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Written statement* submitted by the Press Emblem Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 August 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant against journalists and media workers must not enjoy impunity

Background

Seven journalists¹ and media workers have already lost their lives in Iraq in 2014 and the figures of Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) show that 47 journalists lost their lives in the country since 2009, when the United States of America handed power over to the Iraqi authorities.

Al-Maliki government in recent years has showed its hostility towards Medias (some have been just closed down) and journalists remained victims of numerous violations of their fundamental rights. Mid-July, Iraqi security forces broke into Al-Taakhi² headquarters in Bagdad, threatened the outlet's employees and left with broadcast equipment, computers, mobile phones, and some money.

Even though the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq has long been regarded as a quieter area, away from the turmoil that ravaged the rest of the country, journalists have always been strictly controlled by the authorities and were subject to pressure when addressing topics deemed critical by the authorities.

During the above mentioned period, hundreds of attacks against journalists have been recorded by reliable sources in Iraqi Kurdistan, with a dramatic increase in 2011, when longstanding demonstrations were held in the region. Authorities of the Kurdish Autonomous Region also violate the fundamental rights of Kurdish journalists sympathetic to other political tendencies. The great majority of those attacks enjoyed impunity.

Although there are hundreds of media outlet and despite the fact that most recently there it has been a significant growth of social media, which play a role that traditional medias never could play, self-censorship is a necessity when one wants to address some political or social topics.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

The PEC expresses its deepest concern about the security conditions and the protection of journalists working in Iraq, where the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is operating. In fact the concern goes beyond the borders of Iraq because it is in all the territory controlled by this organization that journalists have to work in extremely dangerous conditions.

On 15 June, members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant went to the home of the family of **Ali Al-Hamdani** (correspondent of the Shiite satellite TV station Al-Faiha) who left the house some days earlier after receiving threats.

On 16 June, a commando of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant set fire to the Kurdistan News TV station's offices in the Ta'mim district of Mosul.

The PEC condemns the horrific killing of James Foley reported by a video released by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. No element of the video allows ascertaining whether the killing took place in Syria or on the Iraqi territory, but this heinous crime should not pass without bringing the perpetrators to justice in a trial that would sentence them in absentia.

At the end of that video, a militant shows a second man, who was identified as another American journalist, Steven Sotloff, who was kidnapped near the Syrian-Turkish border in August 2013 and freelanced for Time, the National Interest and MediaLine. The PEC warns that he could be next captive killed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

¹ The term of « journalists » includes all media workers carrying out their duty on a professional basis

² Arabic-language daily supporting the PDK (one of Kurdistan's two ruling parties) is run by Masoud Barzani, Kurdistan's president.

Conclusion and recommendation

In recent years, neither the Al-Maliki Iraqi Government, nor the authorities of the Kurdish Autonomous Region did insure freedom and protection to media as called for by the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights or promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference as called for by the Human Rights Council in its resolution A/HRC/RES/21/12.

In this context, the armed confrontation with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant increase the threats over journalists in territory controlled by this armed group.

The Press Emblem Campaign calls upon the Government of Iraq and the authorities of the Kurdish Autonomous Region:

- to thoroughly investigate all cases of violence against media and journalists and to held accountable those who are responsible of violations of fundamental rights and of violence and crimes against journalists;
- to respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law and to allow, within the framework of applicable rules and procedures, media access and coverage, as appropriate, of the ongoing armed conflict.

The Press Emblem Campaign calls upon the Human Rights Council to firmly condemn all crimes committed against journalists by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.
