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Indigenous peoples and the international and domestic
protection of traditional knowledge*

Statement written by:-

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Read and submitted by Dr. Sheth Jerjis.

Mr. Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Turkmen of Iraq, I thank you for this opportunity to present the Turkmen cause.

The Turkmen represent the third most important ethnic group in Iraq after the Arabs and Kurds. Unfortunately, they are marginalized and 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.

Iraqi Turkmen have been exposed to intensive assimilation policies, forced emigration and cultural erosion; this policy reached its peak during the Ba'ath regime;

- 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 1965 census, the proportion of Turkmen was further reduced.
- In the 1973 Interim Constitution no reference was made to the Turkmen population in Iraq.
- In the 1977 census the Ba'athist regime denied the presence of Turkmen in Iraq allowing only Arabs and Kurds to register their nationality, while prohibiting registration as Turkmen. In the 1997 census when the Turkmen were forced to register as a 'New Arabs', their number was announced to be negligible.
- 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.
- 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
- The interim constitution, which was written by the Americans in 2004 'to democratize Iraq', included many undemocratic decisions, such as:
 - Giving to the Kurdish minority which represents 17% of the Iraqi population, rights equal to those of the Arab majority while ignoring the rights of the Turkmen who represent 13% of the Iraqi population and also ignoring the rights of the Cheldo-Assyrian community, which represents about 5% of the Iraqi population.
 - Giving the 3 Kurdish provinces the right to reject any decision made by the Iraqi parliament.

With the help of the Americans the Kurdish political parties and militants managed to change the demography of the Turkmen regions, what Saddam's regime had not been able to achieve in 35 years.

The American military authorities constituted the city councils in Turkmen regions, which were predominated by the Kurds. The predominantly Kurdish Kerkuk council, elected a Kurdish governor, a Kurdish Mayor and a Kurdish Chief of the Police. Almost all the high official posts were handed to the Kurds. The USA-made Kerkuk administration brought about 500.000 Kurds to settle in Kerkuk city.

The Kurdish threat to the Turkmen of Erbil continues systematically since 1991 as follows:

- The Barazani Kurds, in order to limit the Turkmen presence and restrict their activities in Erbil, have forced the landlords in Erbil who rented their properties to Turkmen political parties and Turkmen organizations to either terminate their contracts or to abusively increase their rents.
- Turkmen political, social and cultural activities have been severely restricted. Conferences and congresses of Turkmen organizations have been prevented to take place out of the organizations' buildings.
- During campaigns Turkmen are not allowed to hang their boards and flags, except on their buildings and even then they disappear during the night. Almost the same inspection and security methods which were used by the Ba'ath regime are now used Barazani offices. The Turkmen of Erbil feel threatened, they avoid exposure fearing persecution and losing their jobs.. As a result; the Turkmen of Erbil are hesitating to register their children in Turkmen schools, the Turkmen staffs are afraid to talk Turkmen in their offices. Many employees have been dismissed for such reasons.
- In the Turkmen schools and in the education sector, Kurds imposed their will and hegemony by appointing Kurds to the Turkmen education office; these deliberately downgraded the Turkmen education system by ignoring the requirements of the Turkmen students.
- By appointing Kurds who cannot even speak the Turkmen language as directors or head masters to most Turkmen Schools in the regions under their control and by deliberately understaffing the Turkmen schools, they targeted the Turkmen education system in preparation of their Kurdification policies of the Turkmen regions.
- They have imposed the Kurdish language in the Turkmen schools from the first class in primary schools. Turkmen students are forced to sing the Kurdish national anthem, although they have their own Turkmen national anthem

which is forbidden and their history teaching books only contain Kurdish History.

