

**International  
Interparliamentary  
Consultation  
on the Kurds**

*Washington D.C., 27 February 1991*

Kurdish Institute of Paris

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**INTERNATIONAL INTERPARLIAMENTARY  
CONSULTATION ON THE KURDS**

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**KURDISH INSTITUTE OF PARIS**

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## **FOREWORD**

**An International Interparliamentary Conference on Kurdish Human Rights, organized jointly by the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Fondation France-Libertés and the Kurdish Institute of Paris, was held on 27 February, 1991, at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing Room in Washington D.C.. The purpose of this conference was to bring together parliamentarians from Europe and the United States sensitive to human rights issues, in order to examine the fate of the Kurdish people in the context of the Gulf crisis and to review the means by which Western governments could be persuaded to give greater priority to this issue within the framework of their Middle-East policy.**

**Chance so ordained that this conference, programmed well in advance, took place only a few hours before the end of hostilities in the Gulf war was declared. This, of course, lent even greater relevance to the conference but, at the same time, diverted the attention of the media away from the conference, resulting in less press and television coverage than expected. However, the conference was able to better inform several influential members of the Senate and increase their awareness of the plight of the Kurds, particularly in Iraq. To that end, the conference proved very valuable, because these members were to play an important role in modifying the American administration's policy during the Kurdish tragedy of April 1991.**

This conference would not have been possible without the constant encouragement and support of Madame Danielle Mitterrand and senators Claiborne Pell and Edward M. Kennedy, to whom we express again our deepest gratitude. We also wish to thank Peter Galbraith of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and David Phillips, Executive Director of the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Dr. Najmaddin Karim of the Kurdish National Congress of North America, for their precious help in organizing this gathering. Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to all the prominent American, European and Kurdish public figures who, by their speech or their presence, greatly contributed to the influence and success of the conference.

*Statement by  
Senator Edward M. Kennedy*

I want to thank David Phillips for that generous introduction, and I commend him for his leadership in making today's conference possible.

All friends of human rights owe a special debt to the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, the French Liberty Foundation, and the Kurdish Institute of Paris for organizing this timely conference. Together, you are providing new hope for the Kurdish people and all those who suffer persecution anywhere on earth.

The Kurds have no greater champion of their cause than the Chair of this session, Danielle Mitterrand, and it is a privilege to join her in this cause.

Danielle has travelled to Kurdish refugee camps to learn first hand about their tragic history. Through the French Liberty Foundation, she has helped ensure that the Kurds will remain in the forefront wherever human rights are the issue.

The 1989 international conference on the Kurds in Paris brought their plight into the international

spotlight. And last year, through her efforts, the first official reception of the Kurdistan Front of Iraq in Paris brought important international recognition to the Kurdish struggle for human rights and democracy.

Today's conference is an important step in raising the conscience of Congress and the international community. We meet at a time of international crisis—and of unprecedented international cooperation to oppose the tyranny of the dictator Saddam Hussein. All of us hope and pray that peace will soon be achieved.

The world was shocked to learn of Saddam's brutal atrocities against the Kuwaiti people, his scorched earth policy against that land, and his flagrant violations of the most basic standards of human decency.

And yet, the Kurdish people have long known the cruel ways of this ruthless dictator. They have cried out for many years against their repression. They know only too well the high cost of international silence in the face of crimes against humanity.

The Iraqi persecution of the Kurds is one of the worst modern examples of man's inhumanity to man. Iraq has destroyed Kurdish villages, conducted a massive campaign for the forcible relocation of tens of thousands of Kurds, and systematically tried to annihilate their culture.



For years, the world turned a deaf ear to the cries of the Kurds. It turned a blind eye to the atrocities inflicted on innocent Kurdish men, women and children and remained silent to the Kurds' pleas for international condemnation of Saddam's brutal ways.

Perhaps the most deafening silence of all was that of the world community when Saddam Hussein committed one of the most unconscionable acts of recent times — using chemical weapons on Kurdish villages, killing an estimated 5,000 innocent men, women, and children.

I am sure that each of you here today will never forget the sickening photographs of the aftermath of that brutal attack — thousands of bodies frozen in their everyday activities, entire villages wiped out without a moment's notice.

And yet, the world took no action against Saddam Hussein. He committed these crimes with impunity and continued to terrorize his own population. Iraq has one of the world's most abysmal records on human rights, not only against the Kurds, but against any Iraqi who dared to cross Saddam in his brutal ways. And it has taken 700,000 troops, billions of dollars, and many precious lives to defeat him.

Aggression is not a new threat to the Kurdish people. Throughout history, they have suffered endless

persecution and tyranny. Their lands have been divided among five nations whose governments have systematically repressed the Kurdish heritage, language and culture. Twenty-five million Kurds, spread through Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Soviet Union, endure a daily struggle against persecution and eradication of their heritage.

