well. As the spread of coronavirus stopped the work and activities of the organizations and changed the orientation of many of them, at the same time, it was an opportunity for some organizations to work and get more trust of the society and this is because the existence of CSOs and their role during incidents and humanitarian and natural disasters is further needed and seen than at any other time.

The adverse impact of corona pandemic was greater in the areas such as the way and quality of the services provided, advocacy campaigns and the economic and financial aspects of the organizations. If the organizations, before the emergence of coronavirus, were able to provide various services to the citizens and the local communities of the cities and towns, but the emergence of the virus and the government procedures and instructions limited the provision of services in terms of quantity, quality and geographically. The movement of organizations' employees stopped for a few weeks due to the curfew and they were not able to do their job even at their offices. The CSOs employees were not allowed to freely move not just between the provinces but even inside their own cities except the employees of some international organizations including (UN Agencies) and a few number of organizations affiliated to the political parties. The marginalization of the organizations and lack of facilitation for their staff by KRG was part of the concerns of the activists and representatives of the organizations. Kwestan Abdul-Rahman in Azmoon Organization in Sulaimaniyah, mentioned that, "There was not a link between



the governmental institutions and the organizations as the organizations had not been engaged in the Operations Room and Crises Cell”.

In relation to this issue, Kurdistan Human Rights Watch Organization (KHEW), in a report⁽¹⁾ on monitoring the KRG decisions and regulations published on April 7, 2020 sheds light on the same point and they think that CSOs are marginalized and their freedom of working is shrank or tightened and as a suggestion they mention that the government must utilize the human and financial resources of the organizations as well as they must have member within the Crises Cell. The best ever indication or evidence for the marginalization of organizations is out of tens of instructions issued by the Provincial Operation Rooms and High Committee of Coronavirus Confrontation, the name of CSOs is not mentioned even in one point.

Against those concerns, it's not possible not to mention the name of NGOs Department who is an official body and in charge of the organizations' affairs in Kurdistan Region. On March 18, 2020 this department sent a message of four points⁽²⁾ to the region registered organizations urging them to support and coordinate with the government provide services to citizens and overcome this situation despite of asking the organizations to follow the procedures and recommendations of High Committee of Coronavirus Confrontation.

Although the department announced this message on their own website and placed a telephone number so as the organizations call them, it seems that the department didn't have a role worthy to be mentioned in easing the work of organizations under corona pandemic. The department even had some kind of carelessness in appreciating and introducing the work and activities of the organizations. It could have the permanent report including the name and the activity of the organization for the public⁽³⁾ likewise the NGOs Department of Baghdad which undoubtedly has positive impact on the name and the fame of the organizations in the society.

In addition to the overall impact of the pandemic on the organizations, it was noted that the level of pandemic impact was different on the organizations.

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1. Report of KHRWO (2020) which was available on their link <https://www.kohrw.org/onewebmedia/انوروك%20ينالك%8C%80%E2%80%A2%20راي%20ريدواج.pdf> On April 28, 2020
 2. Message of NGOs Dept. of KRG (2020) which was available on the link <https://www.dngo.gov.krd/Article-254> on April 25, 2020.
 3. An example of Baghdad NGOs Department. (2020) which was available on the link <http://www.ngoao.gov.iq/uploads/DOC/4th.pdf> on April 28, 2020

The organizations were active in development area were affected more by the pandemic impact that the work and activities of some of them totally stopped. This situation led to the obligatory stoppage of a large number of development projects as well as led, in a way and another, to the withdrawal of the attempts related to the areas such as freedom of expression, human rights, democracy process, peaceful coexistence among components, education, environment, capacity building of youth...etc. Halsho Abdul-Fattah from Kurdi Institute for Elections in Sulaimaniyah talked about their organization's experience and said that, "***In general, because our organization mostly works in the areas of human rights, law and elections not humanitarian activities such as food distribution, so our organization didn't work under this circumstance, but the available were individual activities as the members of the organization took part, as individuals, in the charity activity, distribution of food and delivering of aid to poor people.***"

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The suspension of the organizations' activities and work was mostly related to the curfew and preventing meetings, gatherings and physical contact. If the development activities had been continued here and there, they didn't have such an impact and simply due to the coronavirus pandemic and the emergence of unwanted circumstance, the priorities of citizens, government and even some of non-governmental actors were changed. With the spread of the virus, the attention of the citizens was on the spread of the pandemic and their health protection concern as well as the priorities of the government changed and the efforts were condensed in the procedures and health protection of the citizens. This transition led non-governmental actors as well, especially some of the CSOs being obliged to change their action plan and activities and to make changes in the way and type of the services they provide that responding to the needs of the people.

With the passage of time and the appearance of the pandemic dangerousness and its economic effects, humanitarian services and aiding low income and



poor people became the key activity of the many of the organizations. Even the organizations, who didn't work in the humanitarian area before, some of them changed their plan towards this direction and started to distribute food basket on poor families.

This was an opportunity for the organizations to enhance their trust among people and to convey the message that these are the organizations who empathizing them and care about their concerns. It was surprising for the organizations and the volunteering groups as well that why the government of Kurdistan tried controlling the aids and funds through creating a bank account for collecting of the contributions donated by donors, benevolent and capitalists. This was a kind of government-centered approach and taking this role from the organizations. In addition to the financial aids and distribution of food basket, the organizations had a prominent role in health awareness dissemination, spraying and disinfection campaigns and distribution of medical and prevention stuff.

Ibrahim Ismail, The Chief of Al-Mesalla Organization, talked about the role of the organizations in health awareness area and he stated that, "***The role of the organizations was more about awareness campaign for prevention, perhaps because of the availability of awareness campaign tools especially social media***".

Within this context, several prevention and health campaigns were conducted by the organizations and the social media was utilized organizations as a wide platform to communicate with people and delivering the messages and instructions of the government health institutions and WHO. Besides, some of CSOs had certain activities for those were quarantined. Dilshad Balaki, the Chief of Aweza Organization in Soran Sub-district, he talked about their organization experience relative to the same topic and he said, "***On March 19, 2020, in Hotel Soran Palace at the gate of Soran District, our organization distributed about 100 various books through the medical teams of Soran Health Directorate over those people who were quarantined at the hotel...***"

The bright side for the organizations under coronavirus was the heating of computer screens and smart phones due to online meetings, seminars and discussions were held by activists and representatives of the organizations to focus on the areas such as political, social, economic and civil activities. The platforms including Zoom, Go to Meeting and Google Meet were not well known before and became alternatives to the meeting rooms, conference and

training halls. Despite of benefiting more from technology which through the organizations and civil activists were able not to only sustaining their previous relations but it was an opportunity to make new relations between the local and international activists. The Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative was one of the prominent examples in this respect.

Banking and Financial Affairs under Coronavirus:

The government procedures and curfew along with the other consequences affected the work and activities of the local and international organizations economically and financially. Since the economic source and financial aid of CSOs in Iraq and KRI is the foreign and international grants⁽⁴⁾, this situation has generated fear and anxiety with organizations for reducing their financial support. The simplest reason of this condition could be that the donor countries have experienced financial challenges domestically due to coronavirus pandemic and reducing their financial support for the other countries is one of the potentials that could be seen as an expected consequence. Due to pressure from the donors and the international partners, the Iraqi Civil Society organizations also experienced challenges and had to think twice to keep the staff of their stopped projects. However, the international donors, here and there, allocated certain funds for the organizations to implement self-protection projects and preventing the spread of the virus.

