



– Press Release –

Kerkuk's Turkmen and Arabs present their views on Kerkuk to European Policy Makers

Conference organized by the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM) in partnership with Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) with the assistance of the office of Ms. Ana Maria Gomes, Member of the European Parliament

Brussels, 23 June 2008: The European Parliament in Brussels played host to a lively conference this week on the Kerkuk issue. The event was convened to discuss alternative strategies for the future of Kerkuk. It brought together senior Iraqi Turkmen authorities, Kerkuk council officials and representatives of the ethnic groups in Northern Iraq to discuss the issues at stake and to try and elaborate on possible solutions to the situation as it stands.

Opening the conference, **Dr. Sheth Jerjis**, Chairman of the SOITM, introduced participants to the background of the Kerkuk problems, outlining the decades of marginalization which had been measured out to the Turkmen of Iraq under successive regimes since the country achieved independence in 1932. Many of Dr. Jerjis' historical illustrations were revisited in later comments by panelists, demonstrating the continuing crucial role of history in influencing the region's political, cultural, and social interactions.

Ms. Ana Maria Gomes MEP, speaking after visiting Iraq earlier in 2008, emphasized the need for all parties to show a level of pragmatism when examining possible solutions to the problems of Kerkuk's governance, urging "all the parties in this dispute to accept the UN resolution....[and not to]...endanger this sensitive process" when "a possible breakthrough seems to be close".

Mr. Marino Busdachin, General Secretary of UNPO, posited the need for a regional solution similar to that found in Catalonia or the South Tirol which has been shown to be effective. The European Union moreover had shown itself to be an important interlocutor which could draw on the own experience to make a valuable contribution to the resolution of the Kerkuk crisis. This proved to a point taken up by **Mr. Muzaffer Arslan**, Advisor on Turkmen Affairs to the President of Iraq H.E. Jalal Talabani, in his appeal to the European Union institutions to place greater pressure on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to end their claims to Kerkuk and the presence of Kurdish militias in the city and the surrounding area.

Further participants included **Ali M. Sadeq**, member of Kerkuk City Council; **Yako Michael Jajjo**, Foundation Assyria; **Mohammed Kh. Nasef**, Member of Kerkuk City Council, member of article 140 committee; **Mohammed Mahdi Ameen**, Member of the Iraqi Parliament (represented by Mohammed Koja); **Rakan S. Ali**, member of Kerkuk City Council; (represented by Akram al-Ubaidi); and **Tahsin Mohammed Ali Wali**, Member of Kerkuk City Council, member of article 140 committee.

Opening the debate to the floor revealed the wide opinion roused by the questions of Kerkuk's status, with the history of the city a constant in the deeply held convictions expressed. Attention was paid however to the need to look beyond the proposed and twice delayed referendum, and concentrate on finding other solutions to the problems at hand. The need to avoid blind nationalism was also a point which was raised and that won widespread support from the gathered audience.

For more information please see www.turkmen.nl, or write to soitm@turkmen.nl