Often in their history, the Kurds have been used as pawns in regional conflicts, and their people and culture have suffered heavy casualties.

For sixty years, Turkey has pretended the Kurds do not exist, although they make up one fifth of the population. For too long, Turkey has prohibited the Kurds from speaking their own language.

I welcome recent statements that this unjust ban will soon be lifted, and I urge the government to ensure that basic human rights are granted to all Kurds.

Kurds continue to suffer in many lands. Hundreds of thousands of refugees languish in camps in Syria, Turkey, and Iran, and their plight has been exacerbated by the Persian Gulf war. Only France and the United States have responded to the United Nations' pleas to accept those who face their third winter in crowded refugee camps.

I urge the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to

make a renewed effort to ease the plight of the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees fleeing persecution in their own lands.

Let us learn from the atrocities in Iraq that silence in the face of injustice only breeds further injustice.

When I last spoke to this conference in 1989, I urged the implementation of several proposals that stemmed from the Paris conference. Those recommendations have yet to be acted upon. If the crisis in the Gulf has taught us anything, it is the need to stand up to aggression anywhere. The plight of the Kurds deserves the world's fresh attention. Any efforts to address regional problems following the Iraqi crisis must include the Kurds.

The United States also must lead a renewed international effort to prohibit the use of chemical weapons. Never again should any individual or any nation use these deadly weapons of mass destruction with impunity. Just last week, the Senate passed a bill mandating sanctions against anyone who uses them. Although President Bush pocket-vetoed the bill last November, I hope he will now ensure it becomes the law of the land.

If we are to achieve the new world order of which we hear so much, we must stand up to injustice wherever it occurs. Perpetrators of repression, torture and other

violations of human rights must be called to account. Unless and until we accept that fundamental principle, there will never truly be a new world order.

The crisis of the Kurds and the actions of Saddam Hussein underscore the need for all of us in every land to stand up for those who have no voice. Out of the ashes and destruction of the Persian Gulf War, a new and better world may be born.

As Robert Kennedy said in Capetown in 1966:

*“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”*

Again, I commend Danielle Mitterrand for the ripples of hope she is sending out. May the Congress of the United States and the whole world hear and heed her message of justice and hope.

*Statement by  
Madame Danielle Mitterrand*

This is not the first time that I am thanking the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Human Rights Congressional Foundation for being received by such an attentive and dedicated assembly. The last time I spoke from this rostrum, I closed my remarks with the following appeal "Do not forget them, silence is killing them!" That was in October 1989. Naturally, I hardly expected to be back sixteen months later in the present circumstances, which should at last allow the voice of law and justice to be heard, but at the cost of truly cruel sacrifices.

On the threshold of the third Millenium, the sudden acceleration of history all over the world awakens hopes of new horizons. Today the sufferings of the Kurdish people, which only yesterday were ignored, are in the news. But this acceleration of the course of events makes me all the more aware of the long, dark road we travelled doggedly together over the years. The Gulf crisis has brought to light the full horror of the Baghdad regime, but long beforehand we were already alerting the world. I am convinced that our

efforts helped to open the eyes of those who until recently kept them closed.

Back in 1981, working in other associations before the France-Libertés Foundation was set up, I remember, like other human rights workers, the wall of silence that shrouded the tragedy of the Kurds. We spared no efforts to open up breaches, but at the time we did not have a full grasp of the problems that concern us today, and so our approach was at first pragmatic and cultural.

The reports we received from many Kurdish exiles in France, but also in Germany, Holland, Switzerland and in the Scandinavian countries, showed that most of them, and particularly the younger ones, were not able to speak their own language, never having had the opportunity to learn to read and write. The Kurds exiled in Europe and the Iraqi Kurds interned in their own country or refugees in Turkey all had the same story to tell: the repression was first cultural. When it is impossible, as I found was the case when I went to Turkey, to speak, to write, to publish, and what is more serious, to teach your children your language, you are condemned to disappear.

Luckily, nothing is ever beyond remedy, because it would appear today that there are signs of a change for the better concerning the recognition of Kurdish culture in Turkey.

We therefore immediately gave support to the Kurdish writers, historians and artists in exile who decided in 1983 to set up a Cultural Institute in Paris, the first and only one in the world. I am not going to tell you its story, but I will say that its struggle to save from oblivion one of the oldest cultures in the world, earned it the “Prix de la Mémoire” awarded last December in Paris by distinguished figures from all over the world. I hope the Kurdish Cultural Institute will find the means of pursuing and consolidating its action on a permanent basis, because it not only helps to preserve and enhance Kurdish culture, it also informs public opinion about the various forms of oppression being applied. With others, it is constantly sounding the alarm.

We first discovered all these reports, all these documents, with both horror and indignation. Then we in turn started to alert individuals and organizations fighting for humans rights, and the press. People started talking about the plight of the Kurds.

