

President Nechervan Idris Barzani
President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Email: C/O dindar.zebari@gov.krd

Your excellency,

I am writing to demand the immediate and unconditional release of journalist Qahraman Shukri, who has been imprisoned since January 2021. Following his arrest, Qahraman Shukri was forcibly disappeared for more than four months. In June 2021, the Duhok Criminal Court sentenced him to seven years in prison in a grossly unfair, secret trial, and in October 2023, the Court of Cassation upheld his conviction and sentence. Before his arrest, Qahraman Shukri's journalism work was critical of Kurdish authorities' handling of the impact on people of Turkish airstrikes in the province of Sulaimaniyah in the KR-I.

According to Qahraman Shukri's family, on 27 January 2021, the Asayish, the KR-I Government's primary security and intelligence agency, raided Qahraman Shukri's family home in the Duhok governorate. After kicking down the front door, the Asayish dragged Qahraman Shukri from his bed and took him into custody. He was forcibly disappeared for four months, until his family received a phone call from the Asayish informing them that he was detained at Zerka Prison in Duhok. When his family visited him for the first time in May 2021, Qahraman Shukri told them that security forces had beaten him, and that he had confessed to crimes he did not commit because he was scared and wanted to make the beatings stop. He was not allowed legal representation for the duration of his interrogation and the investigation.

Qahraman Shukri's family were unaware of the trial until they learned about it from him in a visit to the prison. The Duhok Criminal Court convicted him on charges of joining and spying for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an organization engaged in conflict with Turkey which has bases in the northern areas of the KR-I, and sharing material with them. The court appointed him a lawyer for his trial in front of the Duhok Criminal Court, however he was not allowed to choose his own lawyer, nor given adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence. Qahraman Shukri told his brother he was unaware of the trial until he was transported suddenly in a security vehicle to the Duhok Criminal Court. The Court of Cassation upheld the ruling on 12 October 2023 on the basis of his confessions, which he says were extracted under duress.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Qahraman Shukri, respect the right to freedom of expression and ensure that journalists are able to freely do their job without fear of arbitrary arrest, prosecution and imprisonment.

Yours sincerely,