



مركز حماية وحرية الصحفيين

Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists

## Preliminary Report on

**The Attack on Reporters Covering the Sit-In  
at Al-Nakheel Square on July 15, 2011**

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In line with its basic mission, and its aim of defending information rights and protecting media professionals' freedoms, their personal and professional safety, and confronting the violations they are exposed to, the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) has taken the initiative to publish this preliminary brief report on the violations to which media professionals were exposed during the events that took place on Friday July 15, 2011 at Al-Nakheel Square in the capital city of Amman; the square selected by popular and youth forces to stage the sit-in demanding basic political and social reforms.

In the wake of these assaults, CDFJ formed a task force to collect evidence and information and to investigate facts regarding these violations and their nature, and the ways in which they were committed. The task force comprised Mr. Nidal Mansour, CDFJ's Executive Chairman, Dr. Mohammad Al-Mousa, the International Human Rights Law expert, lawyer Mr. Khaled Khlaifat from the Program for Monitoring and Documenting Violations against the Media (SANAD), Ms. Hiba Jawhar, a media practitioner and CDFJ's coordinator for media and communications, and Eman Abu-Qaoud, a media practitioner.

The task force worked, since the attacks took place on Friday July 15<sup>th</sup> until this date to identify the main feature of the attack, which targeted journalists and media people working for local and international media outlets. The process of investigating the facts and collecting information was based on interviewing a number of victims and witnesses, visits to victims and those injured among media people in hospitals where they were being treated, distributing an information questionnaire to a number of victims to reveal the circumstances of the attacks against them, what was documented in photographs and videos from the cameras of photographers and journalists, and various medical reports, in addition to official positions and statements prior to and after the sit-in. CDFJ commenced with these investigative measures and procedures



immediately after the events, for the purpose of maintaining the evidence and the credibility of the stories and testimonies.

CDFJ aims, through this report to document the facts and evidences it has acquired on the attack waged by public authorities, especially those concerned with the security, on the media staff and journalists who were performing their professional work covering the sit-in and its activities. This comes as part of the mechanisms and approaches declared by CDFJ in its annual report on media freedoms last year (2010), whereby CDFJ emphasized that the process of monitoring and documenting the violations against the freedom of the media and media professionals, as well as media freedoms has become its main priority, and that it will undertake it in a scientific approach based on investigating facts, collecting evidence and documenting violations.

Following is a brief presentation of the main facts CDFJ arrived at regarding the events, and a number of recommendations CDFJ believes are important and should be undertaken in order to preserve the democratic process and support the freedom of expression and information.

- **An Intentional Attack Targeting the Media and its Professionals**

It was clear to CDFJ from the information and evidence it accumulated that the assault of the public security forces and the gendarmerie, and other security agencies was an intentional and premeditated act by itself. It has become clear to CDFJ that a large number of colleagues in the media were assaulted by beating, verbal insults and breaking their cameras and mobile phones, despite the fact that they were wearing vests distributed by the public security to journalists to distinguish them from others. According to other information and evidence made available to CDFJ, it seems that a number of colleagues who were victims of the assault were further tortured at the hands of the security personnel, who saw them cover the events with their cameras. A large number of the cases were the result of the cameras carried by the journalist or media person. Perhaps the most common denominator among most media people who were victims of the attacks is that they were carrying cameras. Among these is the attack on colleagues Raed Awartani,



Ahmad Malkawi, Amal Ghabayen, Mohammad Abu Qatti, Islam Sawalha, Nidal Salameh and others. They all pointed out that they were attacked to prevent them from taking pictures or videos, and that beatings by the security forces and the gendarmerie were concentrated on their arms, so they would drop the cameras they were holding to the ground. Colleague Ahmad Malkawi mentioned that while he was performing his professional duty of covering the events of Al-Nakheel Square sit-in, one of the gendarmerie members turned to him while he was photographing the assault by the security forces and the gendarmerie against the protestors, and asked him not to take pictures. He told him that he was a journalist, and he was wearing the badge. The gendarmerie then took his camera and broke it. Colleague photographer Raed Awartani emphasized that he felt targeted by the security forces and the gendarmerie because of his work as a photographer, and that one of them hit him with a thick club he was carrying perpendicularly into his belly. He lost one of his cameras. Colleague Amal Ghabayen emphasized in her testimony that she was prevented from covering the event by the security forces, and was insulted by the security men using lewd language more than once, and that she was beaten. Colleague Rana Za'rour emphasized that while she was at the sit-in location, security forces members came to the photographer who was accompanying her and asked him to lower his camera, preventing him from covering the event. Colleague Amer Abu Hamdeh clarified that while photographing the event, he was beaten from the back with a shield used for protection by a security person or a gendarmerie, to prevent him from photographing. He continued to take pictures, so a security person beat him with his belt on his hand and neck. The above testimonies and stories represent part of the attacks on colleagues from the media by members of the security forces and the gendarmerie. They all show, without a shadow of doubt, that there was an intention to target the media and the media people, to prevent them from covering the events and practice their work freely, and that these assaults are not individual, secluded or random.

