

Report from Suleimaniya

March 6, 2011

Fires, Broken Bodies, Arrests and Chaos at Freedom Square in Suleimaniya

35 year-old Ayoub joined with approximately 200 young people for an all-night vigil at Freedom Square in Suleimaniya. At midnight he laid down in his tent to rest. Ayoub has been on a hunger strike for the past 12 days and plans to continue until the government answers the demands of the people who have been demonstrating 18 days straight.

At 2:30AM, Ayoub heard people yelling "wake up, wake up". For a moment he was excited thinking, "Parliament has come with good news". Within seconds, he knew there was trouble. "When I woke up, I didn't want to believe the Kurdish authorities would do this", Ayoub said.

Men dressed in black with black ski masks over their faces carrying guns, batons and electric cables began rounding people up and taking them away. Other eyewitnesses said they could have been from the Anti-Terrorism Unit. Men in plainclothes also carrying guns, batons and electric cables began to beat people. Ayoub tried 3 times to get away and 3 times he laid down on the ground and was beaten and stunned with the electric cable. The marks on his hands were obvious and he said he was bruised and bloodied all over his body.

The men in plainclothes began to set tents on fire. One tent was occupied when it went up in flames. The victim remains in the emergency hospital according to another eyewitness. Ayoub's tent was burned to the ground along with all of his papers and a few cherished books.

Ayoub was able to finally get up and run away. A man in a tea shop took him inside and kept him safe for the night. Ayoub returned to Freedom Square at 9AM. The burned tents were taken away and the square was cleaned up. In addition to the destruction of the tents, the demonstrators sound system and the stage set up for the speakers who come daily to the demonstrations were destroyed.

Other eyewitnesses reported that members of the Asaish (Security Police), were present during the attacks but did nothing to intervene.

Ayoub, a contractor who does road and masonry work has made many complaints in the past to government authorities about the corruption he has seen in his business. "I have reported directly to our Prime Minister, Dr. Barham Salih that poor quality materials are used causing a big problem", he said. Ayoub believes that the government can't do anything because of the corruption within the parties. Ayoub has also written to the Minister of Higher Education and the Parliament with a list of concerns he has about the violation of human rights on the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. He has yet to receive any answers.

"I am on a hunger strike now and if the people don't receive answers to their demands soon, I will do something else", Ayoub said. He did not share what that something else is.

As of yet, the International media has given little attention to the crisis in the Kurdish north of Iraq and sinister deeds continue to go on in the dark.