

MOSUL JOURNALISTS
ARE DYING
AMID RESOUNDING
SILENCE

←
The historical Bash
Tapia castle in Mosul,
located on the
western bank of the
Tigris River.»
(Picture Archive,
Council of Nineveh
Governorate)

DOCUMENTED BIOGRAPHIES OF 48 ABDUCTED JOURNALISTS AND 13 JOURNALISTS EXECUTED BY ISIS

Since the group calling itself “the Islamic State” (or “Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham”, ISIS) took control of Mosul in June 2014, this Iraqi city turned into a death trap for journalists, especially after the jihadist militant group seized all local media, getting hold of the full lists of reporters’ names and addresses. Soon after that, ISIS launched a major persecution campaign targeting all types of media workers, following a decision of its Sharia court accusing reporters of violating its instructions and leaking information to local and foreign media from within the city. By these practices, ISIS seeks sowing terror among media workers, intimidating journalists and preventing them from doing their job, thus forcing them to self-censorship.

In this report, compiled over three months, Journalistic Freedoms Observatory (JFO) and Reporters Without Borders (RWB) shed light on the crimes committed by ISIS against journalists and their assistants in northern Iraq. Between 10 June 2014 and the date of publication of this report, JFO – RWB’s partner organization in Iraq – registered 48 kidnappings committed by ISIS against journalists, media assistants and students in journalism since the extremist organization took control of the city.

Among those kidnapped, 13 were executed in different brutal ways after being accused of «treason and espionage», while the fate of 10 others remain uncertain, amid claims that they are still detained in Tasfirat and Badush jails as well as in Al-Ghazlani camp. In 25 other cases, clan and tribal mediation led to the release of detainees, most of which had been subjected to severe torture. They gained their freedom in exchange of pledging to no longer exercise any media activities.

During the first day of the occupation of Nineveh province, ISIS took over 8 TV and radio buildings, seizing technical equipments and taking advantage of state-of-the-art technology to broadcast the first public appearance of its radical leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. ISIS members used the cameras of *Sama Mosul TV*, which was owned by former city governor Athil Al-Najafi, to cover the religious sermon at the Great Mosque of Al-Nouri in central Mosul and broadcast it on website. While video production was carried out by Al-Furqan Foundation, A'maaq, Al-Bayan and Al-Hayat, the Islamic State launched Al-Bayan radio station and *Dabiq TV* channel, via the transmitters and equipments of the formerly government-owned Iraqi Media Network and other media organizations.

The Islamic State, headed by Ibrahim Awad Al-Badri, alias Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, decided to cut off all communications, mobile phone services and the Internet in all of Mosul.

In the wake of that, journalists fled Mosul en masse. According to statistics compiled by the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory over one year, more than 60 reporters and media assistants left the city, 15 of whom seeking refuge outside the country, while others headed for the capital Baghdad and the Kurdistan region. Meanwhile, some 20 others are still stuck inside the city, now fully controlled by ISIS.

Through instructions published by its media centers, the Islamic State had threatened «to kill» anyone who reported information and news from within the city. Aiming to silence all journalists in Mosul, ISIS Sharia Court accused them of violating its directives by continuing their journalistic activities and leaking information to local and foreign media.

Local media professionals from Mosul and outside the city report to JFO that «all journalists who have not left the city have adhered unequivocally to ISIS's instructions of not practicing the profession or contact any media outlet, whether Iraqi or foreign, even before the start of this series of arrests and executions targeting reporters and media workers in the city».

Among the many journalists who had left Mosul under the fierce persecution campaigns targeting the media, some had no other choice than to return to the city, after being neglected by the federal authorities and the different journalists unions on the one hand, and having failed to settle in the capital Baghdad or in the Kurdistan region on the other. They were executed by ISIS Shariah courts upon their return.

MURDERS AND EXECUTIONS

ISIS launched a witch-hunt campaign soon after taking over Mosul and getting hold of records that contain personal data of workers in all local and foreign media. According to the cases registered by the JFO task group, patrols resulted in the murder and execution of 13 journalists and media assistants, including students in journalism at the University of Mosul.

