

Iraqi Kurdistan **VOTES**



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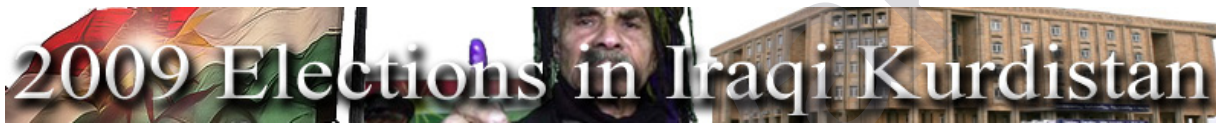
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IRAQI KURDISTAN VOTES



2009 Elections in Iraqi Kurdistan

In a recent article for the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, Michael Knights wrote that the US should start treating post-2009 Iraqi Kurdistan as a member of the top tier of Middle Eastern democracies. Indeed, on 25 July 2009, the parliamentary and presidential elections in Iraqi Kurdistan did represent a significant step forward in the region's experiment with democracy. About 79% of all eligible voters turned out to vote on Election Day in Iraqi Kurdistan's three provinces: Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Faraj al-Haidari of the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) stated in a post-election press conference that these recent elections were the cleanest elections in the history of Iraq. In the parliamentary elections, Iraqi Kurdistan's two historically dominant political parties – the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – ran on a united coalition slate: The Kurdistan List. A number of traditional opposition parties, consisting of Islamists and leftists, ran on their own united slate under the name of the Services and Reform List. The most significant and publicized new development was the formation of a new political organization under the leadership of Newshirwan Mustafa, formerly a deputy of Iraqi President and PUK Secretary General, Jalal Talabani. Mr. Mustafa, accompanied by Mr. Mohammed Tawfiq and other former PUK mem-

bers, formed a group that ran for parliament as the List for Change, which attempted to present itself as an alternative to the region's dominant political establishment. The KDP and PUK, who have dominated Iraqi Kurdistan's political scene for decades and have held the overwhelming majority of seats in the region's parliament since its founding, lost a substantial number of seats in the elections but still secured 59 of the 111 seats. Their losses occurred at the expense of the strong performance from the List for Change, which won 25 seats, mostly from the governorate of Sulaymaniyah. Coming in third was the Services and Reform List, which collectively had 19 seats in the previous Parliament but earned only 13 seats this time around. Two seats were won by the once powerful Islamic Movement, and one seat was earned by another leftist coalition, running as the Freedom and Equality List. The Kurdistan List won just enough votes to be able to form the next government without a partner. However, if they choose to do so, the strengthened opposition can make it more difficult for legislation to pass as than in years past. This emboldened opposition bloc, led by the List for Change, will assume its role in Iraqi Kurdistan's governance at a pivotal moment in the region's history, as a number of serious outstanding issues need to be addressed including the postponed constitutional referendum and various



Parliament, Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

discussions with the Iraqi central government. At the same time, Iraq's national parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 2010, are just around the corner.

For the first time, the President of the Kurdistan Region was chosen via a direct election, as opposed to being selected by parliament. Five individuals ran for the post of the president, including the incumbent President Massoud Barzani. While President Barzani was reelected, winning over 1.2 million votes, runner-up Dr. Kamal Mirawdeli – a previously London-based Kurdish writer and activist – had a surprisingly strong showing, winning over 460,000 votes. Dr. Mirawdeli, who campaigned primarily in his home province of Sulaymaniyah seems to have been endorsed, albeit not publicly, by the List for Change.

The future of the List for Change is perhaps the most interesting issue following these elections. It remains to be seen whether this group, which began as a splinter movement from the PUK, can evolve into a political movement in its own right, permanently altering the Iraqi Kurdish political landscape. For now what is certain is the existence of a credible opposition inside the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament. Those voters drawn by the List for Change's slogans of reform will indeed feel that their votes counted following the strong showing of this list; a result that surprised many observers of Iraqi Kurdistan. Certainly those who voted for the List for Change will be closely watching the list's parliamentarians and other officials to see if they are able to deliver on their slogans of reform.

The ramifications of the List for Change's strong performance are indeed significant and far-reaching. The Kurdish political earthquake had its epicenter in Sulaymaniyah, the former strong-hold of the PUK. Residents of this province seemingly rejected in a recent article for the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, Michael Knights wrote that the US should start treating post-2009 Iraqi Kurdistan as a member of the top tier of Middle Eastern democracies. Indeed, on 25 July 2009, the parliamentary and presidential elections in Iraqi Kurdistan did represent a significant step forward in the region's experiment with

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Photo Courtesy Vladimir van Wilgenburg © Kurdish Herald 2009

Kurdistan List supporters celebrate in the streets following the announcement of preliminary elections results



List for Change supporters celebrate in the streets following the announcement of preliminary elections results



Photo Courtesy Jeff Allan © Kurdish Herald 2009

Kurdistan List campaign poster with picture of Dr. Barham Salih, possible candidate for PM (left), and reelected President Massoud Barzani (right)

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From a geographic point of view, the KDP proved that it has maintained a strong base of support in the Dohuk governorate. The Kurdistan List and President Barzani captured strong majorities of the votes cast in Duhok where a higher percentage of eligible voters turned out than in any other province.

Following the apparent decline in the fortunes of the PUK, it remains to be seen how ministries and other important official duties will be split between the two members of the Kurdistan List. Many have predicted that the PUK's recent weak electoral performance will give way to a departure from the 50/50 power sharing agreements that have kept the two major parties working together – with various degrees of uneasiness – as equals for the last few years. Indeed, one of the most significant effects of the strong showing of the List for Change is the new, weakened position of the PUK; the future of the PUK may indeed not be clear for at least a year. Looking forward, many issues will need to be addressed before the next Iraqi Kurdish election in 2013. It could easily take years for the results of the most recent elections to ripple through the political landscape and, as the rapid rise of the List for Change shows, many things can occur in a short period of time. If Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is implemented prior to the next day of election, then close to 1 mil-

lion people will be added to the pool of eligible voters, most of whom would be from Kirkuk. It is anyone's guess as to where these additional voters may fall on the Kurdish political map, though it is fair to assume that their views would be anything but monolithic.

Of course, the future is unclear. Even the most basic details of the new Iraqi Kurdistan government are, at the moment, in flux. However, it can be said with near certainty that most



President Barzani addresses Kurdistan nation after official elections are announced - 2009

voters in the Kurdistan Region – a region that has now witnessed the rapid rise of a new opposition force – believe in the necessity of taking part in their democratic process and believe that their votes count. This is, by definition, a sign of a flourishing democracy.

OIL IN KURDISTAN:

-A black curse or new power?

By Delovan Barwari



DNO Company, Norway, Iraq, and Kurdistan flags wave at the Tawke oil field in Iraqi Kurdistan - 2009

For many nations, oil has been the main source of economic prosperity and development. Yet, amongst Kurds, the perspective is that oil has been the underlying reason for the partitioning of their homeland, Kurdistan, and the cause to the atrocities committed against them after the British discovery of oil in Kurdistan. Hence, since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Kurdish leaders tenaciously played an influential role in the establishment of the new Iraqi government, and managed to introduce a number of articles in the new Iraqi constitution to grant authority to regions like Kurdistan to dictate over matters outside the exclusive powers of Baghdad. Nevertheless, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been in the center of fiery disputes with the government of Baghdad over the control of land and oil.

According to a report by George Yacu – a geophysicist and advisor to KRG – the region of Iraqi Kurdistan (including Kirkuk) lies on an estimated 43.7 billion barrels (bb) of the 115 bb of Iraq's proven oil reserves and 25.5 of 85 bb of Iraq's potential reserves. Furthermore, based on his report as well as older Iraqi reports and studies, it is estimated that over 100 tcf (trillion cubic feet) of gas

is present in Iraq, mainly in the Kurdistan region. Moreover, the recent explorations conducted in Kurdistan increased the figure to more than 200 tcf of potential gas reserves. As the Kurdish leadership became more aware of the aforementioned facts, their inspiration to become self-sufficient (in terms of the energy and economy) grew stronger.

