

Turkmen participant deprived by the Canadian Authorities of attending the International Human Rights Training Program in Canada

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No doubt, that sustained marginalization and violation of Turkmen Human Rights, is one of the prominent features of the modern history of Iraq. It will be an interesting field for academics to study the reasons why such a large community remain unceasingly underestimated, marginalized, suppressed and exposed to assimilation in different stages of the Iraqi history: English mandate, Iraqi Kingdom, Iraqi Republic, Kurdish region and recently by USA after the occupation.¹⁻³

The Role of International Human Rights organizations and both the working groups on minorities and Indigenous peoples and Human Rights Council of the United Nations remain crucial in putting the issues of the forgotten Turkmen and other minorities on the international agenda.

It seems also illogic to build a democratic Iraq, by the so-called Occupation Coalition Authorities, while the about 3 million Turkmen remain suffering from the severe Human Rights violations threatening their existence.

Canadian authorities refused to give visa to the Turkmen participant to attend the training program of the International center for Human Rights education in Montréal. Such unfair policies by such authorities, who are part of the coalition-power that attacked Iraq to establish democracy, demonstrate the extent of the terrible marginalization of the Turkmen community.

An overview of the application procedure followed by SOITM's participant

- On December 15th 2005, the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM) received an application form from an International Human Rights Organization for the 2006 (27th) International Human Rights Training Program (IHRTTP).
- IHRTTP is an annual Human Rights Training Programme, which is organized by International Centre for Human Rights education in Canada. The program takes place, from June 11th to June 30th 2006, at the John Abbott College, in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, just outside of Montréal.
- Eighty-eight fellows are selected to participate this year in this international Training Program, of which 6 participants are from Iraq: 2 from **women** organizations, one from Iraqi **Christians**, one from the Iraqi **Yazides**, one from a **Kurdish** organization and one participant from **SOITM**.
- Two complicated forms were completed and submitted: the organization and candidate forms. Two supportive letters from international human rights organizations familiar with SOITM's work were presented. Another two international references were also given.
- On March 7th 2006, SOITM and its candidate received an e-mail to inform us, that the Selection Committee of the International Centre for Human Rights has accepted our application and allotted a bursary to cover the travel and participation costs.
- We were advised frequently to start the visa application as soon as possible. The preferable Canadian Embassy to apply for a visa was in Amman. It was very dangerous

SOITM

Stichting Onderzoekcentrum Iraaks Turkmeense Mensenrechten
Kan Pelsstraat 56, 6525 VZ, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Tel / Fax: 0031 (0) 844 14 14
Mobile: 0031 (0)616262586
E-mail: soitm@chello.nl
Web site: www.turkmen.nl

for the SOITM participant to travel through Falluja and Romadi, directly to Amman. He tried to travel to Syria and from there to Amman, but the way through Rabiaa was closed and no bus traveled.

- Thus, we wrote to the Canadian Embassy in Ankara, asking if a Canadian visa can be given to the SOITM member. The answer was "yes, it is possible".
- After obtaining a Turkish visa, the SOITM member traveled to Turkey on Friday, 6th May 2006, and attended the Canadian Embassy on Monday. He presented all the required documents.⁴ He had been asked to give his telephone number and he would receive a result in 10 to 14 days. When he received no phone call during the given period, he attended the Canadian Embassy on May 23rd. After being roughly questioned by Embassy inspector, he was told that they refuse to give him a Canadian visa. He asked to know the reason and to be given an official paper why his visa was refused. He was just told that no visas are given here to Iraqis. He reminded the staff of the Canadian Embassy in Ankara, that he had specifically written to them from Kerkuk (Iraq), asking if it was possible to apply for a Canadian visa in Ankara, and he received a positive answer.⁵ This was not helpful, too. If Canadian visa is not given to Iraqis in Ankara, why the embassy accepted the application and made the participant to wait more than 2 weeks in Ankara.
- SOITM asked the organizing institution in Canada if they could ask for information, about the reason, which made the Canadian authorities refuse the Turkmen participant a visa. Our organization was informed that they have no specific reason and nothing can be done.
- By a petition, the case had been brought into attention of the Canadian Parliament and put on the table of Mr. Inky Mark, Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Once more, SOITM received no reply.

Despite the extensive and expensive work, a member of SOITM (Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation) was prevented, mainly by a political decision of Canadian authorities, to attend an important Training program in Canada, which surely could have improved our work in the direction of a better understanding of Human Rights mechanisms, monitoring the human rights situation and preparing reports.

From SOITM's experiences, the reasons of refusal are either that: the Canadian authorities are unaware of the existence of Turkmen in Iraq; the Canadian Policy supports the USA in continuing the suppression of the Turkmen community; and/or the sharp criticism expressed in the SOITM reports, which describe the war crimes and marginalization of the Turkmen community.

We have also experienced from the meetings, which we hold with several parliamentarians and politicians in European countries, European journalists, International Human rights and civil society organizations, that a considerable number of them support actively or passively (by keeping silent) the war on Iraq and consider it as a major part of the war on the Islamic extremists. It is worth mentioning that the organized fundamental Islamic groups were severely small in the Iraqi community! Many, even non-fundamental, ideological groups are organized to fight occupation.

Reference:

1. General Report of SOITM "Summary of violation of the Human Rights of the Iraqi Turkmen and attempts to assimilate them during the Dictatorial Ba'ath Period", <http://members.lycos.nl/soitum/GR.pdf>
2. Statement presented to the 11th Session, Working Group on Minorities (30 May - 3 June, 2005), United Nations – Geneva, by SOITM: <http://www.turkmen.nl/StatementP.pdf>

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Kan Pelsstraat 56, 6525 VZ, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Tel / Fax: 0031 (0) 844 14 14
Mobile: 0031 (0)616262586
E-mail: soitm@chello.nl
Web site: www.turkmen.nl

3. Statement presented to the 23rd Session, Working Group on Indigenous People (16 - 22 July, 2005), United Nations – Geneva, By SOITM: <http://www.turkmen.nl/StatementPw.pdf>
4. The required documents for Temporary Canadian visa are:
 - APPLICATION FOR A TEMPORARY RESIDENT VISA MADE OUTSIDE OF CANADA 5257B
 - ADDITIONAL FAMILY INFORMATION FORM IMM5406E
 - SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION IMM5549E
 - USE OF A REPRESENTATIVE IMM5476E
 - MILITARY SERVICE TABLE
 - Full, complete, detailed CV: must include dates of employment, position/title, and names of supervisors and list of responsibilities.
 - Copy of the biodata page and page following of passport.
 - Two recent passport sized photos with white backgrounds.
 - Cost recovery fee. [\$75 CAD/45 JOD for single entry, \$150/90 JOD for multiple entry -
5. The following text was received from the International Center for Human Rights Education about the application for Canadian visa in Ankara:

"It is possible in some cases but not recommended. If an Iraqi citizen is legally admitted to Turkey they can make a visa application while they are here. However, there is a mandatory waiting period of 10 business days for all Iraqi applicants. In addition to this, supplementary forms must be filled out and an interview may be required. Therefore, if an Iraqi applicant were to apply here, they would either have to stay here for up to 3 weeks or longer (which could be quite inconvenient and expensive for the applicant), or they might have to travel back and forth up to 2 or 3 times. In addition, Amman has much more experience with Iraqi applicants, and we would recommend that they apply there."

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