

Netanyahu's adviser accused of sexual assault resigns

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JERUSALEM: An adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has tendered his resignation following allegations of sexual assault. David Keyes, Netanyahu's spokesman with the foreign press, formally resigned on Wednesday, nearly three months after taking a leave of absence after he was accused of sexual assault by at least a dozen women.

Keyes issued a statement saying he had "decided to pursue new opportunities in the private sector."

Keyes has denied the assault accusations, saying all were "deeply misleading and many of them are categorically false."

Israel's Civil Service Commission closed an investigation into the allegations last month without taking any disciplinary action against Keyes. Netanyahu thanked Keyes in a statement "for his great contribution to Israel's information effort."



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[Tunisia's 'truth commission' winds up four-year mission](#)

Author:

Wed, 2018-12-12 22:52

TUNIS: After four years working “under fire” and interviewing almost 50,000 witnesses, Tunisia’s commission tasked with serving justice to victims of half a century of dictatorship is poised to submit its recommendations.

Set up in 2014 following the 2011 revolution and in the wake of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s fall, the Truth and Dignity Institute has a mission to “reveal the truth about the human rights violations” in Tunisia between 1955 and 2013.

In its final act, the commission will submit its recommendations to Tunisia’s leadership.

The first version is to be delivered at a public event on Friday and Saturday, before the full report is submitted by Dec. 31.

The government, with the assistance of a parliamentary follow-up committee, will have one year to draw up an action plan based on the recommendations.

The commission’s task was to collect and disseminate testimonies, send some of those suspected of rape, murder, torture or corruption to specialised courts, and recommend measures to prevent any recurrence.

Operating in the only Arab Spring country which has kept to a democratic path since the 2011 revolt, its mandate has also been to seek national reconciliation through a revival of the North African state’s collective memory.

The commission, whose mandate was extended in the spring until the end of 2018, has been studying more than 60,000 complaints and has this year sent dozens of cases to the courts.

Over the past four years, the panel has heard harrowing testimony from victims of torture in jail, some of which has been aired to large television audiences.

“From the very start we’ve worked under fire and come up against difficulties, due to the absence of political will,” commission official Khaled Krichi told AFP.

He said demands for the handover of judicial cases involving corruption had been rejected, as well as for archive materials from the Interior Ministry on prisoners who had suffered torture.

A contested amnesty law passed in 2017 cleared some officials suspected of administrative corruption.

The commission also faced political resistance with the return of former regime leaders to power, internal disputes as well as the lack of cooperation by state institutions.

Thirteen specialized courts have been set up and started work at the end of May on dozens of cases submitted by the commission.

Twenty trials are underway, mostly of victims of the 2011 revolution and of radical and leftist opposition figures tortured under the rule of Ben Ali or his predecessor Habib Bourguiba.

Krichi said settlements have been reached in 10 cases of financial corruption involving former regime figures, including that of Slim Chiboub, a son-in-law of Ben Ali, who has agreed to pay back 307 million dinars (\$113 million).

The state, however, faced with accusations of torture and sexual violence, has rejected 1,000 demands for "reconciliation" with the victims. A row has also broken out over compensation cases, with members of Parliament claiming the costs would bankrupt the state and that many claims were designed to benefit supporters of extremist movement Ennahdha.

At the end of November, the commission drew up criteria for compensation that exclude those with post-2011 government or parliamentary posts.

Around 25,000 people are eligible to compensation from the Al-Karama (Dignity) Fund established in 2014, according to Krichi.

It is being financed by donations, a percentage of the funds recovered through settlements and a one-time government grant of 10 million dinars (\$3.7 million).



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[Palestinian child dies of wounds after border clash: Gaza ministry](#)

Author:

Wed, 2018-12-12 22:27

GAZA CITY: A four-year-old Palestinian boy has died after being injured during clashes between the Israeli army and protesters along the Gaza border, the health ministry in Gaza said.