The disagreement over Iraq's oil, viewed by Kurds as political, has been the main obstacle to the establishment of laws that allow revenue sharing in the production and exploration of Iraq's oil. The failure to pass the so-called hydrocarbons law has hampered foreign attraction in the energy sector and consequently set back the development of Iraq's decayed and underdeveloped oil infrastructure. On the other hand, as KRG became aggravated with Baghdad over the standoff of For many nations, oil has been the main source of economic prosperity and development. Yet, amongst Kurds, the perspective is that oil has been the underlying reason for the partitioning of their homeland, Kurdistan, and the cause to the atrocities committed against them after the British discovery of oil in Kurdistan. Hence, since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Kurdish leaders tenaciously played an influential role in the establishment of the new Iraqi government, and managed to introduce a number of articles in the



Oil pipelines at the Tawke oil field in Iraqi Kurdistan - 2009

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the other hand, as KRG became aggravated with Baghdad over the standoff of the proposed law, it endorsed its own hydrocarbon laws in order to develop Kurdistan's resources. As a result, KRG has successfully made significant progress in oil exploration and infrastructure development of its new oil industry.

Over the years, KRG independently awarded exploration and development contracts with some 30 foreign companies. These moves resulted in a war of words between the Iraqi Oil Minister, Hussein Sharastani, and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, along with Kurdistan's Minister of Natural Resources, Ashti Hewrami. Sharastani went as far as declaring the contracts as illegal and threatened to blacklist the companies involved in the oil projects in Iraqi Kurdistan.

While the world economy fell into a deep recession, oil prices fell sharply, causing a considerable reduction in Iraqi national budget. Consequently, it placed considerable pressure on Maliki's government to soften their stance with KRG over the oil disputes. On 1 June 2009, after years of heated tit-for-tat exchanges, Baghdad finally agreed to allow Kurdish oil to be exported using the Iraqi national pipeline and into the international market via Turkey.

The agreement initiated the exportation of the Tawke oil field developed by Norway's DNO International and Taq Taq oil field developed jointly by Addax Petro-

leum and Turkey's Genel Enerji. The initial production in the Tawke and Taq Taq fields are estimated at around 60,000 and 40,000 barrels per day (bpd), respectively. It is believed that the two fields together have a potential of producing 250,000 bpd.

Under the settlement, the earnings from oil will be directly deposited into a federally managed account and the revenues will be distributed across Iraq on a per capita basis. KRG receives 17% of the earnings and 83% is given to the rest of Iraq.

As the success of United States in Iraq is of the highest importance to the new administration in Washington D.C., the U.S. appears to be more focused on resolving the pending issues between KRG and Baghdad. Therefore, they have placed noticeable pressure on both parties to resolve the Kurdish – Arab dilemma (viewed by many observers as the most sensitive and explosive issue) over land and oil.

Without a doubt, the pressure has influenced the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Al-Maliki, to break the year-long deadlock. Following an official visit to Washington D.C., on 2 August 2009, Maliki flew to Kurdistan to meet with the President of Kurdistan Region, Massud Barzani, in an attempt to bring the feud over land and oil to the negotiation table. The initial reports following the meeting suggests progress. Yasin Majeed, Maliki's media advisor stated: "The visit marked a new era. There was agreement (but) there are big challenges".

Nonetheless, the question of whether Maliki will genuinely recognize the new reality in Kurdistan, or if he will exploit the oil and land disputes to gather momentum in his favor and unite the Shiites and Sunnis against Kurds ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections in December is yet to be seen.

As the demand for the consumption of oil is on the rise throughout the world, specifically by China and India, the world economy is more than ever dependent on the production and availability of this scarce resource. With the new oil discoveries and developments in Kurdistan, will the Kurdish leaders be able to use what has been once regarded as a black curse in Kurdish circles instead as a powerful card to change U.S. and western policy? 🌅

Remembrance and Rebuilding

KUWAIT

19 years after invasion

By Jeff Allan

Saddam Hussein's August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait is but one of the many large scale crimes he committed during the course of his bloody reign as President of Iraq. While Saddam murdered thousands upon thousands in alternatively creative and disturbingly efficient ways, and even used chemical weapons against combatants and civilians alike in Iran and inside Iraq itself, much of the world did not know him for what he was until this very event. Even among the despots of the Middle East, Saddam distinguished himself time and time again with his brutality and total control over Iraq's people, turning the cradle of civilization into a heavily monitored, sprawling prison in which a parent could face death for cursing Saddam in his own home if his son or daughter innocently repeated the parent's statement in school the next day. After the invasion of Kuwait, the true nature of Saddam was there for the world to see. Indeed, it was this act of naked aggression that eventually paved the way for the strengthening of the Iraqi opposition and ultimate overthrow of Saddam's regime 12 years later. Following the discovery of oil in Kuwait, the country, then a British colony, was known for maritime commerce and pearl diving. Local legend states that oil was discovered during a search for a spring in the desert, and, following this momentous event, the state became extremely wealthy. Later, in 1961, Kuwait became independent from the United Kingdom on amicable terms. Oil wealth has enriched Kuwait's government and citizens, and

helped give rise to today's Kuwait, clean and efficient Gulf state with a high standard of living. Under the leadership of the Sabah family, which has ruled since 1763, the country transformed itself into an oil-powered welfare state in which citizens, who comprise a minority of residents due to the presence of large numbers of foreign guest workers, receive a stipend and other high quality support and services from the government and do not pay any taxes. In the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, following disputes over oil drilling and other economic issues, Iraq invaded Kuwait by land, air, and sea, initially sending in numerous divisions of the elite Republican Guard to destroy Kuwait's government and annex the country. After quickly gaining some measure of control over Kuwait and eliminating the role of the Kuwait government, the Iraqi regime and its armed forces attempted to erase all vestiges of Kuwaiti national identity, destroying all government buildings and taking a number of specific measures to erase any and all expressions of Kuwait independence. According to internal Iraqi memoranda, measures taken to reaffirm Iraq's annexation of Kuwait included the prohibition of circulation of the Kuwait dinar, the changing of license plates from Kuwait plates to new plates showing national affiliation as Iraq with Kuwait as the province name, the changing of place names to celebrate Saddam and his regime, the withdrawal of Kuwaiti national identity certificates and substitution for Iraqi identity cards, and a ban on the ownership of the Kuwaiti flag and images of members of the Sabah family.



Painting depicts Kurdish Genocide in Iraq at the National Memorial in Kuwait

Photo Courtesy Jeff Allan © Kurdish Herald 2009

One of many Iraqi documents explaining these specific measures reads as follows:

15/9/1990

As we were moving about the zone assigned to the Third Bayan Unit, we noticed that there are still slogans glorifying Kuwait and its deposed Emir; together with the flag and map of Kuwait. This was the case at al-Sadiq Roundabout. Remove these within 24 hours. The same applies to all traces of the former regime in your respective units. As Kuwaiti men and women took to the streets to protest against Iraqi occupation, terse orders arrived telling Iraqi soldiers how to cope with demonstrators, as seen in an excerpt from this Iraqi document:

9/9/1990

... a plan is to be set including the following:

Move quietly towards the demonstrations area and dismount in an appropriate place

Approach the demonstrators from behind, as far as possible, and block avenues of withdrawal

Deploy an echelon and simultaneously open fire on demonstrators using rifles, machine guns, SPG9 guns, light launchers and flame throwers to kill all of them, so that this action may deter all outlaws

Saddam's efforts in Kuwait at erasing the identity of a nation are not unique, even for him, as the invasion of Kuwait followed his Anfal campaign of genocide against Iraq's Kurdish people by just a few years. Those cognizant of Saddam's Arabization campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan will be unsurprised at the means ordered by the despot in his efforts to Iraqify Kuwait. Just as the province of Kirkuk was remained Ta'mim ("Nationalization" in Arabic), various places throughout Kuwait were re-named to express their new Iraqi identity, bearing names such as Saddam and Rashid (after Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph credited by many for the flourishing of Baghdad). It is no coincidence that the same man who directed the Anfal campaign, Ali Hassan al-Majid, was put installed as the military governor of Kuwait following the invasion. Furthermore, the organized plunder of Kuwait is completely in keeping with the character of the Saddam regime in its own systematic rape of Iraq and organized campaign of theft and neglect in regions of Iraq perceived to be hostile to the regime, such as Kurdistan and the predominantly Shi'ite south. The

unambiguous methods used in confronting the peaceful expression of opposition views are also all too familiar to Iraqis who lived under Saddam's iron fist.