Due to pressure from the donors and the international partners, the Iraqi Civil Society organizations also experienced challenges and had to think twice to keep the staff of their stopped projects

The banks were locked down for a certain period of time due to the governmental procedures, particularly; the curfew which affected the organizations during this period that they were unable to make cash movement (sending and receiving) from their bank account. Undoubtedly, this position had a reflection on the organizations as they couldn't conduct their work and activities according to their own plan but they had to wait until the gate of the

4- Index of 2018 about the sustainability capacity of CSOs in Iraq - <http://www.pfo-ku.org/index.php/report/2017-05-19-16-00-33/408-2019-12-19-07-48-50>



banks were opened and utilized their cash. Meanwhile, due to the blockage of the border between the provinces, the organizations were unable to send their fund to other provinces and towns to conduct the activities that they were possible to be implemented. Some organizations were unable to pay their employees' salary, especially; the organizations that use financial system, their employees are paid through the bank cheque. Some of those organizations and local ones in particular obliged to change their payroll system during this period and paying the salary in cash if the organization had been able to get cash. For such a situation, the organizations had to get the prior consent of the donor.

Having financial crisis under coronavirus led to the issuance of certain instructions by banks related to the banking deals and transactions. The bank subscribers (including the organizations) had to follow the instructions even if they didn't like. As per an official letter that has been issued by the Iraqi Central Bank with the reference number 5/6/822 on March 29, 2020 and it has been sent to the bank branches in KRI (see a copy of the letter in the appendices)

mentions that for withdrawing incoming money in dollars, the subscriber can receive only 75% of the requested amount in dollars and the rest must be in IQD which is 25% of the whole amount. This instruction generated concerns by the organizations because they're financially damaged even if it's a small amount. The organizations had bank account in the Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) mentioned that the bank has opened a new account in IQD for each subscriber without prior notice to process the transactions and execution of the instructions.

Networking and Joint-working of Organizations:

Despite the interruption of the organizations with each in general, the spread of coronavirus and its dangers enhanced the spirit of joint working among the organizations and civil activists. The organizations whose field of work was close to each other, some of them announced the initiative of joint working. Although some of the participants of this assessment believed that the level



of joint working didn't reach to form networking among the organizations, we can refer to one of such networks as an example that it was made under coronavirus. From the emergence of the virus on March 27, 2020 each of Wadi Organization, Kirkuk Now Website, Nwe Radio in Halabja and Dang Radio in Garmiyan together declared ***“Corona Information Service...Reliable News for Citizens”***, which the goal was to communicate the information and correct news from reliable and professional sources to the citizens.

Meanwhile, the ICSSI was an umbrella to collect CSOs and civil activists not just on the level of Iraq and Kurdistan Region but internationally as well. This was through webinars which they were weekly arranging them with the Iraqi and Kurdistan organizations including Iraqi Social Forum, Al-Messala Organization, Kurdistan Social Forum, Solidarity Center, Peace and Freedom Organization and Sport against Violence ...ect. The objective of those webinars was to discuss the impact of coronavirus spread on the economic condition, labor rights, women rights and domestic violence, education, health system, the situation of freedom of expression, working of the organizations and several other topics. The outcomes of many of those webinars were published in report form in Kurdish, Arabic and English languages so as a lot of people get benefit from the discussions.

Besides joint working, the CSOs, under coronavirus and at different stages, had common attitudes about certain events including the violations against human rights and freedom of expression. For instance, on May 25, 2020 more than 300 organizations, networks and human rights trainers in Iraq and Kurdistan Region published a joint statement against the arrest of a group of activists of CSOs and journalists in Duhok province. However, after publishing a letter of the Ministry of Interior of KRG in social media that asked UNHCR just to cooperate with Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF), 82 CSOs in Kurdistan Region published a joint announcement against that letter of the Ministry of

Interior.

With the spread of coronavirus, the Non-government Coordination Committee of Iraq (NCCI) was, daily and continuously, providing information and data to the organizations. All logistic services and instructions that were possible the NGOs and their employees to utilize them, they were delivering them to their members via email in Kurdish, Arabic and English languages.

Freedom of Expression and Media under Coronavirus:

Due to the fear of freedom of expression and the right of access to information shrinkage under corona pandemic, the Office of High Council of Human Rights in UN in a statement containing five points and they published it on March 19, 2020⁽⁵⁾ focused on the protection of freedom of expression, guaranteeing the press work and journalists to deliver the proper information and facts at the both local and international levels. Whilst, the statement urging the governments to commit to the implementation of local laws related to the areas of access to information and freedom of press that are developed as per the principles of international laws.⁵ Despite of having three laws in Kurdistan Region related to the freedom of expression; (1) Press Law No. 35 of 2007, (2) Access to Information Law No. 11 of 2013 and (3) Demonstration Organization Law No. 11 of 2010, it was noted that the freedom of expression retracted a lot under coronavirus. i.e. Looking to the situation of freedom of expression and press working under coronavirus in Kurdistan Region, it's clear that the fear of international organizations about the shrinkage of freedom of expression was right.

The increase of the number of violations against journalists and media outlets was one of the topics that attracted the attention of freedom of expression defenders, although facilities were made for the journalists during curfew especially they were permitted to cover the events. The reactions and complaints were not just at the local level but the international organizations and actors had their own saying about this issue. This was a clear indication for the level of fear and deterioration of the condition of freedom of expression under corona. The violation against journalists is at a time that their life and health were subjected to danger due to the nature of their profession as 85

5- The statement of the Office of High Council of Human Rights in UN <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25729&LangID=E>



journalists in Kurdistan Region infected by corona virus, according to the President of Kurdistan Journalists syndicate⁽⁶⁾, while with the emergence of the pandemic the Journalists syndicate issued special instructions for the self-protection of journalists.

The violations and health risks on the life of the journalist were in line with the press and media outlet activities that had importance more than any time else, because people were depending on the information and data that were published by journalists and media outlets on the daily basis as well as they were part of citizens awareness campaigns in relation to the self-protection procedures from the pandemic. But it was noted that there was discrimination, in providing information, against journalists and media outlets not affiliated to the government or the ruling political parties. For this purpose, they were obliged to use second hand information which they were subjected to many problems in several ways. Abdul-Rahman Bamarni, as a journalist and a civil activist in Duhok province, in a special webinar about freedom of expression in Kurdistan Region which was arranged in April, he said that, "Those who work for one of the media outlets of the ruling parties can have access to all the information they ask for, though we know that they can publish the piece of information that allowed by their parties. The other journalists can have access to the second hand information published by the media channels of the parties. Hence, the ministers and governmental officials prosecute the journalists for publishing false information and criticized by the government which through this process would be clear that the second hand information and data were untrue. For such a behavior, the journalists could be accused of providing improper information"⁽⁷⁾.

As journalists and activists were subjected to violations including arresting, threatening, preventing them cover the activities, confiscating and breaking press equipment...etc, the likewise violations continued under the spread of coronavirus. The most prominent efforts to limit the freedom of expression and the violations against journalists, media outlets and civil complaints could be shown as below:

- ▶ The journalist and civil activist (Hemn Mamand), on March 24, at 9 p.m. in Erbil was arrested after been beaten and underestimated by a masked force. It was

6- The Press Report of Zaman Website <https://www.zamenpress.com/Details.aspx?jimare=28223>

7- The report of (ICSSI) <https://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/archives/11644>

found later that the reason behind his arrest related to the publishing a post by Hemn in his private facebook account. Hemn criticized the government in his post and he had written that;

“I’ve encouraged people so far to stay at home and protect themselves which is an ethical, national, humane and medical action, but on the other side, the life of people including labors and employees is in a worst case and the authority in turn is careless that it hasn’t paid so far the December payroll, therefore; if they don’t care about the life of people and the salary of employees, we will pour into the street, destroy the quarantine and this authority”.

After ten days of work and efforts, he was released on bail. Later and after one day, at 13:00 a.m. they arrest him once again! After the issuance of his release resolution on bail of 1 million Iraqi dinars, he will be arrested in the same day April 26, 2020 and for the third time.

