

June 8, 2021

## **KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy Highlighted the Latest Human Rights Developments in a Press Conference**

On June 8, 2021, Dr. Dindar Zebari, KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy held a press conference underlining the key human rights developments in the Kurdistan Region with respect to the recent reports published by international organizations and counterparts.

Concerning the latest assault on Peshmerga forces in Metina mountain, KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy stated that "five Peshmerga were killed and seven others were injured as a result of an aggressive act perpetrated by PKK militants. The civilian and environmental impacts of the border clashes since their commencement have culminated in evacuation of 85 villages only in Shiladze area since 1995. In Amedi, PKK has imposed restriction of movement on a total of 169 villages-because of which the villagers merely can go to their lands for irrigation. Since 1995, 28 citizens have been killed as the result of the border bombardments. Furthermore, deliberate and non-deliberate deforestation and burnings have been incurred, among other catastrophic consequences. We call on the PKK to stop their provocations on the neighboring countries from Kurdistan Region territories, and request the Federal government to act as the sovereignty of Iraq is jeopardized."

Regarding the recent fire incident that incurred heavy damages on Sharia IDP camp near Duhok, Dr. Dindar Zebari stated that "the KRG will respond to the needs of the victims in coordination with the relevant international counterparts, and request the Federal government to assist in compensating the civilians who suffered losses", adding that about 400 tents have been destroyed and about 200 families suffered economic losses.

KRG Coordinator highlighted the threats of the ISIL militants in the disputed areas and affirmed that "In the first five months of 2021, 105 terrorist acts have been recorded in which bombings, rockets, artilleries, affirmative attacks, aerial surveillance, and etc. were used. KRG and the Federal government are coordinating their efforts to establish joint commands and operation rooms in the disputed areas to redress the security vacuum." Zebari added that good steps have been taken in this regard.

Dr. Dindar Zebari alluded to the issue of drug victims in the Kurdistan Region and asserted that "currently the overwhelming majority of the reformatory centers' population consists of victims of drug abuse. In Erbil, 3089 people were arrested in the past two

years for involvement in drug trafficking and/or consumption. Among them, 75 were arrested for committing a felony by trading drugs; while the rest 3014 were arrested for consuming them. The international community should be more engaged to enrich the endeavors in combating this phenomenon. Serious efforts are deployed by the KRG to combat drug trafficking and implement rehabilitative measures. Nevertheless, kind support, insights, and expertise from our esteemed international counterparts are indispensable for the efforts to be fruitful."

The KRG Coordinator commented on the status of religious freedoms and remarked that freedom of faith and religion constitutes the backbone of a consolidated democracy, and it is mentioned in the US Department of State's annual report on religious freedoms that the protection of the Iraqi religious structures has become part of the strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States.

Finally, Dr. Dindar Zebari stated that "A free media is important for its own sake and is an essential element in a well-functioning democracy. The Kurdistan Regional Government is proud that Kurdistan has a vibrant media, and Kurdistan has long been recognized as a regional exemplar of freedom of expression and freedom of the media."

KRG Coordinator further elaborated that 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 invited European Union member states to support legal and judicial reforms in Kurdistan.