1. On 29 June 2014, journalist **Maysaloon Al-Jawadi** was executed by the Islamic State, weeks after being abducted and jailed in Badush prison. Her body was handed over to the city's medical forensic unit.

According to information gathered by JFO, Al-Jawadi was tortured by ISIS before she was shot to death. The 42-year-old TV presenter had been working at *Al-Mosuliya* channel since 2009.

2. On 15 July 2014, ISIS executed journalist **Fadel Al-Hadidi** after 12 days of detention. He was abducted from his home on 3 July 2014 in the Wady Hajar district in southern Mosul and taken with his son Sayf to a downtown detention center.

Some media sources from Mosul told JFO that ISIS tortured Al-Hadidi prior to his murder, a fact confirmed by a medical source from the city's forensic unit that could examine his body, before it was delivered to his family. The 53-year-old journalist had worked in many Mosul-based newspapers and was a prominent columnist in the city, having also worked in the province Media Office.

3. On 24 August 2014, ISIS murdered **Nayef Al-Shammari**, *Sama Mosul TV* director, after he was kidnapped from his home and tortured in detention for over two weeks.

The extremist group handed over the body of 50-year-old Al-Shammari to the forensic unit following his execution in Ghazlani camp in southern Mosul.

4. On 13 September 2014, ISIS executed **Walid Ismail Abdullah**, a broadcast technician who worked at the *Al-Iraqiya TV* channel's office in Mosul, after he was kidnapped by the jihadists from his home in the eastern part of the city.

51-year-old Abdullah had been in this function since the 1980s. His family had no information about the place of his detention, nor did they know whether he was alive or dead, until his name appeared on the notorious list released by ISIS referring the 2070 «executed» detainees, with copies of it hung by the extremist group in several parts of Mosul. Although ISIS announced his death, it did not hand over the body to his family.

5. On 8 February 2015, journalists from Mosul reported to JFO that *Sama Mosul TV* correspondent **Qais Talal** was shot to death by ISIS members in the city center.

According to a Mosul-based reporter, the extremist group accused 27-year-old Talal of spying and communicating with state-owned media. He was detained for more than four months.

Talal had been working as a journalist since 2011, after graduating from the Institute of Fine Arts - Theatre Directing Department. He worked as a reporter for *Shafaq news* agency, *Al-Rasheed TV* and *AL-Bayyna AL-Jadida* newspaper, among others.

6. On 16 February 2015, ISIS executed photojournalist **Ashraf Shamil Al-Abadi**. Citing private sources, his relatives told JFO that the Islamic State had killed Al-Abadi, but refused to announce his death or hand over the body to his family.

7. On 15 March 2015, Mosul-based journalists told JFO that the extremist group executed photojournalist **Omar Younis Al-Ghaafiqi** after he was kidnapped from his home, east of Mosul. The jihadist group did not hand over his body to the family, and his parents were only informed of their son's execution for violating Sharia court orders and leaking information to local and foreign media.

23-year-old Al-Ghaafiqi had worked as a photojournalist for different Mosul-based media, before joining the Nineveh province Media Office.

8. On 26 April 2015, ISIS executed journalist **Thaer Al-Ali**, the editor of the local newspaper *Rai' al Nas*, on charges of «collaborating with media hostile to the Islamic State», as the militant extremist group found local media phone numbers and names of the province government officials in his cell phone following an interrogation that lasted for more than two weeks. After his execution, ISIS handed over the body to his family.

On 7 April 2015, JFO had received a notification from its representative in Mosul, reporting the abduction of 45-year-old Thaer Al-Ali in a café at the city's Al-Dawasa district, while making phone calls providing local media with information».

9. On 17 April 2015, ISIS executed journalist and coordinator **Firas Yasin Al-Jubouri**, alias Firas Al-Bahr, after being kidnapped from his home in the Qadissiyah 2 district of north east Mosul, while his mobile phone and laptop were confiscated.

Mohammed Saleh, a relative of Firas Al-Bahr, told the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory that «ISIS militants were evoking information and press reports leaked to Baghdad-based and foreign media».