The arrest of Hemn Mamand led to the local and international reactions. On April 27, 2020 more than 500 organizations and figures, inside and outside of Kurdistan Region, announced a campaign to free Hamn Mamand and urged to free him as soon as possible⁽⁸⁾. At the international level, the organizations and global media outlets talked about this case and covered as a violation against the right of freedom of expression as well as called for his release. At the beginning of his arrest, the Front Line Defenders Organization did follow up and provided necessary information on the case to the international community in the next days and later they placed the information on their website.⁽⁹⁾

As journalists and activists were subjected to violations including arresting, threatening, preventing them cover the activities, confiscating and breaking press equipment...etc, the likewise violations continued under the spread of coronavirus.

8- The Proclamation of 500 organizations and figures to free Hamn Mamand on the website of Awena Newspaper. <https://www.awene.com/detail?article=25100&fbclid=IwAR0Yz3TDj1JErCFf8osoxvrw3vtEDjaXFGJrGoBbchNp8zoT-eT05I0oqk>

9- information about the case of Hemn Mamand on the website of Frontline Defenders <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/arbitrary-detention-human-rights-defender-hemin-mamand>



In relation to this case and responding to the international organization report, Dindar Zebari, Coordinator of International Recommendations in KRG, he talked about the arrest of Hemn and he said that;

“Unfortunately, Hemn Mamand, via social media and disseminating false information such as the spread of coronavirus in the prisons of Kurdistan, calling people to break the quarantine and curfew and coming out which their life is endangered and the number of the infected will increase”.

According to PFO teams for observing and following up, the statements of Dindar Zebari regarding the international reports always accompanied by the concerns and dissatisfaction of activists and independent journalists because his statements are often toward the advocacy for the government and the authority.

The detaining and arresting of journalists and activists because of posting their topics in social media as well as criticizing the government and the authority has become more than a case or it's noted as a phenomenon and PFO teams recorded a few number of likewise cases under coronavirus. For example, on March 24, an activist called Sangar Jawhar in Taq Taq District was arrested as a result of publishing a piece of critical writing in his Facebook account about the officials of the area. After been detained for 24 hours, he was released. Harem Jaf, the reporter of Kurdistan24 satellite, he was arrested in Kifri Town on March 27, after the follow up of PFO teams found that it was because of a critical post which he published in his Facebook account on the behaviors of a security force of the area. Dilshad Himo was also arrested for the same reason on April 1, in Duhok province. On April 7, 2020 in Sulaimaniyah, the journalist Zrian Muhammad the reporter of Awena News to be called by the Security of Sulaimaniyah just after two hours from publishing a few number of photos in his personal account of Facebook about the traffic and the danger of the spread of coronavirus opposite to the Department of Trade Control of Sulaimaniyah. As a reaction to the event, Metro Center for Defending the Rights of Journalists published a statement in their official page in Facebook and declared that;

“The publication of those photos by Zrian Muhammad is a legal and professional job; he had to be appreciated instead of to be arrested because he has asked not to breach the self-protection stage”. ⁽¹⁰⁾

10- The Statement of Metro Center about the arrest of Zrian Muhammad in Sulaimaniyah Province
<https://web.facebook.com/metrocenter/photos/a.902418366477236/3079019445483773/>

These cases show that the security institutions observe journalists and civil society activists in social media. After they are arrested and due to the lack of a special law to social media, these cases, most of the time, dealt with in the courts as per the law of preventing abuse of communications means (Law No. 6 of 2008) where often journalists become victims. This is at a time where press law found in Kurdistan Region but it's not relied on for such cases.

- ▶ The attempt of locking down of the media outlets under coronavirus was another type of freedom of expression shrinkage in Kurdistan Region. On April 6, 2020, the Minister of Health of KRG directing an official letter to the public prosecution to take tight legal procedures against NRT T.V Channel because the channel accuses the government for publishing improper and incorrect information about the statistics of coronavirus and using the pandemic for his personal purpose (a copy of the letter is enclosed). In relation to the same issue, on June 3, 2020, the Ministry of Culture and Youth warning NRT Channel with the reference letter No.(108 confidential) that they **encourage people to breach the self-protection decisions of the government, terminate the curfew and doubts about the availability of coronavirus pandemic**. The warning is designed that if the channel continues working in this way, they will take legal actions against the channel. For this letter of the Ministry of Culture, Halgwrđ Jundiyanî, the General Director in the same ministry and in a statement to K24 satellite which is considered as a close channel to the Prime Minister, he criticized the letter of his ministry and says that, "The Ministry of Culture had to close the channel."⁽¹¹⁾ This comes at a time that the channel was covering all the concerns and civil demonstration of people in all Kurdistan Region Provinces which they were voluntarily organized by people and criticizing the government and the officials for corruption, lack of salary and services and the adverse instructions of the government about the curfew and not taking into account the life and living of citizens.
- ▶ The citizens protested including demonstrations and civil disobedience under coronavirus despite of the decisions of the government and the curfew procedures. On May 16, 2020 some of the citizens, activists and teachers organized a demonstration and expressed their dissatisfaction against the lack of salary and services. The security forces used violence to control the situation and ending up the demonstration as well as arrested a number of teachers and

11- Press report of K24 Channel about the letter of the Ministry of Culture
<https://www.kurdistan24.net/so/news/109b13bb-065f-437d-ad21-989bff33e042?fbclid=IwAR352rRmjLqWztYexfzwpp10bd6vosApO4GYx6TAVximb2KcnPgRaeSaOgw>



protesters including Badal Barwari the teacher and the activist. The arrest of demonstrators accompanied with local and international reactions. At the local level, CSOs, human rights activists and some of the MPs of opposition parties published a protest statement. For instance, 311 organizations and 183 activists of human directed a statement to the Iraqi republic President and President of Kurdistan Region on May 26 to intervene in freeing the demonstrators and labeled Badal Barwari as a well-known civil activist of Kurdistan Region⁽¹²⁾. On May 19, 2020, in relation to the demonstration of Duhok, The New Arab Website published a report about the violations in English language⁽¹³⁾. What was noted that Dindar Zebari, the Chief of Assessment and Responding to International Reports Department talked about the demonstrations and said that,

“The arrests were related to the reason that those people violated the self-protection instructions and procedures”

The response of Zebari came after a letter from the Amnesty International Organization⁽¹⁴⁾ on May 27, 2020 that had been sent to his office for the arrest of the demonstrators and among them Badal Barawri.

Within the framework of civil disobediences, on June 2, 2020 a number of citizens and breadwinners in various cities and towns, especially in Sulaimaniyah province, poured into the street to against the curfew and government procedures and carried out peaceful demonstrations. But the security forces faced the demonstrators and journalists whom they were covering the demonstrations. In this regard, Metro Center for Defending Journalists published an announcement in the same day mentioned a number of violations against journalists and media outlets⁽¹⁵⁾. On June 15th, different classes of society carried out a protest gathering in front of the UN headquarter against the invasion of Turkey. The security forces prevented the gathering and

12- The statement of the organizations and activists from the page of activist Hogr Chato. <https://web.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10158919376132923&set=a.457297922922>

13- The press report of the website of The New Arab. (2020), it was available on the website on May 25, 2020 <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/5/19/press-freedom-activists-condemn-iraqi-kurdish-authorities-arrest-of-journalists>

14- The report of Amnesty International Organization. (2020) it was available on May 29, 2020. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1423962020ENGLISH.pdf>

15- The Statement of Metro Center about the violations of June 2, 2020. http://www.hawlati.co/page_detail?smart-id=14286&fbclid=IwAR0xEbcnyBlk1j742i5P3yEdtgx73Y0GYQnf72MESVQF9imz8Cb3yX6s-nQ

▶arrested 24 demonstrators. All of them were released after several hours of detaining. On June 20, a number of citizens in Shiladize demonstrated against the Turkish invasion on the territory of the Kurdistan Region. The security forces using force and violence dispersed the demonstrations and arrested 10 of them.

