

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

MURTADHA AL-JANOUBI

مرتضى الجنوبي

At liberty **Iraq**

Environmental activist documenting the degradation of Maysan's marshes, arrested after participating in protests demanding fair water allocations for communities facing drought and displacement, and released the same evening.

HuMENA.

Prepared by HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · 8 November 2026

Case reference HM-IQ-2026-023

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Environmental activist documenting the degradation of Maysan's marshes, arrested after participating in protests demanding fair water allocations for communities facing drought and displacement, and released the same evening.

STATUS	**At liberty**
ARRESTED	**4 Mar 2026**
COUNTRY	**Iraq**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Drop any charges that remain on record against Murtadha Al-Janoubi in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Murtadha Al-Janoubi faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Murtadha Al-Janoubi can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

Latest updates on this case
Scan the code or visit:
https://humena.org/defenders/murtadha-al-janoubi/

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DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD
Arbitrary detention	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9
Criminalisation of solidarity	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5
Threats and intimidation	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

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HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

27 January 2025

CONTEXT

Iraq's fourth Universal Periodic Review

Iraq underwent its fourth UPR at the UN, receiving recommendations to reduce arbitrary detention and protect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

4 March 2026

ARREST

Arrested at a water-rights protest in Maysan

He was arrested in the morning in Al-Musharrah, Al-Kahla district, during demonstrations he had helped organise for fair water allocations for the marshes. Nine other protesters were also detained.

4 March 2026

RELEASE

Released the same evening

He was released the same evening, as were the other protesters. No charges were reported.

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THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Murtadha Al-Janoubi built his reputation as an environmental activist through sustained field documentation of the marshes in Maysan Governorate, one of Iraq's most ecologically significant and economically vulnerable regions. For years he monitored the water crisis affecting the marshlands, recording its cascading effects on food security, livelihoods, and local ecosystems.

His public work examined domestic water management policies, the environmental consequences of oil expansion near the marshes, and the impact of reduced cross-border water flows. He documented conditions on the ground, dried riverbeds, depleted fish stocks, abandoned villages, and raised questions about the policy decisions behind them. His monitoring was rooted in direct observation and engagement with affected communities.

The marshes of Maysan are home to communities whose livelihoods depend on water for fishing, agriculture, and livestock. As drought intensified in recent years, displacement from the hardest-hit areas increased. Families who had lived in the region for generations were forced to leave. Others remained but faced severe shortages, relying on expensive water delivered by tanker trucks. Al-Janoubi documented these realities and linked them to public resource management, making his work both environmental advocacy and civil oversight of government policy.

The Arrest

In early 2026, drought conditions in Maysan reached a critical threshold. Drinking water supplies, agriculture, and livestock were under direct pressure. Communities around the Meshrab River and surrounding marshlands staged demonstrations demanding fair and sufficient water allocations and government action to address the crisis.

Al-Janoubi participated in these protests. On the morning of 4 March 2026 he was arrested in Al-Musharrah, Al-Kahla district, during demonstrations he had helped organise, together with nine other peaceful protesters. Iraqi authorities have not issued an official statement specifying the legal basis for his detention or the charges against him and the other detainees.

He was released the same evening. It remains unclear whether he was granted access to legal counsel or allowed to communicate with his family while held. The absence of this information raises serious concerns about respect for procedural safeguards under Iraqi law and international human rights standards.

Context of Intimidation in Maysan

This arrest cannot be separated from a broader pattern of targeting activists in Maysan. In recent years

the governorate has witnessed assassinations, attempted assassinations, and attacks against those engaged in civil oversight and advocacy. These incidents have not been followed by transparent, independent investigations that lead to prosecutions or accountability for perpetrators or those who ordered the violence.

This impunity functions as an enabling factor. It expands the scope for violations and undermines the ability of civil society to monitor public policies and demand accountability. The arrest of Al-Janoubi and other protesters fits within this context. His documentation publicly linked marsh degradation to resource management decisions, including oil activities near ecologically sensitive areas, cross-border water management, and internal water distribution mechanisms. This work made him a predictable target in efforts to silence oversight where environmental crises intersect with economic and political interests.

Legal Framework and Obligations

Iraq is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Articles 19 and 21 of the Covenant guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Articles 36 and 38 of the Iraqi Constitution provide parallel protections. The right to water is recognised as a fundamental human right under international law, affirmed by UN General Comment No. 15 (2002) and UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 (2010).

The 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders protects the right to monitor, document, and seek remedies for violations. It prohibits retaliation against individuals who exercise these rights. Procedural safeguards require that detainees be informed of the reasons for their detention, be able to defend themselves, have access to a lawyer and communication with family, and be brought without undue delay before a competent judicial authority.

On 27 January 2025, Iraq underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review. The review included recommendations to strengthen protections for rights and freedoms, reduce arbitrary detention, and safeguard freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The arrest of Al-Janoubi and other protesters in March 2026 is a test of the government's willingness to implement these commitments, particularly in regions where environmental crises and resource management intersect with political and economic interests.

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SAMPLE LETTER

Copy it, adapt it and send it from your own address.

Your Excellency,

I am writing about the case of Murtadha Al-Janoubi, environmental activist; documenting marsh degradation, water policy impacts on livelihoods, and ecosystem decline in Maysan Governorate in Iraq, who has been released. I am writing to ask that the case be closed properly and that no further reprisal follows.

In brief: Environmental activist documenting the degradation of Maysan's marshes, arrested after participating in protests demanding fair water allocations for communities facing drought and displacement, and released the same evening.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Drop any charges that remain on record against Murtadha Al-Janoubi in connection with peaceful human rights work;
2. Confirm publicly that Murtadha Al-Janoubi faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case;
3. Guarantee that Murtadha Al-Janoubi can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal;
4. Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

I will continue to follow this case until the record against Murtadha Al-Janoubi is cleared and no reprisal remains.

Respectfully,

[Your name]
[Your city, country]
8 November 2026