

Statement by The Kurdistan Region of Iraq's Coordinator for The Office of International Advocacy

KRG's Coordinator for International Advocacy: NRT Has Encouraged Public Disturbance and Violated the Law

In the Kurdistan Region, freedom of speech and freedom of expression are guaranteed by law. There are hundreds of TV channels, journals, newspapers, radios, etc. that operate freely and independently in the KR. However, a number of media agencies often aim to damage public security and civic values.

In this respect, Dr. Dindar Zebari, KRG's Coordinator for International Advocacy, stated that "NRT and its sponsor Shaswar Abdulwahid have consistently aimed to exploit the freedom media agencies enjoy in KR for their own political agenda. Abdulwahid is not merely an independent entrepreneur now; he also leads a political party. He nonetheless utilizes NRT's platform to fulfil his political tendencies. Ironically, they usually resort to provocative propaganda campaigns amid critical circumstances, such as during the war against terrorism and coronavirus outbreak."

"Article 2 from Law No. 12 (2010) enacted by the Ministry of Youth and Culture, whenever a media agency encourages public disturbance and harm social harmony, the aforementioned ministry retains the right to take the following procedures: 72 hours closure as the first penalty; a week in the case of repetition; and in the final notice, the ministry will terminate its license", Zebari added.

The KRG's Coordinator for International Advocacy further stated that "NRT has violated the rules stipulated in the above-mentioned law; hence the Ministry of Youth and Culture opened a lawsuit against it which will be discussed in the court soon. The General Prosecutor demanded NRT's broadcast suspension in June due to encouraging citizens to violate the preventative and social-distancing measures issued by the government."

The General Prosecutor Office in the Kurdistan Region impartially operates under the Judicial Authority. It has the authority to oversee the legitimacy of the laws and regulations, protect national security, pursuing the implementation of law, observing violations conducted by government and non-governmental institutions, among others. As far as the above-mentioned matter is concerned, the General Prosecutor approved a request from the above-mentioned ministry to pursue the potential violations. The court will hear both the plaintiff and the defendant on the scheduled date.

According to the KRG's Coordinator, "Ministry of Youth and Culture sent several warnings to NRT, urging them to soften their rhetoric that incentivized hundreds of people to not abide by the protective regulations issued by the government. The last warning was delivered on June 3, 2020. It alluded to the fact that KR-I goes through a critical period, which demands implementing social-distancing and protective measures to be surpassed.

Hence, the warning letter contended, NRT has violated regulations issued by the Ministry of Youth and Culture."

"Nevertheless, despite its violation of the Ministry of Youth and Culture's legal framework for the third time now, NRT's license has not been suspended. Only their offices have been temporarily suspended. Furthermore, no reporter or correspondent of NRT is detained," Zebari added.

In his final remarks, the KRG's Coordinator emphasized that "rights and duties of journalists are enshrined in the Law No. 35 (2007). KRG firmly believes in the democratic values, primarily the rights of free speech and free expression. Nonetheless, the act of journalism should not be exploited as a means to fulfil political ambitions, especially amid critical situations."