

## **Awat Hassan continues to be the voice of change among ongoing death threats**

Awat Hassan Abdulla is a civil society activist and one of the main organizers of the teachers' protests that are currently happening in the city of Sulaimani. Since the beginning of the school year in September 2016, the teachers are on a strike and demand that their full wages be paid and that the government sector will stop and deal with its internal corruption. The schools and universities remain closed until now. Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an international human rights organization, have been in contact with Mr. Awat Hassan Abdulla and his family, who requested that we accompany them. Mr. Awat and his family have been receiving threats and following a series of violent detentions and beatings by the Security forces (Asaish), the last one took place on the 1 December 2016, he and his family fear for their safety and lives. CPT agreed to accompany him and his family.



Teachers demonstrating at Salim street in the city of Sulaimani, December 01, 2016. Photo by Kasia Protz.

Mr. Awat started co-organising teachers' demonstrations on 1 October 2015. Soon after the first demonstrations, on December 2015 he and other organizers met with Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister and his deputy regarding the salary reductions. After the meeting, Awat started to receive death threats through phone calls.

Since mid of September 2016, Awat was detained three times by the Asaish. On 20 September, 2016 he and four other organisers, Mustafa Hassan Gawra, Hawraman Nimat, Dilshad Mahmud and Adil Hassan were seized by the Asaish in Penjween city, after they participated in a meeting with civil society organizations and activists. Awat told us that he was able to send a short message to the media through a shared messenger group, which aided in their release. In addition, people protested in Penjwen asking the security forces to release them. On 24 September he was seized by the Asaish yet again, this time together with his 9 year old daughter. Awat was ill treated and badly beaten and his daughter continues to be traumatized and still cannot sleep at night. The following day after his release he went to the Asaish office in Sulaimani to meet with the head of Asaish who allegedly told him, "Yes, I took you and I can do to you whatever I want."

On the 27th of November, his car was burned outside of his home. The fire brigade arrived after half an hour, but the Asaish and police arrived two hours later. His brother Amanj Hassan mentioned to us that the cars were set fire to at 1:46am, but the Asaish and police did not arrive until 3:58 p.m. When they arrived to investigate the incident the police were told to leave by the Asaish. The Asaish went from house to house in Awat's neighborhood and deleted security camera footage from that day.

In the morning of 1 December members of the security forces came to Awat's home to arrest him, they claimed they were doing it for his protection. The security forces detained him and his brother Amanj. They beat both brothers, shocked Amanj with a taser and threatened to beat him with a brick. Awat's brother's 4 year old daughter witnessed the beating and arrest, she thought that her "dad was being killed by the police". She is very traumatized by this incident. They both were arrested early in the morning and released after 10pm, throughout which time they received no food and little water. Awat suspected that the water they were given may have been drugged. He noticed a small hole in the lid of the water bottle and after drinking it he felt very weak. After his release, he went to the hospital. The doctors confirmed that he was drugged and offered him treatment and to pump his stomach. Soon after visiting with the doctor members of Asaish showed up. This raised fear in Awat and his family and so they decided to leave the hospital without receiving treatment.

Awat shared with the members of the CPT team, "There have been rumors from people that I will be killed. I asked the security forces about the rumors who in response told me that they would not kill me but they will make me kill myself". He was also told by one of his neighbors, Mr. Sardar, who tried to prevent the Asaish from entering Awat's house, that Asaish told him that he should go away because the order comes from a person in power and that "he wants Awat dead or alive".



Awat Hassan talking to CPTers at his home, December 04, 2016. Photo by: Rezhiair Fakhir.

Additionally, "After our arrest the whole neighborhood is scared and traumatized by the incident," said Awat. One of Awat's neighbors saw Awat's burning car. He informed police about the incident and who he saw burn Awat's car. The police found out that his neighbor had communicated with Awat about details of the incident. Since then, his neighbor has been very scared to talk with Awat and his family about this any further. In addition to that, Awat's wife's student has informed her that he has seen the people who burned their car. After telling her, he was threatened by the Assaish and he has since stopped talking about this event. Awat's neighbors are also scared to visit Awat and his family.

Awat and his family demand that the government, security forces and international NGOs and agencies take action to protect his and his family members' lives.

Christian Peacemaker Teams continue 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.

CPT - Iraqi Kurdistan Team  
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