The murmur at last began to gain strength, but only very timidly. It was still in the midst of indifference that, day after day, the aggression against the Iraqi Kurds continued, culminating in the horrors of 1988 with the displacement of population, the destruction of their traditional villages and the poison gas attack on the inhabitants of Halabja. But although the terrible pictures of the chemical holocaust had a more

marked effect on the world's conscience, the attitude of governments and large international organizations was still one of scepticism.

I well remember that when the Kurdish Institute and France-Libertés organized, in October 1989 in Paris, the first International Conference on the Kurds, a lot of the support that had been promised did not materialize. And yet a few months earlier, the many messages of encouragement and proposals to help had led us to hope for more genuine commitment and solidarity. Nevertheless, the event did attract a number of distinguished participants from thirty-two countries, including a few American friends I am happy to see today, and numerous leaders of Kurdish movements from Iran, Iraq, the Soviet Union, Syria and Turkey. Hence the considerable coverage in the French and international press. The final resolution of the conference stressed the need to pursue the information effort started in Paris, to organize further conferences and to alert the large international organizations. Our Foundation was charged with the follow-up and coordination of this action.

In this framework, in order to review the situation of the millions of Kurdish nationals living in Iraq, France-Libertés organized in Paris last September a meeting of the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdish community. A press conference was held. On this occasion they were received, for the first time in history, by representatives



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of the French Government. They expressed their willingness to play a representative part in a future democratic government in Iraq.

The message I would like to leave with you is therefore a simple one : let us see to it that the voice of the Kurds is not once again lost in the thunder of the war in the Gulf. Let us not forget that there are twenty-five million of them and that they have their place in the organization of peace and in the life and development of the region.

I will say to you what I have already said to you in October 1989. I would like this conference to develop concrete solutions for putting an end to the martyrdom of the Kurdish people, deprived of its most elementary rights: the right to life and the right to dignity.

I will also say this to the Kurdish representatives here today: you will only be listened to, and your message will only be heard, if you "speak with one voice, within and outside each of the countries you live in, in the name of your determination to maintain your cultural identity and to defend your legitimate political and democratic rights" (I have just quoted what you said yourselves in the final resolution of the Paris International Conference). For it is by defining common goals that you will give the lie to those who count on your divisions for refusing to act.

In conclusion, I will say that while we have made considerable progress, a long effort is still required for the Kurdish people to be able to enjoy, like the other peoples in the region, its full rights, all its rights.

Thank you.

*Statement by  
Senator Claiborne Pell*

I am delighted to welcome you to this afternoon's session of the Interparliamentary Consultation on the Kurds. It is fitting that we should be discussing the plight of Saddam Hussein's first victims on this day when coalition forces have liberated the home city of the Iraqi dictator's latest victim.

Our objective today is clear. As the dust of war settles, the world will be turning to the post-war situation. Some problems of necessity must be addressed. This includes the future relationship between Iraq and Kuwait. The cooperation demonstrated in the liberation of Kuwait now may provide an opportunity to address other critical Middle East issues including the Arab-Israel dispute and the status of Lebanon.

I would hope and urge that the future of 5 million Kurdish people in Iraq and another 20 million in the region should also be on the agenda of any effort to settle Middle East conflicts. This is a matter of simple justice. The Kurds have been repeatedly promised

self-determination and autonomy. And just as repeatedly these promises have been broken. Often the broken promises have been accompanied by the most brutal human rights violations. This afternoon we will be hearing more about this.

I also believe that decisions about the Kurds should not be made without the Kurds. In any future peace negotiation, the Kurds should have a place at the table.

Our objective today is clear. It is to raise the profile of the Kurdish issue so that it will be part of the post-war deliberations. I commend Madame Mitterrand, the Kurdish Institute of Paris, the Fondation France-Libertés, and the Congressional Human Rights Foundation for their role in highlighting the Kurdish issue.

A year and a half ago, I attended the International Conference in Paris on the Kurds. For me it was an eye-opening experience. Like many Americans, I was not fully aware of this people of 25 million with a rich and varied culture, so long denied their cultural, political, and human rights.

I also heard the phrase "the Kurds have no friends." Sadly, this has been true for too long in the history of Kurdistan. Today's conference is intended to tell more people about the Kurds. And as more people

come to know the Kurds, the Kurds will certainly have more friends.

Our first speaker will be Peter Galbraith of the Foreign Relations Committee staff. He has direct experience with some of the human rights atrocities suffered by the Kurds and will speak on this subject.

## A Brief Presentation of the Kurdish Issue

by  
*Kendal Nezan\**

Madame Mitterrand, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege and an honour for me to speak to this prestigious gathering.

