

April 7, 2021

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

Response to the Amnesty International 2020 Report

On April 7, 2020, Amnesty International released their assessments on the situation of human rights in 149 countries. As far as Kurdistan Region is concerned, the report raised some concerns which will be clarified accordingly in this statement.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is the host of 992,732 IDPs and refugees. Precisely, 734,713 of them are IDPs. There are 238,345 Syrian, 8,440 Turkish, 10,534 Iranian, and 700 Palestinian refugees. Contrary to popular perception, the majority of IDPs and refugees live with the host communities in the Region, while only 29% live in 35 camps. About 38% of the total displaced populations live in Erbil, 41% in Duhok, and 21% percent in Sulaimani.

KRG reiterates dedication to accommodate IDPs and refugees, regardless of the circumstances. Regarding the return, KRG policy is clear: to support, encourage and facilitate the voluntary return of all displaced persons without exception to their original areas, and in this context KRG has facilitated the return process for more than 700,000 people since 2016 to the liberated areas.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the displaced persons wish to return to their original and liberated areas, but, according to opinion polls conducted by humanitarian organizations, more than 80% of the displaced are not ready to return at the present time due to the lack of adequate conditions, such as basic life services, job opportunities, and financial supports. The destruction of homes and security concerns also caused hesitation to return.

Concerning the border bombardments, they endanger the lives of Kurdistan citizens, destroy their properties, annihilate the villagers' agrarian lands, impair civilian infrastructure and damage the forests. Moreover, these actions have imposed displacement on many of the villagers, and killed five civilians along with dozens of casualties.

KRG has requested the PKK and other armed elements to discontinue their provocations against the neighboring states from the KRG territories. Also, it calls upon neighboring countries to consider that civilians inhabit the border areas, which are currently exposed to bombardments; hence they are forced to flee their homes and abandon their farming lands.

The Committee of Human Rights in the KR Parliament is in the process of writing an evaluation letter of the precise damages incurred on the inhabitants of the bordering areas. The letter will be submitted to the Presidency of the Parliament and subsequently will be referred to the Council of Ministers to assess and provide the compensation.

The report of Amnesty also raises concerns about freedoms of speech and expression. As far as the press in the Kurdistan region is concerned, Journalism Law No. 35 of 2007 regulates freedom of journalism and expression. Meanwhile, the journalists are responsible for protecting national security and, simultaneously avoiding the defamation of particular institutions without necessary evidence. Nevertheless, no journalist has been arrested arbitrarily. There are clear proceedings that are implemented to enforce the law after the courts issue arrest warrants or initiate other legal processes.

The right of demonstration and freedom of assembly is similarly regulated within the framework of law. Kurdistan Parliament Act No. 11 of 2010 allows for organizing protests in the Kurdistan Region. According to the Act, people are constitutionally and legally allowed to protest. People are permitted to express their views and deliver their demands as long as they remain legally bound and follow some procedures in the benefit of common good and avoid violence and vandalism.

KRG law enforcement agencies remain committed to not arbitrarily arrest anyone regardless of the views they hold and express. A glimpse to the public disturbances in Zaxo and Sulaimani in August and December 2020, respectively, tell that detrimental objects and weapons were utilized by some protesters to twist the peaceful demands, public and private properties were destroyed, and casualties occurred both from the protesters and law enforcement officers. Nevertheless, rule of law was preserved and legal proceedings were taken transparently.

After the atrocities that the Yezidi community went through, the KRG extended a helping hand in various ways to the displaced without discrimination, which included first securing special places to shelter them, and then securing all necessary primary services such as water and food. The Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Region issued its decision No (5170) on 08/21/2014 to form a high committee to define the crimes that perpetrated against the Yezidis as genocide, and the committee has worked over the past years to internationalize the case and tried to echo their agonies to the International Criminal Court.

In addition, a special committee was formed to collect information and follow up the file of the kidnappers, and a judicial commission was formed to investigate the crimes committed by the terrorist organization ISIS in the Sinjar region and other surrounding areas, documenting these crimes and recording statements. And in this cabinet, the Genocide Committee has been formed to resume the tasks of the other committees.

KRG proudly flourished with the preservation and promotion of values indispensable for a decent civil life. The governmental institutions prioritize the promotion of rule of law, good governance, and all aspects of human rights.