Following the January 17, 1991 initiation of UN-sanctioned, US-led military action aimed at driving Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, orders came from the highest levels in the Iraqi regime to steal everything possible from Kuwait. These orders were handwritten note on Iraqi Ministry of Oil stationary by Hussein Kamel Hassan, Saddam's then powerful son-in-law and cousin, to Ali Hassan al-Majid on February 19, 1991 stating that Saddam had ordered Iraqi forces to "haul all possible possessions from the Kuwait Governorate... which could contribute to build up network facilities." The note concluded, "Do your best to facilitate this mission. Victory is ours." This final stage of robbery of the highest degree was viewed as a victory by Saddam and his henchmen. Following the liberation of Kuwait on February 26, 1991, Kuwait began the process of rebuilding and recovery from the Iraqi occupation. The plunder of Kuwait's resources was a sort of modern scorched earth campaign



Kuwait Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Municipality Affairs Dr. Fadhil al-Safar (on left) August 2nd at National Memorial in Kuwait

that left over 700 oil wells burning and millions of gallons of oil dumped into the Persian Gulf and included the organized destruction and looting of educational, scientific, and cultural institutions and landmarks such as the Kuwait Towers and the Kuwait National Museum. UNESCO labeled the actions of the Iraqi forces, many of whom were acting in accordance with strict orders from the highest levels of leadership, as a "premeditated, preplanned devastation." Today's Kuwait is a modern, expensive, consumer driven state with clean streets and modern, high rise buildings and reliable basic services. The scars of the tragic events of 1990-1991 are only outwardly available when they have been intentionally left in place for the purpose of remembrance, or where immortalized in war era photographs displayed in places such as the Kuwait Towers or the Sheraton hotel.

Nineteen years after the Iraqi invasion, Kuwaitis remember the Iraqi invasion all too well as the most calamitous event in their nation's history. While Kuwait has visibly recovered, the events of 1990-1991 are undoubtedly etched into the Kuwaiti national consciousness. The book is not yet closed on this war. Years ago, 605 Kuwaitis abducted during the Iraqi occupation were still unaccounted for. After the removal of the Saddam regime in Iraq, the bodies of over 200 of these missing Kuwaitis were found buried in Iraq, though over 300 remain unaccounted for. A close look into the Kuwaiti reflections on the nation's recent tragedy can be found at the Kuwait House of the National Memorial, the museum dedicated primarily to the events of 1990-1991. A tour of this modest, but nonetheless impressive and informative site, can teach a visitor a great deal about Kuwaiti perceptions of the war and all parties involved.

The Kuwait House of the National Memorial, also known as Beit al-Watani (the shortened Arabic form of its proper name), briefly addresses Kuwait's pre-war history and asserts Kuwait's historical existence as a geographic unit distinct from what is present-day Iraq. It then presents an account of the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, and its subse-

quent liberation, placing a great deal of emphasis on both the criminality of the Iraqi regime's actions and the steadfast opposition to Iraqi opposition by the Kuwaiti people and the Kuwaiti resistance forces. Interestingly, the Iraqi people are not vilified. It seems that efforts have been taken to show sympathy with the Iraqi people who suffered as a consequence of Saddam's wars, as footage is shown of refugees crossing Iraq's borders with Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia and, later, Saddam's use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians is depicted and condemned. This, among other atrocities including the use of chemical weapons on Iran and the torture and execution of Kuwaitis, is featured in a hall entitled "The Iraqi Regime Crimes – Mother of all Crimes". Rather than unfairly indicting the Iraqi people for the events of 1990-1991, Beit al-Watani seems more concerned with proving time and time again the criminal nature of Saddam Hussein and his willing accomplices. New exhibits celebrate the capture of Saddam and picture Iraqis celebrating the downfall of Saddam's regime and, later, the news of the dictator's arrest. The head of a large Saddam's efforts in Kuwait at erasing the identity of a nation are not unique, even for him, as the invasion of Kuwait followed his Anfal campaign of genocide against Iraq's Kurdish people by just a few years. Those cognizant of Saddam's Arabization campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan will be unsurprised at the means ordered by the despot in his efforts to Iraqify Kuwait. Just as the province of Kirkuk was remained Ta'mim ("Nationalization" in Arabic), various places throughout Kuwait were renamed to express their new Iraqi identity, bearing names such as Saddam and Rashid (after Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph credited by many for the flourishing of Baghdad). It is no coincidence that the same man who directed the Anfal campaign, Ali Hassan al-Majid, was put installed as the military governor of Kuwait following the invasion. Furthermore, the organized plunder of Kuwait is completely in keeping with the character of the Saddam regime in its own systematic rape of Iraq and organized campaign of theft and neglect in regions

استخدام الغازات ضد الأكراد في حلبجة
 USING THE CHEMICAL GASES AGAINST THE KURDISTAN IN HALEBTCHA



Photos in memory of victims of chemical attacks in the Kurdish town of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan at National Memorial in Kuwait

Photo Courtesy Jeff Allan © Kurdish Herald 2009

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remain unaccounted for. A close look into the Kuwaiti reflections on the nation's recent tragedy can be found at the Kuwait House of the National Memorial, the museum dedicated primarily to the events of 1990-1991. A tour of this modest, but nonetheless impressive and informative site, can teach a visitor a great deal about Kuwaiti perceptions of the war and all parties involved.

The Kuwait House of the National Memorial, also known as Beit al-Watani (the shortened Arabic form of its proper name), briefly addresses Kuwait's pre-war history and asserts Kuwait's historical existence as a geographic unit distinct from what is present-day Iraq. It then presents an account of the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, and its subsequent liberation, placing a great deal of emphasis on both the criminality of the Iraqi regime's actions and the steadfast opposition to Iraqi opposition by the Kuwaiti people and the Kuwaiti resistance forces. Interestingly, the Iraqi people are not vilified. It seems that efforts have been taken to show sympathy with the Iraqi people who suffered as a consequence of Saddam's wars, as footage is shown of refugees crossing Iraq's borders with Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia and, later, Saddam's use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians is depicted and condemned. This, among other atrocities including the use of chemical weapons on Iran and the torture and execution of Kuwaitis, is featured in a hall entitled "The Iraqi Regime Crimes – Mother of all Crimes".

Rather than unfairly indicting the Iraqi people for the events of 1990-1991, Beit al-Watani seems more concerned with proving time and time again the criminal nature of Saddam Hussein and his willing accomplices. New exhibits celebrate the capture of Saddam and picture Iraqis celebrating the downfall of Saddam's regime and, later, the news of the dictator's arrest. The head of a large statue of Saddam rests on the floor of the museum, peering out of a replica of the "spider hole" in which Saddam was found on the day of his capture. On August 2 of this year, a special event was held at the presentation center of Beit al-Watani commemorating the anniversary of the invasion. This event featured a film on the war followed by a play which depicted different scenes from the war including one event which was a common experience for Kuwaiti families under Iraqi occupation – the arbitrary capture of young Kuwaiti men and their subsequent torture and execution. Following the play, young Kuwaitis wearing a variety of the costumes depicting people from all walks of life sang patriotic songs and, one by one, stepped forward and loudly proclaimed in Arabic, "I love Kuwait." The event was as much a remembrance of the terrible events of the invasion and occupation as a demonstration of patriotism. This event was attended by Dr. Fadhil al-Safar, Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Municipality Affairs, a senior representative of the Kuwaiti government.

Nineteen years and many thousands of deaths later, the darkest day of Kuwaiti history cannot be forgotten as it also proved to be a watershed in the modern history of the Middle East. For the first time ever, the world was unable to ignore the brutality of Saddam and his regime. Indeed, for the first time, an Arab country was harshly victimized by Saddam, just years after he waged a war against Iran which he claimed was fought in defense of the entire Arab world. Today, partially as a result of Saddam's ill-fated adventure in Kuwait, the Middle East is a very different place. One must hope that other dictators and murderers in the region will soon also face justice, and that the lessons of the 1990-1991 war and its legacy can be studied and learned from by many in the years to come. 🌸

TURKEY AND THE PKK: EDGING CLOSER TO PEACE OR A ROAD MAP GOING NOWHERE?

