



IHAT CLOSURE THREATENS PROPER INVESTIGATIONS INTO ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE BY UK SOLDIERS IN IRAQ

[London, 10 February 2017] Earlier today, the UK Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon announced that the Iraq Historical Allegations Team (IHAT) would be shut down as early as this summer. According to Minister Fallon, IHAT - established in 2010 to investigate over 3,000 allegations of abuse by UK soldiers in Iraq - was able to reduce its caseload because many of the allegations brought forward by [former solicitor] Phil Shiner have been widely discredited. It is expected that any remaining cases are to be transferred for investigation by the Royal Navy Police, rather than by IHAT which was initially scheduled to close down in 2019.

REDRESS is concerned that the pre-mature closure of IHAT will limit the prospects for a full accounting of what happened in cases like Baha Mousa, the Iraqi hotel receptionist who died after being interrogated and abused by British soldiers. His case is now the subject of an ongoing investigation by IHAT. There is also the case of fifteen year old Kareem Ali, who allegedly was thrown into a canal and left to drown. More than 300 cases have resulted in compensation payments while others have led to disciplinary hearings. Rather than closing down IHAT, the Government should ensure that it can continue to fully and independently investigate these and any other credible allegations of abuse within the timeframe set by IHAT itself.

For the Royal Navy Police to “reabsorb and complete the remaining investigations as normal business”, as Minister Fallon has said will happen following the closure of IHAT as a separate investigative body by this summer, is of concern because it removes any semblance of an independent investigation into any remaining cases.

“Any investigation into the allegations of abuses by UK soldiers in Iraq must not only be independent but must also be seen to be independent,” said Carla Ferstman, Director of REDRESS. “It is vital that all allegations of torture and related abuses are fully scrutinised. The Iraq Historical Allegations Team must be given the full autonomy, resources and authority to continue with its work. The impropriety of a solicitor does not reduce the importance of getting to the bottom of any torture practices. This is important for accountability of those responsible, but also to guarantee non-repetition,” she said.

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