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6 May 2020

To: KRG President Nechirvan Barzani
KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani
PUK Co-heads Lahur Talabani and Bafel Talabani
Director of the Asayish Directorate, Sulaimani, Hassan Nuri
Governor of Sulaimani Province, Haval Abubakir
KRG Minister of Justice, Farsat Ahmad Abdullah

It is with great sadness that we learned the Iranian Government executed Mostafa Salimi, a Kurd from Saqqez in the Kurdistan region of Iran, on 11 April 2020. We would like to offer our sincere condolences to the family of Mr Salimi. It is a terrible loss for all people in Kurdistan.

What led up to Mr Salimi's execution in Saqqez has been the subject of much debate, different versions proliferating by the day. Even the version that is the outcome of a recent parliamentary enquiry raises many questions. Mr Salimi's family and residents of villages in the Penjwen area of Sulaimani province, an area secured by Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga, claim that Mr Salimi was captured by Asayish and handed over to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) Quds' military base known as Ramezan Sepah, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The General Prosecutor of the Penjwen district allegedly justified the handover by claiming that Mr Salimi had illegally crossed the [border](#). But the Asayish Directorate in Sulaimani [denies](#) it was involved in any handover, claiming that Mr Salimi was not known to them and had not been registered as passing through any border point. In Iran, a prosecutor in the province of Kurdistan claimed Mr Salimi was captured near [Saqqez](#), inferring he had not been in the KRI.

After the story broke, various authorities let it be known that Mr Salimi was a former member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iran (KDP-I) but was arrested in 2003 for an armed robbery in which three policemen were killed and for which Mr Salimi was sentenced to death. He may or may not have been guilty of any of these crimes, given the perfunctory procedures in the Iranian Court system, where confessions are elicited under torture, prisoners do not necessarily have a defence lawyer, and trials can last five to fifteen minutes. Nevertheless, Mr Salimi had been in prison for 17 years when riots broke out over fear of Covid-19 spreading in Iranian prisons. Along with 75 other prisoners, Mr. Salimi escaped from the prison in Saqqez city on March 27.

Whatever the background of Mr Salimi, given the history of Iranian Kurds being assassinated in the KRI, many Kurds are extremely hurt and angry that Mr Salimi was not granted asylum, and, instead, was allegedly handed to the Iranian authorities inside the KRI, knowing this would mean certain execution. Most Kurds would agree with the independent Kurdistan Board of Human Rights that maintains the fate of Mr Salimi should have been decided by a KRG court of law, given he may have illegally entered the KRI and because he would face execution in Iran. An

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additional concern is that IF he was handed over to Quds or another Iranian authority, then how far up *which* chain of command was the decision made?

If Mr Salimi was captured inside the KRI and handed over to an Iranian authority, then this was a breach of Mr Salimi's human rights, international law and Article 21 of the Iraqi constitution which stipulates that political asylum seekers should not be extradited to their countries of origin. Mr Salimi allegedly took refuge in the KRI believing it was a safe place, as it has been for many Kurds and Sunni Arabs from Iran, Syria, Turkey and central and southern Iraq. Unfortunately, if Mr Salimi was handed to an Iranian authority inside the KRI, then it was not a safe haven for him, and if not for him, what are the implications for all the other persecuted Kurds of Iran, Turkey and Syria who have fled to the KRI in search of safety?

Given the seriousness of the matter, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) ordered an investigation. Five parliamentarians from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) delivered their findings to parliament in late April. They came to yet another conclusion. They found that Mr Salimi was among seven prison escapees who attempted to cross into the KRI. Mr Salimi succeeded on April 2, and arrived in Syagwez village in the Penjwen area, where he met two men in the mosque. One of the men reported him to Asayish, whereupon Mr Salimi was taken to the border, allegedly for quarantine purposes given the threat of coronavirus. At the Bashmakh border crossing, *somehow* Iranian authorities assumed custody of him. The findings by five KDP parliamentarians only aggravated KDP – PUK relations. Each blamed the other for sacrificing fellow Kurds to maintain relations with Turkey or Iran respectively, both countries intent on destroying Kurdish unity.

Kurdish Lobby Australia advocates for democracy, peace and prosperity in all regions of Kurdistan. We wonder why only [KDP parliamentarians](#) conducted the aforementioned investigation and strongly condemn asylum seekers' lives being endangered. We ask the KRG to:

- Launch a truly independent investigation into events leading to Mr Salimi's capture and execution and publicly announce detailed evidence behind the findings;
- Develop a consistent policy for the protection of those who are unjustly persecuted by neighbouring governments and seek asylum in the KRI; and
- Where necessary, put the individual on trial inside the KRI to ensure justice is done.

We ask these things knowing how difficult it can be for the KRI leadership to apply the rule of law when neighbourly relations are at stake. Nevertheless, it is our sincere wish that, despite the obstacles, the KRI becomes a beacon of justice in the region.

Yours Sincerely,

Eziz Bawermend
Co-Chair President, Kurdish Lobby Australia

Dr. Gina Lennox
Co-Chair Public Officer, KLA