By Thomas James

There are many wars that seem intractable; wars in which whole generations grow up knowing nothing else. The Troubles of Northern Ireland was one such war, but in 1998 that conflict did find an end, and today Northern Ireland rarely grabs headlines in Britain or the rest of the world.

Another long-lasting and even deadlier war is that between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Lasting 25 years now, it has cost the lives of tens of thousands and left hundreds of thousands of others displaced and destitute.

It is a war of identity and ethnicity that apparently neither side is capable of winning. Begun in 1984 as a reaction to the second-class status of Turkey's large Kurdish population, it continues to rumble on. While the PKK point to human rights abuses and to the denial of ethnic and cultural rights by Turkey, they and all perceived sympathizers are in return vilified for alleged attacks on Turkish military and civilian targets.

As of late, there are whisperings that some sort of solution to the "Kurdish question", the root cause of this war, may be at hand. Turkish newspapers are now more than ever dominated by debate on the Kurdish question, and for once, some commentators can see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Current hopes rest on a thaw in attitudes from both sides. Turkey and its current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), are coming around to the idea of a non-military solution. Turkish President Abdullah Gul, formerly a high ranking member of the AKP, has spoken of an "historic opportunity" to resolve the Kurdish question and move the country away from its past. Over the past few days, certain features of the government's initiative have apparently been leaked to the Turkish press, though the government is apparently still working out the details of this plan.

On the other side of the fence, and deep in the mountainous border areas of south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and west-

ern Iran, the PKK seems increasingly keen to take the initiative to engage in an honest dialogue with Turkey in hopes of reaching a solution. At the same time, the PKK strongly rejects any attempt to find a solution that does not include input from the PKK or its supporters.

On April 13 of this year, the PKK entered into a unilateral ceasefire, pledging not to launch offensive operations. In an interview with this writer, Bozan Tekin, a PKK Vice President and Spokesman for Murat Karayilan – the acting military leader of the PKK – said that the ceasefire is an attempt to "open ways for a peaceful and democratic solution for the Kurdish people." The ceasefire has now been twice extended, most recently from July 15 to September. A PKK statement of July 15 explained that this was to give time to "prepare the ground"

Graffiti on the walls of the Kurdish city, Diyarbakir, to a roadmap for a roadmap to peace to be issued by their imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan.



Speaking from the Qendil Mountains on the Iraqi side of the Iran-Iraq border, Tekin also explained that the huge success of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), accused by Turkish politicians as being close to the PKK, in Turkish provincial elections this past March had "demonstrated the will of the Kurdish people to find a democratic solution to the conflict". Emboldened by the DTP successes, Tekin added, "The solution of the Kurdish question is very near, yet the other parties have to sense this".



On the Turkish side, there is also an increasing will to solve its Kurdish question and in recent years steps have been taken to reverse an institutionalised policy that left Kurds deeply marginalized. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's vision of modern Turkey allowed little to no room for recognition of the cultural identity of the country's significant Kurdish population, and a number of Kurdish resistance movements were formed following the founding of Ataturk's republic. The PKK, which was officially established in 1978, is the latest, and perhaps most significant incarnation of the Kurdish protest movement in modern Turkey.

Turkey's political and military establishment has long been suspicious of Kurdish political aspirations for autonomy or independence, either from within Turkish borders or from the Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq or Syria. Indeed, Turkey has even viewed Kurdish movements outside of the national borders as targeting Turkey itself. The post-Ottoman battle for newly-born Turkey's territorial integrity left many Turks deeply sensitive to the possibility of Kurdish self-rule or independence, and thus any negotiations with Kurdish rebels draw fierce criticism from a significant portion of Turkey's ruling establishment and population.

Recent statements from state officials including Army Chief of General Staff, Ilker Basburg, suggest that the Turkish government realizes that the Kurdish question cannot be solely resolved through military means. Yet the violence continues on both sides and the government has refused to open talks with the DTP, despite their clear support from ordinary Kurds, most recently seen in Turkey's nationwide municipal elections. Years of bitter conflict have resulted in

deep recriminations and suspicions on both sides. Thus, any resolution will be painfully difficult to come by for many on either side of the conflict. If the Kurds choose to push for a road map to a solution authored by Abdullah Ocalan, it may be unacceptable for many Turks regardless of the content.

Currently serving a life sentence as the sole inmate on the Turkish island of Imrali, Ocalan is much reviled figure among Turks and is often referred to as a "baby killer".

There has recently been a great deal of talk in the Turkish press of the government pre-empting Mr. Ocalan's road map with a plan drawn up by the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). That said, despite increasing optimism, it is important to note how far apart the two sides remain and how the years of often brutal violence have created a climate of deep distrust.

During the interview with this writer in May, Bozan Tekin outlined the conditions for peace and the laying down of PKK arms. Tekin listed the PKK demands as including freedom for Abdullah Ocalan, freedom of identity for Kurds, democratic autonomy within Turkey "on the Basque model", and of an end to the village guard system set up by Turkey to combat the PKK.

Recent statements from PKK officials confirm these conditions, and analysts think that it is likely that Ocalan's forthcoming roadmap will be broadly based on these. However, his freedom is unlikely to be granted, and the prospect of democratic autonomy will not wash well in a country seemingly obsessed with territorial integrity.

Indeed, one US academic and Kurdish affairs expert, Dr. Michael Gunter, recently commented that despite progress, "Turkey remains too far removed from being ready fully to satisfy what the Kurds ultimately want and that is recognition of the Kurds as co-stakeholders in modern Turkey."

Dr. Gunter expressed his doubts on the roadmap, and speculated that any progress would be "incremental" at

best. News of the extended ceasefire and Ocalan's roadmap has gained a mixed reception in Turkey, but many are cautiously optimistic.

Ayhan Bilgen, editor at Gunluk newspaper and spokesman at the Turkey Peace Parliament, greeted the news positively, noting that Ocalan may be able to help encourage people to lay down their arms. However, he also offered a note of caution, warning: "People should not expect these problems that have festered for years to be solved with a magic wand."

Despite the ceasefire, there continues to remain some skirmishes between rebel group and the Turkish military. Some view this as an indication that the rebel organization may not be entirely keen on halting violence. Indeed, an ex-PKK member stated that a peace deal remained far off, as some PKK elements were committed to continuing the armed struggle. However, PKK leaders contend that the rebels are acting in pure self-defense, and Karayilan apologized for the deaths that have resulted from the skirmishes in a recent interview this year.

Nonetheless, judging by the protracted history of the conflict, it seems that although the road to peace has begun, it is likely to be a long one, with many setbacks along the way. 🌅

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TURKEY

How the Kurdish Struggle is playing out at the European Court of Human Rights

By Sayran Sulevani

The Turkish government's latest push for EU membership has been accompanied by renewed interest in the Kurds. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently announced his government's work on a 'Kurdish initiative' expected to be released later this month. In a public statement, he urged opposition parties, NGOs, academics and the media to take part in the process of national reconciliation. However, the apparent correlation between reform efforts and accession ambitions has left many human rights advocates skeptical of the sincerity of these acts. The reform movement, spurred most recently by the EU accession process, has collided head-on with the nationalist political establishment and a deeply entrenched status quo. The result is a contradictory space within which Kurdish human rights activities have both flourished and floundered. One arena where this clash has played out is at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

In 1987, the Turkish government made a formal application for EU membership and recognized the right of individual petitions to the ECtHR. Within six months, government officials declared a state of emergency in the predominantly Kurdish southeast of the country. During the region's fifteen-year period of emergency rule, hundreds of thousands of people were driven from their homes, thousands of villages were razed and reports of extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, disappearances and torture skyrocketed. Under the Emergency Law, all government action in the region took place outside the reach of the national constitution.

