

June 15, 2021

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

Statement in Response to Amnesty International

On June 15, 2021, Amnesty International shared a public report, raising concerns regarding the applicable legal framework in the Kurdistan Region and the freedom of expression.

KRG has flourished with bedrock values that are essential for consolidating coherent democratic institutions, a thriving civil society, and efficient legislation and policy-making strategies that strictly adhere to rule of law and the preservation of essential freedoms.

The outbreak of Coronavirus in the past year presented dismal challenges to KRG. In response the government prioritized the protection of public health. In particular, the KRG requested media outlets to not call the public to ignore COVID prevention measures for the purpose of preserving the health of the citizens. Those who broke the instructions and the media outlets involved in endangering the public health, were subjected to legal proceedings. But the government, apart from the proceedings, did not keep anyone in detention in this respect.

Some of the protests referred to in the report became violent: security forces were fired on, security force personnel and civilians were injured, and there was widespread damage to property. Most governments around the world have taken extraordinary restrictive measures to slow the spread of the disease. The KRG believes its actions were correct in the circumstances, and were consistent with human rights obligations under international law.

Regarding media freedom, KRG believes that free media is important for its own sake and is an essential element in a well- functioning democracy. KRG has a vibrant media, and Kurdistan has long been recognized as a regional exemplar of freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

KRG has requested United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to help further improve the legal system. The KRG is working with the UK to train local judges.

The KRG has a longstanding agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross granting ICRC representatives' unrestricted access without advance notice to any place of detention in Kurdistan, and has recently offered the same access to UN human rights officials. Under this arrangement UNAMI has made 14 visits to detention facilities and interviewed 60 prisoners.

We have also invited European Union member states to support legal and judicial reforms in Kurdistan. Furthermore, senior government ministers have been holding consultations with local advocacy groups, in particular the Metro Centre for Journalists' Rights and the Kurdistan Journalist Syndicate, to address concerns regarding media freedoms and rights.

Since its establishment, KRG has embarked on a mission to consolidate a well-functioning democratic system, and to flourish with standardized calibers of human rights and good governance.