

Press release from the family Nahed Hattar

On 12 August 2016, prominent writer and political thinker Nahed Hattar reposted a caricature entitled “the lord of ISIS,” making a mockery of members of “ISIS,” on his personal Facebook page. He was not the first to have reposted the caricature, as many people had published the same image on the same site before him, and many did so after him as well.

As soon as the image was published, an organised campaign was launched against Mr Hattar, led by the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters, lawyers, the Assabeel newspaper, and former members of parliament. This campaign has falsely accused Mr Hattar of ‘offending the divine being’. The campaign was masterfully coordinated, as evidenced by the barrage of complaints submitted to the Attorney General.

Within hours, the campaign against Mr Hattar spread across social media sites, followed by the direct intervention of Prime Minister Hani Mulki that same night (prior to this incident and in July 2016, Mulki had sent Mr Hattar threatening verbal communications via several messengers, in reaction to an article Mr Hattar had published in the Ammon News Agency entitled, “has Mulki overstepped his bounds?”). Immediately thereafter, Mulki issued several mutually contradictory orders to the Minister of the Interior. He instructed him to summon Mr Hattar for interrogation under the auspices of the Administrative Governor, while the wording of this request contained a verdict against Mr Hattar, stating “take the necessary legal actions against him [Nahed Hattar].” Furthermore, Mulki emphasised that “the laws will be firmly enforced against anyone who engages in such aberrant actions”. In other words, he issued his verdict immediately after asking the Minister of the Interior “to investigate what has been attributed to the writer Hattar, namely publishing materials offensive to the divine being on social media.”

The declaration by the Minister of the Interior exposed and led the way for two spiteful groups to seek revenge on Nahed Hattar: the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters, and a group of corrupt officials, for whom Mr Hattar was a prime enemy.

Following the organised campaign and after an arrest warrant was issued, Nahed Hattar clarified his intention and stressed that the cartoon was only mocking ISIS supporters. He published the following clarification with the Ammon News Agency:

“I have shared a post that contained a cartoon entitled ‘the lord of ISIS,’ to which I have no connection whatsoever, as claimed by the Brotherhood. The cartoon mocks terrorists and their image of God and heaven, and does not offend the divine being in any way, shape or form. In fact, it rids the concept of divinity of what the terrorists promote. There are two types of people who were angered by this image: good people who did not understand the meaning, which is to mock the terrorists and see divinity as devoid of what is attributed to it in the terrorist mind; and these people I respect and appreciate. And ISIS-supporting Muslim Brothers, who themselves possess this sick imagination concerning the relationship between humans and the divine. The latter have exploited the caricature to settle political feuds which have nothing to do with their claims.”

The Prime Minister has acted unlawfully and overstepped his authority by commandeering the jurisdiction of the Attorney General’s Office, as well as partaking in the incisive and divisive campaign, having announced in the media what he had instructed his Minister of the Interior to

do. Moreover, in his statement he used provocative language to split and divide Jordanian society.

Minutes after this statement was issued, security forces raided Mr Hattar's home, insisting on doing so without a search warrant, and threatening to break down the door! They also threatened to arrest his son if they discovered that Nahed had been in the home. The raid was carried out in the presence of a large number of security, intelligence and preventive security personnel.

Only minutes after the raid was over, the media reported that the Ministry of the Interior considered the writer Nahed Hattar "a fugitive from justice" and asked to bring him out of hiding, as soon as possible, according to a statement by the Governor of Amman, Khaled Abu Zaid. By doing so, the provocative campaign, exposing Mr Hattar to danger, had intensified and become more evident. The Ministry of the Interior has also usurped the role of the General Prosecution Office, the only institution with the legal right to decide whether an individual is a fugitive or not, as stated in Article 243 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

On 13 August 2016, Mr Hattar turned himself in to the Governor of Amman, who subsequently turned him over to the Attorney General the following day. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood continued their organised, coordinated campaign; they had already begun filing complaints-against Mr Hattar in several areas: from the Attorney General of Karak, to South Amman, to the Palace of Justice. These complaints were filed by lawyers with known affiliations to the Brotherhood movement.