When EU membership became a tangible goal in the late 1990s, the judgements of the ECtHR gained significant political weight in the reform process. Turkey passed a 2002 EU harmonization law, which amended the Penal Code to allow for retrial in light of ECtHR decisions. Similarly, Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution was amended to allow for retrial in light of ECtHR decisions. Turkey's latest push for EU membership has been accompanied by renewed interest in the Kurds. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently announced his government's work on a 'Kurdish initiative' expected to be released later this month. In a public statement, he urged opposition parties, NGOs, academics and the media to take part in the process of national reconciliation. However, the apparent correlation between reform efforts and accession ambitions has left many human rights advocates skeptical of the sincerity of these acts. The reform movement, spurred most recently by the EU accession process, has collided head-on with the nationalist political establishment and a deeply entrenched status quo. The result is a contradictory space within which Kurdish human rights activities have both flourished and floundered. One arena where this clash has played out is at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan (left) meets with pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party leader, Mr. Ahmet Turk (right)

In 1987, the Turkish government made a formal application for EU membership and recognized the right of individual petitions to the ECtHR. Within six months, government officials declared a state of emergency in the predominantly Kurdish southeast of the country. During the region's fifteen-year period of emergency rule, hundreds of thousands of people were driven from their homes, thousands of villages were razed and reports of extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, disappearances and torture skyrocketed. Under the Emergency Law, all government action in

Kurdish rights activists from the Kurdish Human Rights Project on a fact-finding mission near the village of Kirkpinar in Dicle, Diyarbakir. Residents were forcibly displaced in 1993

Photo Courtesy Kurdish Human Rights Project



the accession process began and the ECtHR's jurisprudence has informed many of Turkey's legislative reforms. However, the Turkish government's poor record of implementing reforms has left many human rights advocates wondering about the ECtHR's true impact.

Reforms Spurred by ECtHR Rulings

The ECtHR held Turkey to be in violation of the ECHR in a series of internally displaced persons (IDP) cases in the 1990s. In *Akdivar and Others v. Turkey* (1996), local security forces were held responsible for burning down the houses of the applicants. In another case, *Dogan and Others v. Turkey* (2004), the ECtHR held that no effective remedies existed for Turkey's displaced persons and introduced the idea of a governmental compensation scheme. As a result of the Dogan and Akdivar line of cases and increasing pressure from the EU to compensate and secure the return of IDPs, the Turkish government enacted compensation legislation in 2004.

The importance of freedom of expression in a democratic society was emphasized by the ECtHR in *Incal v. Turkey* (1998). The court stressed that the right of expression is especially important to political parties and that any action to restrict their speech should be closely scrutinized by courts. The Turkish government liberalized its laws on freedom of expression through a series of EU harmonization packages in 2002 and 2003. The Constitution was amended in 2001 to remove the prohibition against using a language prohibited by law and the Law on Political parties was amended in 2003 to make it more difficult to dissolve political parties.

Increased awareness of rights

The accession process has seen an increase in the number of minorities in Turkey seeking to enforce their rights, both before national courts and the ECtHR. In 1999, when Turkey became an official candidate for EU accession, 653 petitions were submitted to the ECtHR. In 2008, the number swelled to 3,706. Between 1999 and 2008, Turkey had the most decisions delivered against it of all 47 member states, with 1,652 decisions in which at least one violation was found. The success of the applications has been

the region took place outside the reach of the national constitution.

When EU membership became a tangible goal in the late 1990s, the judgments of the ECtHR gained significant political weight in the reform process. Turkey passed a 2002 EU harmonization law, which amended the Penal Code to allow for retrial in light of ECtHR decisions. Similarly, Article 90 of the Turkish constitution was amended in 2004 to give the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR direct effect and supremacy over Turkish national law. Although

Turkey has improved its execution of ECtHR judgements in recent years, the European Commission's 2008 report on Turkey's progress towards accession noted with disapproval that further legislative reforms to bring Turkey into line with the ECHR have slowed almost to a standstill.

The European Commission looks to ECtHR decisions and their enforcement in Turkey as a measure of Turkey's progress toward its accession goals. As such, ECtHR decisions have gained considerable persuasive power in Turkey since



Fragments of human skull and bones found during excavation in Kurdish cities of Silopi and Cizre. Crimes likely perpetrated by JITEM, an illegal unit formed within the Turkish gendarmerie.

Photo Courtesy Today's Zaman Online



Kurds protest for their rights; some holding signs that write, "Allow Kurdish to become an official language"

quite high. Of the 264 judgements delivered regarding Turkey in 2008, only one resulted in a finding that no violations had occurred.

The availability of ECtHR decisions in Turkish, improvements in enforcement and decreased fear of repercussions for approaching the ECtHR have all contributed to the increased volume of applications. In particular, applicants outside urban centers, often assisted by individual lawyers rather than human rights organizations, have been increasingly petitioning the ECtHR.

Early ECtHR litigation in Turkey provided a method of officially documenting the sheer volume of abuses occurring in the country's south-east. More recently, organizations such as the Istanbul-based Foundation on Social and Legal Studies (*Toplumsal ve Hukuk Araştırmaları Vakfı-TOHAV*) have begun to engage in strategic test case litigation both at the national and international levels, focusing on issues including restrictions on the Kurdish letters q, w and x.

Implementation issues and limits of the court

Clearly, progress has been made in Turkey in the form of wide ranging reforms and growing public rights awareness. However, the government's dismal record of implementation has left the impression that much of the reforms are in name only.

As a result of the legislation ostensibly enacted to compensate IDPs, some 1,500 home destruction cases pending before the ECtHR were rendered inadmissible. In the 2006 decision *İçyer v Turkey*, the ECtHR held that the new compensation scheme was an effective domestic remedy that had to be attempted before applications could petition the ECtHR. However, the work of the commissions quickly deteriorated after the İçyer decision, with reports of drastically reduced settlement offers, inconsistent damage assessments and exclusion of applicants from the scheme.

Despite liberalizing reforms, free speech continues to be limited in Turkey. The new penal code, which entered into force in 2005, contains further provisions limiting non-violent expression. Several high profile closure cases against political parties led the European Commission to observe in its 2008 Progress Report, "The current legal provisions applicable to political parties do not provide political actors with an adequate level of protection from the state's interference in their freedom of association and freedom of expression." As a result of the prohibitions in the new penal code and provisions introduced under Anti-Terror legislation in 2006, prosecutions of non-violent opinions increased between 2005 and 2008.

In July, noted human rights activist Leyla Zana was convicted of disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization for a speech made abroad and sentenced to 15 months in prison. She had already been sentenced to 10 years following a similar conviction in 2008. Similarly, local politician Orhan Miroğlu was convicted for speaking Kurdish during the 2007 election speeches, a decision that he has taken to the ECtHR. Unfortunately, the constitutional amendments on language prohibition did not extend to political parties.

In theory, these cases can be appealed to the ECtHR; however, the court's large backlog and limited resources means that petitions will likely not be heard for an additional five to ten years. Further, recent reforms designed to address the backlog have imposed strict admissibility rules which will deprive many petitioners of a decision based on the merits of their individual cases.

Despite concerns, accession is a driving force for change

The EU remains deeply divided about Turkey's accession bid. According to recent opinion polls, the Turkish public is increasingly skeptical as well. Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), however, has renewed its commitment to accession in a series of strong public statements. Indeed, the government has roundly rejected proposals tabled by Germany and France for a limited partnership with the EU.

The AKP maintains that reforms will continue with or without the accession process. Clearly, the government's recent behavior suggests that it has an interest in addressing the Kurdish question. In addition to recent public announcements regarding a 'Kurdish initiative', the government has expressed an interest in consulting with academia, civil society and politicians. On August 5th, Prime Minister Erdoğan met with Ahmet Turk, leader of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party for the first time – albeit as an AKP member and not as prime minister – reportedly in an effort to bolster unity. However, the direct correlation between the pace of reforms and the government's accession zeal have advocates concerned about what a breakdown in Turkey-EU relations could mean for the Kurds.