Allow me first of all to express, on behalf of the Kurdish Institute and all the Kurds present here, our heartfelt thanks to the leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and to the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, especially to Senators Edward Kennedy and Claiborne Pell and to Congressmen Tom Lantos and John Porter, for having made this conference possible. We are also honoured that Madame Danielle Mitterrand, President of the France-Libertés Foundation, has made a special trip from Paris with us to express her solidarity with the Kurdish people. We will also be hearing today from other well-known people who have come from the United Kingdom, from Germany,

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\* Chairman of the Kurdish Institute of Paris.

from France and from several regions of the United States. We are deeply grateful to them all.

This conference, as you are all aware, is being held at a crucial moment in history. For the past several weeks, the armed forces of an international coalition numbering some thirty countries have been fighting a many-faceted battle against the Iraqi regime in order to force it to respect the resolutions of the United Nations. American and Western public opinion has at last come face to face with the bloody, dangerous and abominable character of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. During these past weeks, the press has often mentioned the situation of the Kurds in Iraq, featuring particularly the chemical weapons massacre of Halabja. Thus the Kurdish question has been put on the table, at least as far as Iraq is concerned. But we must also recognize that the fate of the five million Kurds, who make up about 30 % of the Iraqi population and who, for the past 22 years, have been subjected to persecution by the terrible dictatorship of Baghdad, has been of less interest to governments than the fate of 700,000 Kuwaitis, the most recent victims of this dictatorship.

Nonetheless, thanks to the media, broad segments of public opinion have now learned that the Kurdish problem also exists in countries bordering Iraq : in Turkey, Iran and Syria. So even if the Kurdish question has not been put on the formal agenda of the

United Nations and does not yet seem to be part of the American vision for a new regional order in the Middle East, this question is at least now seen as more sharply defined and morally urgent. People now understand, to a greater or lesser degree, that it will be impossible to apply the rule of law and achieve justice, that there can be no lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, if the Kurdish question is not settled fairly.

In this short introduction, I will attempt to give you some reference points which may help to clarify a question which is often considered complex. First of all, some demographic data.

According to figures recently used by President Ozal himself, there are at least 12 million Kurds in Turkey. The Kurdish population is estimated at 8 million in Iran, 5 million in Iraq, 1,5 million in Syria, half a million in the Soviet Union and about 750,000 spread throughout the West. This amounts to a total of at least 27 million in the Middle East alone, making the Kurds the third most numerous people in West Asia, after the Arabs and the Turks. The Kurdish problem is therefore not simply a question of "national minorities", nor even just a matter of human rights. We are speaking here of a genuine national identity with its own language, its own culture and its own civilization, which has existed for several millennia in its own territory, which has been called



Kurdistan - the country of the Kurds - since the year 1150. The population of this country, which occupies an area as large as France, is today greater than that of two thirds of the member states of the United Nations. Kurdistan is also the only country in the region which possesses an abundance of both water and oil. The two major rivers of Mesopotamia, the Tigris and the Euphrates, both have their source in Kurdistan. More than three quarters of Iraq's oil (77%) come from the Kurdish region, as does all of Turkey's and Syria's oil. Rich deposits of chrome, iron and uranium are also to be found in Kurdish territory. In an equitable world order respecting the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, the Kurdish people would have their own state. Given its wealth, its history and its demographic weight, such a state would be today one of the three or four major Middle Eastern powers and, situated as it is at the crossroads of the Turkish, Iranian, Caucasian and Arab areas, it would constitute a pole of stability and democracy, an extraordinary bridge between all these cultures and civilizations. Had such a state existed, we would doubtless have been spared the Iraq-Iran conflict, the Gulf War, the series of military dictatorships in Turkey and the Kurdish people would certainly have been spared 70 years of war, repression, suffering and misfortune.

Why, then, has such a state never been created even though it was foreseen and provided for, in January

1918, in President Woodrow Wilson's famous Fourteen Points Declaration before the US Congress and by the International Treaty of Sèvres signed on 10 August, 1920 ? The answer to this painful question is not simple, even though the chief responsibility for this injustice lies with the great colonial powers of the time, Great Britain and France, which drew up the map of the region according to their own interests with no consideration for the wishes of the local populations concerned. Another reason for this failure was inherent in the Kurdish society of the period, torn by internal quarrels among elites which were unable to meet the challenge of history. At the time, many Kurds believed Turkish general Mustafa Kemal's promise to create a Moslem state of Turks and Kurds, and these Kurds consequently decided to place all their forces at his disposal. When this state was created and recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, Mustafa Kemal immediately broke his promises of Kurdish autonomy and dissolved the national assembly which had included 75 Kurdish representatives. He even closed Kurdish schools and forbade all expressions of Kurdish culture.

The Iraqi Kurds learned from this bitter experience and when, in January and February 1925, they were consulted by a League of Nations mission of enquiry, an overwhelming seven eighths of them came out in favour of an independent Kurdish state and

categorically refused the return of Turkish sovereignty or annexation by Iraq. The Council of the League of Nations did not, however, take this clear position into account and on 16 December, 1925 decided, at the request of the British Empire which held the mandate in Iraq, to incorporate this Kurdish territory with its oil wealth into the state of Iraq. In exchange for their acceptance of this iniquitous British plan, France and the United States each received 23.75% of the revenues of the Turkish Petroleum Company which later became the Iraq Petroleum Company, in charge of exploiting all the oil deposits of Kurdistan.