“Ahmed Abu Abed, aged four years and eight months, died as a result of the wounds he received last Friday east of Khan Yunis,” health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said in a statement late Tuesday.

The statement did not provide further details on how the child was injured. In the hospital where the boy died, 38 year-old Bassem told AFP he was the child’s uncle.

He said Abu Abed was injured by shrapnel when his father was shot during

regular Friday protests along the border.

It was not clear why the child had been taken to the border protests and there was no independent confirmation of the circumstances.

His funeral will take place on Wednesday.

The Israeli army said it was reviewing the incident, while accusing Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas of using residents as cover for attacks.

"The Hamas terrorist organization cynically uses Gaza residents, especially women and children, as human shields and places them at the forefront of the violent riots, terrorist attacks and the terror of arson, demonstrating their contempt for human life," the army said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Facing this reality, the IDF (army) does everything possible to avoid harming children."

Palestinians have been protesting along the Gaza border at least weekly since March 30, triggering repeated clashes with the army.

At least 235 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire, the majority during clashes on the border but others in air strikes or by tank fire.

Two Israelis have been killed over the same period.



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[Nobel laureate returns to Iraq, pledges to work for peace](#)

Author:

Wed, 2018-12-12 22:37

BAGHDAD: Iraqi activist Nadia Murad met her country's president in Baghdad on Wednesday after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy on behalf of victims of wartime sexual violence.

Murad, a member of Iraq's Yazidi minority, was among thousands of women and girls who were captured and forced into sexual slavery by Daesh militants in 2014. She became an activist on behalf of women and girls after escaping and finding refuge in Germany.

She arrived in Baghdad from Stockholm on Wednesday, and was received by President Barham Salih.

"There is no meaning to the Nobel prize without the ongoing work for the sake of peace," Murad told group of community leaders and foreign ambassadors at the presidential palace.

Yazidis are followers of an ancient faith who are falsely branded devil-worshippers by Sunni extremists. When the Daesh group swept into northern Iraq in 2014, the militants massacred thousands of Yazidi men and enslaved an estimated 7,000 women and girls.

Many managed to escape as U.S.-backed Iraqi forces gradually drove the militants from all the territory they once held in a grueling 3-year campaign, but some 3,000 Yazidi women and girls are still missing.

Murad called on the Iraqi government and the US-led coalition to search for the missing. She also called on the government to rebuild her hometown, Sinjar. More than 80 percent of Yazidis are still living in displacement camps.

In her Nobel speech on Monday, Murad urged world leaders to put an end to sexual violence, saying "the only prize in the world that can restore our dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals."

Iraq's president said Murad "embodies the suffering and tragedies Iraqis have gone through in the past and represents the courage and determination to defend rights in the face of the oppressor."

The Yazidis had endured a "heinous and a rare crime in history," Salih said and called on parliament to pass a law recognizing it as a genocide.

Murad later met Hadi al-Amiri and Falih al-Fayadh, top leaders of Iraq's Popular Mobilization militia umbrella, which played a key role in the war against IS. The militias are jointly responsible, with Iraqi federal forces, for the security of Sinjar.

As Murad was receiving her prize in Oslo, Iraq celebrated the anniversary of its costly victory over IS, which still carries out sporadic attacks and controls a remote enclave just across the border in Syria. The war left tens of thousands dead, and destroyed entire neighborhoods and towns. Some 1.8 million people are still displaced from their homes.



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'Let hope unite us,' Nadia Murad says in UAE in her first appearance as a Nobel laureate
Congolesse Denis Mukwege, Iraq's Nadia Murad win 2018 Nobel Peace Prize

[Syrian state seizes opponents' property, rights activists say](#)

Author:

Wed, 2018-12-12 22:11

BEIRUT: Syria's government has been using a little-known anti-terrorism law to seize property from dissidents and their families as it takes back control of areas that were held by rebel groups, rights groups and some of the people affected say.