The rapid changes that have taken place in Turkey have been driven largely by the EU accession process. However, the reform process has been resisted by the political establishment and implementation has been slow and uneven. Given that opposing poles of reform and resistance are still strong in Turkey, actual change will, in all likelihood, continue to be slow and uneven. Despite these difficulties, the process has introduced immense incentives for solving a human rights problem previously rendered invisible by longstanding government policies. Ultimately, a space has been created for people to engage in a sort of rights discourse with the state. Approaching the ECtHR has proved to be one method of entering the discussion.

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TESEV

Re-Conceptualizing Internal Displacement In Turkey

by Natsumi Ajiki

The involvement of various well-established civil organizations in the struggle for a solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey is not frequently discussed, but nonetheless it is a significant part of the issue. One such organization involved in these efforts is the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), has worked with Kurdish internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Turkey following human rights and democratizing reforms. While TESEV is well respected among foreign think tanks, civil societies and governments – cooperating organizations include the World Bank, the European Commission, Global Dialogue, the Brookings Institute, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the embassies of Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands – domestic support is still modest, despite the increased urgency in the need to finding a solution to Turkey's Kurdish question.

TESEV is one of Turkey's leading independent research organizations, and has published numerous policy recommendations on Turkey's most problematic and controversial issues, including minority rights, Turkish-Armenian relations, and Cyprus, in the effort to promote the role of civil society and improve the democratic standards since 1994. After extensive two-year academic research and field works in the provinces of Diyarbakir, Batman, Istanbul and Hakkari, TESEV expanded its work on Kurdish IDPs and southeast Turkey's socio-economic developments since 2004. TESEV is the first organization that examines the Turkish case within the global framework of internal displacement. TESEV emphasizes the importance of hearing the victims' stories in their own words in order to find about the conditions under which millions of citizens were displaced, and IDPs' experiences during and after the process of being displaced. Based on the evaluation of IDPs' problems from legal, political, socioeconomic, demographic and psychological perspectives, TESEV disseminates policy alternatives.

While the exact number of internally displaced Kurds in Turkey is still a matter of serious controversy, it is fair to say that hundreds of thousands of people have lost their property and cultural homeland, both forcefully and somewhat voluntarily, as a result of the armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish forces since 1984. Many



Dilek Kurban, JD speaks at a conference “Internal Displacement in Turkey: Government Responses” in Van organized by TESEV on 27 June 2009

of these IDPs fled from eastern and southeastern Turkey to the western provinces of the country. Nevertheless, there is little social, economic and political support or rehabilitation service for these Kurdish migrants who now live far from their ancestral homeland.

When approaching the issue of Kurdish IDPs, one comes to realize that it cannot be adequately addressed without revising the conventional approach to identity, citizenship and democracy in Turkey. For instance, TESEV's Program Officer, Dilek Kurban states in the TESEV publication *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration* that the Turkish state has knowingly minimized both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of its reports on Kurdish IDPs, and thus, the issue has received little attention. Furthermore, the same publication states that the conventional interpretation of internal displacement through official state ideology has created a great obstacle to the solution of the Kurdish question. Internal displacement in Turkey is often referred to "*yerinden olma*," (the literal translation of which is "loosing one's place") which implies to a process without an actor undertaking or causing it. Such conceptual framework about Kurdish IDPs is problematic. TESEV along with other NGOs working on the issue insists that "*yerinden edilme*," (the literal translation of which is "losing one's place due to more than a mere factor") is the right term for the majority of cases within the Kurdish displacement because the latter term posits a social and political agent that made people displaced. Studies performed by TESEV and other human rights organizations have verified the fact that the majority of internal displacement occurred due to the Turkish military officers' pressure on villagers to either become a village guard or abandon the village. Nevertheless, the Turkish government has long portrayed the internal displacement of Kurds as taking place for the sake of national security. Hence, the Turkish government legitimates the occurrence of internal displacement via its preferred terminology of "*yerinden olma*" and consistently denies the occurrence of village evictions at the hand of the Turkish military in addition to the PKK. The official manipulations of both data and discourse are built upon the perception that the state has no fault in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of citizens. TESEV urges to re-conceptualize the problem of internal displacement and IDPs' citizenship rights and sees the government as the main political agent to tackle the issue while the civil society organizations monitor and actively participate in the process.

In addition to macro-level policy suggestions, TESEV also offers micro-scale solutions to different aspects of the Kurdish question. The majority of Kurdish IDPs suffer from psychological trauma, little access to their assets and lack of necessary skills to integrate themselves into an urban economy. In order to alleviate the conditions of IDPs, TESEV has promoted participatory models in Batman and Hakkari in conjunction with local governorships

and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In each case, TESEV emphasized an interdisciplinary and locally ingrained grassroots approach to build social rehabilitation projects for both migrants and returnees. Victims of forced migrants along with local municipalities, trade unions and professionals in healthcare, law and education have worked together to improve their situations. TESEV also facilitated numerous workshops and conferences and opened new channels for policy-oriented public dialogue. Each participatory model has faced both success and failures, but has, either way, created momentum to confront its past for the improvement of the future.

TESEV's most difficult task, according to Project Officer Serkan Yolacan, is to reach people and the bureaucratic establishment to generate sincere public debates regarding the settlement of the long-standing Kurdish question. Nevertheless, TESEV continues to strive to facilitate public and closed conferences with the participation of representatives from political parties, NGOs and local governments and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). TESEV also plans to hold regional meetings in western Turkey and the Black Sea region where majority of the population is secular-nationalist and nationalist. Parallel to the Kurdish initiatives from the government and other direct participants in the conflict, a civil organization like TESEV can also help reach a solution by gradually making it possible for the Kurds in Turkey to become legitimate members of the state who can work on many levels to reach a solution.

Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation
(TESEV) WWW.TESEV.ORG.TR

Combating Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan

As the first organization in Iraqi Kurdistan to open a women's shelter, WADI is an authority on women's issues in the region, an area of great concern to any activist or observer concerned with true democratization and respect for human rights. When the organization's "Nawa center" opened in 1999, the social acceptance for such an institution was scarce, and the group's volunteers faced daily challenges of various types. In some people's eyes, women's shelters are seen as institutions that break up homes, and the female beneficiary is believed by those people to be bringing shame upon her family. Furthermore, even the employees of the organization have faced ridicule for their efforts. Mr. Falah Murad Khan, the director of WADI's office in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan, laughingly recalls an incident where he was phoned by an anonymous caller telling him that he should be ashamed that, as a man, he was working on "feminine" affairs. This was after Mr. Khan appeared on a radio show talking about WADI's efforts to fight female genital mutilation.



Anti-FGM Movement Logo

In a region plagued by various issues of gender discrimination, WADI has devoted much of its efforts as of late to one particular, serious issue: female genital mutilation. This practice involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, which more specifically includes partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora. This painful surgery is customarily performed on women usually between the ages of 4 and 12, without regard for medical concerns or sanitation. The procedure itself is customarily done by a woman using a razor or knife, and no anesthetic is provided. Following the cutting, the woman's bleeding wound is covered with ash and sometimes icy water is used in an attempt to control bleeding. The victim of this procedure may indeed bleed to death or contract a potential lethal infection.

This phenomenon has been widely discussed over the last few years in Kurdistan; although no one has ever provided any real data regarding the number of Kurdish women who have been victimized in this awful way. This changed in 2003, when WADI sent out teams of workers to knock on the door of every house and ask the women if they had been "circumcised". This bold idea bore fruits, as the different teams discovered disturbing tendencies among the rural population of Kurdistan and then developed a plan of action to address this issue.

WADI assembled teams consisting of specially trained employees and assigned them to different areas such as Raniya/Qaladize, Germiyan, Erbil and Sulaymaniya. These teams, consisting of only women, traveled around villages and knocked on doors, seeking to inform the people about genital mutilation. The first year of the project was dedicated to using data obtained to map the various areas that have been

specifically affected by trends of female genital mutilation. The teams began contacting women in certain villages, gathering them to view a film produced by the organization about genital mutilation. The film is a sort of documentary where doctors and religious scholars speak of negative effects of genital mutilation. The doctor in the film speaks about the damage done to women from a medical point-of-view, while the Islamic cleric states that it is non-Islamic to circumcise girls. There are also women in the film, victims of genital mutilation, who share their painful experiences.

