
IRAQI PRESIDENT, UN ENVOY AFFIRM GOV'T RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATORS

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Iraqi President Barham Salih and Special Representative of UN Secretary-General for Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert on Sunday confirmed the responsibility of government to protect peaceful demonstrators.

In a meeting held in Salih's office, the two discussed "the current situation in the country and the possible solutions that help protect the security and stability of Iraq and the people's aspirations for reform," said a statement of the presidential office.

They confirmed the right of citizens to peaceful demonstration, as well as the responsibility of government institutions to protect the demonstrators, and preserve state security and citizens' property, according to the statement.

The meeting came after a deadly shooting that killed 23 protesters in central Baghdad. The shooting happened on Friday evening when dozens of unidentified gunmen broke into the al-Khalani Square and opened fire at unarmed protesters.

Salih and Hennis-Plasschaert confirmed the need to intensify security measures, arrest the perpetrators and bring them to justice, the statement said.

They also reviewed the constitutional mechanisms and required effort to speed up the legislations necessary for reform and fair elections, as well as the selecting of an appropriate candidate to head the cabinet for the next stage, it added.

On Saturday, Hennis-Plasschaert condemned the Friday shooting, urging the Iraqi armed forces "to spare no effort to protect the peaceful demonstrators from violence by armed elements operating outside the control of the state."

Mass demonstrations have continued in the capital Baghdad and other cities in central and southern Iraq since early October, demanding comprehensive reform, fight against corruption, better public services and more job opportunities.

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