On 17 May 2015, at around 01:00 AM, the journalist's family was urgently summoned to the forensic unit of Al-Jumhoori Hospital, to receive the body of its son who had been shot both in the head and chest, as he was «executed on charges of treason and espionage.»

31-year-old Al-Bahr had worked as a news and programme coordinator in many Mosul-based satellite channels in, including Al-Mosuliyah and *Nineveh Al Ghad*.

10. On 16 July 2015, ISIS executed photojournalist **Jala'a Adnan Al-Abadi** and summoned his family to the forensic unit at the Jumhoori Hospital in central Mosul, to receive his body.

Married and father of two children, Al-Abadi was one of those who returned to Mosul, having left the city following his detention for more than four days in mid-June 2014. He was released by ISIS after signing a pledge not to exercise any media activity.

«Jala'a suffered various types of torture at the hands of ISIS over three days," Yasser Al-Hamdani, director of Nineveh Media Foundation, tells JFO recalling the photojournalist sufferings during his first abduction in June 2014. "On the fourth day, he appeared in the so-called ISIS Sharia Court, which released him after his pledging not to work again with the media».

Al-Hamdani fled Mosul when the city fell into the hands of the extremists, seeking refuge in the province of Kurdistan where he settled down. He says he met Al-Abadi in Dohuk province (north of Mosul) after the photojournalist first managed to escape his hometown, then they met again in the same city, less than three months later, when Al-Abadi revealed his plans of returning to Mosul completely aware of the danger his decision entailed, as he was driven to despair after failing to find a job or receive help from journalists unions in Baghdad or Iraqi Kurdistan.

Jala'a eventually returned to Mosul through the Syrian border. Almost four months later, ISIS militants broke into his house, on 4 June 2015, abducting him blindfolded and confiscating his mobile phone and his personal computer. He was taken to a downtown detention center, where he was immediately executed.

11. On 5 August 2015, ISIS executed writer and journalist **Ghazi Al-Obeidi**, who was kidnapped and put under arrest by the extremist militant group for more than a week. His family were summoned to the forensic unit to receive his body after he was shot to death.

65-year-old Al-Obeidi was a famous columnist who published his articles in different local newspapers under the title «the fish man», with reference to the prophet Jonah, one the most prominent symbols of Mosul. In his writings, he focused mainly on financial corruption and its links with violence and terrorism.

12. On 9 August 2015, the extremist militant group executed **Zuhair Kinan Al-Nahass**, less than a week after he had been abducted from his home in the Muthanna district of east Mosul.

20-year-old Al-Nahass, an only child, was a second-year student in journalism at the University of Mosul. He had taken a picture from his house of a burned-out ISIS car targeted by an international coalition missile. He was killed because of the photograph that was soon picked up by the local media.

13. On 16 August 2015, ISIS executed **Yahya Al-Khatib**, just 13 days after the journalist's 28th birthday. He had worked as a sports reporter and TV presenter at Al-Mosuliyah and Nineveh Al-Ghad satellite channels, until the city fell into the hands of the criminal militant group.

At the end of 2014, Khatib left Mosul to Baghdad, and then moved to Erbil in northern Iraq after spending three months in the capital, where he failed to join any media or obtain any financial or moral assistance by the Iraqi Journalists union.

He then moved to the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan where he settled for more than six months, before deciding to return to Mosul, despite the ISIS threat.

Declining to be named, a Mosul-born journalist who currently lives in Erbil told JFO that Al-Khatib said prior to his return that he prefers facing "ISIS knives rather than begging for a living (elsewhere)".

According to statistics compiled by JFO since 2003, 60 Iraqi media workers were killed in Mosul, 37 of whom were journalists, technicians and media assistants who died on duty, while 13 others were executed by ISIS after the extremist jihadist group took control of the city. Over the past decade, a total of 10 journalists and media technicians had been killed but not because of their journalistic work.

ABDUCTION AND TORTURE

ISIS carries on its persecution campaign against journalists and the media, especially with the ongoing flow of information, from inside the city, to local and foreign media. The Islamic State tightened its control over information and pictures, searching meticulously for the sources of leaked documents.

