

**Kurdistan Regional Government's Response to the Committee to Protect Journalists' Query
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March 14, 2021

Statement by the Kurdistan Regional Government Office of the Coordinator for International Advocacy (OCIA)

Response to the Committee to Protect Journalist (CPJ)

On 16 February the Criminal Court of Erbil sentenced Sherwan Amin Sherwani and Guhdar Zebari to six years each in jail. The Committee to Protect Journalists has raised some concerns about the trial and sentencing.

Mr Sherwani and Mr Zebari were tried by the Criminal Court of Erbil. The court is independent of the government and apolitical. The Kurdistan Regional Government does not and will not interfere with legal processes. Mr Sherwani and Mr Zebari were found guilty of gathering classified information and passing it covertly to foreign actors in exchange for substantial sums of money. This information directly put at risk the lives of senior Kurdish and foreign officials in Kurdistan. They were also found guilty of possession of illegal weapons. The verdict was based on Article 1 from Law No. 21 (2003) enacted by the Kurdistan Region Parliament.

Mr Sherwani and Mr Zebari were represented throughout by their own lawyers. They had access to their lawyers while awaiting trial.

Neither conviction was related to the defendants' journalistic work.

The trials were observed by representatives of diplomatic missions, international non-governmental organizations, the Kurdistan Parliament, and the media.

The court verdicts and sentences are subject to appeal. The judge who chaired the trials has already forwarded the court documents to the Appellate Court.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) have had unrestricted access to Mr Sherwani and Mr Zebari in detention.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is fully committed to the rule of law, to a fair and impartial legal process, and to the freedom of the media. The Government is currently working with UNAMI and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure Kurdistan is fully meeting its international human rights obligations and is following international human rights best practice, in particular in respect of media freedom.

KRG Coordinator Office for International Advocacy (OCIA)