What supports CDFJ's belief that the assault was intentional is what was mentioned in Prime Minister Dr. Ma'rouf Al-Bakhit's statement, one day before the sit-in, that he "will not be lenient with any open sit-in." This was further emphasized by a statement by the Minister of Interior, Mazen Al-Saket, after the assault, that "Jordan will not permit the repeat of Al-Tahrir Square experience."



### ▪ **Wide-Range Assault**

There is no doubt that the assaults carried out by the security forces and the gendarmerie against the media personnel are wide-spread, and are not limited or simple in nature. This assault is not the first of its kind this year; it was preceded by other assaults, most important of which is the one that took place in the Interior sit-in on March 25, 2011, and the one against Al-Awda march on May 15, 2011, as well as assaults, threats and many other harassments against journalists and media colleagues individually and over different dates, which are documented by CDFJ.

The events of Al-Nakheel Square, however, were distinguished by the large number of journalists and photographers who were beaten, insulted and roughed up, some of whom sustained serious and dangerous injuries. They also came after the Director of the Public Security pledged to protect journalists and not to attack them.

CDFJ has so far documented 16 assault cases against colleagues from the media, who were targeted on July 15, 2011 by members of the security forces, the gendarmerie and the traffic police, and perhaps by other security agencies who could not be identified because of the uniform the security forces were wearing that day. The most important cases documented by CDFJ in which colleagues from the media were assaulted may be summarized as follows:

1. Colleague Sami Mahasneh, who sustained a serious injury including a broken arm, degraded tissue of the thumb, and serious injuries in his left eye close to the vision nerve. He was beaten with a stick and kicked by security forces boots.
2. Colleague Raed Awartani from Jordan Days, who sustained a knee fracture as a result of being beaten by the security forces. His camera was broken.
3. Yazan Khawas from Nourmina Channel, who was beaten on the left arm that was carrying a microphone, resulting in bruised tissues.
4. Colleague Mohammad Al-Najjar, Al-JazeeraNet correspondent, who was beaten and insulted by the public security personnel, and prevented from covering the event or taking pictures.



5. Colleague Yasser Abu-Hilaleh, Bureau Chief of Al-Jazeera Channel who was also beaten and insulted to prevent him from covering the event.
6. Colleague Amal Ghabayen from Ammon News Agency, whom the public security personnel tried to stop from covering their assault on one of the young participants in the sit-in. She was insulted using lewd language and chased in order to confiscate her camera. She was beaten with clubs.
7. Colleague Ahmad Malkawi from Saraya News, who was beaten and his camera was broken by the public security personnel, using clubs they were wielding.
8. Colleague Ali Al-Zu'bi from Nourmina TV Channel, who was beaten by the public security personnel using a thick club from the back, concentrating on his arm so he would drop the camera. His camera fell but was not broken.
9. Colleague Mohammad Fdailat from Amman Net, who was insulted by the public security personnel using lewd language, and was prevented from reaching the venue to take pictures.
10. Colleague Anas Damra from Ammon News Agency, who was assaulted by public security men with a club from the back because he attempted to thwart public security men from continuing to beat colleagues Mohammad Al-Kiswani and Mohammad Abu Qatti.
11. Colleague Mohammad Abu-Qatti from Reuters and Ad-Dustour, who was beaten by public security personnel, breaking one of his cameras because he was taking pictures of the protestors being beaten, and because he tried to help his media colleagues who were being badly beaten and insulted.
12. Colleague Rana Ismail Za'rour from Al-Arabiyah TV Channel who was insulted by public security personnel using lewd language, and was prevented from taking pictures.
13. Colleague Hiba Kiwan from the online Saraya News Agency, who was exposed to the vicious violence of public security men like her colleagues.
14. Colleague Islam Sawalha from the Amman Post website, who was asked to stop taking pictures by the public security men, and was beaten from the back with a public security man's helmet. Sawalha's camera fell to the ground. When he resumed taking pictures using his mobile phone, public security men and traffic police beat him on the arms and his phone fell to the ground.

15. Colleague Nidal Salameh from the Electronic Iris, who was beaten by the gendarmerie and insulted using degrading terms. They snatched his camera and smashed it.
16. Colleague Amer Abu Hamdeh from the Amman BBC office, who was attacked from behind with a shield while taking pictures of the events. He was beaten again with a public security man's belt, on his arm and neck to prevent him from taking pictures.

