

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences**

Ref.: AL IRQ 1/2026  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

7 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 53/4, 52/9 and 59/20.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **killing of Iraqi human rights defender Yanar Mohammed**.

Ms. Yanar Mohammed was an Iraqi human rights defender and feminist who worked to protect women against gender-based violence, domestic abuse and so-called honour killings. She established a network of safe houses for women victims of violence and advocated for women's equality and secularism. Ms. Mohammed had a profile of broad global engagement and visibility; she was a close partner to numerous international organizations and participated in numerous international forums, including the United Nations. Ms. Mohammed was the recipient of the 2016 Rafto Prize from Norway, presented annually to honour human rights defenders.

The targeted killing of a woman human rights defender was the subject of communication UA IRQ 5/2020 sent on 28 September 2020. The extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance of human rights defenders were the subject of communication AL IRQ 5/2021 sent on 15 November 2021. We thank your Excellency's Government for the responses received dated 23 February 2021 and 28 January 2022 respectively. However, in light of the following information received, we remain gravely concerned about the killing of Ms. Mohammed, and its broader chilling effect on civic space, and women human rights defenders in particular, and we would like to inquire about the actions your Excellency's Government has taken to ensure accountability.

In its review of eight countries published on 26 February 2026, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) found that Iraq lacked a framework to investigate and prosecute rape and other gender-based violence, including by non-State actors. It stressed the importance of gender equality as a human right.

According to the information received:

On 2 March 2026 at 09.00 a.m. local time, Ms. Mohammed was shot by two unidentified gunmen on motorcycles at her home in northern Baghdad. She was taken to hospital where she subsequently died of her wounds. The gunmen sped away from the scene and no claim of responsibility was issued.

Ms. Mohammed had reportedly just returned to Baghdad from Canada a few days earlier. Ms. Mohammed had to relocate to Canada in 2023 due to an arrest warrant against her for “human trafficking”, which was directly connected with her work, visibility and public criticism of patriarchal norms and political institutions.

It is worth noting that Ms. Mohammed had been subjected to consistent online abuse and death threats since 2004, believed to originate with Iraqi religious extremist militia groups. She had been forced to restrict her movements at times for her own safety.

On 2 March 2026 at 1.00 p.m., the Iraqi interior ministry announced in a Facebook post that the interior minister had ordered an investigation into the killing of Ms. Mohammed, to identify the perpetrators and present them to justice. There had been no public update on the investigation at the time of writing.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, and we take note of the measures taken by the authorities to investigate this case, we express our most serious concern at the killing of Ms. Mohammed in particular in light of the previous targeting of women human rights defenders. We are also concerned by reports that the killing was preceded by threats against her in retaliation for her work and from which she was not afforded protection. Finally, we are alarmed that the killing of Ms. Mohammed was committed with the additional aim of sending a clear chilling message to civil society in Iraq, in particular to women human rights defenders active in the so-called Coalition 188, that they will be targeted if they continue to carry out their human rights defence work. The Coalition 188 is a prominent pressure group of Iraqi women’s rights activists, lawyers, civil society organizations, and politicians formed to oppose the recent amendments that were introduced to Iraq's Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959 and which reportedly discriminate against women and girls and reduce their protection and equality before the law.

We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government of its obligation under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it ratified on 25 January 1971, to protect individuals, including human rights defenders, not only against violations of the Covenant by its agents, but also against acts committed by private persons or entities, in line with the interpretation of the Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 31.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, in its general comment No. 34, the Committee underlined that States have a duty to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, para. 8.

silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression as well as to investigate these attacks in a timely manner, prosecute the perpetrators and provide appropriate forms of reparations to the victims or their representatives.<sup>2</sup>

We are alarmed that the continued failure to effectively protect human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders and feminists against violence may constitute a failure on the part of your Excellency's Government to comply with its obligations under article 7(b) of CEDAW which requires that states parties "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.

We would also like to remind the Government of your Excellency that under article 6(1) of the ICCPR State parties must ensure that the right to life extends to foreseeable threats even if they do not result in the loss of life and must take measures of protection of persons in vulnerable situations because of specific threats against them.

We also wish to underline the responsibility that your Excellency's Government has a responsibility of due diligence to prevent women's rights violations, as well as the duty to investigate and punish acts of violence as well as to provide compensation. 1984 and the CEDAW Committee affirmed that under general international law and specific human rights covenants, States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation (A/47/38, para. 9).

There is a clear duty on the part of States to establish the truth as part of effective reparations. According to principle 2 of the United Nations Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity, "every people has the inalienable right to know the truth about past events concerning the commission of heinous crimes and the circumstances and reasons that led to them." Principle 4 affirms that victims and their families have the right to full and effective access to information concerning violations, including the identity of perpetrators and those responsible at all levels and principle 5 further specifies that "states must take appropriate action, including measures necessary to ensure the independent and effective operation of the judiciary, to give effect to the right to know" (E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1).