After viewing the film, there was time for a discussion among the women, and according to WADI's employees, some of them realized that genital mutilation was a bad thing and stated that would not put their own daughters through it.

The following year the WADI teams went back to the same homes and spoke to the same women that they had met who were shown the film, with the purpose of finding out if the women had indeed spared their daughters from circumcision, or if they had succumbed to pressure from the rest of the village. The film would be shown again, but now the WADI teams would concentrate specifically on the unconvinced women. The third year, the teams yet again went back to the villages they were assigned to the first year and spoke with the same women from the last two years. From 2005-2008, the WADI teams visited a total of 84 villages.

As the American-led war against Saddam Hussein approached in 2003, the WADI organization trained groups of workers to provide immediate assistance to internally displaced women and children as a result of the war. When it became obvious that the war did not impact women and children in the Kurdistan autonomous region, the organization switched its focus and traveled to various villages to see what sort of aid women were in need of. This is when the teams discovered that females in many of Kurdistan's rural areas had similar stories of post-circumcision complications. Many of the village women had been genitally mutilated, and reported that, as a result, they suffered physically and sexually.

A major long-term - indeed lifelong - complication of so-called circumcision is that women lose a sense of sexual desire. Unfortunately, not everyone sees this as a negative consequence. Mr. Khan explained, "This is not seen as a problem, as sex is viewed as being for the enjoyment of the man only."

In 2004, the teams of WADI spoke to 1,500 women in the Germiyan region, and 907 of them admitted to being victims of female genital mutilation. At the same time, the team assigned to the Erbil region discovered that 380 of the 440 women they spoke to subject to the practice.

Four female employees of WADI present during the meeting in Sulaymaniyah told various stories about the people they met and discussions they had during the course of their work. During their many meetings with the women of villages, they discovered that some women were mutilated during their wedding day. They had also been told that some women had been mutilated so badly that parts of their inner thighs had been sliced off in the process.

One would hope that the local government would be the first in line in addressing the serious issue of female genital mutilation. Sadly, according to Mr. Khan, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs were, at first, very open to collaboration with WADI, but after all the plans were set, they withdrew their support. According to Mr. Khan, the Ministry of Health claimed that the statistics presented by WADI were inaccurate, and it was impossible that so many females could have been subjected to genital

mutilation. Mr. Khan explained that the sudden reluctance of the ministries to cooperate with WADI might be because the government sees this sort of work as possibly generating bad publicity for the region.

Regardless of the difficulties facing those who seek to combat female genital mutilation, there is actually a glimmer of hope. The WADI teams have discovered that, after fighting genital mutilation for years, there is now, in some areas, a certain stigma attached to the practice. The younger generation, upon choosing a wife, will ask her if she has been "circumcised". If she has been, she becomes less desirable because now men know that a woman sexual urges decrease substantially as a result of this mutilation. Many men in the younger generation want their wife to enjoy sex as much as they do.

WADI is taking a special approach in tackling this serious societal problem, as, year-after-year, they work with the same people. The people who viewed the film about the genital mutilation were contacted the following year and the year after to see if they had "changed" their minds. This approach has the likely affect of giving those contacted a sense of importance and motivates them to be a more active part in this focused, individualized effort. At the same time, it provides for reliable data concerning the efficacy of WADI's approach to education on the issue of female genital mutilation. One will hope that they can continue in their efforts despite the



One would hope that the local government would be the first in line in addressing the serious issue of female genital mutilation. Sadly, according to Mr. Khan, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs were, at first, very open to collaboration with WADI, but after all the plans were set, they withdrew their support. According to Mr. Khan, the Ministry of Health claimed that the statistics presented by WADI were inaccurate, and it was impossible that so many females could have been subjected to genital mutilation. Mr. Khan explained that the sudden reluctance of the ministries to cooperate with WADI might be because the government sees this sort of work as possibly generating bad publicity for the region.

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LOCATION

GERMIYAN

31 SCHOOLS IN THE BORDERS OF BITWAN & PISHDER, BAUSAN & SHAQLAWA

RANIYA, QALADIZA

ERBIL

SULAIMANIYAH

TOTAL

Number of Schools

148

31

75

46

53

353

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SURVEY

3954

2317

1704

1903

730

10608

Victims of FGM

2408

2184

1659

1445

475

8171

% of total Pop.

61%

94%

97%

76%

65%

76%

WADI, translated from Kurdish by Haje Keli (c) Kurdish Herald 2009

various obstacles that lie in their way, and receive increased support from both governmental and non-governmental groups to expand their efforts. It would be a true victory for Kurdish society if the practice of female genital mutilation could soon become a thing of the past.

Unfortunately, not everyone sees this as a negative consequence. Mr. Khan explained, "This is not seen as a problem, as sex is viewed as being for the enjoyment of the man only."

In 2004, the teams of WADI spoke to 1,500 women in the Germiyan region, and 907 of them admitted to being victims of female genital mutilation. At the same time, the team assigned to the Erbil region discovered that 380 of the 440 women they spoke to subject to the practice.

Four female employees of WADI present during the meeting in Sulaymaniyah told various stories about the people they met and discussions they had during the course of their work. During their many meetings with the women of villages, they discovered that some women were mutilated during their wedding day. They had also been told that some women had been mutilated so badly that parts of their inner thighs had been sliced off in the process.

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WADI is taking a special approach in tackling this serious societal problem, as, year-after-year, they work with the same people. The people who viewed the film about the genital mutilation were contacted the following year and the year after to see if they had "changed" their minds. This approach has the likely affect of giving those contacted a sense of importance and motivates them to be a more active part in this focused, individualized effort. At the same time, it provides for reliable data concerning the efficacy of WADI's approach to education on the issue of female genital mutilation. One will hope that they can continue in their efforts despite the various obstacles that lie in their way, and receive increased support from both governmental and non-governmental groups to expand their efforts. It would be a true victory for Kurdish society if the practice of female genital mutilation could soon become a thing of the past. 🌺

In Memory of Aram Tigran... you will be missed

By Jeff Allan and Mehmet Fidan



The late Armenian singer, Aram Tigran

Photo Courtesy Jeff Allan © Kurdish Herald 2009

It was with great sadness that we heard the news of the passing of Aram Tigran, one of the most gifted contemporary Kurdish singers and musicians. Mr. Tigran, age 75, died on August 8, 2009 in Evangelismos General Hospital in Athens, Greece. His life story is indeed the story of a refugee and was dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Kurdish identity and, more specifically, culture and language.

Mr. Tigran was an ethnic Armenian and son of an Armenian Genocide survivor and native of Diyarbakir. He was born in Qamishlo, a predominantly Kurdish city in Syria, in 1934, and showed a great love and gift for music by the age of 9. By the age of 20, he was singing in Kurdish, Arabic, and Armenian. In 1966, he moved to Yerevan, Armenia, and worked for Yerevan Radio for 18 years. In 1995, he moved to Athens, Greece. During his 53 years music career, he composed hundreds of songs, including 230 Kurdish songs (in various dialects) and many in Arabic, Armenian, Turkish, Syriac, and Greek, and released has twelve albums. He was loved and respected by millions of Kurds and many of Kurdistan's most well known artists, and he took a keen interest

in helping young, promising musicians. Such was his influence on Kurdish music that, in 2005, a number of artists collaborated to produce an album dedicated to Mr. Tigran entitled Evina Aram (Love for Aram), in which they recorded their own versions of many of his most popular songs. Among the artists participating in this project were Gulistan, Rotinda, Xelil Xemgin, Xero Abbas and Diyar.

After obtaining Greek citizenship two years ago, he visited his ancestral homeland, seeing his parents' home city for the first time and later performing in both the Kurdish region for an audience of tens of thousands and later in Istanbul at a DTP-sponsored event. This year, he took part in Diyarbakir's 9th Culture and Arts Festival, but because of ill health, he was only able perform three Kurdish songs. He was the final performer at this year's Newroz celebration in Diyarbakir, where he sang in Kurdish and Turkish.