In addition to the abovementioned cases, there are other cases that were monitored and are being documented and verified. They include colleague Faheem Kareem from the New York Times, Khalil Mazra'awi, member of the Journalists Association Board and Director of the Photography Section at Ad-Dustour, Dana Jibril from Amman Net, Ra'ad Adaileh from Al-Rai newspaper, Lena Ejailat from Reuters, Mohammad Hannoun from the Associated Press, and many others. CDFJ will seek to document these cases in its final report.

The assaults have inflicted clear and evident harm on many media colleagues. They were characterized by a number of common denominators; namely, targeting the media person's arms to drop his camera, and beating from the back, so that the assailant's identity remains unknown to the victim. The sweeping majority of these colleagues were wearing the reporter vests and their badges identifying them.

#### ▪ Systematic Assault

It is evident that the assault waged against the media personnel on July 15 was systematic and targeted, and not incidental or individual. Most cases exhibited a specific pattern when the act or assault was committed by the public security men. The number of public security men participating in the assault was very large, and they were divided into groups. It was also directed at preventing the media person from doing his / her job of revealing the truth and covering the events, through targeting his cameras and arms specifically.

What enhances the belief that the assault was systematic is that the public security and gendarmerie, and others from security systems were wearing



their uniforms without any reference to their names or numbers, in an attempt to conceal their identities.

Furthermore, the assault against media staff took place this time while they were wearing their distinctive vests, distinguishing them from protestors. The assailants' insults against them included clear terminology indicating targeting the media and the press.

CDFJ emphasizes, in this context that one should understand the systematic style of this assault through the official agencies refraining from taking any protective measures to prevent the assault by the public security personnel, and their keenness to use ineffective or unserious measures to pursue the perpetrators among the public security forces, as well as refusing to reveal the identity of official or those involved in the incident. Furthermore, the authorities have not initiated an independent and neutral investigation for revealing the truth and holding officials accountable for the assault, concerning those who implemented it or kept silent about it, or those who ordered it, accepted or approved it.

### **A Proved Responsibility that cannot be Brushed Aside**

It is evident to CDFJ, and to any other neutral party, that the responsibility of the public authorities, including the security forces for the assault against the media people is clear and evident. The government admitted the assault, although it described it as incidental or individual. Pictures and reports indicate this responsibility.

There is no way for avoiding this responsibility for any reason or justification. The public authorities did not take any measure to prevent the assault, and did not seriously or practically start any independent and large measures aimed at identifying all perpetrators, including leaders and followers, for the purpose of trying them at courts of law and punishing them according to the serious nature of their acts.

The policies of avoiding pursuit and punishment from which leaders and followers benefit has contributed to the continued violation of the basic human rights of citizens and media people equally. It is no more acceptable to resort to claims of an individual nature of the assaults. The



repetition is an indication of a system based on non-accountability and the perpetrators avoiding punishment.

▪ **Imposing the Law and Assaulting Media Staff**

Evidence and information collected by CDFJ indicate that there is no scope for saying that the assaults of July 15<sup>th</sup>, which targeted media people, can be listed under what is popularly termed "authority of security men to impose the law." Conditions and terms that should exist to practice these authorities were not present at all on July 15<sup>th</sup>. The clearest evidence to this is that none of the official positions and statements were observed, especially that the Prime Minister had emphasized, one day before the protests, that he would not tolerate any open sit-in in Jordan.

The media person, who was wearing a vest that distinguished him / her, or even those who were not wearing vests, did not pose any risk or threat to the public order, requiring the practice of violence against them. All evidence points to the fact that media people were targeted to prevent them from covering the events and to confiscate the evidence they had accumulated of the violent behavior of the public security and gendarmerie personnel against the protesters.

The July 15 marches were peaceful. There was no need to use violence against the protestors or the media. Even if, as it was said, one or two reporters used lewd language against security men, this does not justify violence against them. There are clear legal measures that can be resorted to. Violence is not the legal procedure to deal with these issues.

Add to this that the magnitude of the violence used by security people, though not justified or required, was not compatible. Pictures show twenty or thirty security men attacking one media person, which is not justifiable at all considering the situation.

Most important is that the security and gendarmerie men should have practiced their authority to impose the law towards those who organized the marches in which participants carried clubs and daggers, and not towards those who carried out a peaceful sit-in without any violation.



CDFJ is certain that the security and gendarmerie men violated the conditions to practice their authority in imposing the law, and that the international controls and standards designated for such cases were not present, and that their behavior represented a clear violation of the law and human rights principles.

▪ **A Clear Violation of Human Rights and Freedoms of the Media**

The security and gendarmerie, and other security apparatus men's assault against media people who participated in covering Al-Nakheel Square on July 15<sup>th</sup> represents a clear and blatant violation of the provisions of the Jordanian Constitution, the Jordanian Law and Human Rights Conventions which Jordan signed and ratified, and published in the Official Gazette.

