

UN Libya mission concerned over journalist's disappearance

Mon, 2019-12-16 19:26

LONDON: The UN's mission in Libya said Monday it is concerned over the "enforced disappearance" of a human rights activist and journalist.

Reda Fhelboom was detained at Mitiga airport by a Tripoli-based armed group on Saturday night after arriving from Tunis, UNSMIL said. Tripoli is controlled by the Government of National Accord, but militias hold sway across the city and other parts of the country. A rival administration based in the east is fighting against the GNA and the armed groups that support it.

UNSMIL expresses concerns over the enforced disappearance of human rights defender and journalist Reda Fhelboom, calls for his immediate release – full statement: <https://t.co/McKANUIxJypic.twitter.com/gjd3NuBEbn>

– UNSMIL (@UNSMILibya) [December 16, 2019](#)

"UNSMIL is concerned that Mr. Fhelboom's arrest and detention may be on account of his work as a defender and journalist and therefore in violation of Libya's international human rights law obligations regarding the right to liberty and security of the person and freedom of opinion and expression," the Un mission said.

It called for Fhelboom's prompt release and urged that all human rights activists and journalists working in Libya should be protected.



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[Amnesty raises to 304 number of Iranians killed in protests](#)

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Mon, 2019-12-16 12:08

DUBAI: Amnesty International said Monday that at least 304 people were killed in last month's anti-government protests in Iran, a significantly higher number than what the rights group had reported previously.

The protests, which lasted about four days in several cities and towns in Iran in November, were sparked by a sharp rise in gasoline prices. During the violence and in the days that followed, Iranian authorities blocked access to the Internet.

Amnesty said that Iranian security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters, killing scores. Iranian authorities subsequently arrested thousands of protesters as well as journalists, human rights defenders and students in a sweeping crackdown to prevent them from speaking up about the protests, the London-based watchdog said.

Tehran has yet to release any statistics about the scale of the unrest, though two weeks ago the government acknowledged that the security forces shot and killed protesters. Iranian state media referred to some of those shot and killed as “rioters”.

Amnesty said earlier this month that at least 208 were killed in the Nov. 15-18 protests. It did not provide an explanation for the new and higher death toll, reiterating that it had spoken to dozens of people inside the country and had compiled credible reports.

The majority of the deaths recorded by Amnesty were the result of gunshots to the head, heart and other vital organs. Among those killed, according to Amnesty, was a 15-year-old boy in the city of Shiraz who was shot as he passed by a protest on his way from school.

The rights group had noted how during the protests, Iran shut down Internet access, blocking those inside the country from sharing videos and limiting knowledge about the full scale of the turmoil.

The protests were rooted in widespread economic discontent that has gripped the country since President Trump imposed crushing sanctions after withdrawing America from Tehran’s nuclear deal with world powers.

Iran’s national currency, the rial, has sharply plunged from the time of the 2015 nuclear accord while daily staples have risen in price.

Despite the hike in prices, gasoline in Iran remains among the cheapest in the world.



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[Tampa attorney forces Qatari emir's brother into legal corner](#)

Mon, 2019-12-16 18:02

A Florida attorney has succeeded in forcing Qatari Sheikh Khaled Al-Thani to either respond to a lawsuit accusing him of ordering two former American security employees to kill individuals he believed were involved in embarrassing and blackmailing him, or face a Federal Court default judgment. The US District Court for the Middle District of Florida has accepted that Tampa attorney Rebecca Castaneda has successfully served Sheikh Khaled— the brother of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani – with a legal order to either appear in court or default and accept a court judgment in favor of the two former employees, Matthew Pittard and Matthew Allende.

Among causes of action named in the lawsuit is an allegation that when Sheikh Khaled discovered that Pittard had helped an American escape from his palace in Doha, he fired Pittard and threatened to kill him. After Sheikh Khaled refused to give Allende time off after a three-day party, the employee escaped from the sheikh's palace by scaling a six-meter-high fence, shattering one of his legs in the process.

Castaneda told Arab News that the two employees are prepared to reveal under oath in court details of lurid accusations that Sheikh Khaled – a playboy race car driver who competes around the world through his Massachusetts company Al-Anabi Racing LLC – engaged in sex and drug parties involving homosexuality that were part of a blackmail scheme.

"Sheikh Al-Thani and Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC have been served. His legal options now are to respond to the suit by either admitting or denying what the plaintiffs allege," Castaneda said.

"The alternative is that the sheikh can refuse to answer the charges in court. In that case, the judge would issue a default judgment against him." A default judgment in the US would allow the plaintiffs, Pittard and Allende, to win their case.

Castaneda said that Sheikh Khaled was personally served with legal documents sent to Al-Anabi Racing LLC on Friday, Dec. 13 – a day that is traditionally considered "bad luck" by Americans.

"Serving a foreign defendant can be difficult. It is especially difficult in cases where a country is not a member of certain legal treaties. There was

never a question as to whether he would actually be served. It was merely a question of how long it would take. Six months. Six years. He was absolutely going to be served," said Castaneda, who has been trying to force Sheikh Khaled to appear and answer claims against him in the Florida Federal Court since the lawsuit was filed in July.

