

# Human Rights Abusers Set Up PMF Department of Human Rights

by [Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#) | [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Sep 17, 2024

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Updated September 23, 2024

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Ameer al-Kaabi \(/experts/ameer-al-kaabi\)](#)

Ameer al-Kaabi is an Iraqi analyst with a decade of experience examining the country's security and political events. He specializes in intra-Shia political affairs and the activities of Iran-backed militias.



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and cofounder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to Iran-backed militias.

Brief Analysis

Part of a series: [Militia Spotlight \(/policy-analysis/series/militia-spotlight\)](#)

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## UN officials should not be holding events hosted by Iraqi militia figures responsible for the deaths of protesters and other gruesome offenses, yet that is precisely what is happening under a new militia "human rights" bureau.

On June 26, Faleh al-Fayyad—the U.S.-designated human rights abuser who chairs Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces—established a new PMF "Department of Human Rights." Among many known offenses against the Iraqi people, Fayyad [supported the policy](#) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/leveraging-us-sanctions-faleh-al-fayyad>) that led to militia members killing civilians with sniper fire and shooting tear gas canisters directly into the heads of protesters, creating some of the most gruesome imagery of the 2019 demonstrations. As [Amnesty International](#) (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/iraq-gruesome-string-of-fatalities-as-new-tear-gas-grenades-pierce-protesters-skulls/>) and [Human Rights Watch](#) (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/29/sleep-law/violence-against-protesters-and-unaccountable-perpetrators-iraq>) documented, over 500 protesters were killed under his watch, thousands more wounded, and hundreds illegally detained and abused.

The PMF Department of Human Rights will be part of the office of PMF secretary-general Abu Muntadher al-Husseini (birth name Tahseen Abid Murat al-Abboudi), the organization's former chief of operations who [aided Fayyad](#) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exposing-and-sanctioning-human-rights-violations-iraqi-militias>) in the murder, torture, and abduction of protesters in 2019 (Figure 1). The department will be led by Hussein Chalob Hardan (Abu Muslim al-Saeedi) (Figure 2), head of the PMF's al-Huda Foundation for Strategic Studies and an advisor to Fayyad. Despite these murderous connections, UN organizations have held multiple events in Iraq this year either under the new department's aegis or featuring known human-rights abusers.

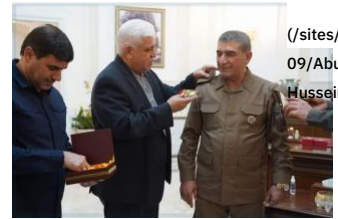


Figure 1: Faleh al-Fayyadh pins new rank on Abu Muntadher al-Husseini after their involvement in attacking unarmed protesters in 2019.



Figure 2: Hussein Chalob Hardan, head of the PMF's Human Rights Department. (Ed. note: Hardan had a fatal heart attack three days after this analysis was published.)

On April 25, Husseini held a workshop with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), after which the PMF posted the following note on Twitter: "The workshop, held at the headquarters of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Baghdad, titled 'Children's Rights According to International Principles,' focused on the role of the Popular Mobilization Forces in safeguarding general human rights, children's rights, and the principles it has adopted in promoting these humanitarian concepts." The PMF Media Directorate's X account tagged UNICEF's Arabic account in the post, but UNICEF didn't react to or repost news about the seminar.

On May 20-22, the PMF hosted another workshop with the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR). The event was held at the PMF's Central Security Directorate, an organization [closely connected](#) (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm847>) to protester killings and terrorist operations through its founder, the U.S.-designated terrorist and human rights abuser Abu Zainab al-Lami (birth name Hussein Falah al-Lami).



Figure 3: UNAMI meeting with Soleimani and Muhandis pictures overhead, September 2024.

And on September 2-5, PMF headquarters held yet another human rights workshop, this time with officials from the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and attended by Husseini, Hardan, and Mahdi Hassan Mohammed (head of training at the IHCHR). Notably, event sessions were held under the pictures of U.S.-designated terrorists Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi

al-Muhandis (Figure 3), both of whom were identified as architects (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/exposing-and-sanctioning-human-rights-violations-iraqi-militias>) of the 2019 murder, torture, and abduction of Iraqi protesters. UNAMI [posted about \(https://x.com/UNIraq/status/1831640920351240619\)](https://x.com/UNIraq/status/1831640920351240619) this activity.

Although one of the goals of international human rights training is to guide errant security forces toward better behavior, it is unusual to allow widely recognized human rights abusers to lead the sessions and benefit from the cleansing effect on their public image. Any steps that the PMF takes to recognize its gruesome human rights record are welcome, yet the fact remains that no one has been held accountable for killing or "disappearing" over 500 Iraqi civilians in 2019. These investigative and punitive steps should be undertaken first, before international organizations stumble into traps laid by human rights abusers hoping to whitewash their crimes.

*Postscript:* Immediately after the publication of this analysis, UNAMI and IHCHR held a three-day seminar with the PMF Human Rights Department and fifteen PMF officers in Baghdad on September 17-19.

*Postscript 2:* Hussein Chalooob Hardan had a fatal heart attack on September 20, 2024, three days after this analysis was published. ❖

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