Subsequently, Mr Hattar was arrested and detained in Marka jail pending further investigation. This act marked a new chapter in his character assassination, especially since he was left in detention deprived of the opportunity to respond. And owing to the wave of mobilisation and incitement carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood, strengthened by Prime Minister Mulki and promoted by the Minister of the Interior, an unprecedented campaign against Mr Hattar was initiated by the Department of Iftaa (Islamic affairs advisory), the Union of Churches, journalists, and corrupt and invidious individuals. The campaign was meant to disparage him and his character; it targeted his political views, which bore no connection to the caricature, as well as his history of political activism and struggle, and his connections: locally, in the Arab World, and internationally. It took advantage of his vulnerability, being deprived of the right to respond to defend himself; it reached a point where defending him was considered a crime in itself.

During his detention, a new chapter of this case began, causing the beneficiaries from Mr Hattar's predicament to become more confident and more aware of the goals they wished to achieve. While in jail, various kinds of humiliation and torture had been implemented against him, including the following:

1. In jail, he was classified as a "dangerous criminal."
2. His hands and feet were shackled by cables.
3. He was transferred with his head covered from the jail to the hospital.
4. Upon arrival at the hospital, he was shackled to his bed.
5. The doctor asked the police officer to release his shackles in order to facilitate examining him, but the officer refused.

6. When Mr Hattar became fatigued and vomited, he asked to be laid on his abdomen to prevent suffocating, but he was left lying on his back, shackled to his bed.
7. After the doctor examined him, in the presence of a medical committee, and he was treated intravenously, a group of security personnel entered the room and brutally removed the needle from his body, before transferring him to the jail room of the hospital.
8. His brother and his attorney filed a lawsuit against the Minister of the Interior, the manager of Al-Bashir Hospital, the Minister of Health and the Director of Security, accusing them of attempted murder. This complaint was submitted to the Attorney General, but he refused to accept it, after a wait of four hours, from 10 am to 2 pm. He told them, “this matter is not under my purview; return to Judge Amal Abu Ubaid.”
9. Minister of the Interior Salama Hammad insisted that Nahed was “claiming to be ill,” and thus a medical committee was formed to reexamine him. This happened after Dr Raja’i Mu’ashir (a former cabinet minister and a local dignitary) had intervened, and Nahed himself consented to return to the hospital. However, they took him back there in the same humiliating way as before.
10. When Nahed returned from the hospital to jail, he sent his brother Khaled a letter, saying, “even if I were to die in jail, do not take me back to the hospital.” And several witnesses heard him say, “when I entered AL-Bashir Hospital, I experienced the worst days of my life.”

During his detention, a campaign of incitement was launched against Mr Hattar on social media. Among the instigators were those who demanded that he be executed in front of the Hussaini Mosque, and those demanding that he be tortured using methods unimaginable, even for the worst offenders. However, neither of these barbaric demands was met with anger from the State, or from any of its apparatuses, who remained silent. This opened the door to intensifying the campaign of incitement, again exposing Mr Hattar and promoting his assassination, signalling that this was their desire. We have submitted a trustworthy list to the Governor of Amman of the people who incited the killing of Nahed Hattar, and none of them were held accountable.

After the campaign of incitement had intensified, we, Nahed’s family – including his mother, his wife, his sons and his brothers – demanded to be protected. We filed a complaint with the Governor of Amman, Khaled Abu Zaid, concerning the threats, but we were not offered any sort of protection. The governor declined our request using flimsy excuses. His exact words were: “these are threats made of cardboard.”

On 8 September 2016, Nahed Hattar was released from jail on bail. Before his release, the deputy police chief of Amman, Talal Al-Abdallat, was asked to ensure protection for him. Al-Abdallat contacted someone (we do not know whom), after which he told Mr Hattar and his entourage, “your personal safety is your own responsibility. Our security records indicate that your level of danger is less than 0%. Have a good morning and walk in front of the Hussaini Mosque.”