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide information on the steps and where available the results, of any investigation carried out into the killing of Ms. Mohammed, including the steps taken to identify the direct and indirect perpetrators

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<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34, para. 23.

responsible and bring them to justice. If such an investigation has proved inconclusive, please explain why and how this is compatible with Iraq's international human rights obligations.

2. Please provide information, and where available, the results, of any investigations or judicial or other inquiries which may have been carried out in relation to the reported threats against the aforementioned woman human rights defender. If no inquiries have taken place or if they are inconclusive, please explain why and how this is compatible with the duty of protection of the State under its international human rights obligations.
3. Please provide information on the measures taken to prevent future killings of women human rights defenders, particularly those members of Coalition 188, as well as to prevent future death threats against human rights defenders and their online intimidation.
4. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that human rights defenders in Iraq, including civil society organisations in Iraq can carry out their peaceful and legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any sort.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Morris Tidball-Binz  
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion  
and expression

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

## Annex

### Reference to international human rights law

The above-mentioned allegations appear to be in contravention of articles 6, 9, 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Iraq on 25 January 1971.

Article 6 (1) of the ICCPR provides that every individual has the right to life and security of the person, that this right shall be protected by law, and that no person shall be arbitrarily deprived of his or her life. In elaborating on article 6 in its general comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee recalled that State parties must ensure the right to life and exercise due diligence to protect the lives of individuals against deprivations caused by persons or entities whose conduct is not attributable to the State (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 7). In the same General Comment, the Human Rights Committee also stated that the obligation of State parties to respect and ensure the right to life extends to reasonably foreseeable threats, and that State parties may be in violation of article 6 even if such threats do not result in the loss of life. States parties are thus under a due diligence obligation to take reasonable, positive measures that do not impose disproportionate burdens on them in response to reasonably foreseeable threats to life originating from private persons and entities whose conduct is not attributable to the State and must also prevent, investigate, punish and remedy arbitrary deprivation of life by private entities (*ibid.*, para. 21). As also elaborated in the General Comment, the duty to protect the right to life requires State parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence, such as human rights defenders (*ibid.*, para. 23).

Article 9(1) of the Covenant establishes the right of all persons to liberty and security of person. As established by the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 35, the right to security of person obliges State parties to take appropriate measures to protect individuals from foreseeable threats to life or bodily integrity proceedings from any governmental or private actors. State parties must respond appropriately to patterns of violence against categories of victims such as intimidation of human rights defenders. (CCPR/C/GC/35, para. 9).

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media”. In its [general comment No. 34](#), the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including “political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11).

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and

who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that “all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress” (para. 23).

We would also like to remind your Government of article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified, with reservations, by Iraq on 12 March 1981 which provides that states parties will take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life.

Additionally, we would like to refer your Excellency’s Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We would further like to refer to articles 5(a), 9 and 12(2) of the Declaration, which hold that all persons, individually or in association with others, have the right to meet or assemble peacefully for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms; that everybody has the right to benefit from an effective remedy in the case of the violation of these rights and freedoms; and that everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of these rights and freedoms.

We wish to recall the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on the killings of human rights defenders (A/HRC/46/35) in which she stated that ‘defenders advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights, and women and transgender human rights defenders are often attacked with gendered threats. The Special Rapporteur notes that many threats are gendered, and that specific types of threats are made against women and transgender human rights defenders. In his 2019 report to the Human Rights Council, the previous mandate holder discussed the particular risks and threats facing women human rights defenders. He noted that women human rights defenders whose actions were perceived as challenging patriarchal and heteronormative systems tended to face threats and attacks, as they questioned understandings about women’s identity and their place and role that were taken for granted, and disrupted gendered power relations’ (para. 65).

We further recall that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights in its concluding observations in 2024 recommended that Iraq “strengthen the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers working on economic, social and cultural human rights, as well as their family members, from any kind of threat, harassment, kidnapping, torture, enforced disappearance and killings’ (E/C.12/IRQ/CO/5).

Additionally, we recall that the State has a duty to investigate alleged or suspected violations of article 6 in a prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent manner, and that all persons identified by the investigation as having participated in crimes of extra-legal or arbitrary killings, should be brought to justice and punished with sentences commensurate with the gravity of the crimes committed (general comment 36). Failure to properly, independently and reliably investigate the killing, with a view to holding accountable those responsible, would in itself constitute a grave violation under international law. In this respect, we refer to the United Nations Revised Manual for the Effective Investigation of ExtraLegal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions also known as the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) (“The Minnesota Protocol”), which provides detailed guidelines on the duty to investigate potential unlawful deaths “promptly, effectively and thoroughly, with independence, impartiality and transparency.”