The extremist group abducted 48 journalists and media assistants, four of whom were students in journalism at the Mosul University. It is believed that most of them are still under arrest in Tasfirat, Badush and Ghazlani camps, while clan and tribal mediation led to the release of 25 others who were subjected to severe torture.

Abductions of journalists in Mosul often take different violent forms, including abuses such as beating and equipment confiscation.

Photojournalist **Hisham Al-Hirbawi** recalls his abduction by ISIS militants, who chased him before detaining him for two weeks with his assistant, who was killed later by the extremist group.

In an interview with JFO Al-Hirbawi said he and his colleague **Jala'a Al-Abadi** were kidnapped on 18 June 2014 by armed militants in the cultural university district in central Mosul when they were filming a documentary depicting daily life in the city after being controlled by the extremist organization. 25-year-old Al-Hirbawi was working for *Al-Taghyeer* and *Al-Sharqiyah TV* channels along with *Ain news agency* when the two journalists were arrested and taken to the Mosul operations command center, turned into a jail following the Iraqi army withdrawal.

Al-Hirbawi evoked the continuing torture he suffered at the hands of ISIS extremists who were seeking information about the work of journalists in the city and how they communicated with their organizations.

Al-Hirbawi was released after paying a 20 000 US\$ ransom to an ISIS member and accepting the terms of an unspoken agreement before the Sharia court.

He left Mosul in sorrow, mourning his colleague's death: "After I fled the city, ISIS militants went back to hunt for my friend Jala'a Al-Abadi and killed him.»

During a three-day persecution campaign, from 27 to 30 October 2014, ISIS kidnapped 14 journalists and media assistants, including reporters, photographers, technicians, light engineers, video editors and other media management people and employees.

A local journalist who managed to flee Mosul told JFO that «the mass kidnapping launched by ISIS extremist militants targeted workers of *Sama Mosul satellite TV* channel, which was presided by former Nineveh governor Athil Al-Nujafi and funded by the local government, before it was controlled by the Islamic State armed forces on 10 June 2014."

The journalist, who currently lives in Baghdad, said that «ISIS troops patrolled different districts of the city, raiding the homes of reporters, who were arrested, ill- treated and jailed at Tasfirat prison, converted by ISIS into a detention center at the heart of the city».

JFO could identify 11 of the 14 Sama Mosul staff who were still under arbitrary detention. Among them, photographer Walid Al-Aqidi; video editors Ahmed Rafi and Ethar Rafi; technicians Saleh Hussein, Muhammad Yunus, Yasser Al-Qaisi, Yasser Al-Haj Hashim and Mahmoud Shaker, administration manager Abu Shahd, in addition to reporter Qais Talal and cameraman Ashraf Al-Abadi, both killed after their abduction.

A local reporter, still trapped inside the city, said that «the mass kidnapping of *Sama Mosul* staff came after ISIS accused them of providing *Nineveh Al-Ghad satellite TV* with press reports and scoops from inside the city. *Nineveh Al-Ghad* is owned by the former Nineveh governor Athil Al-Nujafi, currently based in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Speaking gingerly with JFO from the outskirts of Mosul for fear of being seen by ISIS agents while using a mobile phone, the local reporter said the Islamic State released nine of the fourteen kidnapped *Sama Mosul* workers almost a month later. On 20 November 2014, the extremist group released **Walid Al-Aqidi, Ahmed Rafi, Ethar Rafi, Saleh Hussein, Muhammad Yunus, Yasser Al-Qaisi, Yasser Al-Haj Hashim Mahmoud Shaker and Abu Shahd.**

The relatives of an abducted journalist said the *Sama Mosul* kidnapped staff "were severely tortured by ISIS before their release, as the militants tried to force them to confess their contacts with local and foreign media as well as leaking information about the general situation in the city.»

Local journalists in Mosul told JFO that ISIS also abducted brothers **Sameem and Mohamed Ibrahim** on 31 December 2014 from their home in the Al-Nur district of north east Mosul.

