

## The science community must unite over Iraq

SIR — Members of the international scientific community are deeply disturbed by the systematic murder of several hundred academics in Iraq, the recent mass kidnapping at the Ministry of Higher Education's Research Directorate (see *Nature* **444**, 252–253; 2006 — although it seems that most, if not all, of those taken were subsequently released) and the consequent threat to close all the universities in Baghdad.

Recent assassinations have included that of Isam Kadhem F. al-Rawi, a geology professor at the University of Baghdad. Al-Rawi refused to join the estimated 2,000 Iraqi scientists thought to have fled the country (see *Nature* **441**, 1036–1037; 2006). Instead, he remained and was a candidate for minister of higher education and scientific research. He monitored and publicized the plight of academics in Iraq and had compiled and maintained a list of his colleagues who were victims of hit squads — a list that al-Rawi now joins.

Local and international authorities must ensure that scientists and academics in Iraq are protected. In July, ICSU, the International Council for Science ([www.icsu.org](http://www.icsu.org)), issued a statement condemning the violence in Iraq ([www.icsu.org/9\\_latestnews/latest\\_19.html](http://www.icsu.org/9_latestnews/latest_19.html)). ICSU's new Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science, of which I am chairman, now urges international organizations to join ICSU in searching for ways to bring this aggression against Iraqi scientists to an end, and to express solidarity with them.

Science is a global endeavour. When its fundamental values and principles are undermined and scientists are discriminated against or maltreated, it is science, and society as a whole, that suffers.

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