And so, Mr Hattar walked out of his detention, after visiting the governor, exposed and unprotected, later to become an easy target, armed with safety assurances that left no doubt; while several people who had previously been in danger (much less severe than the threats

against Nahed Hattar), had been provided with such protection, and in some cases were even compelled to be put under protection, such as Laith Shubeilat, Tujan Faisal, and Zulaikha Aburisha.

Khaled Hattar, Nahed's brother, had also asked the security commander of the Amman region, Brig. Gen. Ubeidallah Al-Mu'aitha, for protection, and his request was declined.

25 September 2016: The assassination of Nahed Hattar in front of the Palace of Justice

King Abdullah II has ordered to form a commission of inquiry as to the circumstances described above, which were explained to him when he visited the grieving family. More than six months after the assassination, we asked to meet with the Minister of Justice, where we discovered that there is no such committee of inquiry, but rather a "committee of verification." When we asked the minister why there was no communication with Mr. Hattar's family and lawyer, the minister asked to arrange a second meeting to allow for additional research. However, this meeting has been postponed three times and has yet to be held.

We have become increasingly convinced by the day that the government, represented by Prime Minister Hani Mulki, has contributed directly to the assassination of Nahed Hattar. They did so once, when they incited the public opinion against him and described him as a fugitive from justice and arrested him arbitrarily and described him as a dangerous criminal; and a second time when he was denied protection; and again when the government failed to protect his freedom of expression and opinion, as is ensured by domestic laws and international conventions. Another time was when they left those who incited to kill him and assassinate his character, prior to assassinating him physically, free from indictment. All of this made his assassination more feasible, and this was made even clearer when it surfaced that the assassin was an official employed by the state, who had been known to the security apparatus.

Nahed Hattar was a Jordanian writer, journalist and intellectual. He had been arrested several times for his political activism and his writings in the press (1978, 1979, 1996, 2016). He was subject to an assassination attempt in 1998, which caused him serious injuries requiring a number of surgical procedures. Mr Hattar continued his dissenting political and intellectual activism, prompting the authorities in Jordan to forbid him from writing in the local press from 2008 until the day of his assassination.

Nahed Hattar is considered the theorist of Jordanian national identity and a pioneer of Jordanian national movement. In his studies, books and essays he presented an analysis of the social, cultural and political structure of Jordanian society. Mr. Hattar defended Jordan against the Zionist project, embodied by the notion of 'the alternative homeland' and the liquidation of the Palestinian issue at the expense of Jordan and Palestine alike. He stood against the liberal policies and the comprador who sought to destroy the state institutions and the middle class. He also worked towards renewing the narratives of the national social liberation movement, and rediscovering the centrality of the nation state and the notions of development, counter-democracy, eastern culture and resistance against colonialist projects and their religious extremist apparatuses in the region, especially in Syria.

We, the family of Nahed Hattar, who have always been proud of him and of his history of struggle, as well as of the fact that he baptised his journey of intellect and struggle in his own blood, and gave his spirit as a martyr for his beloved homeland Jordan, and sacrificed his life for it, and did so to protect and preserve public freedoms, we condemn the government for ignoring the orders of the King. This act of ignoring His Majesty's orders confirms to us that the government had been involved in his assassination. We demand that a neutral, non-governmental commission of inquiry be formed, comprising human rights centres and organisations, members of parliament, and the attorney general. This commission will be given full authority to investigate the circumstances surrounding the case until the day of the assassination. It will have full authority to interrogate anyone who has had any connection to this matter, and primarily Prime Minister Hani Mulki. It will publish the findings of the investigation, and consequently refer anyone whose involvement in the case is confirmed to the proper jurisdiction. The committee will also be privy to the security file of the assassin (if one exists) and to the assassin's domestic and international affiliations, as well as to the body that trained and armed him and provided him with the necessary information, and ultimately sent him to execute the assassination.

If our demands are ignored, we will resort to the international human rights courts and seek relief via any and all international humanitarian laws to accomplish our goal, as well as appeal to any relevant international body.

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