The journalists were subjected to lots of violations under coronavirus when covering the activities and events. On March 19, staffs of NRT channel were not allowed by security forces to cover the visit of the Ministry of Finance to international border crossing of Haji Omaran. On April 26, a press team of Speda Channel was prevented to cover the protest gathering of the owners of car exhibitions in Duhok. On May 16, 8 journalists were arrested as they were covering the demonstrations of Duhok. On June 4, a team of Speda Channel was beaten by security forces at the check point of Kalak and confiscating all their equipment and destroying them.



Recommendations and Suggestions:

- KRG must apply the NGOs Law as it's which provides equal opportunity to the work and activities of the organizations and prevents any form of discrimination to have access to the financial resources.
- KRG must utilize the human and financial capacity of the organizations, and for this purpose the CSOs must have representatives within the crisis cell and operations room under the crises.
- The NGOs Department of Kurdistan Region must have a prominent role to facilitate for the activities of the organizations under the crises so as the organizations to be able to deliver their services to the citizens properly, freely and easily.
- The financial instructions and banking regulations must take into account the competence and the situation of NGOs and they cannot be treated as the companies.
- The CSOs and civil activists must increase their joint working, networking and cooperation to increase their impact and making more pressures.
- The KRG must carry out freedom of expression relative laws appropriately, especially; the Law of Demonstration Organization, Law of Access to Information and the Press Law.
- Civil freedom of expression is a legal right and must not be violated under any pretext.
- There must be a key and neutral role for the public prosecution in protecting and defending on the rights of the citizens and journalists.

Appendixes

(1) Request letter from the Ministry of Interior



(2) The statement of the organizations and activists from the page of activist Hogr Chato.

- عيد في السجن
311 منظمة و 183 مدرب في مجال حقوق الانسان
يطالبون الحرية للمعتقلين في محافظة دهوك
- نناشد باسم منظمات المجتمع المدني الموقعة ادناء والذي يتضمن الطلب من رئيس جمهورية العراق حامي الدستور ورئيس إقليم كردستان للتدخل للافراج الفوري عن الرملة المعلمين والموظفين و نشاط المجتمع المدني و الاعلاميين وعلى رأسهم الناشط المدني بدل عبدالباقي برباري ، الذي اعتقل قبل يوم 16/5/2020، لمشاركته في تنظيم اعتصام بمحافظة دهوك للمطالبة باطلاق رواتب المعلمين و الموظفين المتأخرة.
- وتؤكد منظمات الموقعة أن التظاهر السلمي حق دستوري من حق الافراد والجماعات ممارسته وفق القوانين والأنظمة وأن على السلطات احترام هذا الحق المشروع.
- الحرية للزميل بدل عيد الباقي، الذي هو أحد كوادر منظمات المجتمع المدني ، وأحد أبرز الناشطين المدنيين في الإقليم.
- اسم المنظمات
- 1- منظمة النجدة الشعبية
 - 2- رابطة مدربي حقوق الانسان (183) مدرب
 - 3- شبكة عدالة للسجناء (54) منظمة
 - 4- منظمة الدراسات و المعلومات الجندرية
 - 5- شبكة حمس لمراقبة الانتخابات (113) منظمة
 - 6- منظمة مراقبة حقوق الانسان الكوردية
 - 7- منظمة حقوق الانسان في كوردستان
 - 8- منظمة ميثرا للتنمية والثقافة اليارسانية
 - 9- منظمة البحوث و التنمية
 - 10- معهد الاصلاح للتنمية
 - 11- منظمة السلام و الحرية
 - 12- شبكة الترتايف للتنمية والديمقراطية
 - 13- الجمعية الثقافية لشباب العراق
 - 14- منظمة افق للتنمية البشرية
 - 15- مركز نيوي لحقوق الاقليات
 - 16- منظمة التنمية و الازدهار
 - 17- منظمة العدالة لحقوق الاقليات
 - 18- مركز ميثرو للدفاع عن حقوق الصحفيين
 - 19- منظمة تازموون لتنمية المجتمع
 - 20- جمعية الانثايق للتنمية و التطوير الاقتصادي
 - 21- المنظمة الابزيدية للتوثيق
 - 22- منظمة حمورابي لحقوق الانسان
 - 23- شبكة تحالف الاقليات العراقية (21) منظمة
 - 24- جمعية حويلان (وحدتنا) الثقافية
 - 25- منظمة انماء الديمقراطية و حقوق الانسان
 - 26- جمعية الفردوس العراقية
 - 27- شبكة النساء العراقيات (100) منظمة
 - 28- مؤسسة المدني لحقوق الانسان
 - 29- جمعية نساء الشيك

Chapter 2

Corona's impact on the work of CSOs and freedom of expression in South and central provinces

First: The Reality of Iraqi Organizations during the Corona Pandemic

The Corona virus pandemic of 2020 spread in Iraq, starting on February 24, 2020 in the city of Najaf, when a sample of an Iranian religious student examined and the result was positive for his infection with the Corona virus. Other cases with Covid-19 were revealed, and there were 9,846 confirmed cases in Iraq, including 285 deaths as of 5 June 2020. Iraq took a series of precautionary measures in January 2020. Baghdad decided to prohibit entrance of people from China to the country, while its citizens were evacuated from the Chinese city of Wuhan. The Iranians were prohibited from entering the country through the border crossings, and the Iraqi government airlines' flights to Iran from the airports were suspended. Hence, the situation came to the closure of border crossings, airports and domestic flights between the governorates, full quarantine, and then partial quarantine which it continues until now (June 6, 2020).

The High Committee of Corona Pandemic Confrontation has issued a wide range of decisions in order to reduce and end the virus, although it did not exclude the work of civil society organizations in the continuity of their work. In reality, civil society organizations had a prominent role in providing services to the community. The NGO Department in Baghdad was more ready and cooperative than the Kurdistan Region Organizations Department to respond to the work of the organizations during the Corona pandemic. In addition to facilitating the organizations operations, the Baghdad NGO Department created an electronic link to document the activities of registered organizations and publish their reports professionally. Seven reports have been published on the activities of the organizations and their positive campaign



for the citizens' needs. The report states that the services of local organizations during the crisis reached (3,227,637) Iraqi citizens through 788⁽¹⁶⁾ organizations (duly registered with the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations) and included 18 Iraqi governorates. According to the Department of Organizations, international organizations in Iraq did not have a primary role in these campaigns. Therefore, the NGO Department demands the branches of international organizations in Iraq that it is necessary for them to have local partners in the implementation of their projects in Iraq.

One of the proposals from some civil society organizations was that there were calls from the civil society organizations to have a representative in the Supreme Committee of Corona Confrontation in Iraq, but certainly the proposal was not accepted by the official authorities.

