



Iraqi Turkmen Human  
Rights Research Foundation

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## **Oral Presentation of the Chairman of SOITM on Turkmen of Iraq**

### **11<sup>th</sup> session of Working Group on Minorities – United Nations - Geneva**

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Mr. Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am Sheth Jerjis, Chairman of the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation in the Netherlands. I am very honoured to be given the opportunity to introduce the Iraqi Turkmen cause to this UN conference on the Minorities.

The Turkmen represent the third most important ethnic group in Iraq after the Arabs and Kurds. Unfortunately, their true representation has always been underestimated for economical and political reasons since the creation of the Iraqi State in 1921. In reality, the Turkmen represent at least 13% of the Iraqi population. Their number is around 3 millions and their presence in Iraq dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

### **History**

According to the most reliable references, the Turkmen can trace their ethnic origin to Turkic tribes who were living in Central Asia.

The Iraqi Turkmen are the descendants of the Turkic OGUZ TRIBES who migrated “in several and successive waves between the 7th and the 13th century to the west of their territories up to Anatolia and Mesopotamia where they settled. As time went on and their number increased, they achieved progress, played an important role and got high positions in the governments of the territories in which they settled, essentially in “the Umayyad, the Abbasids and Buyids sovereignty”. They even went on to become leaders and rulers, establishing their own states and Emirates like the Seljuk Empire in 1055 and Iraqi Seljuk state, established in 1118, followed by the Atabegs of Mosul and Erbil, the Kipchaks of Kerkuk, the Ilhanids, the Jalayirds, the Timurids, the Kara Qoyunlu and the Ak Qoyunlu states and the Safavids.

Therefore, one can say that the Turkmen history in Iraq dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and that the Turkmen have largely contributed to and long times dominated the political life in Iraq during the Abassids, Seljuks, Atabegs etc.

The Turkmen established their own states and Emirates in Iraq and ruled the country from 1055. Later they made huge contributions and played important roles in Iraq during the Ottoman Empire from 1535 to 1918.

Unfortunately after First World War, and since the creation of the new Iraqi state in 1921, the Turkmen role, and their representation in Iraq have been voluntarily diminished, their important contribution to Iraq's history has been largely and voluntarily ignored and the Turkmen have suffered from a policy of assimilation and systematic marginalization which affected them hugely and caused considerable prejudices to them as a minority in Iraq.

### **Geography of Turkmen region in Iraq**

The Turkmen of Iraq live mainly in a region called Turkmeneli, which stretches from the town of Talafar in Mosul province to the towns of Badra and Al-Aziziyya in the Al-Kut province. They are found in the following provinces in many Districts and sub-districts and hundreds of Villages: Mosul, Erbil, Kerkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kut and Baghdad.

- Since many centuries the largest Turkmen population concentration is in the city of Kerkuk which is considered by the Turkmen as their capital city

### **Population**

After World War I, Great Britain occupied Iraq and obtained a mandate from the League of Nations to govern the country. Because of the existence of important oil reserves in the Kerkuk region, which was part of the Mosul Wilaya under the Ottomans, the British, in order to grab and control the oil fields of Kerkuk, have voluntarily underestimated the number of the Turkmen in the north of Iraq by putting their number at a ridiculous 2% of the Iraqi population. This was done in order to facilitate the detachment of the Mosul Wilaya from the Ottoman Empire and later from Turkey during the Lausanne Treaty negotiations in 1923.

This figure of 2% was repeated later on by the successive Iraqi governments to undermine the presence of the Turkmen in this oil-rich region.

- According to McDowell the Turkmen outnumbered other nationalities in Kerkuk province as a whole in the 1950s.
- The population of Kerkuk province was 388,939 of 6.250.00 million of the total Iraqi population.
- The population of Arabs and Christians did not exceed 20-30 thousand in Kerkuk province.
- There should have been at least 180,000 Turkmen in Kerkuk province alone
- This making up 2.9% of the total Iraqi population,
- The large populations of Turkmen in Erbil, Mosul, Diyala, al-Kut and Baghdad are not included.

Despite the fact that the January 2005 elections were rigged and that a great number of Turkmen were denied the right to vote, the number of Turkmen elected in the Iraqi National Council was 15 out of 275, which represents 5.5% of the Iraqi population, this fact alone clearly contradicts the 2% figure theory fabricated by the British and adopted by the successive Iraqi governments.

