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IRAQ JOURNALIST RELEASED AFTER THREE YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

On February 17, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) authorities finally released journalist Guhdar Zebari, ending his over three-year wrongful imprisonment. Zebari, along with four other journalists and activists, was arrested in October 2020. He faced a deeply flawed trial at the Erbil Criminal Court, which led to a six-year prison sentence based on allegations of torture and coerced confessions. Although his release was anticipated in August 2023 due to a commuted sentence, he was unexpectedly given an additional six-month sentence on unfounded charges, further prolonging his time in detention. While his release is welcome, he should never have spent a single day behind bars.

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

On October 7, 2020, the Asayish, Kurdistan Region of Iraq's (KRI) main security agency, arrested journalist Guhdar Zebari along with four others. They were convicted by the Erbil Criminal Court on February 16, 2021, receiving six-year sentences from a trial marked by grave injustices. The charges were severe, accusing them of espionage, endangering officials by collecting sensitive information, and planning to arm an unspecified group. The trial was tainted by allegations of torture, the use of coerced confessions, and restricted access for defense attorneys, all of which were overlooked by the appellate court on April 28.

Nechirvan Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, reduced Zebari's sentence by 60% on March 2, 2022. However, just before his expected release, he was further sentenced to seven months for a minor offense related to a car logo alteration, which his lawyers argued was a pretext for prolonging his imprisonment. This alteration was reportedly made before Zebari's purchase of the car.

Zebari's extended ordeal continued even after serving the additional seven months. On August 23, 2023, he faced new baseless charges related to possessing an unlicensed weapon, leading to another six-month sentence on October 1, 2023. This weapon, found in his sister's home, was an antique hunting firearm, which at the time of his arrest, was not required to be licensed.

Zebari's lawyers have acknowledged Amnesty International's support in this matter, noting its significant positive impact.