



For immediate release – 17 April 2008

Iraq: Release of Journalists Welcomed

ARTICLE 19 is relieved to hear that Iraqi Associated Press photographer Bilal Hussein and British Journalist Richard Butler have been released.

The Iraqi Associated Press (AP) photographer Bilal Hussein was released and handed over to AP colleagues at the Baghdad checkpoint on 16 April 2008. Hussein was held by the US military since April 2006 following suspicion of working with insurgents and has always insisted on his innocence. The US military's decision to release him comes after an Iraqi judicial panel dismissed the charges brought against him by the US defence department and ordered him to be released under an amnesty law adopted by the Iraqi parliament at the start of 2008. The charges brought against Hussein were never made public. The amnesty was granted on 7 April.

British journalist, Richard Butler, was kidnapped by gun men in the town of Basra on 10 February 2008. He was working for American network CBS. Butler was rescued by Iraqi soldiers who found him in a house in the Basra district during a major military sweep on 14 April 2008.

“We are pleased to hear about the positive role that the Iraqi authorities played in those two releases and we hope for continued support in protecting journalists and media workers in Iraq” said Dr. Agnès Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE19.

Despite these welcomed releases, Iraq continues to be a dangerous place for journalists. More action for protection is needed. Journalists and media workers continue to be targeted from all sides by various armed groups, Iraqi authorities and US forces.

According to the latest report released by Iraqi local group the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory (JFO), from September 2006 - 2007, 23 journalists and media workers were kidnapped. Most of them were killed, but the fate of six is still unknown. The same report documented 42 arrests by the Iraqi authorities. A further 18 journalists faced court cases and/or imprisonment on cases filed against them by government officials.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.