



www.rsf.org

April 8 2004

Dear Congressional Members,

We are the families of journalists killed or missing in Iraq during the year 2003. We are writing to you jointly from Amman, Ramallah, London, Brussels, Warsaw and the Bekaa Valley (Lebanon), backed by Reporters Without Borders, to express our deep dismay and grief at the silence, lack of information and the untruth emanating from your government about the fate of our loved ones.

Tarek, Mazen, Terry, Fred, Hussein and Taras were journalists. They acquired the experience and wisdom of war reporters by covering the Balkans, Afghanistan, Chechnya and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just a year ago, they were sent to Iraq to report on the conflict and upheaval in the region. As seasoned war correspondents, they were well prepared in advance of what they were to expect when they arrived in Iraq. This war was to be their last.

On 22 March 2003, a team from the British TV network ITN led by star reporter Terry Lloyd came under US and Iraqi gunfire near Basra, in southern Iraq. Terry was most probably killed by US Marines. French cameraman Fred Nérac and Lebanese interpreter Hussein Osman mysteriously vanished.

The British military police started an investigation in June but was never allowed to question the Marines involved. Despite the promises of Secretary of State Colin Powell, the US Army has not cooperated sufficiently with British investigators and so reduced the chances of finding out what really happened including recovering the bodies of Fred and Hussein.

April 8 was a terrible day for the media in Baghdad. Tarek Ayoub, of the pan-Arab television station Al-Jazeera, was killed when US planes bombed his office, even though the Pentagon was well informed prior to the war of the coordinates of the station. Banners posted outside the station were yet another indication of Al-Jazeera's commitment to cooperating with US forces. The US Army reported that it had made a serious and regrettable mistake but eye-witnesses called it a deliberate attack. Disgracefully, Tarek's death has still not been investigated.

A few hours later on the same day, Taras Protsyuk, of Reuters news agency, and José Couso, of the Spanish TV station Telecinco, were killed when a US tank fired a shell at the Palestine Hotel. The Pentagon at first denied any wrong-doing, claiming that the tanks had responded to "direct firing" from the hotel. Then the story changed and officials said the troops were trying to neutralize an "enemy hunter/killer team."

This excuse did not adequately explain the tragic event. A Reporters Without Borders investigation concluded that US troops had not been told the building was a hotel full of 200 journalists and that it was not clearly marked as a «Non Firing Zone» on the maps they were given before they entered the city. How much longer must we wait before the US Army admits these deaths could have been avoided? When will those responsible be punished?

Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana was killed by US troops in a Baghdad suburb on August 17. He had asked soldiers if he could film the Abu Ghraib prison where the soldiers were stationed as guards. At that moment, a military convoy came by and its troops mistook his camera for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and shot and killed Dana. An investigation conducted by the US authorities in as little as two weeks concluded that no military rules had been broken. The Pentagon did not bother to send the results of this mockery of an enquiry to Reuters or Dana's family before making them public.

We are speaking up today to tell you we are not satisfied with the vague excuses of an army on the move busy with major operations.

What happened to Tarek, Mazen, Terry, Fred, Hussein and Taras cannot be dismissed as just "regrettable incidents." A few half-hearted apologies and supposed enquiries that always conclude the Army acted in accordance with the rules of warfare and in "legitimate self-defense" are not enough. On the contrary, they fill us with bitterness and deepen our grief.

Can we not expect a leading democracy claiming to defend freedom around the world to honestly admit its mistakes and take full responsibility for them?

Time has stopped for us and despite your silence we will not allow the loss of our loved ones to be forgotten. We ask you to give us further information, reopen the prematurely-closed investigations and take all necessary steps to see these tragedies are not repeated.

Yours truly,

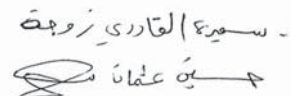
The families of journalists killed or missing in Iraq



Lidya Litvinchuk - Poland



Dima Tahboub-Ayyoub - Jordan



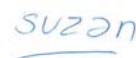
Samira Kaderi-Othman - Lebanon



Chelsey Lloyd - United Kingdom



Fabienne Nérac - France



Suzan Dana - West Bank

Conseil International
International Council
Président
Fernando Castelló
Reporteros sin fronteras
España

Vice-présidents
Olivier Basille
Reporters sans frontières
Belgique
Pierre Veilletet
Reporters sans frontières
France
Gérald Sapey
Reporters sans frontières
Suisse
Rubina Möhring
Reporter Ohne Grenzen
Österreich
Alessandro Oppes
Reporter Senza Frontiere
Italia
Alice Petren
Reportrar utan Gränser
Sverige
Michaël Rediske
Reporter Ohne Grenzen
Deutschland

Trésorier
Michel Schweri
Reporters sans frontières
Suisse

Secrétaire général
Robert Ménard

Bureaux permanents
Permanent Offices
Abidjan
Bangkok
Istanbul
Montréal
Moscou
New York
Tokyo

Secrétariat International
International Secretariat
5, rue Geoffroy-Marie
75009 Paris
Tél. (33) 1 44 83 84 84
Fax. (33) 1 44 23 11 51
E-mail : rsf@rsf.org
www.rsf.org