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Iraq: Amnesty International deplores imprisonment of Kurdish doctor

Amnesty International deplores the imprisonment of medical doctor 'Adil Hussain, who was jailed for six months and fined by a court in Erbil, in Iraq's Kurdistan region, on 24 November 2008 because of an article he wrote for the daily *Hawlati* newspaper.

Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

'Adil Hussain was prosecuted after writing an article about sex and homosexuality from a medical perspective, which *Hawlati* published on 11 April 2007. He was charged under Article 403 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which concerns the publication of material deemed immoral. He has appealed against the verdict but currently remains imprisoned. Kurdish media workers have launched a campaign for his release.

Background

The action taken against 'Adil Hussain runs counter to recent reforms affecting the press. In September 2008, the Kurdish parliament passed a new press law abolishing imprisonment for defamation, which had been used to punish journalists in the past, although journalists and others in the Kurdistan region continue to face prosecution or other harassment if they criticize the KRG government or its judicial authorities and security forces, or write about alleged corruption and nepotism. Some have been abducted and physically abused while others have received death threats. In July 2008 Souran Mama Hama, a 23-year-old journalist was shot dead in Kirkuk, a Kurdish-dominated city outside the KRG region. He had published articles on alleged corruption and nepotism within the two leading Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). A few days before his murder he had reportedly received anonymous death threats. The KRG publicly condemned Souran Mama Hama's killing but as yet no-one has been brought to justice for his killing.

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