Despite this, in some governorates, some organizations have been prevented by agencies that are not responsible for dealing with the local and international organizations to do their work. A complaint was submitted to the NGO Department which was circulated an official letter on May 13, 2020 and published on the official website of the Department and stipulates that, "The Department of Non-Governmental Organizations warns entities and organizations playing the role of mediator between them and the rest of the non-governmental organizations operating in Iraq and prejudice their competencies in accordance with the provisions of the NGOs Law No. 12 of 2010 and Cabinet Resolution No. (469) of (2013) which considers the NGO Department to be the only entity competent to manage all NGOs, taking the role of the department, impersonating it, speaking in its name, and notifying NGOs to stop submitting requests for the movement of wheels and associates to the organizations department (on the pretext that the financial report is not fulfilled) is considered a violation that the law held them accountable and the department reserves the right to take the appropriate legal procedures against the party that has done this violation.. The NGO Department invites local organizations and branches of foreign organizations not to listen to any party claiming to transfer the directions of the department, and that the inquiry be formally from the department directly about the reality of the positions of the organizations, bearing in mind that the department did not authorize any party to speak on its behalf or transmit its directions and warns the authorities against taking this role and violators will be subject to legal actions. It is worth

16- <http://www.ngoao.gov.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=945>

to mention that the NGO Department continues implementing the requests to manage the movement of organizations and their affiliates in accordance with the mechanism approved within 24 hours of the date of application submission and in cooperation with the National Operations Center (NOC).⁽¹⁷⁾

Besides, some activists were subjected to violations during the performance of their volunteer work, especially in Nineveh. In March 2020, in Nineveh, the activist Talal Fouzan, one of the volunteer teams leader in Nineveh, was arrested by the security authorities during the distribution of food baskets to poor families. But after a media campaign by the activists and the appointment of a lawyer for him to defend him was released by the Nineveh court and he was cleared of the charge. Talal told the Peace and Freedom Team, "I was accused of my affiliation to ISIS. ***I was arrested without a judicial order. But the court announced my acquittal because I was accused without any evidence and I am a civilian activist and volunteer. Everyone knows me and all organizations in Mosul as well where we provided a lot to our people in Nineveh Governorate during and after the liberation, as well as at the commencement of Corona appearance***". Following the harassment of the voluntary organizations and teams in Nineveh, and after the intervention of some organizations with the official authorities, the Governor of Nineveh province, Najm Jabouri, issued on April 1, 2020 a circulated note to all the concerned authorities, calling them to facilitate the mission of the registered organizations and volunteer teams to start their work during the quarantine period.⁽¹⁸⁾

In another situation, a dangerous file and for the first time, the Iraqi official authorities announced on March 8th, 2020 Resolution No. 21 which was issued by the Terrorist Money Freezing Committee of the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Office - the Iraqi Cabinet to freeze movable and immovable funds and economic resources of five non-governmental organizations and their chiefs on charges suspected of terrorism, they are:

1. Iraqi Nature Organization and its Chairman, Azzam Jawad Mahdi Alloush.
2. Shams Al-Rafidain Charitable Organization, and its president, Fatima Hassan Jassim Muhammad Al-Qaisi.
3. World Youth Foundation for Training and Development and its president Iban Idris Dawoud.

17- <http://www.ngoao.gov.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=940>

18- A copy of the book is within the appendix



4. The Islamic Education Association and its Chairman Diaa Badri Hammoudi.
5. Mubadirun Relief and Development Organization and its president, Abbas Hussain Muhammad Al-Jubouri.⁽¹⁹⁾

We tried to contact people from those organizations about their response to the decision, but we were unable to reach them. Likewise, the content of the decision does not mention details about the work and nature of these organizations, although there were environmental activities for the Iraqi Nature Organization in some governorates in the previous years!

As on the level of organizations' response to contribute facing Corona, there was an agreed opinion by the presidents of the Iraqi organizations and activists that although the organizations had initiatives from here and there, but it was not at the required level. In this context, Khaled Al-Khalidi from the Sergio Dimelo team states that, ***"The New Coronavirus outbreak revealed that the dilemma of civil society organizations that went through with the experience of the ISIS terrorist invading the Iraqi regions has still stand as the organizations in general were unable to respond immediately on the ground to support the state institutions, whether with humanitarians or human resources just in a very narrow limit. Most of the organizations ignored the risk of the virus during the first two months due to the lack of real assessment which the virus spread in the countries including China, Italy and Iran, and therefore valuable time has been wasted to arrange the conditions of organizations in Iraq."***

Most of the organizations that were met stated that it was difficult for the organizations to obtain the approval of the Crisis Cell in their provinces to continue their work and because the gatherings and workshops were not permitted. Most of their work was directed towards communication via the Internet, whether it was meetings or some training or work to raise awareness about protection from Corona.

In this way, Ali Badr from Al-Khair Humanitarian Organization in Maysan Governorate mentioned that, ***"Most of the organizations stayed at home and the did home office working and what we are seeing is that the members of the organizations communicated with the organizations in obtaining certificates to participate in courses via the internet with international***

19-<https://www.aml.iq/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85-21-1.pdf>

organizations and Iraqi universities.”

As for those who see that the role of the organizations was good, in our meeting with the activist Safaa Amin from the Al-Amin Relief and Development Association in Basra states that, ***“The organizations’ contribution is good to spread awareness against the dangers of this epidemic as well as providing food and drug assistance to families affected by the curfew.”***

We can say that the organizations had some basic roles in Iraq:

1. Providing and distributing food baskets to marginalized groups.
2. Spreading awareness of corona protection.
3. Distribution of medical stuff.
4. Contribute to sterilization and disinfection.

In a respective topic to the reality of the organizations during Corona outbreak, the organizations localized themselves. i.e. They could only work at their regional level due to the curfew between the provinces. They could work just at the governorate level and not at the national level. It was only possible to work at the national level in the issue of awareness online. There was difficulty in the distribution of food and health aid and even the issue of disinfection and sterilization at the national level. In spite of this, some authorities tried to work in some different governorates. Khaled Al-Khalidi from Sergio Dimelo team states that they worked during the pandemic and that, ***“Our team was able to actually intervene in 5 militarily isolated outposts which are Al-Hilal in Al-Muthanna Governorate, Al-Sadal Fariha in Najaf, Al-Haritha in Basra, Khan Al-Lwalwah in Diyala and the two sectors 56 and 57 in Baghdad as we worked on sterilization and disinfection of these areas”***.

The work at the local level in every governorate, district, or sub-district has also affected the networking between organizations. Ahmed Salem, in Al-Jisr Organization, Anbar Branch, says that, ***“Each organization continues to work alone to highlight its activity only”***. This is one of the problems among the Iraqi civil society organizations, where the experience of most of the networks and alliances did not survive and if succeeded, was just seasonal. The most prominent examples are some networks working in the field of election monitoring, where some of them succeeded in observing, but after the monitoring process they stop working!



With regard to the permit to work during the pandemic and curfew, all those who were interviewed by the organizations mentioned that there was discrimination against the organizations, as some organizations close to the authority or close to some government officials were provided with statements and exceptions to them despite the fact that some of them did not offer anything worthy to be mentioned. In this situation, Maitham Al-Alawi, from Psychosocial Support Organization in Fallujah-Anbar, says that, ***“Yes there are organizations affiliated with the officials in the state and they provide them with letters of thanks, facilitate the mission and they are not exist on the ground as well as did not provide anything during the pandemic”.***

In relation to the organizations' obligations towards the NGO Department in Baghdad, especially with regard to licensing or submitting annual reports, during the pandemic, the organization's registration, though it was not formally announced, it was stopped and no new registration has been issued for the submitted organizations. In Iraq, there are more than 5 thousand organizations registered with the NGOs Department from local organizations and branches of international organizations, except those have registered in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq. According to the department, due to their legal deficiencies, the registration request of 728 organizations were rejected, where their names are published on the website of the department besides 12 organizations were suspended from January until February 2020, as well as their names are published on the site. Because of the complete and partial quarantine, most of the registered organizations did not submit the progress and financial reports for the year 2019 to the Department of Organizations, which were supposed to be delivered in March 2020, but it was postponed until mid-May 2020. But again because of the situation, the report was not adhered to. In the beginning of June 2020, the Department of Organizations announced the deadline for the submission of the report which will be 15 days following the lifting of full in Iraq. So far, it is not known the date when the full curfew in Iraq will be lifted due to the Corona pandemic.

