

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

SHERWAN SHERWANI

شروان شرواني

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **Iraq**

Kurdish journalist who investigated corruption and prisoners' rights in Iraqi Kurdistan, arrested in 2020 amid a crackdown on protests, sentenced to six years for "threatening national security," then given four more years in July 2023, two months before his scheduled release, later cut to two years, and a third sentence in August 2025.

HuMENA.

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

Case reference HM-IQ-2026-003

01

THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Kurdish journalist who investigated corruption and prisoners' rights in Iraqi Kurdistan, arrested in 2020 amid a crackdown on protests, sentenced to six years for "threatening national security," then given four more years in July 2023, two months before his scheduled release, later cut to two years, and a third sentence in August 2025.

STATUS	**Imprisoned (serving sentence)**
ARRESTED	**7 Oct 2020**
COUNTRY	**Iraq**
SENTENCE	**Six years in prison for threatening national security, confirmed on appeal; sentence reduced to three years by presidential decree in February 2022; an additional four years imposed in July 2023 for alleged document forgery, reduced to two years on appeal in October 2023; a third sentence of four years and five months imposed in August 2025, reduced to three years and five months on appeal in October 2025.**
CHARGES	**Threatening national security (2021 conviction)** **Falsifying and forging documents (2023 conviction under Articles 295 and 298 of Iraqi Penal Code)**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Release Sherwan Sherwani immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

Latest updates on this case
Scan the code or visit:
https://humena.org/defenders/sherwan-sherwani/

02

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
Denial of family visits	UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 58
Enforced disappearance	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16
Judicial harassment	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12
Press freedom violation	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19
Prolonged pretrial detention	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)
Torture	Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7
Unfair trial	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

October 2020

CONTEXT

Held incommunicado and in solitary confinement after arrest

After his arrest he was held at an Asayish facility without his family being told where he was, then kept in solitary confinement for more than two months. He said he was tortured to force a confession. His lawyer first saw him on 26 October 2020.

7 October 2020

ARREST

Arrested in the crackdown on protests in the Kurdistan Region

Arrested in 2020 during a wave of arrests of journalists and activists in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, after reporting on corruption in the Kurdistan Regional Government and on conditions inside Asayish detention facilities.

15 February 2021

HEARING

Appears before Erbil Criminal Court on national security charge

He appeared before the Erbil Criminal Court on a charge of "undermining national security".

16 February 2021

CONVICTION

Sentenced to six years for undermining national security

The Erbil Criminal Court sentenced him to six years in prison on national security charges after his arrest in 2020, in proceedings widely condemned as retaliation for his reporting on corruption in the Kurdistan Region.

28 April 2021	**APPEAL: JUDGMENT UPHELD** Erbil appeal court upholds the six-year sentence
27 June 2021	**FINAL JUDGMENT** **Request to correct cassation decision rejected** The request to correct the cassation decision, filed on 5 June 2021, was rejected and the six-year sentence became final.
18 November 2021	**UN OPINION OR DECISION** UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finds his detention arbitrary (Opinion 71/2021)
23 February 2022	**PARDON** **Kurdistan Region presidential decree reduces the sentence** A decree by the President of the Kurdistan Region halved his sentence, from six to three years.
20 July 2023	**CONVICTION** Four more years for alleged document forgery, two months before his release date
29 October 2023	**APPEAL: SENTENCE REDUCED** Forgery sentence reduced to two years on appeal
19 August 2025	**CONVICTION** **Four years and five months added weeks before his scheduled release** The Erbil Criminal Court imposed an additional four years and five months, his third politically motivated conviction since 2021, weeks before he was due to be released. The new case rests on a June 2022 complaint by a prison officer alleging threats made while Sherwani was in detention.
October 2025	**APPEAL: SENTENCE REDUCED** **Appeal court upholds the third conviction and reduces the sentence to three years and five months** On appeal, the court upheld his third conviction and reduced the sentence imposed in August 2025 to three years and five months in prison.
22 April 2026	**HUNGER STRIKE BEGINS** Announces a hunger strike over mistreatment in prison

04

THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Sherwan Sherwani is a Kurdish journalist and human rights defender from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He served as chief editor of Ashur magazine and was an active member of 17 Shubat, a human rights organisation operating in the region. His journalism focused on two areas that brought him into direct conflict with authorities: corruption within the Kurdistan Regional Government and the treatment of prisoners held by Asayish, the Kurdish internal security forces and primary intelligence agency in the region.