With Syria's conflict stabilized, at least for now, and President Bashar Assad back in control of the biggest cities, there is an increasing focus on how he will handle the areas where the 2011 uprising against him flared.

International attention has focused on policies, such as legislation known as Law 10, that could eventually enable the government to dispossess people in the opposition strongholds worst damaged in the war.

But while Law 10 has not yet been put into effect, the separate anti-terrorism law has already been used to seize property, including from people who had no hand in violence, according to human rights groups.

One man, an architect who joined street protests against Assad early in the uprising, and posted anti-government material online, lost his house, office and farmland in Ghouta in southwestern Syria as well as his car, he said. "I built my house brick by brick. I built it with my bare hands, tended to every corner and to every inch," the architect said. He now lives in the northwestern province of Idlib after fleeing with many other Ghouta residents after its surrender in April.

As they stand to lose property permanently, and because in many cases they have family members still living under government control, none of the six people who spoke to Reuters after being named in seizure orders wanted to be identified.

Lists circulating online – which rights groups believe to be accurate – show that hundreds of such orders have been made, affecting potentially thousands of people.

Seizure

The architect first knew a government security order had targeted him when the Architects and Engineers Syndicate terminated his membership because of a security order and canceled his pension.

He had joined the protests against Assad early on, but said he never took up arms or played a role in local government in his area of eastern Ghouta, which the army recaptured in April.

In 2016, he tried to sell his car. "The broker in Damascus told me that a seizure for security had been imposed on all the properties owned by me, my partners, my wife and children," he said via a messaging app.

The family needed money, so he sold the car for parts for 190,000 Syrian pounds – about \$580 at that time.

When they left for Idlib along with thousands of others as part of a surrender deal with the government covering eastern Ghouta, the family had to abandon their family home, an office and farm land that is now all forfeit to the state.

"It is hard to describe a house you lived in your whole life and land you planted with trees that you watched grow. I miss the doors, windows and even the doorstep," the architect's son said.

Uprising

About a year into the uprising, Assad updated Syria's anti-terrorism laws, issuing a decree to give courts the power to impose "security seizure" orders against individuals.

Initially, assets are frozen under these orders, preventing owners from selling, or using them commercially. When the seizures are executed, the state will sell the assets by auction.

A doctor from the eastern Ghouta town of Douma who left in April and now lives in Turkey said his house, land, clinic and car had been seized.

"The Syrian regime has labelled all the opposition activists as terrorists,

tried them in absentia and seized their properties," he said.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said orders to freeze assets were among numerous laws the Syrian government used to punish political dissidents and opponents. Damascus denies targeting peaceful dissidents with its anti-terrorism laws, or unlawfully dispossessing people. The government did not respond to a Reuters request for further comment.

HRW said it could not verify lists of people affected by the court orders that are circulating online, or the scale of the property freezes. But it said it had confirmed several cases of people whose names it found on one such list.

Two Syrian rights groups, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, said they had verified numerous cases. The network said it had registered at least 327 individuals targeted by property seizures from 2014 to 2018. The observatory said it had registered 93 cases of property seizures targeting opposition activists. It was aware of many other cases, but was not able to verify them because those involved were too scared to speak freely, it said.

Fear

Those affected, already fearing for their lives if they return after being branded terrorists, also face a loss of property that could discourage family members from going home.

"They left the people whose property they seized with nothing to return to, not even hope," said the architect, who now lives in rebel-held Idlib province with his family.

Paradoxically, it is often the people who left eastern Ghouta who are in most need of the property they left behind. One man left eastern Ghouta for Idlib and now lives in poverty far from home.

He cannot find work there and wants to pay smugglers to cross the border into Turkey. But his once rich parents, who stayed in eastern Ghouta, cannot raise the money by selling or renting land because their assets have been frozen. They found out about the court order before the government retook eastern Ghouta in April.

"My parents are now guests in their own home. The house they have lived in for their whole lives is now put under seizure by the government because we were opposition activists," he said.



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