On the other hand, all local and international organizations operating in Iraq were surprised by the decision of the Central Bank of Iraq about increasing the proportion of commission for transfers received from outside Iraq and paying a quarter of their cash in Iraqi dinars. The Central Bank of Iraq issued a decision on March 29, 2020 and circulated it to all approved banks in Iraq⁽²⁰⁾, and it says that:

20- A copy of the book is within the appendix

1. The commission for transferring the sums into Iraq will be at the rate of seven thousand, which was previously four thousand.
2. The amounts are paid to the recipients by 75% dollars and 25% IQD. i.e In every hundred dollars transferred to any party, including civil society organizations, %75 paid in dollars and the rest will be in Iraqi dinars at the rate of IQD 1,182 per US dollar!
3. Opening a special account for the Iraqi dinar for every customer and depositing the amount in dinars if the customer does not have an account in the Iraqi dinar. All the organizations surprised with such a dealing and some of them considered it as an appropriate action because they didn't request to have IQD account but it has been opened by the bank itself without any authorization or request!

This measure embarrassed the financial position of the organizations. On the one hand, the dollar price in the market is much higher than the banks, and also caused them another problem related to organizing financial reports with their financiers.

Besides, the lock down of the banks due to the pandemic delayed the payment within the organizations, whether for the payroll payments or for their activities' expenses.

Second: Freedom of Expression in Iraq Under Corona

The protests and demonstrations continued, in one way or another, in Iraq, although the number of demonstrators has decreased, and they announced a demonstration against the government's policies, demanding the fall of Al-Mahdi government, early elections and the amendment of the constitution and reforms.⁽²¹⁾ The demonstrators committed to the health protection and the social space between them to protect from the pandemic, and no cases of corona were reported among the demonstrators in the demonstration areas. In March and in the end of May 2020, the Monitoring Teams of Peace and Freedom Organization recorded a set of violations against the protestors, especially in Baghdad and Basra as follows:

- Anonymous gunmen attacked the demonstrators in Tahrir Square in the center of Baghdad on Tuesday, April 21, 2020 and shot them in the first day of the partial lifting of the curfew in the Iraqi capital because of the

21- PFO has published 5 reports on the demonstrations that could be seen in the website of the organization. www.pfo-ku.org



quarantine, and as a result a demonstrator was killed and two others were wounded.

- In the late night of Sunday, May 10, 2020, demonstrators gathered in front of the headquarters of the “Thaarul Allah” Movement in Basra to renew their demands for political reforms and change the ruling class who’s accused of corruption. Gunmen, inside the building, shot the demonstrators and killed a 20 year protestor after being shot in the head, according to medical sources and witnesses. On Monday, May 11, 2020, the Iraqi security forces announced the arrest of at least five militants affiliated to that party.
- On May 10, 2020 hundreds of people demonstrated again in a step to escalate the protests again in Iraq, to pressure the government holding early elections and hold those whose hands stained with the blood of more than 800 peaceful demonstrators since October 1, 2019 accountable. Despite the new Prime Minister’s decision, Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, not to assault the demonstrators, the security forces used excessive power to disperse the demonstrators on the Republic Bridge who passed the first two checkpoints in order to cross the bridge and enter the Green Zone.

The demonstrations started again in the southern governorates, calling the new government to “hold accountable all those involved in killing the demonstrators, release the detainees among the demonstrators, and carry out the reforms demanded by the demonstrators.”

Following the first meeting of the new government, Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, the Prime Minister gave a televised speech to Iraqi people on Saturday, evening, May 9, 2020. Al-Kazemi promised to “investigate the facts about all the incidents,” and pledged in his speech to “holding the negligent of the Iraqi blood accountable, compensating the families of the martyrs, and caring for the injured.”

The superintendent of the media center of the Supreme Judicial Council, Judge Abdul Sattar Bayraqdar, stated that according to the latest data submitted by all courts to the administration of the Supreme Judicial Council, there is not any arrested or convicted peaceful demonstrators, given that demonstrating is a constitutionally guaranteed right under Article (38) of the Constitution.⁽²²⁾ However, some local and international organizations⁽²³⁾ and

22- <https://www.hjc.iq/view.67292/>

23- see the report of Human Rights Watch Organization in this link on forceful kidnapping <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2020/05/18/375158>

activists of the demonstrations' areas confirm that there are hundreds of young demonstrators whose fate is unknown, they have been arrested by armed groups in Iraq, and the Iraqi government must release them immediately, especially the new prime minister came from the Iraqi intelligence agency along with his good relationship with the various Iraqi authorities.

On May 18, 2020, the High Commission of Human Rights in Iraq issued a statement about the events that took place in the demonstrations in Diwaniyah Governorate. It states that, ***"The Commission followed with great concern and sorrow the events that took place in Al-Diwaniyah Governorate today between the demonstrators and the security forces. While the commission praises the peaceful demonstrations and cooperation between the security forces and the demonstrators in the last period in all governorates of Iraq, the commission asks the demonstrators and the security forces in Al-Diwaniyah Governorate to exercise restraint, be wise, adhere to the rules of peaceful protest, and refrain from using any excessive violence, release the detainees, and at the same time we call the prime minister for urgent intervention to avoid the escalation of the situation to get out of control, which may generate consequences and violations of human rights"***.⁽²⁴⁾

On the other hand, at the beginning of June 2020, 29 civil actors, including the Peace and Freedom Organization, called the Iraqi government and related institutions to stop pursuing activists and bloggers from Anbar Governorate due to their solidarity with the uprising or criticizing deficiencies in the performance of the local government there.

The organizations, unions, and trade unions signed this call demanded the government of Mr. Al-Kadhemi to investigate the issue and fulfill its obligations regarding not to prosecute activists and guarantee freedom of expression. They also say in their statement that, ***"The arbitrary practices and restrictions on activists and the local population in Anbar represent a serious turning point in dealing with civil society and the practice of democracy in Anbar, and from this standpoint we call on the local government and security services in the province to stop chasing and threatening activists and the local population, restrict the security services to their security role defined by law, not to interfere in the work of voluntary organizations and teams, and to hold accountable those who practice arrests, summons, and intimidation against them. Arrests and mass summonses of activists in the governorate***

24- <http://ihchr.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3361>



and forcing them to sign illegal pledges violate the current Iraqi constitution and the conventions and principles of human rights”

Anbar Governorate witnessed in the past months a number of cases of arrest and threats to a number of civil society activists and bloggers, as a result of their expression of their solidarity with the large demonstrations that spread in the governorates of the center and south. These activists were subjected to arrest, torture and abuse, and they were released after taking pledges not to publish or write on the issue.⁽²⁵⁾ Pursuit of activists in the demonstrations and civil society activists is also present in other governorates according to the opinions of some civil society leaders, who requested their names not be mentioned.

On May 7, 2020, Amnesty International addressed an open letter⁽²⁶⁾ to the new Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, asking them to ***“Accelerate the curbs of the security forces and initiate comprehensive and independent investigations on the killings.” The letter adds: The authorities have had months to change course away from the use of violent repression. The new government must reassure protesters that they have the right to expect security forces to provide protection for them, not to arbitrarily kill and deform them, that their government will address their grievances, especially their demands to meet their social and economic rights”***.

On the other hand, a number of protesters stormed the headquarters of MBC Iraq in the capital, Baghdad, on May 18, 2020 in response to content broadcast by the channel, which some parties considered offensive to the former deputy chief of the popular mobilization, Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis. The protesters broke into the channel office in Al-Waziriyah neighborhood in Baghdad.