Meanwhile, by virtue of the Franco-Turkish agreement of 20 October, 1921, France had annexed and incorporated into Syria, then under French mandate, the Kurdish provinces of Djezireh and Kurd Dagh; whereas Iran had crushed the independence movement led by the Kurdish chieftain Simko.

So, by the end of 1925, the carving up and sharing out of Kurdistan between the various states of the Middle East was complete and the scene had been set for the future tragedy of the Kurdish people. Since then, some have described the Kurds as victims of history. But I often wonder if their fate has not, rather, been determined by the geography of their country and, indeed, if history itself is not determined above all by geography. This country of high mountains, interspersed with a multitude of valleys, is at the

crossroads of the routes linking Asia to Europe and the Russian steppes to the Arab Middle East. These were, of course, trade routes but also served for a series of great invasions which, across the centuries, destroyed the internal Kurdish political entity. In order to throw some historical light on our common reflections today, I would like to illustrate this point with a description of some decisive moments in Kurdish history.

In the second half of the 10th Century, Kurdistan was divided among four Kurdish principalities. One of these four dynasties might, over the years, have established hegemony over the others and built a state governing the whole of the Kurdish territory in a process similar to that of the unification of France. However, the massive invasions of Turkish-speaking tribes sweeping across the steppes of Central Asia put a stop to any such natural evolution. A little later, in the 12th Century, the dynasty of the Kurdish prince Saladin might have developed into a Moslem Empire under Kurdish leadership, something like the Ottoman Empire under the Turks. But the Mongolian invasions of the 13th Century completely overwhelmed the political structures of the region. Later still, in 1515, the Kurdish princes signed a pact with the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, which recognized Kurdish autonomy in exchange for a military alliance against the Shiite Persian empire. This Turko-Kurdish agreement

created a period of peace in Kurdistan which lasted for three centuries. Even though the Kurdish region was divided into 17 principalities and a myriad of hereditary lordly domains, the Kurds were still practically independent as far as managing their own affairs was concerned, and they were able to develop their own language. We should not forget that, at this same historical moment, Germany counted some 350 autonomous states and that Italy was divided into far more principalities than Kurdistan.

At the beginning of the 19th Century, when the ideas of the Nation-State and of nationalism, products of the French Revolution, penetrated the old Ottoman Empire, some Kurdish princes, like their German counterparts, tried to create an independent Kurdistan. It is interesting to note that the two most powerful movements for Kurdish independence, those of Prince Mohammad of Rewandouz (1839) and of Bedir Khan Pasha of Bohtan (1848), could only be crushed by the Ottomans thanks to the support of the British and the Germans.

From the second half of the 19th Century onwards, such interference by foreign powers became a permanent feature of contemporary Kurdish history and has remained so ever since. I mentioned a moment ago under what circumstances Kurdistan was divided in the 1920s and what the role of the great powers was in the subjection of the Kurdish people. I should now

add that these foreign interventions and all kinds of aid to the anti-democratic regimes oppressing the Kurds have never ceased.

In the 1920s and 1930s, efforts in Ataturk's Turkey to suppress the Kurdish people's struggle for their freedom were supported by the Soviet Union overtly, and by France and Italy more discreetly. Since the 1950s, the United States has given wide-ranging support to Ankara without asking for any respect of human rights by the Turks in return. This indifference to their human rights record has allowed the Turks - at the end of the 20th Century - both to recognize the existence on their national soil of 12 million Kurds and to claim that they, the Turks, took a great democratic step forward when they permitted the Kurds to speak their mother tongue. Despite this, Turkey to this day forbids the publication of any books or magazines in Kurdish, thus preventing the perpetuation and the transmission of an entire people's culture which is several thousand years old. In a world where the role of the media is crucial, Turkey's 12 million Kurds are not allowed to establish newspapers, radio or television stations in their own language even if they are willing to pay for them entirely out of their own pockets. They are not allowed to teach the language of their ancestors to their children. How can the Western democracies expect to be taken seriously in the Middle East when they speak about human

rights and freedom, if they can so easily tolerate this great injustice committed by one of their allies?

The Iran of the Shahs was upheld first by the British, then by the United States. Everyone knows that the Iranian monarchy was scarcely an example of tolerance and democracy, but the regime of the Ayatollahs has made the persecution of 8 million Kurds even worse. Since August 1979, the Iranian army has waged war on the Kurds, whose crime is to fight for their autonomy within a pluralist and democratic Iran. Who has heard the call of the Kurdish fighters for freedom and democracy? Even when the Iranian Kurdish movement courageously denounced the taking of American hostages by the Islamic regime, no Western government offered support to the brave Kurds struggling in isolation, silence and material deprivation for the ideals and the principles which are exactly the same as those the great democracies are always promoting in public.

