

Mr. Prime Minister:

I write to ask your help in assuring that justice is done in the case of Bilal Hussein, an Iraqi citizen and photographer for The Associated Press who has been detained by the United States military since April 12, 2006. They say they suspect him of aiding terrorists.

U.S. military officials have made many accusations against Mr. Hussein, although they have provided no evidence to support them. AP has conducted its own investigation of every specific allegation and has found them all to be either not credible or absolutely false.

We believe the real reason for Mr. Hussein's detention and incarceration for 19 months without charges is that he produced images of conflict in Anbar Province which the military did not want the citizens of Iraq and the United States to see.

Just days ago, AP was informed that the military intends to submit a criminal complaint against Mr. Hussein before the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, on or shortly after November 29.

While we are grateful that Mr. Hussein will finally have a chance to see and challenge the evidence against him, we are deeply concerned that U.S. military authorities are doing their best to make it difficult for his case to receive a fair hearing.

Mr. Hussein's attorney barely has time to reach Baghdad before the 29th. There is no time at all to prepare his client and his case for court. Military authorities refuse even to tell him what day he must appear in court until the morning of the first hearing. They have also refused to disclose to him the specific allegations they will make to the court or the supporting evidence they will submit.

We fear that the special hostility of the U.S. military to Mr. Hussein and his work as a journalist puts him at special risk now.

Mr. Hussein's initial hearing before an Iraqi investigative judge is critical. It will determine whether there are charges against him and frame the legal and factual issues that will decide his fate.

U.S. military attorneys have had 19 months to prepare for this important day. They know the law and facts to which they will seek to draw the judge's attention. They are experienced in presenting evidence against detainees before Iraqi judges and are familiar with the rules and procedures governing such cases.

Mr. Hussein's attorney, on the other hand, will have no idea which allegations and what evidence he must seek to overcome with arguments and evidence of his own. And although he will be aided by local counsel, it will be his first appearance in an Iraqi criminal court.

For these reasons I ask that you take whatever steps you consider appropriate to insure that proceedings against Mr. Hussein are conducted with the care and impartiality that any of the 24,000 Iraqi citizens detained by the U.S. military would have a right to expect of an Iraqi court.

We are grateful for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Curley
President and CEO
The Associated Press