



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Statement on the kidnapping of former EPIC staff member and Princeton University scholar Elizabeth Tsurkov

WASHINGTON, DC – The Board of Directors and staff of the Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC), a non-profit dedicated to the advancement of Iraq’s peace and development, are saddened to learn that our former staff member and Princeton University scholar, Elizabeth Tsurkov, who went missing while visiting Baghdad in March 2023, is being held captive by an Iraqi armed group.

EPIC is deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of Ms. Tsurkov, who was in Iraq on an academic research mission, and the chilling effect that her abduction may have on academic and public policy institutions seeking to improve understanding of Iraq’s peace and development needs. Ms. Tsurkov worked with EPIC from 2018 to 2019 where she distinguished herself as a researcher, humanitarian, and passionate advocate for human rights.

Family and friends of the young researcher believe the reason behind the kidnapping may simply be Ms. Tsurkov’s dual nationality. By all reports, Iraqi security authorities are aware of her capture.

“Elizabeth is a world class researcher with an incredible capacity for empathy. She has an ability to connect with people of different backgrounds across cultural divides. These skills, combined with her fearlessness and unwavering fidelity to the truth have made her a powerful advocate for the voiceless,” reflected Zeena Rahman, President of EPIC's Board of Directors.

“As a colleague, I experienced first-hand how driven Elizabeth can be to do the best possible field research and writing, which often focused on local communities affected by violence,” said EPIC Director Erik Gustafson. “She genuinely cares about the people she researches and understanding how they see the world.”

EPIC calls on the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani and all relevant authorities to make every effort to secure the freedom of Ms. Tsurkov and ensure her safe return to her loved ones. We ask all involved parties, including Elizabeth’s captors, to recognize and respect the apolitical and academic nature of Ms. Tsurkov’s work in Iraq and to cooperate with Iraqi authorities to ensure her safety and end her captivity.

*Founded in 1998 with offices in Washington DC and Erbil, the **Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC)** is an independent 501(c)3 organization working directly with Iraqi civil society to improve governance and human rights, promote peace and recovery in conflict affected areas, and combat climate change while mitigating its impact on vulnerable populations.*

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