

Amidst death threats, Gulala Sdiq's voice still echoes change



Gulala giving a speech during one of the latest protests in the city of Sulaimani. Photo by: Kasia Protz

Gulala Sdiq is a teacher, civil society activist, and one of the main organizers of the current protests in the city of Sulaimani. She is one of thousands of teachers that have been on strike in the streets of Sulaimani demanding their full wages and an end to government corruption. As a result of the ongoing strike, the schools remain closed in the city of Sulaimani and surrounding areas. Gulala Sdiq requested Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) to accompany her and her family after receiving threats from security forces over the past few weeks. CPT is an international human rights organization seeking to transform violence and oppression. After hearing her story an agreement was made to accompany Gulala Sdiq for the upcoming days in her home.

Gulala started co-organising protests in October 2016. She, along with other teachers made a council (33 Teachers) to organize peaceful demonstrations in attempts to push the government to respond to their demands. This council is affiliated with no single political party but is asking for the rights of all workers and teachers, as Gulala told CPT. On 27 November, 2016 the government tried to end the boycott and once again asked the teachers to open schools. The government has put forward an unclear proposal to the teachers. They offered them a payment of 100000 ID (around 100US Dollars) for local city teachers and 150000 ID (around 150US

Dollars) for teachers in rural areas. In response, the teachers refused and asked that their salaries be paid in full. One of the other organizers told CPT that “we supposedly were to receive the payment for seven months. The teachers later found out that they would receive this payment for one month only.” The government responded to the teachers and said that they are unaware of this deal.

In the morning of 27th of November Gulala's car was set on fire in front of her home. Gulala told CPT , "When I met with Asaish (local security forces) on the 4th of December they told me 'We burned your car because you are affiliated with a specific political party and your case is a political case.'" She replied, "I am just a teacher and I do not have a salary. That is the only reason that I am in the streets together with other teachers."



Gulala standing beside her burnt car. Photo by: Kasia Protz.

Following the car burning incident, on the December 1st, Gulala and her husband were arrested in front of their home. There was no order from the judge for their arrest. Gulala and her husband were held in prison for eight hours. She reported to CPT that Assaish made them sign a promise that they would not participate in the demonstrations anymore. During her time in prison she was offered food and water but she refused as she had a fear that she was being drugged. "I drank a little water and immediately got a headache," said Gulala. During her arrest Assaish also took her mobile phone. They looked through its files and held it until December 4th. After Gulala received her mobile back she discovered that a tracking device had been installed. After removing the device her mobile phone stopped working completely. Gulala says she also sees Assaish in civilian clothing in cars observing her house often.

“Since my car was burned we feel pressured from Assaish, the whole family feels afraid, and my sisters and brother are scared to visit me and our parents. I can't sleep or eat. I sleep in a different house. I know of many others killed here in Kurdistan for standing up for their basic human rights. I feel I don't have any security. I feel my life and my family's lives are in danger,” Gulala told us.

Gulala is asking for her voice as well as other teachers' voices be heard and for protection for her family and herself.

Christian Peacemaker Teams continues to observe the nonviolent and peaceful demonstrations in Iraqi Kurdistan and accompany teachers and other civil society activists who ask for their rights through nonviolent methods and means.

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