Rather than close this humble eulogy with our own additional words of tribute, we believe it is more fitting to end it with those of Mr. Tigran from a verse that he wrote after seeing Diyarbakir for the first time:

DI XEWNÊN ŞEVAN DE MIN BAWER NEDIKIR
BÎ ÇAVAN BIBÎNIM BAJARÊ DIYARBEKIR
ROJBAŞ DIYARBEKIR ME PIR BÊRIYA TE KIR
TE DERÎ LI ME VEKIR
TE ME ŞA KIR

IF I HAD DREAMED IT, I WOULD NOT HAVE BELIEVED IT
BEING ABLE TO SEE THE CITY OF DIYARBAKIR WITH MY OWN EYES
GOOD DAY DIYARBAKIR, I MISSED YOU VERY MUCH
YOU OPENED YOUR GATES TO US
YOU MADE US VERY HAPPY

Jeff Allan is co-founder of Kurdis Herald and a member of the editorial board. Mehmet Fidan holds a masters degree in Political Science from Brooklyn College and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the History Department of the City University of New York. His primary focus is the Kurdish Question in Turkey. He was previously a history teacher at Istanbul University for 7 years.

LETTERS OF THE DIASPORA

from the United Kingdom:

Aspiring Kurdish Linguist, Dentz Ekici

By Vahal A. Abdulrahman

Once heard that the majority of those who identify themselves as Kurds cannot claim fluency in Kurdish, and this shocking fact was recently confirmed to me by a young Kurdish linguist, Deniz Ekici, who currently is pursuing a Ph.D. at Exeter University's Center for Kurdish Studies. Fortunately, Mr. Ekici himself has devoted a significant portion of his 33 years of life focusing on the preservation and promotion of the Kurdish language and, by extension, the Kurdish identity.

Mr. Ekici explains that he believes that there is a direct link between national identity and language, and states that a significant number of Kurds, especially in Turkey, continue to use Turkish as their primary language at home. Years after the relaxing of restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language in Turkey, the most common excuse for the use of Turkish at home is that they can express themselves better in this language than in Kurdish. Furthermore, many parents believe that it is important for their children to have a proper command of the Turkish language to succeed in their classes, which are, of course, conducted exclusively in Turkish. He explained that some parents take the risk of drawing the wrath of authorities by giving their children Kurdish names, but when it is time to call their children into another room or explain something to them, they cannot help but use Turkish. His assessment of this insistence on the use of Turkish, rather than Kurdish, is that they do not have enough awareness about the significance of language and how that significance directly affects one's sense of belonging.

So how has this distinct, ancient language survived in Turkey? Mr. Ekici attributes its survival to Kurdish mothers, specifically in rural Kurdistan whose lack of direct communication with the Turkish state kept them in the Kurdish-speaking world. The efforts of Kurdish intellectuals in the Diaspora also play a role in the survival of the Kurdish language. Deniz Ekici is certainly one such intellectual. He has published a number of books on Kurmanci-Kurdish linguistics and contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Protest and Revolution in World History: 1600 to Present* by profiling Kurdish leaders and movements who have played a significant role in the history of the Kurdish people. Just this month, Mr. Ekici's latest work, an instructional CD-ROM on beginner level Kurmanci, was released by the University of Arizona Critical Languages Program and the UA Computer Assisted Language Instruction Group. This novel work presents an interactive approach to learning Kurdish and is equivalent to a one-year college course.

Fluent in both Kurmanci and Turkish, Mr. Ekici, through his own studies, now has a very strong command of the Sorani-Kurdish dialect as well. There is no doubt that Mr. Ekici is an emerging star in the world of Kurdish linguistics; a world sorely in need of dedicated intellectuals motivated by the idea of service to their nation.



Deniz Ekici, Aspiring Kurdish Linguist
- © Kurdish Herald 2009

When I asked Mr. Ekici where the best place was for one to pursue a study of Kurdish linguistics, he immediately said, "Iraqi Kurdistan", as it is the only place in the world where Kurdish is the first language. However, even inside KRG-administered borders, there is a linguistic division between speakers of the Kurmanci and Sorani dialects, with the overwhelming majority of residents speaking the latter. Kurmanci in Iraqi Kurdistan is nonetheless important because the governorate of Dohuk is home to some one million Kurmanci speakers, and the region as a whole is just south of Turkey's Kurdish region; a large area that is home to many millions of native speakers of the Kurmanci dialect.

When pressed on issues of dialect, Mr. Ekici does not believe that there should be any efforts by the KRG to impose Sorani or Kurmanci on people, as the two can and should coexist and be mastered, especially by the residents of Iraqi Kurdistan. As to the issue of mixing the two dialects, and proposed use of a unified dialect incorporating elements of both Kurmanci and Sorani (i.e., "Sormanci"), he rejects it on linguistic grounds, saying that such they possess distinct features in tactical, lexical, temporal and grammatical terms.

Iraqi Kurds' recent experience with self-rule has contributed tremendously to the advancement of the Kurdish language, but more needs to be done to ensure that Kurds use Kurdish as their language of preference, Mr. Ekici believes. He is greatly concerned with the minority Hewrami and Zazaki dialects being overtaken by Sorani and Kurmanci, respectively, and believes that immediate measures should be taken to ensure the survival of these Kurdish dialects. And, furthermore, more efforts must be made by millions of Kurds to promote the use of the more dominant dialects. Mr. Ekici's message to Diaspora Kurds is short and to the point: "Speak to your kids in Kurdish."

VOICE OF KURDISH GIRL

Is it not enough, such ignorance? These
rusty thoughts bring us sorrow
We Kurdish girls and women are neither
voiceless nor without honor
To live in freedom, we are made war-
riors by our existence
For liberty and equality, we are in con-
stant battle

We are intelligent and wise, not lazy nor
foolish
We will resist your command, do not
think we are fainthearted
We do not accept your force, we shall be
doves of peace
Brave, bold, and fearless, we are sun-
shine among clouds

Success of Kurdish women, for us it is
notable
Why show discontent, disbelief and be
doleful?
The struggle of women has become
known to the world
Is it due to your pride you refuse to be
proud?

Or is it so-called honor that has become
what has torn our hearts
Honor is a fine excuse only for those
who slay and take part
They spread these habits for their inter-
ests and pleasure
Where is your heart and your con-
science? This nation is being withered

Honor is neither woman nor man, honor
is in only this land
Honor is in hands of our common foe, so
enough with your bigotry
Male and Female alike, must together
share a free home
Until when must I say, a horse cannot
live alone?

DENGÊ KEÇA KURD

Gelo bese pašketin, ji hizrêt
jengî dil tengîn
Em keç û jinê Kurda, ne bê
rûmet û bê dengîn
Ji bû jiyana serbest, şerkerîn
em deng bi zengîn
Bu azadî wek hevî, em tim
bi hawar û cengîn

Em zana û pisporîn, ne
lawaz û ne zarokîn
Ber singê te dê girîn, hizir
neke tirsinûkîn
Zorîyê pesind nakeyn, ji bû
aştiyê kevokîn
Çak û çeleng û çespan, nava
ewran da em rûkîn

Serkeftina keça Kurd, ji bo
me ew serfirazî
Çima hemberî keçan, bê
bawerîn û ne razî?
Xebata keça Kurdi, li cihan
deng da bi gazî
Yan bû we kêmatî ye, hûn bi
me bibin şanazî?

Yan jî gelo keç namûse?
Lew ta nûke dil let lete
Yên bi keç kojîyê mest,
namûs bu wan xoş hêcete
Bû berjewendî yên xu, belav
kirî ev edete
Ka we dil? Ka we derun? We
paş êxist ev milete

Namûs ne keç u ne kur,
namûsa me تنها xake
Me namûs di dest dujmin,
bes li me rakin hîlake
Nêr û mê herdo wek hev,
serbest bijîn eve çake
Gelo ta kengî bêjim, hespe
tine tozê nake!



Kurdish poet, Perwer Shushi

Poetry & Art Feature: Voice of the Kurdish Girl - Dengê Keça Kurd by Perwer Shushi
Kurdish Herald publishes Poetry & Art from featured Kurdish artists and writers. In this issue, Kurdish poet, Perwer Shushi, writes a tribute to the Kurdish female and for the cause of gender equality. The piece entitled, "Voice of the Kurdish Girl", is Perwer Shushi's latest work.