Castaneda said that Sheikh Khaled has until Jan. 2, 2020 to formally respond to the lawsuit or face a default Federal Court judgment that could severely affect his multiple companies and investments in the US and other countries where the US legal jurisdiction is binding.

The attorney said that Pittard and Allende are prepared to detail in open court the individuals and the reasons Sheikh Khaled ordered the alleged killings, as well as the sheikh's threats to kill one of the two plaintiffs. In one case, Sheikh Khaled is alleged to have ordered the killing of a Los Angeles-based drug dealer who was trying to blackmail the sheikh with claims he had photos and videos of him taking part in drug and homosexual sex parties.

"We don't know the veracity of the drug dealer's claims, but the sheikh took them seriously and asked Pittard to kill the blackmailer," Castaneda said. In another case, Castaneda said Sheikh Khaled ordered Pittard to murder a Moroccan woman who was a friend of the sheikh's wife.

Castaneda said that Sheikh Khaled feared the woman was feeding embarrassing information about him to a Saudi national at a time when his brother, Sheikh Tamim, and Qatar were engaged in an international row with Saudi Arabia and three other Arab countries.

Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates broke ties with Qatar and expelled their diplomats in June 2017 over accusations that Sheikh Tamim and Doha were funding and enabling terrorism.

If Sheikh Khaled fails to appear before the Federal Court, Federal Judge Thomas P. Barber could rule against him, imposing fines, penalties and judgments.

Pittard and Allende are seeking \$33 million in the lawsuit against the Qatari royal, accusing him of not only threatening their lives but also damaging their ability to work.

Castaneda also expanded the original lawsuit, filed in July 23, 2019, to include 18 of Sheikh Khaled's aliases. Castaneda said that the sheikh has used variations of his name on businesses, bank accounts and property that he owns.

The lawsuit identifies 21 variations of Al-Anabi Racing LLC, including Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC.

A telephone call to Al-Anabi Racing's offices at 27 Pill Hill Lane in Duxbury, Massachusetts, went unanswered. The company sponsored five cars at last year's National Hot Rod Racing Association Pro Mod races.

Also named as defendants in the original lawsuit are Sheikh Khaled's companies Geo Strategic Defense Solutions (GSDS) and KH Holdings, alleging violations of the US Fair Labor Standards Act and violating US laws.

Castaneda said that KH Holdings has already been properly served and could be defaulted at any time. GSDS has yet to be served.



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US lawsuit against Qatari emir's brother expanded
Brother of Qatari emir accused of plotting double murder

[Morocco says arrests extremist who planned 'suicide attack'](#)

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Sun, 2019-12-15 18:27

RABAT: Moroccan anti-terror police announced Sunday the arrest of an alleged extremist who "planned a suicide attack."

The 41-year-old extremist tried to "build expertise in the use of arms," Morocco's central office for judicial investigations said in a statement. He was imbued in the "ideological propaganda" of the Daesh group, it added. "Electronic devices and documents... on the making of explosives" were seized, the office said.

Long spared extremist violence, Morocco was last year hit by the gruesome murder of two Scandinavian tourists in the High Atlas mountains, committed in

the name of Daesh.

The perpetrators were sentenced to death, a penalty not carried out in Morocco since 1993.



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[Backer of Iraq anti-government protests killed in Baghdad](#)

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Sun, 2019-12-15 15:46

BAGHDAD: A supporter of Iraqi anti-government demonstrators was gunned down in Baghdad, a police source said Sunday, the fourth backer of the protest movement to be killed in two weeks.

Mohammed al-Doujaili, 24, was shot in the back near the Tahrir Square protest hub on Saturday night, the police source said.

Another man who was with him was wounded in the same attack, and al-Doujaili died of his wounds at a Baghdad hospital Sunday morning, relatives said. Doujaili, who helped distribute food to protesters encamped in Tahrir Square, was buried in Baghdad's Shiite-dominated district of Sadr City. He is the fourth protester to be killed by unidentified assailants over the past two weeks.

Father of five Ali al-Lami was shot and killed by several bullets to the head earlier this week and prominent civil society activist Fahem al-Tai was killed in a drive-by shooting in Iraq's shrine city of Karbala.

In one particularly gruesome case, the bruised body of 19-year-old Zahra Ali was found on December 2 outside her family home in Baghdad, hours after she had gone missing.

Iraq's capital and its Shiite-majority south have been gripped by more than two months of rallies against corruption, poor public services and a lack of jobs.

Around 460 people have been killed and 25,000 wounded, most of them protesters, since the youth-led rallies erupted on October 1.

Since then demonstrators in the capital and southern cities have disappeared almost daily, in most cases taken from near their homes as they returned from protests.

Protesters accuse pro-Iran armed factions of playing a role in the killings and abductions.

London-based rights group Amnesty International on Friday urged Baghdad to clamp down on what it called a "campaign of terror targeting protesters". Demonstrations once again took place on Sunday in Baghdad and across the south of Iraq, where schools and public administrations remained closed, AFP correspondents said.



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