And what can one say about Iraq? You are aware how and why nearly all the major powers from the East and the West helped to arm to the teeth a dictator whom the Kurdish resistance had managed to keep in check until 1975. What is perhaps less well known is that more than three quarters of these weapons were purchased with the income from petroleum from the Kurdish regions and that most of these weapons - including napalm, phosphorus bombs, chemical and

bacteriological weapons - were first used against the population of Kurdistan. The participants in this conference, who will be speaking after me, will describe the scope of this human and ecological tragedy. A few days ago in Geneva, at the UN Commission on Human Rights, a representative of the International Human Rights Foundation called this tragedy “an insult to the conscience of humanity”.

When, in the 1920s, countries like Great Britain, France and the United States decided to divide our country and agreed to the subjugation of our people, they took upon themselves a great historical responsibility for the evils that have befallen us for the past 70 years. When they later gave financial credit and weapons indiscriminately to repressive and anti-democratic regimes - in particular the terrible dictatorship of Saddam Hussein - these same countries, as well as the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy and others also assumed responsibility for the present situation of the Kurdish people. The late Andrei Sakharov called this situation a tragic one, and Senator Pell has stated that it should be at the top of the international human rights agenda.

Today, all the countries I have just mentioned are united in the coalition against Iraq. Tomorrow, they will contribute to determining the new order in the Middle East. They have a moral, historical and political responsibility to redress the wrongs and the injustices



of the past, to bind up the wounds of the Kurdish people by devising a fair and equitable solution to the Kurdish problem. Without a solution that respects the dignity, the character and the democratic aspiration of 27 million Kurds in the Middle East, this region cannot hope to enjoy lasting peace and stability. We, the Kurds, very much count on the support of American public opinion and of the United States Congress so that the new order put forward by President Bush will truly be based on freedom, democracy and justice for all the peoples of the region, and that the Kurds will not once again be sacrificed to selfish interests.

Thank you.

# The Tragedy of the Kurds in Iraq

by  
*Jalal TALABANI\**

Madame Mitterrand, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you most sincerely for offering me this opportunity to speak to you about the continuing tragedy of the largest nation in the world today which is being denied any form of national expression or human rights.

The tragedy of the Kurds is manifested most blatantly in the suppression of its national and cultural identities, the denial of opportunities for progress and development, and the subjection to brutal campaigns of deportation, destruction and even genocide. The human rights organisation Helsinki Watch sums up the plights of the Kurds as "a staggering list of human rights abuses, arrest, torture, murder, assassination, chemical warfare, mass deportations, expulsions,

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\* Leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

appalling conditions in refugee camps, refusal of political asylum by the West, denial of ethnic rights to language, literature and music, and destruction of villages and towns”.

This horrendous tragedy, which is truly unique in our modern times, has resulted primarily from the forced annexation of parts of Kurdistan by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, and from the denial of the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people.

Kurdistan was carved up in the aftermath of the First World War in contravention of the wishes of the majority of Kurds and in spite of the following :

1- The Treaty of Sèvres explicitly recognized the need to grant Kurdish rights in central Kurdistan (which was annexed to Turkey) and southern Kurdistan (which was formally annexed to Iraq in 1924). Clauses 63, 64 and 65 of this treaty called for the establishment of a semi-independent Kurdish entity under international protection with the option of developing into an independent state within one year.

2- In his historic introduction to the Charter of the League of Nations, the American President Woodrow Wilson recognized the need to liberate Armenia, Kurdistan and the Arab countries from Ottoman rule

and spoke of the right of the Kurds to freedom and independence.

3- The Joint Declaration of 25 September 1922 between the governments of Great Britain and that of the then newly established State of Iraq recognized the right of the Kurds to have a special state. This declaration was preceded by a parliamentary statement in July 1922 by the then Minister for Colonies, Sir Winston Churchill, who said : “We do not want to force the people of southern Kurdistan to join the government of King Faisal” and added that the British government is “studying the demands of Kurds for self-rule”.

4- Repeated promises by the French and British allies in their joint statements, and by Sir Winston Churchill at the Cairo Conference, that they agreed to the establishment of a federation of Kurdish principalities.

5- Mustafa Kemal Pasha repeatedly promised Kurdish representatives to the Turkish National Assembly that he will grant the Kurds self-rule far more generous than that outlined in the Treaty of Sèvres.

6- Whenever referenda have been held, the Kurds have expressed their rejection of the division and annexation of their homeland. In this regard, I cite two examples:

First: The report by the Committee of Three, which was set up by the League of Nations in 1924 to examine the case of Mosul Province (i.e. southern Kurdistan), stated that the majority of the inhabitants of the province object to annexation and demand independence.

