

ADVOCACY DOSSIER

TANYA KAMAL DARWISH

تانیا کمال درویش

At liberty **Iraq**

Tanya Darwish led Rasan Organisation, the only LGBTIQ+ rights group in Iraqi Kurdistan, until a court ordered its closure over a rainbow logo. She has been under criminal investigation since 2021 and has been subjected to sexualised defamation campaigns.

HuMENA.

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

Case reference HM-IQ-2026-005

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Tanya Darwish led Rasan Organisation, the only LGBTIQ+ rights group in Iraqi Kurdistan, until a court ordered its closure over a rainbow logo. She has been under criminal investigation since 2021 and has been subjected to sexualised defamation campaigns.

STATUS	**At liberty**
COUNTRY	**Iraq**
CHARGES	**Spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions under Article 403 of the Iraqi Penal Code** **Violating public integrity and decency**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Drop all charges against Tanya Darwish related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

02 End the judicial harassment of Tanya Darwish and guarantee a fair process meanwhile.

03 Guarantee that Tanya Darwish faces no arrest, travel restriction or other reprisal for peaceful human rights work.

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

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DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

	INTERNATIONAL STANDARD
Criminalisation of solidarity	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5
Defamation and smear campaign	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12
Gender based violence	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 35 Convention against Torture, Article 1
Judicial harassment	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12
Unfair trial	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

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HOW THE CASE UNFOLDED

April 2019

COMPLAINT FILED

Petition filed against Rasan staff

A petition with 530 signatures accused Tanya Darwish and Rasan staff of 'spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions' under Article 403 of the Iraqi Penal Code.

2021

CONTEXT

Police issue arrest warrants for 11 Rasan staff

After the February 2021 complaint, police issued arrest warrants for 11 current or former Rasan employees under Article 401 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which criminalises public indecency.

February 2021

COMPLAINT FILED

Parliament member files complaint

Omar Gulpi, a member of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, filed a formal complaint against Rasan Organisation, accusing it of violating public integrity and decency under Article 403.

16 June 2021

INTERROGATION

Police summon Darwish for interrogation

Tanya Darwish received a call from police informing her that she, her staff, and former Rasan employees were under investigation following a complaint by the Department of Non-Governmental Organisations. Her lawyer advised her not to attend, fearing detention.

17 June 2021

CONTEXT

Lawyer requests postponement

Darwish's lawyer asked police to postpone the interrogation, citing her health condition.

2022

CONTEXT

Closure case heard in court

The court case seeking the closure of Rasan was heard in 2022. According to Tanya Darwish, the trial focused on Rasan's activities and never raised any issue with its logo.

31 May 2023

OFFICE CLOSED

Court orders Rasan Organisation closed

A court of first instance in Sulaymaniyah ordered the closure of Rasan Organisation based solely on its rainbow-coloured logo. The court concluded the logo reflected activities in the field of 'homosexuality' but cited no illegal conduct.

June 2023

APPEAL LODGED

Rasan files appeal

Rasan Organisation filed an appeal against the closure order but remains prohibited from resuming its human rights activities while the appeal is pending.

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THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Tanya Darwish is a woman human rights defender and the director of Rasan Organisation, a civil-society group based in Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Rasan was founded to promote and defend the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people through a combination of direct support services and public advocacy. The organisation provided legal assistance, social support, and psychological counselling to individuals facing discrimination, violence, and exclusion. It also conducted awareness-raising campaigns aimed at shifting public attitudes and challenging harmful stereotypes.

Rasan was the only organisation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq dedicated to supporting and advocating for the LGBTIQ+ community. Its work filled a significant gap in a region where state institutions offer little protection and where social hostility toward sexual and gender minorities is widespread. Women and LGBTIQ+ individuals who sought help from Rasan often had nowhere else to turn.

Escalating Complaints and Criminal Charges

In April 2019, a petition bearing 530 signatures was submitted against Rasan staff, accusing them of "spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions" under Article 403 of the Iraqi Penal Code. The petition was the first of several attempts to shut down the organisation through legal complaints.