This assault represents an attack on the freedom of opinion and expression, including the media freedom, prohibition of torture and other forms of treatment, harsh penalty and inhuman and insulting behavior, as well as the right to peaceful congregation.

In addition, this assault represents a violation of United Nations principles regarding the use of force in imposing the law. These violations require that the victims be vindicated and compensated, and the perpetrators held accountable criminally, civically and administratively.

▪ **Recommendations**

In light of the facts that have been proven to CDFJ, and which CDFJ concluded after it collected information and evidence regarding the assaults on media personnel on July 15, 2011, CDFJ recommends the following:

**First:** The need for public authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, to carry out an objective, independent and fast investigation by an investigation committee that does not include among its members any person who is associated with any security apparatus, regardless of its nature, preferably to include judges, public prosecutors, academicians,



lawyers and civil society activists who are known to have the experience and integrity.

**Second:** Try individuals who are suspected of being involved in the assault against media people, from various public and security institutions and agencies, whether leaders or followers, including anyone who gave the order to carry out the assault, contributed to implementing it or kept silent and accepted it, providing a cover to the perpetrators and absolving them from the accountability and penalty.

**Third:** Investigation and litigation must be carried out on the basis of standards to vindicating the victims of human rights violations observed internationally, including those related to punishing the perpetrators, and compensating the victims.

**Fourth:** Guarantee that all victims among the colleagues in the media are compensated for what befell them in terms of moral and material damage.

**Fifth:** Suspend anyone suspected of participating in the assault on the media people as explained in the second recommendation above, and terminate his services upon proof of his guilt, by a final and conclusive legal judgment issued by an independent court that has nothing to do with the suspect agencies or apparatuses in these assaults.

**Sixth:** Commit all security agencies to respect the sanctity of media work, and to take the preventative measures to prevent any assaults in future.

**Seventh:** The security agencies and public authorities involved in the assault should expose publicly the people responsible for the assault, and apologize to the victims, guaranteeing that the assault will not be repeated.

**Eighth:** All measures should be taken to guarantee that each member of the public security and gendarmerie participating in law enforcement shows his name and number clearly and legibly.

**Ninth:** Work at training members of the public security and gendarmerie members and all security apparatus members in areas related to



international standards related to human rights and controls of using force during law enforcement operations.

**Tenth:** Start to transfer the authority vested in the Police Court to civil courts regarding crimes of torture, abuse and serious violation of human rights by members of the public security.

**Eleventh:** Agencies and parties that undertook to incite against media people who participated in, or were injured and sustained damages as a result of the assault which targeted them in Al-Nakheel Square sit-in, should work at stopping this incitement because it comprises a clear violation of international and national laws. The government should prevent the media it controls and owns, including those following, directly or indirectly the security systems, from incitement against the protestors and the media personnel. In case these incitements continued, CDFJ calls upon the public prosecution to initiate pursuit against the perpetrators and to refer them to the judiciary for trial and punishment for such serious violations, which should not be pardoned or ignored.

**Twelfth:** CDFJ calls upon civil society institutions operating in the field of human rights to support its efforts in addressing United Nations decisions, especially the one related to the freedom of opinion and expression, and the one related to torture and other forms of treatment or severe, inhuman or insulting punishment represented in the assault on media personnel during their coverage of Al-Nakheel Square sit-in, when the public authorities refrained from holding an independent, quick and effective investigation that leads to holding accountable all those involved in these assaults, and to vindicate the victims and guarantee that these actions are not repeated, according to standards and principles rooted in international law and various human rights conventions.

Copies of the report to:

- His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein, may God protect him.
- H.E. The Prime Minister
- H.E. Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament
- H.E. Speaker of the House of Representatives
- H.E. Chairman of the Judicial Institute



- H.E. Head of the Royal Court
- H.E. Advisor of H.M. the King for Media and Information Affairs
- H.E. The Interior Minister
- H.E. The Foreign Minister
- Public Prosecutor / Palace of Justice
- Public Security Director
- Director of Intelligence
- Director of Gendarmerie
- Chairman of the Freedoms Committee / House of Representatives
- National Guidance Committee / House of Representatives
- Representative and Members of the Jordan Press Association
- Representative of Lawyers
- Civil Society Institutions
- Media Outlets

**Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ):**

CDFJ is a civil society organization, established in 1998, as an organization concerned with defending Jordanian and Arab journalists, their liberties and rights in addition to develop Arab media sector. CDFJ is non profit organization whose mission is to safeguard freedoms, enhance journalists' professionalism, entrench democratic structure, and ensure respect for human rights, justice, equality, and development in an open democratic society based on dialogue and non-violence.

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