

SCOTTISH SOLIDARITY WITH KURDISTAN

Health workers and civil servants strike and demonstrate in the Kurdish Region of Iraq

Report from Dr Goran Zangana of SSK – April 2018

Doctors joined other health workers in coming under increasingly violent attacks in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The authorities responded to protests with intimidation, harassment and physical abuse after doctors decided to join widespread popular demonstrations in the region.

Dr Shayan Askary, an oncology speciality doctor, was attacked, her phone destroyed and verbally abused after confronting security officers who tried to end a doctors' demonstration.

Health workers boycotted work at all levels of services except for emergencies on the 25th March 2018 and repeated this in the following days. They joined teachers, lawyers, engineers and other public employees who walked out and demonstrated in the streets for the fourth day in a row since the 25th. As a result the health system was practically paralysed.



Doctors and other public servants have not received their full salaries for years now. In 2014 a fall in oil prices, the ISIS-related conflict and a decision by the Government of Iraq (GoI) to stop providing KRI with its share of the public budget resulted in a severe financial crisis. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

decided to implement extreme austerity measures including what it calls a **mandatory saving scheme**. According to the scheme, public employees are given only a quarter of their salaries. The rest will be paid supposedly at a later stage when oil prices and economic outlook are better.

Doctors and other health workers believe that the mandatory saving scheme has lasted for longer than the KRG initially promised. They started questioning earlier reassurances by the authorities that the scheme is only a temporary measure. Such anxieties were confirmed recently when the KRG and the GoI decided to continue the scheme despite the latter agreeing to provide KRI's share of the public budget.

With the KRG not intending to end the mandatory saving scheme, doctors' boycotts and demonstrations are likely to continue. Intimidations, harassments and physical abuse by authorities are, therefore, likely to continue as well.

On 28/03/2018, Nachirvan Barzani Prime Minister of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), threatened demonstrators in a press conference that his government would respond with all means available including 'knives and pistols'. This statement by the Prime Minister was widely seen as an invitation and justification for further violence against demonstrators including doctors, teachers and other public servants.

Since the Prime Minister's statement, an increasing number of doctors, health workers and teachers have come under physical attack, embarrassments and intimidation. On 30 March plain clothed security forces attempted to kidnap Dr Zana Dzaey (an Internal Medicine specialist) one of the organisers of the



demonstrations by doctors inside Erbil Teaching Hospital. On the 2 April the administration of the Rizgary Teaching Hospital punished the following doctors and health workers for their leadership in organising the demonstrations; Dr Kawa Khalil (an Ophthalmologist) Dr Hiwa Khalid Qadir (an Internal Medicine specialist) and Muhammed Abdulkarim (a physiotherapist). On the same day, Bestoon Fatah (a health worker) was attacked and physically assaulted inside the Slemany Teaching Hospital.

Doctors and other health workers in KRI, are calling on their colleagues in the region and around the world to stand in solidarity with their struggle for better working conditions. They have called on human rights organisations, civil society, UN agencies and other interested stakeholders to put pressure on the KRG and Gol to end the mandatory saving scheme. They also call on organisations and the media to support demands for stopping violence against doctors and other health workers.

Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan

c/o UNISON South Lanarkshire, 21 Beckford Street, Hamilton ML3 0BT

Email: - scottishsolidaritywithkurdistan@outlook.com