

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST RELEASED AFTER THREE YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

On 17 February, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) authorities released journalist Guhdar Zebari after more than three years of unjust imprisonment. Authorities in the KR-I arrested Guhdar Zebari in October 2020 along with four other journalists and activists. The Erbil Criminal Court sentenced him to six years in prison following a grossly unfair trial marred by serious violations, including allegations of torture and the use of his torture-tainted confessions to convict him. He was scheduled for release in August 2023 after his sentence was commuted, but the authorities sentenced him to another six months on additional spurious charges intended to keep him behind bars.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

On 17 February, authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) released journalist **Guhdar Zebari** after more than three years of unjust imprisonment. While his release is welcome, he should never have spent a single day behind bars.

On 7 October 2020, the Asayish, the KRI's primary security and intelligence agency, arrested Guhdar Zebari and four other activists and journalists. On 16 February 2021, the Erbil Criminal Court sentenced the five defendants to six years imprisonment in a grossly unfair trial on charges including "spying on account of foreign actors; of having supplied the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) with sensitive information; placing the lives of senior Kurdistan regional authorities and foreign officials at risk by gathering information about them; and collecting arms with the intention of supplying them to an unidentified armed group." Guhdar Zebari's trial was marred by serious violations of the right to a fair trial, including allegations of torture that were not investigated, the use of torture-tainted confessions to convict the defendants, and a refusal to allow defence lawyers timely access to the case files. The sentence was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 28 April, which also rejected claims of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 2 March 2022, Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), reduced Guhdar Zebari's sentence by 60%. Prior to his scheduled release on 16 March 2022, the court sentenced him to an additional seven months' imprisonment for allegedly altering the logo on his car from a Daewoo to a Toyota, in violation of Article 279 of the Penal Code. Guhdar Zebari's lawyers told the media that the logo alteration was done prior to Guhdar Zebari's purchase of the vehicle and the charge was an "excuse" to sentence him to further prison time.

Instead of being released on 16 August 2023, after serving his seven months' sentence, authorities charged him with additional spurious crimes intended to keep him behind bars. On 23 August 2023, authorities charged him with possession of an unlicensed weapon, in violation of Law No.2 which was passed in 2022, for which the Erbil Criminal Court sentenced him to an additional six months on 1 October 2023. Guhdar Zebari's lawyers told Amnesty International that security agents found an unlicensed antique hunting weapon in his sister's home at the time of his arrest, but the lawyers also noted that it was not illegal at that time for the weapon to be unlicensed.

In a message to Amnesty International, Guhdar Zebari's lawyer thanked the movement for their efforts and said it had a very good effect.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Guhdar Zebari (he/him)

THIS IS THE FOURTH AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 28/21

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/7138/2023/en/>

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