25- [https://www.facebook.com/infocenteriq/?_tn_&eid=ARCK-N1AqOz9uR0FUmlvAosNjP_Y1N5KLUmQ9Dm6LRI71-cnbRyHETDK2jx8x-BVSMO8voPxb4qImq2vQd&hc_ref=ARRhYM-CEWVPlyiEO3x26bAR2WN-FJUwIhL0BzkaNBLAEvq3CNcNrE3wK7mRgyXnd0LI&ref=nf&_xts__\[0\]=68.ARDgA-NFkgAy7xGWIkM1wlfon4_NN5HiWPKvn5rZ91Unf1UEku585KJ5dUjeVFJ0fSJrgbKs-R2OmYOPduMR69gjri0ezWR8r6_GkVZHkD5qrkqRU3v6FSUMiMD6cAW4NOB2eibmve6X-NxRYx0awGqpRMELeVf7zo57JNXhQem01N2Phqgta4DdMOHBGvoL4VGeF8iYS91aQXCL-WREB3CJnOB_m0PMUgAKTtDD8cYBZX6OCUo2fzpnPuGeeQ3bad5yntIKTP7TFqI-4lgoBm-tatsysGa5rjqofuqJ-qKA-DQrwVee2HuuU5yvj5uptx8yHIGXb-adSOpw31QTiNB5_fUBw](https://www.facebook.com/infocenteriq/?_tn_&eid=ARCK-N1AqOz9uR0FUmlvAosNjP_Y1N5KLUmQ9Dm6LRI71-cnbRyHETDK2jx8x-BVSMO8voPxb4qImq2vQd&hc_ref=ARRhYM-CEWVPlyiEO3x26bAR2WN-FJUwIhL0BzkaNBLAEvq3CNcNrE3wK7mRgyXnd0LI&ref=nf&_xts__[0]=68.ARDgA-NFkgAy7xGWIkM1wlfon4_NN5HiWPKvn5rZ91Unf1UEku585KJ5dUjeVFJ0fSJrgbKs-R2OmYOPduMR69gjri0ezWR8r6_GkVZHkD5qrkqRU3v6FSUMiMD6cAW4NOB2eibmve6X-NxRYx0awGqpRMELeVf7zo57JNXhQem01N2Phqgta4DdMOHBGvoL4VGeF8iYS91aQXCL-WREB3CJnOB_m0PMUgAKTtDD8cYBZX6OCUo2fzpnPuGeeQ3bad5yntIKTP7TFqI-4lgoBm-tatsysGa5rjqofuqJ-qKA-DQrwVee2HuuU5yvj5uptx8yHIGXb-adSOpw31QTiNB5_fUBw)

26- <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1422902020ARABIC.pdf>

The protestors had taken the vicinity of the headquarters before breaking into it, the security forces were present in the surrounding of headquarter and did not interfere to prevent its storming.

On the level of violations against journalists during March and until the end of May 2020, 25 media outlets and journalists were subjected to the violation of death threat, prevented from covering, arresting and attacking news agencies in the governorates of Kirkuk, Nineveh, Salahaddin, Anbar, Baghdad, Maysan, Basra, and Dhi-Qar. Details of the violations are recorded by the monitoring teams of the Peace and Freedom Organization. The quarantine authorities have excluded journalists from quarantine decisions.

Likewise, the Media and Communications Commission suspended the license of "Reuters" news agency and fined it by approximately €19,000 euros for reporting false news and endangering community security. This is after the agency published a report on the Iraqi authorities' concealment of real numbers people infected with the Coronavirus.

The Iraqi Journalists Syndicate announced that there were journalists who were infected with Covid-9 virus in Iraq. Later, it was announced that one of the Iraqi media workers lost his life due to Coronavirus. Corona influenced media freedom, especially with regard to criticizing the measures taken to prevent corona not only in Iraq but across the world.

The media practice in disputed areas between the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi government is not safe for media work where journalists in those areas are subjected to more **pressure. According to a statement by the Metro Center for the Defense of Journalists, " At 11 a.m. on Friday, May 15, 2020 A patrol of Federal Police, arrested Kurdistan 24 satellite team including (Hemn Daloy, the correspondent of the channel and Nawzad Muhammad, the cameraman"** in the village of Zanqari in Daquq district where majority of its population are Kakais).⁽²⁷⁾

The human rights organizations and human rights activists calling the Iraqi government to expedite the review of the laws in force that prohibit freedom of expression and to initiate immediately legislation on modern media freedom

27- <http://www.metroo.org/arabic/dreja.aspx?hewal&jmare=1325&Jor=3>
<https://rsf.org/ar/ranking>



and freedom of expression in accordance with the international obligations of Iraq in respect to the improvement of human rights condition in the country.

It is noteworthy that Iraq ranks 162 globally in the classifications of the Reporters without Borders Organization for the year 2020.⁽²⁸⁾

28- <https://rsf.org/ar/ranking>

Third: conclusion

1. In the commencement of the pandemic, organizations had a greater role in distributing aid, awareness, sterilization, and distributing health stuff, but with the passage of time, the organizations' contribution decreased, according to the official reports issued by the NGO Department.
2. According to the report of the Department of Organizations, there is contribution from 788 organizations cooperating to confront coronavirus in Iraq, and this number will be approximately 20% of the organizations registered in Iraq.
3. For the first time, the NGO Department invites UN Agencies and branches of international organizations to involve local organizations within their work and criticizes the work of international organizations and their contribution for the confrontation of coronavirus.
4. The NGO Department in Baghdad was more cooperative and coordinating with the NGOs than the NGOs Department in Kurdistan Region.
5. There are various official bodies that interfere with the work of NGOs in Iraq, and the Organizations Department called for stopping those agencies from interfering.
6. The work of 5 international and local NGOs on terrorism charges has been suspended in Iraq. A civilian activist was imprisoned in Mosul on the same charge, but he was released after he was acquitted of the charge.
7. The work of the organizations at the time of the pandemic during the period of this study was described as zonal due to the curfew measures. Likewise, teamwork and lack of networking were not seen.
8. Because of the curfew and quarantine procedures, the organizations were unable to submit their annual reports to the Organizations Department which dealt the issue with flexibility, in addition to delaying the registration process for the organizations submitting registration requests for the same reasons.
9. All organizations experienced financial problems on the one hand due to the bank lock down and on the other hand related to the decision of the Central Bank of Iraq for paying 25% of the amounts transferred in Iraqi



dinars, which will have impact on the accounts of NGOs.

10. The massive demonstrations retreated due to quarantine and curfews, as well as due to the granting of a deadline for the new Iraqi government.
11. Continue to pursue activists, especially in Anbar province.
12. Restrictions on media freedoms and the increase in violations against journalists and media outlets.
13. The death of a journalist and the injury of more than two journalists in Iraq with Covid-19 Virus.
14. Continuing violations against journalists in the disputed areas, especially in Kirkuk.
15. Moodiness in dealing with the CSOs and the media according to their closeness to the government or powerful people in local governments, as there were large areas for some and no space for others.

Fourth: Recommendations

1. Calling and supporting the NGOs Department in Iraq to continue asking the international organizations to include local organizations in their projects and have meetings to adopt mechanisms acceptable to that partnership.
2. We ask the Iraqi Central Bank to review its decision to spend the Iraqi dinar for the amounts transferred and exclude NGOs from this procedure.
3. We ask the NGOs Department to develop electronic mechanisms in the Organizations Department in relation to the registration and reports.
4. We recommend that civil society organizations pay attention to remote areas outside the main city centers, as it was found that most of the organizations work focuses in the main city centers.
5. We recommend Iraqi CSOs to reflect about the issue of networking among them, on the one hand, to solve that old dilemma, as well as to increase their influence in their areas of work.
6. We call on the Iraqi government to release the demonstrators immediately and stop chasing the activists.
7. We call on the Iraqi government and the Iraqi parliament to expedite the legislation related to the freedom of expression, including the Freedom of Demonstration Law and media freedoms, and the Law of Access to Information.
8. We call on the Iraqi government to hold accountable all those involved in the violations against the demonstrators and against the media and activists.
9. We call on the Iraqi government to end the phenomenon of assaulting journalists in the disputed areas.
10. We call on the CSOs in Iraq to show increased interest in electronic activities through various applications of workshops, meetings and discussions, as well as electronic media campaigns.