After nearly two weeks of detention, the militant group released photojournalist Sameem Ibrahim, who soon left the city to Iraqi Kurdistan, while the fate of his brother Mohammed is still unknown.

Mohamed Ibrahim, born on 15 May 1971, is a professional reporter who works for Al-Ain news agency along with his brother Sameem.

On 4 January 2015, the extremist militant group abducted *Al-Mosuliyah TV* reporter **Abdul-Aziz Mahmoud** from his home at the Algiers district in central Mosul. He was brutally beaten before being driven blindfolded to an unknown destination.

Following a series of contacts with tribal prominent figures, it was confirmed that Mahmoud had been detained in a residential area of former government officials that was converted by the extremist militant group into a police base. Those mediators managed to convince ISIS of releasing him after nine days of torture under arrest. Upon his release,

he fled the city secretly seeking refuge outside the country, according to local journalists. On 25 August, ISIS militants kidnapped photojournalist **Adil Al-Sayegh** at the Bab Al-Toob district in central Mosul. The 40-year-old cameraman had spent many years working for *Salah Al-Din satellite TV* in Mosul, until he was forced to leave his job permanently for fear of ISIS appalling atrocities, contenting himself with a humble profession in a city market. He was released after two weeks of interrogation under torture.

JFO refrains to mention the names and cases of 13 other journalists and media assistants who were kidnapped and tortured before being released, between 10 June 2014 and the date of publication of this report, as they desire to remain anonymous for fear of any reprisals against members of their families who are still banned from leaving the city.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

JFO survey shows that some of the journalists kidnapped by ISIS often become unaccounted for. The fate of 10 journalists and media assistants abducted in different times is still unknown.

1. The fate of writer and journalist **Jamal Al-Masri** has been unknown since 4 July 2014, although some local journalists from Mosul believe he is still held by ISIS and therefore has not been executed.
50-year-old Al-Masri worked as a political presenter at the *Al-Mosuliyah TV* channel. He had hosted officials from security services, criticizing the actions of different armed groups. He was detained by ISIS along with his older son after a raid in his home. While the son was released on the following day, Jamal Al-Masri was kept under arrest to be interrogated by ISIS militants.
2. On 13 August 2014, **Mohanad Al-Aqidi** was arrested in his home and taken to a detention center in southern Mosul. He worked as a journalist for several local news agencies and video editor in local satellite channels.
Local journalists from Mosul and outside told JFO that Al-Aqidi is still detained by ISIS, while a relative of his believes he is jailed outside the city, specifically in Tal Afar prison.
3. ISIS continued its persecution of Mosul-based journalists. On 3 September 2014, the extremist group kidnapped **Ali Al-Nawfali**, who is over 50 years of age. A relative of Al-Nawfali told JFO that ISIS militants arrested the photojournalist while he was riding his motorcycle near his home in the southern Mosul district of Wady Hajar, before taking him to a downtown detention center." Al-Nawfali worked as a photojournalist in various Mosul-based media, having held several photographic exhibitions in Iraq and abroad, the most recent of which was staged in Jordan.
According to the information gathered by JFO, Al-Nawfali is still held by ISIS since his abduction more than a year ago. His family has not received any notification of his death, and his name did not feature in the notorious list released by ISIS referring the 2070 detainees, including journalists, who were executed between 10 June 2014 and the date of its publication, with copies of it hung by the extremist group in several parts of Mosul.
4. In mid-January 2015, ISIS kidnapped journalist **Riad Al-Hayali**, editor-in-chief of *Dijla newspaper*.
Media sources from the city told JFO that Al-Hayali is still alive and is being held by ISIS in a detention center in Mosul, after he was arrested in his home.

5. On 3 February 2015, ISIS militants abducted **Zakir Khalil**, editor-in-chief of *Al-Mizan* local newspaper, on charges of «treason and espionage» as well as leaking information from inside the city, thus disobeying the extremist group's instructions.
6. Also, the fate of **Mohamed Ibrahim** is still unknown. The correspondent of *Al-Ain news agency* is unaccounted for since he was kidnapped by ISIS militants in 31 December 2014 from his home in the Al-Nur district of northeast Mosul, before he was taken to a detention centre.
The report refrains to point out the details of four other cases, since their families who are still trapped inside Mosul.

