



"Iraqi Turkmen: The Human Rights Situation and Crisis in Kerkuk"

European Parliament, 26 – 27 March 2007
(ASP 5G1)

- Press Release -

Northern Iraq emerged from the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime as an area of relative stability. What calm there was appears however now under threat, as simmering ethnic tensions threaten to set the stage for a new theatre of conflict. The region is the historic home of a number of Iraqi Communities, including Arabs, Iraqi Turkmen, Iraqi Kurds, and Assyrians, all of whom suffered extensively under a campaign of "Arabisation", instigated by a Ba'ath Party regime intent on securing its domination. Violence and forced displacement radically altered the demographic make-up of the region, a process the Iraqi Constitution has now set out to reverse through process of "normalisation". In a region burdened by a violent past, little consensus has however emerged on what might constitute "normality", greatly complicating the democratic processes aimed at safeguarding future stability.

Kerkuk, a city rich with both oil and history, has emerged as the focal point of this dispute. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution suggests the status of the city should be determined by the "will of its citizens" by the end of 2007, making the process of normalisation a pressing priority. The Iraqi Turkmen, Iraq's third largest ethnic group, in particular stand opposed to the city's inclusion in a Kurdish region, drawing attention to their long historical presence in the city. Their leaders fear however that their input into the normalisation process has been marginalised, owing to a lack of political representation in local administrative structures or a strong voice on the international stage. This is reflected in what they view as primarily Kurdish immigration and voter registration in anticipation of the crucial referendum, as well as a catalogue of unresolved land claims following confiscation during the Ba'ath era.

This conference therefore aims to convene representatives of Iraq's new institutions, with outside policy makers with an interest and opportunity to influence the reconstruction of the Iraqi state, in an effort to ensure that the next crucial steps in the reconstruction process proceed in a manner consistent with the principles of democracy, human rights, and with the genuine inclusion of all affected communities. These are principles without which a stable Iraq will inevitably remain illusive.

With Participation from;

Marco Pannella MEP, *Leader Nonviolent Radical Party (tbc)*

Marco Cappato MEP, *Committee on Foreign Affairs and Subcommittee on Human Rights (tbc)*

Marino Busdachin, *UNPO General Secretary*

Sheth Jerjis, *SOITM Chairman*

Jasim Mohammed Jafar, *Iraqi Minister and Member of the Iraqi Parliament*

Muzaffer Arslan, *Advisor on Turkmen Affairs to the President of Iraq H.E. Jalal Talabani*

Hassan Aydinli, *Iraqi Turkmen Front Representative in Europe, Belgium*

Ali Mehdi, *Head of the Turkmen Group at the Kerkuk City Council*

Mohammed Khalil, *Head of the Arabic Group at the Kerkuk City Council*

Enver Bayraktar, *Leader of the Turkmen Justice and Development Party*

Burhan Jaf, *EU Representative of the Kurdish Regional Government*

Note to the Editor

The Conference will be held in Room ASP 5G1 of the European Parliament, Rue Wiertz, 1047, Brussels

The First Session will be held on 26 March from 3pm until 6.30pm, the Second Session on 27 March from 9am until 12.30pm, followed by a Press Conference at 1pm

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