Second: King Faisal I told the British High Commissioner to Baghdad that the majority of the Kurds in the eastern, southern and central regions of Kurdistan aspire to establish an independent Kurdish state. (This is reported in Telegram N° 503 of 20 September 1921 which was sent by the British High Commissioner to the Minister for Colonies.)

Furthermore, Kurdish resistance has been a dominant feature of contemporary Kurdish history as the natural response to the campaigns of assimilation and genocide, and as an expression of rejection of the division and annexation of the Kurdish homeland.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANNEXATION

Despite all the aforementioned, British and European policy has been directed toward maintaining the division and annexation of Kurdistan. This annexation was in effect implemented by military force and in contravention of the wishes and aspirations of the Kurdish people. This state of affairs has led to what we

see as the tragic plight of the Kurds, manifested most blatantly in the following ways:

1- The Kurds have been deprived of their basic right to choose their governors and officials in Kurdistan and to elect their representatives to the central authorities.

2- The Kurds have been deprived of their right to study in Kurdish and thus develop their language and culture.

3- The Kurdish National Movement has been brutally suppressed through the waging of indiscriminate wars, resulting in the destruction of Kurdistan with devastating social, economic, cultural, political and ecological consequences.

4- Assimilation of Kurdish identity through the ruthless chauvinistic policies of Turkification, Arabisation and Persianisation, particularly in Kurdish areas rich in oil and minerals.

5- The plundering of the oil, water, and agricultural wealth of Kurdistan and depriving the Kurdish people of their rightful share of this wealth. Indeed, that wealth has often been used to acquire weapons of destruction to suppress Kurdish identity.

6- The development and progress of agriculture,

industry, health and culture in Kurdistan have been severely disrupted and hindered.

7- Kurdish history, including the very important contribution Kurds have made to Islamic civilisation and humanity, has been distorted as part of the chauvinistic policies aimed at suppressing Kurdish identity.

### THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND DEMOCRACY

Owing to the fact that the right to self-determination is considered as the natural right of all nations, in accordance with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the forced annexation of a country and a people clearly violates this internationally recognized right.

The right to self-determination emerged as a principle during the French Revolution of 1789 which called for Liberty, Fraternity and Equality amongst mankind, demanding the right of the people to govern themselves through their democratically elected representatives in an atmosphere in which freedom of speech, thought, religion and association prevails. Therefore, self-determination is a democratic right... it is indeed the manifestation of democracy in the field of national rights, which means the right of

a nation to govern itself through its own democratically elected representatives who would constitute the legal authority in their country.

However, nationalism of the larger, or ruling, nation often turns to suppress the right of the smaller nations to democracy and self-government. Jawaharlal Nehru has written of his disappointment at how Turkish nationalism turned from a national movement for the liberation of Turkey into a chauvinistic onslaught against the Kurds. And now we see how Arab nationalism in Iraq, Sudan and Algeria has been transformed into chauvinistic movements seeking to assimilate the Kurds, the people of southern Sudan and the Berbers.

Democracy does incorporate the right to self-determination, since it provides for the right to free elections, freedom of expression and of political activity. Thus, the right of a people to choose their own system and form of government is the right to self-determination. Therefore, those who object to the right of self-determination are in fact opposing democracy and reject its fundamentals. It is a gross mistake to confine the domain of democracy to the freedoms of the individual. Another most important pillar of democracy is the collective right of a people to govern themselves through their elected representatives, and indeed through their right to



exercise sovereignty by freely choosing to co-exist with other nations within a unitary state, or to choose secession and independence. True democracy entails freedoms for the individual and groups, and therefore those who believe in democracy are bound to recognize unequivocally the legitimacy of the right of all nations to self-determination.

### THE KURDISH PEOPLE AND THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

In the aftermath of the disintegration of the European empires, with the exception of the Russian Empire which appears to be on the brink of disintegration, I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that the right to self-determination cannot be denied or disputed legally or morally. Therefore, anyone who acknowledges the existence of the Kurds, numbering 25 to 30 million people, must logically accept their right to self-determination.

However, the old notion about the impossibility of implementing the Kurdish right to self-determination is still being affirmed in many quarters, ranging from the states that rule over Kurdistan to the European countries, the United States of America, the Soviet Union, China and even many of those who sympathize with the Kurdish people and their just cause.

The liberation and unification of Kurdistan to form an independent state is considered an impossibility in the present international political climate.

So what is the position of the Kurdish National Movement on this most vital issue ?

**Firstly:** The Kurdish National Movement considers the Kurdish people as one people who have been divided by colonialist powers in contravention of all relevant charters and international conventions. The division of Kurdistan is an historic injustice that ought to be redressed in accordance with the principles of democracy and human rights.

