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IRAQI KURDISTAN: Reverberations of an uprising

The father of a demonstrator killed last year in Iraqi Kurdistan is working locally and internationally for freedom for those still in prison and accountability for officials who have wrongfully detained, beaten, tortured and killed people for participating in legitimate public witness.

On February 19, 2011, Iraqi Kurdistan security forces shot into a crowd of demonstrators, killing Surkew, the teenaged son of Zahid Mahmoud Imam. Surkew was on his way home from school when he joined the protest; security forces shot him in the midsection. He died in the hospital later that day. It was the third day of the [Kurdish Spring Uprisings in Sulaimani](#) against corruption in the government.

Sixty-two days after the daily protests began, security forces used tear gas on the crowds and burned down the stage in Azadi (“Freedom”) Square, ending the demonstrations.

Ten people were killed during the demonstrations. Security forces wounded and arrested hundreds of demonstrators, and beat and tortured many of the detainees. “I was beaten up and still have breathing issues because of the tear gas, and I have still problems in my back because of the beatings,” said Zahid during an interview with CPT. “This happened even after my son was killed.”

Over a year after the demonstrations ended, Zahid campaigns on behalf of the still-imprisoned demonstrators and for the prosecution of those who killed other demonstrators last year. “Until I will get to my goal [of having those responsible prosecuted], I will continue until everyone knows about the situation here.” He told CPT that he speaks out for the sake of “the blood of my son who was murdered and all the others who were murdered.”

Zahid believes it will be more effective if he shares his story outside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Accepting an invitation from the Swedish Green Party, he visited Sweden in April 2012. He met there with a group called the 17th of February, composed of Kurdish people who live in Sweden and are supportive of the demonstrations.

He also met with a Swedish government official responsible for Middle East Foreign Affairs. Zahid told the official that some Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities who have Swedish citizenship helped people who had committed brutality leave the country. He asked him to freeze their financial



Zahid stands next to photo of a victim of repression in Valentine's Day action, Sulaimani, February 2012.

resources and launch investigations into the killings, beatings, arrests and torture of demonstrators. Zahid told him those authorities should be held accountable for this on their return to Sweden. The official promised to report Zahid's message to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Zahid said he thinks the trip to Sweden was good for sharing the dark side of the Kurdistan Regional Government and unmasking its pretense of democracy.

He hopes to make similar tours to other European countries and to the U.S. Zahid told CPT that he does not need any financial help – just an invitation. He is also happy and available to do an interview from his home.

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