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Mr. Mofak Salman  
12, Village Close  
Kilbreck, Stamullen  
Co-Meath, Ireland  
Tel: 00 353 1 841 6676

[Email: msalman@eircom.net](mailto:msalman@eircom.net)

## **The current situation of the Indigenous Turkmen of Iraq**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson

Honorable delegates, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Mofak *Salman*, I am honoured today to have been granted this opportunity to partake in the twenty-fourth session, Protection of Human Rights and Working Group on Indigenous Populations. My objective is to draw your attention to the current situation of the indigenous Turkmen<sup>1</sup> in Iraq. Although their history traces them to one of the oldest people of the modern Iraq, they have been and continue to be systematically deprived of their basic human rights and ethnic survival in the region.

Over the centuries, Turkmen played a constructive role in Iraq defending the country against foreign invaders and contributing to the civilization of the society. Turkmen lived in harmony with all ethnic groups around them but since Iraqi independence from the British Mandate in 1932, the government of Iraq has failed to implement a democratic and pluralistic constitution and government, one that endorses, protects and secures the right of the Turkmen nation. Since 1932, the Turkmen began to experience a different situation. They were removed from the administration, pushed into isolation and ignored. Then, their fundamental human rights in culture and education were violated by the closure of their schools.

The monarchy era that lasted from 1932 to 1958 saw the removal of the Turkmen from government posts and their deportation to Arab populated areas. The suppression of the Turkmen peaked in 1946 when they were subjected to what is historically known as the Gawer Baghi massacre.

Such tragedy did not change after the revolution, which took place in 1958. Many Turkmen intellectuals and leaders were brutally assassinated, especially during the Kerkuk massacre committed by the Kurds on 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1959.

Commencing in 1968, the Ba'ath party rule, opened one of the darkest chapters in Turkmen history. During much of the 1970s and 1980s, the Turkmen and Kurd populations were forcibly relocated in order to bring about a change in the demographic nature of northern Iraq. A policy that is commonly referred to as *Arabisation* ("*ta'rib*") was invoked by the Iraqi government programme where Arab families were resettled from southern Iraq to replace and dilute the Turkmen population. Many Turkmen and Kurdish villages were bulldozed, and new Arab settlements were built nearby. Turkmen were forced to change their national identity to Arabic, all Turkmen schools and cultural associations were closed and the Turkmen political leaders were arrested, imprisoned and executed.

In 1972, the Iraqi government issued new legislation prohibiting the study of Turkmen languages in Turkmen schools. They also banned Turkmen publicity and media.

As part of the Iraqi governments regime of legalising its ethnic cleansing policies, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2001, in an unprecedented move, it passed Resolution No. 199, giving all non-Arab Iraqis over 18 the right to change their ethnic identity to that of Arab. Such legislation is contrary to all the principles of human rights and is politically motivated.

During the Gulf war in 1991, an operation known as 'provide comfort' was launched by the allied forces to ensure a safe-haven through an air exclusion zone which prohibited Iraqi aircraft's from flying north of 36<sup>th</sup> parallel. This safe-haven caused the division of the Turkmen into separate communities in the Kurdish autonomous area and under the Iraqi administration. During this period Kurdish political parties enjoyed unprecedented autonomy in administering their political affairs. However the treatment of the Turkmen under their control illustrates a pattern of systematic human rights violations.

After the 2003 war brought an end to the despotic Ba'ath regime, the Turkmen as an indigenous people expected to see democracy, fairness, an end to discrimination, the right to self- determination and an end to violence. Unfortunately, the opposite has occurred regarding the human rights situation in Iraq, in particular concerning the Iraqi Turkmen.

Since the refusal of the Turkish parliament to allow U.S. ground troops to attack Iraq from south-eastern Turkey and since the occupation of Iraq, the US administration in Iraq took several measures against the Turkish government in general and against the Turkmen in particular. For example;

