

June 28, 2021

Statement by KRG Office of the Coordinator for International Advocacy (OCIA)

Statement in Response to CPJ

On June 22, 2021, the Misdemeanor Court of Duhok sentenced Mr. Umed Haji for one year in prison and a fine of IQD 240,000. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has raised some concerns.

Regarding the imprisonment sentence, Mr. Umed Haji has been trialed on the basis of violating Article 2 from the Law No .6 (2008) of the Misuse of Electronic Devices, parallel to two lawsuits opened against him. Furthermore, another lawsuit brought forward fined him in accordance with Article 240 from the Iraqi Penal Code.

The involved violations are legally alien to journalism. The person in question is not registered in the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, and he stated during the investigation and court hearing he did not state that he is a journalist.

Mr. Haji has been represented by his own lawyers throughout transparent legal proceedings and in the court. In detention, he has had weekly phone calls with his family, in addition to access to legal counsel. The visits to detention and reformatory facilities were nevertheless restricted due to the outbreak of Coronavirus.

The defense lawyers are reportedly appealing the court decision soon, hence the case will be referred to the Appellate Court.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is fully committed to the rule of law, to a fair and impartial legal process, and to the freedom of the media. KRG emphasizes that there is a clear split between the jurisdiction of the court and of the government. KRG respects the independence of the judiciary, committed to a coherent check-and-balance system, and cannot interfere in the judicial process.