

On the fourth anniversary of the uprising:

Why do successive governments ignore the protesters' demands?

With the advent of October 1st, we remember what happened in October 2019 when hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Baghdad and the provinces to demand their rights, which had been denied by successive governments in Iraq. They raised the slogan "We Want a Homeland," but these peaceful crowds were met with excessive violence from security forces. This led to the deaths of dozens on October 1st, 2019, followed by a series of assassinations and persecution that targeted the protesters.

The protest movement lasted for several days before the youthful crowds, who were subjected to snipers and live ammunition, retreated. They returned on October 25, 2019, gathering at the gates of the Green Zone in an attempt to breach it. However, security forces had no option other than deliberate killings and the use of brutal suppression methods. This turned the protests into open sit-ins in most Iraqi cities, expanding to include various segments of society.

Revenge against the protesters:

The events of October 2019 witnessed the fall of hundreds of martyrs and wounding of thousands of peaceful protesters. The deliberate killings, arbitrary arrests, and cases of abduction and enforced disappearance continued in most Iraqi cities even after the end of the protests. Authorities collaborated with non-state armed groups and those benefiting from financial, administrative, political corruption, and those opposed to change, attempting to quell the movement in any way possible.

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Concerns about lack of justice:

Today, on the fourth anniversary of the October protests, we renew our demands for more justice and the resolution of cases related to the missing and the prosecution of those responsible for killing the protesters. Despite the formation of investigative committees one after the other, the Iraqi public remains in the dark about their findings and investigations. Transparency is absent, and it is clear that successive governments since 2019 have not been serious about achieving justice. This raises concerns about the fate of hundreds of missing Iraqis and the wounded and persecuted who are still subject to vindictive lawsuits.

Many families are still demanding justice for their loved ones, and many activists remain missing after participating in the October protest movement and subsequent demonstrations.

Timid government response:

In contrast, the government's response has been limited regarding the violations and crimes committed against human rights defenders and activists. This was highlighted by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which stated, "Committees do not provide any general information about their work, making it difficult to assess their effectiveness, and what is more concerning is that in many cases, judges, investigators, and human rights defenders who demand accountability face threats and attacks by individuals believed to be associated with or supported by armed elements."

In a letter to the Prime Minister (Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani), Amnesty International confirmed its documentation of the campaign of suppression against the protesters in October 2019, resulting in the deaths of hundreds. It described these as "extrajudicial executions outside the scope of the judiciary"

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and thousands of injuries at the hands of security forces. Amnesty International also documented torture and enforced disappearance of protesters, journalists, and human rights defenders. To this day, no information has been released regarding the results of the extensive investigations into these violations.

Fears of a lack of real accountability:

The impunity for attacks on human rights defenders, activists, and those seeking justice is concerning and continues to stifle freedom of expression. The Iraqi judiciary remains weak, and activists and human rights defenders are still at risk of revenge from armed groups or those complicit with them.

Suppression of the protest movement and civil activity in Iraq continues, taking various forms. Despite international calls for respect for human rights in Iraq and the government's obligation to take all necessary measures to uncover the results of the investigations and resolve the issues of the victims of the protest movement, the government's response has been tepid. Furthermore, the government's restrictions on the work of civil society organizations and their activities continue, along with distorted campaigns targeting activists and women's rights defenders including incitement to murder, without any government action or measures to combat these campaigns and restrictions.

Recommendations:

1. The Iraqi government should make greater efforts to conduct effective, immediate, comprehensive, impartial, transparent, and genuine investigations into all crimes committed against the protesters, activists, and journalists.

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2. Provide practical and full assistance to the victims throughout the legal process and take measures to overcome obstacles to justice while ensuring the safety and security of the victims and their families.
3. Take real and deterrent actions against the campaign targeting women's rights issues and refrain from engaging with it.
4. Respect the rights of human rights defenders and activists to carry out their work freely without intimidation or threats.

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