- Turkmen newspapers are prevented to be distributed to the bookshops and libraries. Since the late 1990s, the cafés and other public places were prevented by the Barazani security elements to open the Turkmen TV and radio.
- In addition to the economical support from the Western powers and Israel for decades and the huge gains made from customs duties they imposed since 1991 on all imported goods to Iraq via the north of the country, the Kurdish political parties also received a considerable amount of money from the infamous U.N. 'oil for food program'. Meanwhile, the Turkmen political parties and organizations have received nothing and they were even deprived from their fair share from the 'oil for food program'.
- The Turkmen are being discriminated, they are seldom appointed in governmental offices or in the university in Erbil, those who want to be appointed must show allegiance to Barazani and support his party's ideology. For these reasons very few Turkmen have been appointed in governmental offices in the Kurdish region.

The last political attack on the Turkmen of Erbil by the Barazani authorities was carried out on 22 April 2005 and it continues until now. After the agreement between the Barazani security authorities and the head of the Iraqi Turkmen Front office in Erbil, the following Turkmen organizations were occupied by armed militants and the flags of so-called Kurdistan and Kurdish parties were raised on the buildings for several hours:

- Head office of the ITF in Erbil city
- Turkmeneli Television station – almost all the instruments and archives were stolen.
- Turkmeneli radio station
- Turkmeneli Printing House – most of its contents were robbed
- All types of publications of Turkmeneli printing house were stopped, such as the bi- weekly Turkmeneli Newspaper.
- Turkmen House
- The building of Turkmen education and culture and the al-Shifa dispensary House were evacuated and their contents were stolen.

Support of the American troops and non presence of the observers and power to resist made the Kurdish politicians and militants to violate freely the rights of the other sections of the Iraqi community. The Kurdish militants in national guards, security services and other armed forces started to arrest arbitrarily, the innocent Turkmen and Arabs and bring them to Kurdish prisons.

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.

To stop further deterioration of the political, social, and security situation in Iraq and to avoid more bloodshed, more killing of innocent Iraqis and further destruction of the infrastructure of our country we demand the immediate departure of the occupation

powers from our country. If needed, we demand the United Nations to send to Iraq peace keeping forces for a limited period of time and from neutral countries who did not participate in any of the wars against Iraq since 17th January 1991.

The Turkmen believe in a true democracy and demand the establishment of a TRUE DEMOCRACY in a FREE and UNITED Iraq. They want to be a part of this FREE and UNITED Iraq, and refuse to be 'a part of a part' of divided "federal" Iraq'.

But if a federal system is accepted by the majority of the Iraqi people, then the Turkmen should be given the right to govern their own federal region where they constitute a 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 demand** that the upcoming census and/or upcoming election be achieved totally by the United Nations and the international community. **We demand** that 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 Kurdish militants but should be provided by neutral police force from Central and Southern Iraq.

To safeguard the unity of Iraq, the sole official language should be Arabic since Arabs constitute the majority of the Iraqi people. However, as the Temporary Administrative Law has given the Kurdish language the status of second official language in Iraq while the Kurds represent a minority of no more than 17% of the Iraqi population, **we Turkmen** who are the third ethnic community in Iraq representing 13% of the total Iraqi population, **demand** that the Turkish language be considered as the third official language in Iraq along with Arabic and Kurdish.

We also demand a fair representation of the Turkmen in the Commission charged with the writing of the new constitution in order to safeguard our constitutional rights.

We demand with insistence that the Kurdification processes be stopped and that the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish immigrants who were brought to Kerkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, Daquq and other Turkmen cities be returned to Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyya where they came from.

We also demand that the thousands of Kurds who were brought by the two Kurdish parties KDP and PUK, after April 2003, to take positions and jobs in Kerkuk and other Turkmen regions, with the objective of imposing their policy of 'fait accompli' to Kurdify the Turkmen region, be returned to where they came from. **We demand** that the Kerkuk Council be dissolved and that the Kurdish governor, Kurdish mayor, Kurdish police chief be dismissed and that these high positions be fairly shared between the three main communities in Kerkuk: Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs.

We demand that the international community be engaged directly to stop oppression, marginalization and assimilation of the Turkmen of Erbil.

We demand that the Kurdish militias be disbanded and disarmed and that they leave the Turkmen region.

I thank you for your interest and attention.