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Iraq: Journalist Protection Law Needs to be Reviewed

A Journalist Protection Law, prepared by the Iraqi Syndicate of Journalists and endorsed by the government of Iraq, has been laid before the Iraqi Parliament for its consideration. A Note on the draft Law prepared by CLD highlights the important protections for journalists included in the draft Law. But the draft also defines a journalist as a member of the statutory Syndicate of Journalists, the same body which drafted the law, and grants a number of powers exclusively to the Syndicate.

“CLD supports this effort to protect the rights of journalists and to provide them with support,” said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“But by vesting exclusive powers in the Syndicate of Journalists, it breaches international human rights, including to freedom of association and expression. Other countries provide similar protection without effectively forcing journalists to become members of certain associations.”*

CLD recommends that the whole approach of the draft Law be reconsidered, in favour of a system that provides these benefits to anyone who regularly publishes information in the public interest, regardless of their organisational or institutional affiliations.

Some of the other problems with the draft Law are:

- It appears to allow the Syndicate of Journalists to dictate employment rules for the industry.
- It seeks to impose rigid strategies for dealing with crimes against journalists.
- It puts in place a limited regime for access to information with unduly broad grounds for refusing access, when what is really needed is a fully-fledged access to information law.

CLD calls on the Iraqi authorities to reconsider the approach adopted in the draft Law and to explore more democratic ways of providing similar benefits to journalists.

The full Note, along with an English translation of the draft Law, are available at: http://www.law-democracy.org/?page_id=77.

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