TAKING CONTROL OVER THE MEDIA

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After its major offensive leading to seize full control of Mosul on 10 June 2014, ISIS took advantage of the military and security chaos to quickly start a campaign seeking to identify and take control over the media in different parts of the city.

The Jihadist militants seized the headquarters of all media buildings and their equipments, with special focus on radio stations and TV channels. ISIS troops occupied different media headquarters to protect them from any damage that might be caused in the fight against the remaining Iraqi forces.

Soon after taking hold of Mosul, the extremist militant group seized 8 terrestrial and broadcast buildings (radio and television). Paying meticulous attention to its image through audio-visual recordings, ISIS obtained state-of-the-art broadcast technology by taking over *Sama Mosul*, *Nineveh Al-Ghad* and *Al-Mosuliyah satellite TV* stations along with *Ninwa channel* of the government-owned Iraqi Media Network, in addition to *Ninwa*, *Rasheed*, *Dar Essalam* and *Ninwa FM* radio stations.

Broadcast engineer Essam Adib, who managed to flee the city and now lives between Erbil and Baghdad, says ISIS used the modern technical equipment and state-of-the-art technology of the different media it took control of to broadcast the first public appearance on video of its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who delivered a sermon on 7 July 2014 at the Great Mosque of Al-Nouri in central Mosul.

Adib - who entered the mosque «out of curiosity» on the day of that sermon - told JFO that the broadcast crew used four different cameras and the crane shot of *Sama Mosul TV*, which was owned by the former Nineveh governor before being taken over by ISIS.

Local residents told JFO that the headquarters of Mosul-based TV and radio stations have been used by ISIS as propaganda media centers.

The extremist militant group has also made use of terrestrial radio transmitters belonging to the Iraqi Media Network, to launch *Al-Bayan FM* radio, through which it addresses its supporters with jihadist lectures, bulletins, religious songs and speeches of its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

In addition, ISIS took advantage of the other channels to launch *Dabiq TV*, which broadcasts highlights of battles in Iraq and Syria, along with religious sermons and spirited songs.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN IRAQ AND BETTER PROTECTING JOURNALISTS:

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reminds all parties to the conflict, both the government and non-state actors, that they are under the obligation to protect journalists. International law – including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols – forbids deliberate attacks by state or non-state actors against media outlets, journalists and other civilians. Attacks on civilian targets constitute war crimes.

For the Iraqi authorities:

- Grant protective measures to journalists who are forced to flee their homes or usual place of residence in their own country – including those fleeing to the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan – because of the conflict and in connection with their journalistic work.
- Conduct systematic and transparent investigations into attacks against journalists in Iraq, including those in which local government officials are implicated.

For neighbouring countries:

- Protect journalists seeking refuge in their territory from persecution or reprisals by armed groups.
- Grant work permits to refugee journalists who want to continue working, so that they can earn a living.
- For resettlement and asylum countries (especially the United States and European Union countries):
- Give priority to processing the cases of Iraqi journalists who have had to flee abroad.
- Make it easier for journalists who have had to flee abroad in connection with their work to gain access to consulates and to file requests for humanitarian visas.
- Allow Iraqi journalists who have had to flee abroad to file asylum requests at embassies in transit countries and, if the request is approved, ensure that they are able to travel quickly to the country of asylum.

For the United Nations:

Refer crimes of violence against journalists in Iraq to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in order to end impunity. In April 2015, RSF urged the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria and Iraq, in which crimes coming under the ICC's jurisdiction have been committed against journalists, to the ICC prosecutor.

- Appoint a special representative of the UN secretary-general with the job of monitoring respect by states for their obligations under international law regarding the protection of journalists.
- Adopt a resolution emphasizing the need for member states to protect and help both professional and citizen-journalists who seek refuge in their countries.
- Create an alert mechanism for refugee journalists in every UNHCR office in order to guarantee them better access to appropriate individual protective measures, to the emergency resettlement procedure and to the mechanism for temporary evacuation to safe UN member states.



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