In February 2021, Omar Gulpi, a member of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, filed a formal complaint against Rasan, invoking the same penal-code provision and accusing the organisation of "violating public integrity and decency." The complaint provided the legal basis for subsequent judicial proceedings against the organisation and its staff.

On 16 June 2021, Tanya Darwish received a phone call from police informing her that she, current staff members, and former employees of Rasan were under investigation. The Department of Non-Governmental Organisations had lodged a complaint alleging that they had engaged in illegal activities. The charge, spreading hatred with the aim of promoting illegal actions, carries a prison sentence of up to two years. Darwish's lawyer advised her not to attend the police interrogation, warning that she and others might be detained if they appeared. The following day, the lawyer requested a postponement of the interrogation, citing Darwish's health condition. Police also issued arrest warrants for 11 current or former Rasan employees under Article 401 of the Penal Code, which criminalises public indecency.

The Closure of Rasan Organisation

On 31 May 2023, a court of first instance in Sulaymaniyah issued an order to close Rasan Organisation. The ruling was based entirely on the organisation's logo, which featured rainbow colours. Court-appointed legal experts concluded that the logo "fully reflects [the organisation's] activities in the field of 'homosexuality'." The judgment did not cite any illegal activities carried out by the organisation.

Throughout the trial, Rasan was never informed that its logo was the subject of judicial scrutiny.

Rasan filed an appeal against the closure order, but the organisation is prohibited from resuming any of its human rights activities while the appeal is pending. The forced dissolution left women and LGBTIQ+ individuals in the Kurdistan Region without access to the specialised legal, social, and psychological services that Rasan had provided.

Gender-Based Attacks and Online Harassment

Tanya Darwish has been subjected to persistent harassment throughout her work with Rasan. She was targeted in an online sexualised defamation campaign that used fabricated or distorted personal information to attack her credibility and reputation. The campaign sought to undermine her standing as a human rights defender by exploiting social stigma around women's sexuality and autonomy.

Sexualised defamation is a form of gender-based violence used systematically against women human rights defenders in Iraq and across the region. These campaigns are designed not only to silence individual defenders but to deter other women from engaging in public advocacy, particularly on issues related to gender and sexuality.

Context and Pattern of Persecution

The judicial closure of Rasan and the criminal charges against its staff are part of a broader pattern of persecution targeting LGBTIQ+ rights defenders and activists in Iraq. Since the beginning of 2023, there has been a marked increase in hostile rhetoric, legal restrictions, and violence directed at LGBTIQ+ individuals and anyone perceived to support them. This hostility has been fuelled by statements from political leaders, armed factions, and religious authorities across Iraq, including in the Kurdistan Region.

The Kurdistan Regional Government and Iraqi federal authorities have increasingly invoked vague morality provisions in the penal code to criminalise human rights work related to gender and sexuality. These provisions are applied selectively and without clear legal standards, creating an environment in which defenders are vulnerable to arbitrary prosecution and judicial harassment.

Rasan's closure and the criminalisation of Tanya Darwish and her colleagues illustrate the precarious position of those who defend the rights of marginalised communities in Iraq. The state's use of judicial mechanisms to shut down civil-society organisations and prosecute their staff reflects a systemic effort to eliminate spaces for dissent and advocacy on issues deemed politically or socially sensitive.

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SAMPLE LETTER

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

Your Excellency,

I am writing about the prosecution of Tanya Darwish, director of Rasan Organisation; woman human rights defender working on women's and LGBTIQ+ rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in Iraq, which targets peaceful human rights work.

In brief: Tanya Darwish led Rasan Organisation, the only LGBTIQ+ rights group in Iraqi Kurdistan, until a court ordered its closure over a rainbow logo. She has been under criminal investigation since 2021 and has been subjected to sexualised defamation campaigns.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Drop all charges against Tanya Darwish related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights;
2. End the judicial harassment of Tanya Darwish and guarantee a fair process meanwhile;
3. Guarantee that Tanya Darwish faces no arrest, travel restriction or other reprisal for peaceful human rights work.

I will continue to follow this case until the charges against Tanya Darwish are dropped.

Respectfully,

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