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## **IRAQ BANS AL JAZEERA JOURNALISTS FOR 'INSTIGATING VIOLENCE AND SECTARIANISM'**

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Qatar network says ban and closure of Baghdad bureau 'contradicts promises of Iraqi government to protect freedom of speech'

Iraq has banned Al Jazeera journalists from the country and closed the channel's Baghdad office, accusing Qatar's state-funded TV network of inciting violence and sectarianism.

The country's communications and media commission this week told the network that its licence to operate would be revoked for one year.

The commission's letter cited "continuing violations and offences and persistent media discourse instigating violence and sectarianism".

The network's foreign staff were already unable to enter Iraq because the authorities had made it difficult for them to obtain visas, the network's Iraqi bureau chief Walid Ibrahim told AFP.

An Al Jazeera insider told MEE that the network had been "caught in the crossfire" of the chaos engulfing Iraq's politics, where factions led by the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and his predecessor Nouri al-Maliki are vying for control of proposed reforms of government.

Imran Khan, the English channel's correspondent in Baghdad, said on Twitter he had not had one complaint on his coverage in his three years in the city.

Al Jazeera said in a statement that it was told on Wednesday that its licence to operate inside Iraq would be withdrawn, and its journalists had been banned due to "violations of the official codes of conduct and broadcasting rules and regulations".

The network said it was shocked and bewildered by the decision, and promised to continue its coverage of Iraq for its audience there and around the world.

"Al Jazeera is committed to its editorial principles in the coverage of current affairs in Iraq. It abides by its code of ethics in its coverage and programming, and by the highest global standards of professionalism, and has been doing so since its launch," it said in a statement.

The network denied any violations of professional journalism standards in its news coverage and programming.

The commission's decision "contradicts the promises of the Iraqi government to protect freedom of speech", the statement said.

"The network hopes that its Baghdad bureau can resume operations as soon as possible, in the spirit of the press freedoms guaranteed by the Iraqi constitution."

Al Jazeera has suffered several temporary bans from Iraq since the 2003 war, and from several other countries in the Middle East including Egypt, Algeria and Bahrain.

Three of its English channel journalists were imprisoned in Egypt in 2013 for more than a year over the network's reporting of the coup against former president Mohamed Morsi.

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Kaynak/Source: