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## **UNESCO Director-General condemns campaign of violence against Iraqi academics**

Paris, 5 April – The Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, today condemned the campaign of violence waged against Iraqi academics and intellectuals and called for international solidarity and mobilization in favour of education and educators in the country.

“I firmly condemn the campaign of violence waged in Iraq against academics and intellectuals,” the Director-General declared. “The right to education is a basic human right and the persecution of the custodians of knowledge and skills is an unacceptable attack against a whole society. Iraq has a long tradition in learning and academic excellence in the Middle East. By targeting those who hold the keys to Iraq’s reconstruction and development, the perpetrators of this violence are jeopardizing the future of Iraq and of democracy.”

According to the Geneva-based Study and Research Center for the Arab and Mediterranean World, four Iraqi academics, including one physician, were killed last week. The Center says that between 170 and 180 academics have been killed in Iraq since 2003 and that thousands more have been driven into exile.

“UNESCO is currently involved with Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education to help reconstruct the country’s higher education system, which has been severely damaged by decades of oppression and war. We cannot stand by and watch the custodians of Iraq’s culture and learning be threatened, abducted or murdered,” Mr Matsuura said, calling for “international solidarity and mobilization in favour of education and educators in the country”.

The Director-General also announced that he will discuss this issue on 14 April, during a meeting with Muhyi Alkateeb, Iraq’s Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, and members of the International Committee for the Protection of Iraqi Academics. This Committee was created in February this year, under the Geneva-based Study and Research Center for the Arab and Mediterranean World, to raise awareness and support for Iraqi academics and intellectuals.

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