## Political Situation

- Iraqi Turkmen have been exposed to intensive assimilation policies, forced emigration and cultural erosion; this policy reached its peak during the Baath regime, in effect,
  - Under the 1925 Constitution, the Kurds and the Turkmen had the right to use their own languages in schools, government offices and to have their own language press. But in 1933, the Iraqi authorities began closing Turkmen schools and sent activists into exile.
  - In the 1973 Interim Constitution no reference was made to the Turkmen population in Iraq.
  - In the 1977 census they were forbidden to register as Turkmen.
  - In the 1980s dozens of Turkmen villages in Kerkuk, Mosul and Diyala provinces have been destroyed, their inhabitants were forcefully displaced and their agricultural lands and properties were confiscated
  - In the 1990s the Turkmen were forced to change their nationality.
  - Finally, in 1990, the existence of the Turkmen as a community was denied and the new Constitution stated that "Iraqi people are Arabs and Kurds only."
  - Turkmen were exposed to torture, imprisonment, displacement and deportation
- Unfortunately, despite the regime change in Iraq in 2003 after the war and the occupation by the Anglo-American forces, the Turkmen tragedy continues. Today, the Turkmen continue to be marginalized as the US helps its Kurdish allies and promotes their hegemonic ambitions to control the north of Iraq

By repeatedly bombing Turkmen cities in Mosul

- By allowing the Kurdish extremists and Kurdish militants (Pashmargas) to suppress the Turkmen identity of the Turkmen in Erbil
- By allowing the Kurdification of major Turkmen cities like Kerkuk, Daquq, Tuz Khurmatu etc....  
350.000 Kurds were brought to Kerkuk city after the occupation of Iraq in 2003.  
Almost all the high positions and government posts in the local governments of the Turkmen region were given to the Kurds.
- By neglecting the Turkmen political parties and by ignoring their leaders and activists in appointing only one Turkmen lady from the civil society, with no political background to the Governing Council to represent the 13% of the Iraqi Turkmen, while 5 Kurds were appointed to represent the 17% of the Iraqi Kurds.
- By appointing only one Turkmen academic without any political history in the Interim Government to represent the Turkmen community.
- By allowing and accepting all sorts of manipulations and malpractices to happen in favor of the Kurds in the Turkmen region during the last elections of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005: only 2 voting stations were opened in TAL- AFAR a Turkmen city of 300.000 inhabitants, the majority of whom could not vote.
- By allowing the Kurdish political parties to interfere in the Turkmen affairs in order to divide the Turkmen people and limit their political influence in Iraq. This interference was clearly demonstrated in Erbil

on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2005 where the following Iraqi Turkmen Front offices and buildings were occupied by the Barazani militants:

- Head office of the ITF in Erbil city
- Turkmeneli Television station
- Turkmeneli radio station
- Turkmeneli Printing House
- The Publication of Turkmeneli Newspaper has been stopped since then.

## **Demands**

In view of the above stated facts and problems faced by us as a Turkmen in Iraq, I address this assembly on behalf of the Turkmen, requesting your support and asking the UN to intervene in our favor to defend our just cause with the Iraqi authorities. So that finally the 3 million Turkmen obtain full rights equal to those obtained by the Arabs and Kurds and that these rights be clearly stated in the new Iraqi Constitution.

- If a federal system is accepted by the entire Iraqi nation, then the Turkmen should be given the right to govern their own federal region where they constitute the majority.
- Since all the Iraqi census was designed to serve state policy and the last election was mainly to serve the occupation authorities and the Kurds, we request that the upcoming census and/or upcoming election be monitored by the UN and the international community. The Kurdish administration be prevented from interfering in the election and census processes in the Turkmen region and security should no longer be exclusively in the hands of the Kurds but should be provided by neutral police force from Central and Southern Iraq.
- We demand that the Turkish language be accepted as an official language along with Arabic and Kurdish in Iraq.
- We demand that the Turkmen who suffered discrimination, material, physical and psychological losses be fairly compensated.
- We demand a fair representation of the Turkmen in the Commission charged with the writing of the new constitution in order to safeguard our minority's rights.
- We demand that the Kurdish militias be disbanded and disarmed and the Kurdification of Turkmen regions be stopped.

I thank you for your interest and attention.

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1. SOITM: Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation – the Netherlands  
(Stichting Onderzoekcentrum Iraaks Turkmeense Mensenrechten)
  2. CDITR: Committee for the Defence of the Iraqi Turkmen Rights - Belgium