

November 10, 2020

The KRG Coordinator Held a Press Conference in which he Highlighted Subjects Related to Terrorism, Disputed Areas, Border Security, Human Trafficking among others

Today, November 10, 2020, Dr. Dindar Zebari, KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy, held a press conference in the Bella Roma hotel. Representatives from media outlets, diplomatic offices, UN agencies, and NGOs, attended the event. The press conference aimed to underscore human rights-related issues in the Kurdistan Region, and to answer the questions posed by journalists in this regard. Issues highlighted included border security, terrorism, religious freedom, human trafficking, KRG's coordination with United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'sh (UNITAD), forced disappearance, collaboration between Erbil and Baghdad to enforce the requisites of ratified (or acceded) international conventions, among others.

Concerning human trafficking, Dr. Dindar alluded to the US Department of State annual report in June 2020, and said "KRG gave official permission to an NGO to operate the first trafficking shelter in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), and it continued to facilitate the release of several hundred Yezidis from ISIS. Moreover, KRG's anti-trafficking committee created sub-committees to address implementation of the anti-trafficking law, and it inaugurated the Erbil Office of the Directorate of Combating Human Trafficking. The KRG continued to operate four shelters in the IKR for women, which could provide services to female trafficking victims. Proudly, Iraq leaped from tier 2 watch list to tier 2 due to KRG's substantive efforts in levelling with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), a congressional act that provide the legal and political means to combat human trafficking."

Zebari reiterated KRG's commitment to provide a safe haven in the Kurdistan Region for religious and ethnic coexistence. The US Department of State's report on international religious freedom commends KRG efforts to consolidate values related to religious pluralism and coexistence in the Kurdistan Region. "The report stressed that there are dozens of Jewish families, Zoroastrians, Christians, and other components live peacefully in the Kurdistan Region," Zebari added. In the KR, there are 48 Syriac and 18 Turkoman language schools, and roughly 200,000 Christians (including Nineva Plain).

Regarding KRG's coordination with UNITAD, KRG Coordinator stated that "Up to date the KRG has handed over a bulk of requested information directed from UNITAD to the KRG regarding ISIL Crimes and ISIL network. The governmental sources included Counter-Terrorism, Asayish, MOI and Ministry of Peshmerga. Furthermore, three workshops been provided to the KRG on the Digitization Project, Amendments to the IHT Law, and Introduction to International Criminal Accountability, Laws and Investigations".

As with the latest US Department of State's report on counterterrorism, Zebari said that "The report commends KRG as an example of border control and as having an inter-ministerial counterterrorism coordination mechanism, a gap still to be covered by the Iraqi Authorities on their side. Iraq is curiously still not included in few International forums and grants in the framework of counterterrorism, despite its highlighted inclusion within few counterterrorism programs as well as its being part of the Coalition in the war against terror. Hence our recommendation to advocate KRG and Federal Government participation as early as possible in the following: International Platforms to Advance Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Reward for Justice (RFJ), and USAID educational program to counter-terrorism".

Bombardments have been largely intensified in the KR. In this respect, KRG Coordinator explained that "Due to the tensions between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkey, 85 villages have been totally evacuated in the 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- and recently kidnapped 2 citizens. Since 1995, 28 citizens have been killed as the result of the Turkish bombardments."

In his final remarks, Zebari referred to the fragile situation in the disputed areas and said "Up to August 2020, 147 terrorist actions have been recorded that targeted 650 victims. On June 13th 2020 in the night hours, a group of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) elements attacked 3 villagers' houses in Xanaqin, Diala province. The premeditated and recorded crime against the Kaka'i minority consisted of forcing the victims and their families out of their bedrooms and killing cold-bloodedly, without any provocation, innocent civilians from 2 related families. The death toll was of seven persons, one of whom died in an Erbil hospital 40 days afterwards".