

Cyber-attack Female Survivor Steers Community Towards Digital Safety in Iraq

“Internews has empowered me to become one of the very few female digital security trainers in Iraq.”



Twenty-four-year-old Tara Abdulaziz Latif, who is from Kirkuk, a city in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), is now a digital safety trainer.

Despite the [ongoing](#) online threats and attacks that affect individuals in the IKR, Iraqis remain optimistic about the future of their community. Tara is one of these forward-looking Iraqis. She is an active journalist, women activist, and one of the many cyber-attack victims in Iraq, as she explained: *“I was a victim of a harmful cyber-attack. For this reason, I wanted to raise awareness about the digital footprint and identity in my community.”* However, this was not to be, as opportunities were few and far between. *“I had no idea how to take this step and make it happen,”* said Tara.

Tara, who has never overlooked a learning opportunity, took part in two training programs under the Internews’ Azadi Zanyari project: digital safety and advanced security mentoring. The knowledge and skills she gained from the training programs made her stand out as a fast learner such that she was also accepted to participate in Internews’ digital safety training of trainers, which described as a turning point of her life, describing it as: *“As a woman journalist in Iraq, becoming a digital security trainer is a big shift in my career. I can now raise awareness and empower Iraqi journalists and community activists, like myself, to protect their online identities from cyber-attacks.”*

Impressed by her knowledge, confidence, and teaching methods, the [Civil Development Organization \(CDO\)](#) employed her as a digital security trainer. Tara now [trains](#) journalists and community activists on digital safety best practices in Kirkuk and thus contributes to building digital resilience across the IKR. In Tara’s own words, *“We are responsible to save our community from online threats and attacks.”*



Her enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work inspired her trainees to change their digital behaviours: *“I was always wondering why we are getting hacked easily, now I know it’s all about our digital behaviours! We need to do better in this online world to protect our digital identity.”* While another trainee said, *“I changed my digital behaviours by deleting unsecured applications from my devices and surfing the internet safely using Tor. My online personal and work-life became more comfortable and safer.”* Through the skills she gained from Internews’ digital safety training of trainers, Tara has trained and equipped 55 at-risk individuals with the best practices and tools to protect themselves online.

Internews' Azadi Zanyari "Information Freedom" project, which is funded by the US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, advances human rights and the rule of law in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region by increasing journalists' digital, physical, and legal safety.