Sherwani regularly participated in peaceful demonstrations advocating for social and political rights. His work and activism took place during a period of growing public dissent over governance failures and alleged corruption in the Kurdistan Regional Government, protests that intensified in 2020.

Arrest and Initial Detention

Sherwan Sherwani was arrested in 2020 as part of a broader crackdown on freedom of expression in the Kurdistan Region. The arrests targeted journalists, activists, and human rights defenders who had been involved in or reported on protests against government corruption. He was detained alongside four others, Guhdar Zebari, Hariwan Issa, Eyaz Karam, and Shivan Saeed, who collectively became known as the Badinan Five.

On 16 February 2021, the Criminal Court of Erbil convicted all five defendants of threatening national security and sentenced them each to six years in prison. The trial lasted only two days and was marked by serious violations of basic international fair trial standards. Sherwan Sherwani and his co-defendants told the court that their confessions had been extracted under torture. The court dismissed those statements without investigation. On 28 April 2021, the Appeal Court of Erbil confirmed the six-year sentence.

Sentence Reduction and Impending Release

In February 2022, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, issued a decree reducing Sherwan Sherwani's sentence by half, from six years to three years. With time already served, his release was scheduled for 9 September 2023.

Additional Conviction Two Months Before Release

On 20 July 2023, two months before his scheduled release, the Criminal Court of Erbil sentenced Sherwan Sherwani to an additional four years in prison. The charge related to a document submitted to prison authorities on 28 August 2022. That document retracted a previously filed request for conditional release by Sherwan Sherwani and the other Badinan prisoners.

Prosecutors accused Sherwan Sherwani of forging the signatures of the other four Badinan defendants on that document. During the trial, the other prisoners testified explicitly that they had given one another permission to sign on each other's behalf. The court convicted him nonetheless. It applied Articles 295 and 298 of the Iraqi Penal Code, provisions relating to forgery and falsification of documents, sentencing him to two and a half years under one article and one and a half years under the other, for a total of four additional years.

Community Peacemaker Teams, Iraqi Kurdistan documented multiple violations of fair trial guarantees in the proceedings and noted the lack of evidence supporting the application of those penal code articles. The organisation emphasised that the case was not isolated but part of a broader pattern of judicial harassment.

Current Status

Sherwan Sherwani remains in prison in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In October 2023 the forgery sentence was reduced to two years on appeal. On 19 August 2025, weeks before his expected release, the Erbil Criminal Court imposed a third sentence of four years and five months over a 2022 complaint by a prison officer; on appeal in October 2025 it was reduced to three years and five months. In April 2026 he began a hunger strike over the denial of home leave and of a transfer to Sulaymaniyah. His journalism on corruption and prisoners' rights, his participation in peaceful protests, and his membership in a human rights organisation have resulted in prolonged detention under charges that violate international standards of due process and freedom of expression.

05

SAMPLE LETTER

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

Your Excellency,

I am writing to demand the immediate release of Sherwan Sherwani, journalist and human rights defender; chief editor of Ashur magazine; active member of the human rights organisation 17 Shubat, focusing on corruption and prisoners' rights, currently detained in Iraq, and an end to all reprisals tied to this case.

In brief: Kurdish journalist who investigated corruption and prisoners' rights in Iraqi Kurdistan, arrested in 2020 amid a crackdown on protests, sentenced to six years for "threatening national security," then given four more years in July 2023, two months before his scheduled release, later cut to two years, and a third sentence in August 2025.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Release Sherwan Sherwani immediately and unconditionally;
2. Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights;
3. Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

I will continue to monitor this case until Sherwan Sherwani is free.

Respectfully,

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