Fifth: Appendix

A copy from the letter of Anti-Money Laundry Office and Terrorism Financing about the termination of the work of five organizations.



تالياً، يُلغى هذا القرار بدءاً من تاريخ إصداره.

للتأني، إصاحم هذا القرار على الوزارات والجهات غير المرتبطة بوزارة والمحافظات كافة والمؤسسات المالية والبحر المالية والبنوك ذات العلاقة لغرض أخذ الإجراءات اللازمة بشأن التكاليف والامضاء المنشور بهذا الشأن.

ربحاً، يتشتر هذا القرار فوراً في الجريدة الرسمية والمواقع الإلكترونية لمكتب مكافحة غسل الأموال وتحويل الإهاب.

رئيس لجنة تجريد أموال الإرهابين
٢٠٢٠/٣/١٦

(١-٢)



قرار لجنة تجريد أموال الإرهابين
رقم (٢١) لسنة ٢٠٢٠

بناءً على ما عرضه مكتب مكافحة غسل الأموال وتمويل الإرهاب بموجب كتابه (سرى) ٤ أو العدد (١٢٢) بتاريخ ١٣/٢/٢٠٢٠، واستناداً إلى أحكام قانون مكافحة غسل الأموال وتمويل الإرهاب: (٣٩ لسنة ٢٠١٤)، ونظام تجريد أموال الإرهابيين: (٤ لسنة ٢٠١٦)، ووفقاً للتصاريح المكونة إلى اللجنة.

قررت لجنة تجريد أموال الإرهابيين في جلستها الاعتيادية الثانية المنعقدة بتاريخ ٢٠٢٠/٣/١٦ ما يلي:

أولاً: تجريد الأموال المنقولة وغير المنقولة والموارد الاقتصادية لعدد ٥ تكتلات المذكورة في اتمام وروادها إضافة إلى الأشخاص المشابهة بهم، بحسب الآتي:

- أ- (شركة الشمس العراقية) ، اسم رابسة الشراكة : فاطمة حسن جاسم محمد القيسي - اسم الإبر صميحة محمد علي - كود : ١٩٩٩/٢/٩ .
- ب- (مطلة طبيعة العراق) ، اسم رئيس المنظمة : حازم جواد مهدي خورش .
- ج- (مؤسسة شباب العالم للتدريب والتطوير) ، اسم رئيس المؤسسة : أمين العريس داود ، اسم أمين سر المؤسسة : منصور إبراهيم علي صالح الكيلاني ، اسم مسؤول فرع بابل : مدين عويده عبد الله فالح الجنابي ، اسم الإبر : أسيا خضير - كود : ١٩٩٧/١٠/٢ .
- د- (جمعية التربية الإسلامية) ، اسم رئيس الجمعية : ضياء باري حمودي ، أمين سر الجمعية : عبد الرزاق عبد الوهاب عبد الرزاق احمد السامرائي ، اسم الإبر : نيرة شهاب ، كود : ١٩٩٦ ، وبلغت صمد حميد التجمي كود : ١٩٩٣/٣/٢٧ .
- هـ- (مطلة معارون للائحة والتسمية) ، اسم رئيس المنظمة : عباس حسين محمد الجبوري .

(٢-١)

A copy of the letter by Nineveh Governor to facilitate the operation of the organizations.

Republic of Iraq Ninawa Governorate Governor Office		جمهورية العراق محافظة نينوى مكتب المحافظ
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم بمأ بيد هم قواتنا المسلحة من أجل أعمار نينوى		
No:		المعد: ٦٨٠
Date:		التاريخ: ٢٠٢٠/٤/١
الى / الجهات ذات العلاقة م/تسهيل مهمة		
<p>إشارة الى كتاب مركز نينوى للاستشارات والبحوث بالعدد ٣/١٥ في ٢٠٢٠/٣/٢٦ برجي تسهيل عمل المنظمات المحلية المسجلة وفق القانون والفرق التطوعية من أجل ضرورة العمل الجماعي الدؤوب لدعم ومساندة عمل الحكومة المحلية وخليّة الازمة من أجل العمل على زيادة البرامج الخاصة بجانب النوعية الصحية وتقديم المساعدات الإنسانية والاغاثية وفق الضوابط والتعليمات تماشياً مع توجيهات خلية الازمة ولما لها دور ايجابي في تحقيق عملية التكامل في المجتمع لمواجهة تفشي وباء (فابروس كورونا).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">شاكرين تعاونكم معاً خدمة للصالح العام... مع التقدير</p>		
 		
نجم بيد الله بيد محافظ نينوى ٢٠٢٠/ ٤ /		
ninava.gov.iq		governor@ninava.gov.iq

A copy of the Central Bank decision.

Republic Of Iraq
CENTRAL BANK OF IRAQ



البنك المركزي العراقي
بنك العراق المركزي للتحويلات والادخالات
CBI
CENTRAL BANK OF IRAQ

البنك المركزي العراقي
بنك العراق المركزي للتحويلات والادخالات

NO :
Date :

إلى / المصارف المجازة كافة
عمولة سحب الدولار التقدي

دائرة الاستثمارات والتحويلات الخارجية
قسم التحويلات الخارجية
العدد : ٨٤٤ / ٦ / ٥
التاريخ : ٢٠٠٧ / ٢ / ٢٩

تحية طيبة ...

الحقاً بكتابتنا المرقم بالعدد (١٢٦/٢/٩) في ٢٠٠٦/٣/١٦، نود إيضاح الآتي:

١. تكون عمولة السحب التقدي للدولار الأمريكي والمثلثي من الحوالات الواردة للمصرف الى حساباتنا في البنك الفيدرالي الأمريكي وكذلك الحوالات الواردة للمصارف من مصارف أخرى بنسبة (٠,٠٠٧) سبعة بالألف.
٢. يتم صرف مبالغ الحوالات الواردة أعلاه للمصارف بواقع (٧٥%) نقداً بالدولار وفق العمولة أعلاه، و (٢٥%) تتلف دينار عراقي وفق سعر الصرف الرسمي (١١٨٢) ديناراً للدولار.
٣. على المصارف ان تقوم بصرف نسبة الـ (٢٥%) أعلاه الى زبائننا أصحاب الحوالات بسعر (١٢٠٠) دينار / دولار، وتقديم طلباتها في نهاية كل شهر الى دائرة المحاسبة في البنك المركزي لغرض معالجة فرق السعيرين في حساباتها لدينا بالدينار العراقي.
٤. للمصارف صرف كامل مبلغ الحوالة الواردة بالدينار العراقي ان رغب الزبون بذلك ويتم معالجة فرق السعيرين بنفس الآلية المذكورة.
٥. نؤكد بأن الآلية أعلاه لا تشمل ايداعات الزبائن بالدولار نقداً، حيث تصرف للزبون بالكامل، وإنما تقتصر على الزبائن الذين يستلمون حوالات واردة من خارج العراق مهما كان نوعها، وحوالات الدولار الداخلية بين المصارف في حساباتها لدينا.

مع التقدير...



د. نزار صباح احمد
المدير العام



تسليمة منه الى:

- مكاتب السيد المحافظ، للتفصل بالاطلاع، مع التقدير.
- السيد نائب المحافظ، للتفصل بالاطلاع، مع التقدير.
- دائرة الضريبة، للتفصل بالاطلاع، مع التقدير.
- دائرة المحاسبة، للتفصل بالاطلاع، مع التقدير.
- دائرة العمليات المالية، للتفصل بالاطلاع، مع التقدير.

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