

Advocacy dossier

Yanar Mohammed

ينار محمد

Killed Iraq

Yanar Mohammed co-founded Iraq's first network of safe houses for women fleeing violence. She was shot and killed outside her home in Baghdad on 2 March 2026, days after returning from Canada.

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The case at a glance

Yanar Mohammed co-founded Iraq's first network of safe houses for women fleeing violence. She was shot and killed outside her home in Baghdad on 2 March 2026, days after returning from Canada.

Status **Killed**	Country **Iraq**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Order a full, independent, and impartial investigation into the killing of Yanar Mohammed, with timely public reporting on findings.

02 Identify and prosecute those responsible, both the direct perpetrators and any state officials who ordered, enabled, or covered up the killing.

03 Provide effective reparation to the family of Yanar Mohammed.

04 Take immediate steps to protect other defenders working in the same field from similar attacks.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Extrajudicial killing International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6

Threats and intimidation UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

03

How the case unfolded

2003

Defender activity

Co-founded OWFI

Yanar Mohammed co-founded the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, establishing the country's first network of safe houses for women fleeing gender-based violence.

2004

Threat

Recurrent death threats from 2004

From 2004 onward, Yanar Mohammed received recurrent death threats over her work for women's rights and secularism.

2 March 2026

Extrajudicial killing

Killed in armed attack

Two unidentified gunmen on motorcycles shot Yanar Mohammed, 66, outside her home in northern Baghdad at approximately 9:00. She was transported to hospital but died from her injuries.

2 March 2026

Context

Prime Minister orders an investigation

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani ordered an investigation into the killing.

4 March 2026

Call by others

International outcry begins

Amnesty International and other rights groups, including FIDH, OMCT and Human Rights Watch, issued statements demanding a full and independent investigation.

April 2026

Context

Investigation stalls

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights reported that the results of the investigation remained unknown, that no group had claimed responsibility, and that the perpetrators had not been arrested.

24 April 2026

Other act

UN experts demand an investigation into her killing

Four UN Special Rapporteurs, on human rights defenders, on extrajudicial executions, on freedom of expression and on violence against women, called on the Government of Iraq to bring the perpetrators to justice promptly. They described the Interior Minister's announcement of an investigation as a step in the right direction and said they were in touch with the Iraqi authorities.

10 June 2026

Context

No one charged after three months

One hundred days after the killing, the Hurra Coalition of feminist organisations and Equality Now said that no one had been charged and that the investigation had made no meaningful progress.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Yanar Mohammed, co-founder and director of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, was shot dead outside her home in northern Baghdad on 2 March 2026. On 24 April 2026 four UN Special Rapporteurs called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice; by 10 June 2026 no one had been charged, and no later report of an arrest or of the results of the investigation has been found.

Background and Work

Yanar Mohammed co-founded the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq in 2003, at a moment when the collapse of state institutions left Iraqi women acutely vulnerable to gender-based violence. She built OWFI into the country's first network of safe houses, operating across several Iraqi cities. The shelters provided protection, legal support, and emergency refuge to hundreds of women fleeing domestic abuse, trafficking, and honour-based violence.

Her advocacy extended beyond direct service provision. She campaigned for legal reform, challenged religious and tribal authorities who sanctioned violence against women, and argued consistently for secular governance and women's equality under the law. Her work drew sustained hostility from conservative political factions, militias, and extremist groups who viewed her feminist and secular positions as threats.

Threats and Restrictions

From 2004 onward, Yanar Mohammed received recurrent death threats. Armed groups, including ISIS during its territorial control of parts of Iraq, targeted her with messages intended to force her to abandon her activism. The threats compelled her at times to limit her public movements and to spend periods outside Iraq for her safety.

Despite the persistent risk, she maintained OWFI's operations and continued to speak publicly on women's rights. The organisation's safe houses remained active, and she remained its public face and director.

The Killing

Yanar Mohammed returned to Baghdad from Canada in the final days of February 2026. On the morning of 2 March 2026, at approximately 9:00, she was standing outside her residence in northern Baghdad when two unidentified gunmen on motorcycles approached and opened fire. She was transported immediately to a hospital, where medical personnel attempted to treat her injuries. She died shortly after arrival.

The timing of the attack, days after her return from abroad, raised immediate concerns among colleagues and international observers that her movements had been surveilled. The perpetrators have not been identified, and no group has claimed responsibility.

Impact and Aftermath

The killing sent a wave of fear through Iraq's women's rights community. OWFI issued a statement confirming the attack and expressing alarm for the safety of its remaining staff. Other members of the organisation received threats in the days following Yanar Mohammed's death.

Her assassination represents the elimination of one of Iraq's most visible feminist voices and a direct attack on the infrastructure of protection she had built for women at risk. The safe houses she established continue to operate, but the loss of her leadership leaves the network and the broader Iraqi women's rights movement profoundly diminished.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/yanar-mohammed/

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