1. US forces has been providing safe haven to the PKK terrorist organisation in the North of Iraq even though they had listed the PKK as a 'terrorist organisation'.
2. US forces appointed a Kurdish governor in the Turkmen populated city of Kerkuk without election and without the consent of the population.
3. US forces allowed only Kurdish militia to carry weapons in the north of Iraq, where they proceeded to terrorize the local Iraqi population. Over two hundred thousand Kurds from outside, poured into Kerkuk city unabated on the Election Day of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004, even though the election legislation clearly stated that no transportation movement was permitted between cities.
4. The arbitrary arrest of Turkmen by the U.S.. The US Military have abducted hundreds of Turkmen and Arabs in Kerkuk and sent them to prisons in Kurdish-held northern Iraq. According to Iraqi officials, U.S. government documents and revelations from the victims families, these Turkmen and Arabs were transferred secretly and in violation of Iraqi law to prisons in the Kurdish controlled cities of Irbil and Sulymaniyah.
5. The city of Telafer, which is located in the northwest of Iraq, with approximately 500,000 citizens, became a direct target for the U.S. and Kurdish militia. For instance, the U.S. forces have appointed a Kurdish person to be in charge of

the city, despite the fact that the city is predominantly occupied by Turkmen. The town was targeted several times by both U.S. and Kurdish Paramilitary forces and innocent people were arrested.

After the occupation of Iraq, the Kurds have intensified their Kurdification campaign in the city of Kerkuk. Presently the Turkmen have been undergoing campaigns by the Kurds with the help of US forces in Turkmeneli <sup>2</sup> in an often more brutal fashion than carried out on Kurds by Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi Kurds are attempting by various methods to eliminate Turkmen identity especially from Kerkuk City in order to dilute them into Kurdish society.

1. The Kurdish officials working at the administration of the Kerkuk Municipality have been confiscating real estate and lands belonging to the town administration with a view to granting them to ethnic Kurds newly arrived in Kerkuk and who are not originally from the town.
2. Kurdish parties have been encouraging and offering financial support to all Kurdish families from outside Kerkuk to move to Kerkuk and also Kurdish parties transferred a large number of Kurdish employees and police officers from the north of Iraq to be appointed in Kerkuk.
3. In order to suppress the Turkmen voice in northern Iraq, the Kurdish militias have established several puppet Turkmen parties to serve their own purpose. The Turkmen parties established by the Kurds are designed to divide the Turkmen people and are used to smear the name of the Turkmen and to smear the name of the real representatives of the Turkmen. Nevertheless, these leaders have been appointed in various governmental high-ranking positions and these leaders are being introduced to the world as the real representatives of the Turkmen while they are clearly not.
4. The Kurds have managed to bring hundred of thousands of Kurds from outside to Kirkuk before the election to show that they are overwhelming majority in Kirkuk and force the established government under the occupation to have a referendum in the year 2007. The date of the referendum was cleverly calculated to make sure that both Kurdish parties have enough time to transfer an adequate number of Kurds to the city of kerkuk. The Kurdish plan is very obvious to win the referendum and annex Kirkuk city to an autonomous region, which is currently under Kurdish control.
5. The Turkmen Commission on Human Rights found that the Kurdish party continues to commit extremely grave violations of human rights especially in Erbil, Kerkuk, Tal Afar and Tuzkhormatu . There are many victims of arbitrary detention under the accusation that they are "terrorists" for example:-
  - On Tuesday, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2004, the general director of education, Dr. Ibrahim Ismail, an ethnic Turkmen, was shot several times in the head by attackers who sprayed his vehicle with gunfire. Dr. Ismail was an active member of the Iraqi Turkmen Front. He was one of the organisers that staged organised peaceful protests condemning what the Iraqi Turkmen Front describes as attempts by the city's Kurdish community to seize Turkmen and Arab land, and to distribute

them to the Kurdish people.

- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2005, a prominent Turkmen military brigadier Mr. Sabah Bahlul Kara Altun who was a member of the Iraqi Turkmen Front was gunned down while he was leaving the Husamadin Mosque in Jumhuriya Street, Kerkuk after Friday prayers. Mr Altun was assassinated because he objected to his position being taken over by Kurds. No investigation was carried out regarding the killing and no one was apprehended.
- On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 2005, the leader of the Iraqi Turkmen Party Musalla Branch, Mr. Necmettin Kasaboglu, was arrested on his way to Turkey, at the Zaho border gate, by the Kurdish militia as a result of his opposition to the forced changing demography of kerkuk.
- On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, the U.S. forces and Kurdish secret service (called Asayish) raided Tuzkhormatu city. The raiders ransacked offices and religious shrines, tore portraits of religious leaders and arrested several prominent religious Turkmen Shi'aa leaders. The following people: Adnan Mohammed Amerli, Seyid Aziz Seyid Kadir, Ayoub Ibrahim Al-Najar, Seyid Hussein Seyid Kadir and Talal Hussein Kuwaiti were also arrested by the Kurdish militia.
- The newly established Shifa hospital, which is located adjacent to the Kerkuk mosque, was attacked on the night of March 24, 2004. Shifa hospital was established with the help of a Turkmen charity called the Turkmeneli Foundation. The main objective of this hospital is to provide free medical services for all Iraqi communities. The attackers fled the scene in a pick-up truck. Later, the police found the truck used by the attackers in the neighbourhood of Rahimawa, which is a Kurdish suburb located in the north of Kerkuk city. The abandoned truck had bullet holes stained with blood and the remaining empty cartridges of an AK-47. The only militia allowed by the U.S. forces to carry and utilise such weapons are the Kurds; no investigation was carried out regarding the killing and no suspects were apprehended.
- On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2005 the Kurdish militia lead by Massuad Barzani stopped all communication from the Turkmeneli Party building in Erbil. The Turkmeneli printing office, TV and radio transmission equipment had to cease operations. This 'gagging' of media outlets continues to the present time. Moreover, armed Kurdish militia have also occupied the head office of the Iraqi Turkmen front in Erbil city, Turkmeneli Television & Radio station, Al-Shifa Dispensary building, and the Turkmen Culture Association Center. The entire contents of these buildings were ransacked and stolen.

Illegal confiscation of Turkmen lands in North of Iraq under the Kurdish regional Government continues to be one of the most challenging issues confronting the Turkmen that are residing in Iraqi "Kurdistan". In addition, Turkmen towns and villages under the jurisdiction of Kurdish Regional Government are marginalised in comparison to Kurdish towns and villages regarding funding and rebuilding of infrastructure.

In addition, on January 30<sup>th</sup>, KDP militia in Telafer prevented as many as 100,000 Turkmen from casting their votes in the election. This flagrant exclusion of Turkmen in

a newly democratic Iraq serves to illustrate that Turkmen lack adequate representation in the Iraqi government, largely contributing to their voicelessness in Iraqi affairs in general. The independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), the Coalition powers and Iraqi government did not take the appropriate measure to amend the situation and guarantee a successful election for all segments of the Iraqi population.

Taking the present facts presented into consideration, a comprehensive analysis ought to be conducted to further understand the continuous repression of the Turkmen in Iraq. The analysis should consider the following recommendations:

1. In the newly formed constitution by the interim government it is clearly stated that Iraq consists of only Kurds and Arabs. The Turkmen have been totally disregarded and we strongly believe that a new Iraq must be inclusive, ethnically and religiously balanced in representing Iraq's three main groups.
2. A Turkmen Administrative Region within a federalist system, would serve to safeguard the rights of the Turkmen of Iraq by protecting their cultural and linguistic rights while remaining an integral part of the country.
3. Turkmen urge the Iraqi government and international community to immediately stop the continuing oppression of Turkmen in Tal Afar and to take all the necessary steps to allow their repatriation. A replacement of US forces with UN personnel in Turkmeneli would introduce stability for all ethnic groups into the region.
4. The present Iraqi government must work diligently to ensure that the Kurdish militia are disarmed and that Turkmen are granted appropriate representation in the government as indigenous people.
5. The government of Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government must ensure that appropriate and equal funding is directed for the infrastructure rebuilding of Turkmen towns and villages and heavily populated areas such as Kerkuk, Tuzkhormatu, Telafer.

## **Mofak SALMAN** **Iraqi Turkmen Committee**

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### ***Turkmen***<sup>1</sup>

*The Iraqi Turkmen live in an area that they call "Turkmenia" in Latin or "Turkmeneli" which means, "Land of the Turkmen. It was referred to as "Turcomania" by the British geographer William Guthrie in 1785. The Turkmen are a Turkic group that has a unique heritage and culture as well as linguistic, historical and cultural links with the surrounding Turkic groups such as those in Turkey and Azerbaijan. Their spoken language is closer to Azeri but their official written language is like the Turkish spoken in present-day Turkey. Their real population has always being suppressed by the authorities in Iraq for political reasons and estimated at 2%, whereas in reality their numbers are more realistically between 2.5 to 3 million, i.e. 12% of the Iraqi population.*

***Turkmeneli**<sup>2</sup> is a diagonal strip of land stretching from the Syrian and Turkish border areas from around Telafer in the north of Iraq, reaching down to the town of Mendeli on the Iranian border in Central Iraq. The Turkmen of Iraq settled in Turkmeneli in three successive and constant migrations from Central Asia, which increased their numbers and enabled them to establish six states in Iraq.*