**Secondly:** The impossibility of exercising a right during a given historical period does not, and should not, mean the nullification or cancellation of that right or its legality. Therefore, the Kurdish people retain their right to self-determination. Whereas the circumstances which prevent the implementation of this right are only temporary and have been imposed by dictatorships and chauvinistic nationalism... circumstances which clearly cannot be sustained without the use of force.

A similar impossibility also extends to other democratic and human rights in the region. The impossibility is clearly temporary and unsustainable, particularly at the time when the winds of democracy

and change are expected to storm through the Middle East, as it did in Eastern Europe.

**Thirdly:** Whilst the Kurdish National Movement considers the right to self-determination a legitimate strategic objective, we are realistic and acknowledge the geopolitical realities of the region. Therefore, the movement advocates democracy and human rights within the states that rule over Kurdistan as a foundation upon which a realistic solution to the Kurdish national problem can be based. We propose an achievable solution in the form of federated or confederated Kurdish entities within the existing states. Such a solution does not entail changing the present political boundaries in the Middle East and this possibility is now being examined by many European governments.

Even President Turgut Özal advocates a confederated Iraq among Arabs, Kurds and Turcomans (the latter are estimated to number less than half a million). Noting that the Kurds in Turkey number about 15 million (i.e. more than 30 times the number of Turcomans in Iraq), is it not our right to advocate a confederated Turkey amongst the Turks, Kurds and Arabs? Surely the Turkish President should consider implementing his model for confederation in Turkey, for this would become an exemplary experience for the whole region. The situation in Turkey is most

important. Whereas we are hopeful about the prospects for the democratic process in Turkey, I believe that the viability and seriousness of Turkish reforms on the Kurdish front depend on:

- 1- The ending of the civil war in Kurdistan;
- 2- A general amnesty for all Kurdish political prisoners and Peshmergas;
- 3- The return of all exiles and deportees to their original areas of residence;
- 4- The granting of genuine democratic liberties to the Kurds in Turkey, including the lifting of bans on Kurdish political parties. This is undoubtedly influenced by the wider progress of democracy in Turkey.
- 5- Respect for Kurdish culture and recognition of the right to use Kurdish language through the press, radio and television.

Furthermore, when the friend of the Kurdish people, President François Mitterrand, proposes a framework of federation and democracy as a suitable system of government in the multi-national states of Europe, is it not viable and indeed desirable to widen the sphere of this framework to also benefit the peoples of the Middle East ?

We are not seeking a utopia or an impossible dream, but for democracy and human rights to be accorded to the Kurdish people. Our call for democratic federal or confederal systems of government in the countries that rule over Kurdistan is not only based on the relentless struggle of our people for their right to self-determination, but also on the principles of democracy, human rights and international treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Sèvres, the Fourteen Points of President Woodrow Wilson, the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and ending with the Paris Charter of 1990.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The just struggle of the Kurdish people has been continuing for over 100 years and the states that rule over the Kurdish homeland have failed in eradicating Kurdish identity, despite their ruthless campaigns of assimilation and genocide and the use of chemical weapons. Surely, comprehensive peace and stability in the Middle East cannot, and will not, be achieved without finding a just solution to the Kurdish national problem. We advocate a solution based on democracy, which I believe to be the panacea for the problems of the region, and through federal or confederal systems of government.

The Kurdish genie is out of the bottle and will never return to it, and it is perhaps appropriate to remember the words of Jawaharlal Nehru when speaking of the Kemalist onslaught against the Kurds in the 1920s : “How can one crush a people who insist on freedom and are ready to pay the price for it?”

Therefore, democracy, human rights and the interests of mankind, including those of Europe, the United States of America, Japan, the Soviet Union and China, require the finding of a just solution to the Kurdish national problem and reparation of the historic injustices that have been inflicted upon the Kurds.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Kurdish movement today is predominantly a democratic and secular movement which can play a constructive role in the establishment and consolidation of democracy in the region and can play a moderating influence in the face of fundamentalist tendencies and dictatorships which endanger the prospects of peace and stability in the region.

Therefore, I appeal to you in the name of the principles of democracy and freedom, and through you to the

Congress and the Senate, to support our efforts to establish democracy and lay the foundations of a new Middle East in which the genocide of the Kurds cannot be allowed to occur once again.

Woodrow Wilson called for the liberation of Kurdistan. We hope that your great nation will take up that call and help to alleviate the tragedy of the Kurdish people.

The Kurdish people deserve your support, and indeed the support of the American Administration. American support for our democratic objectives is most important in ensuring lasting stability in the Middle East and protecting the legitimate interests of the international community in this most important region.

## Human Rights of Kurds in Iraq

by  
Hoshiyar ZEBARI\*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure many of you have come to know the Kurds through the injustices that have been inflicted on my people.

Atrocities are perpetrated every single day, and few other nations have suffered as much as we have. Just imagine being a Kurd in a country like Iraq. A Kurd is viewed as a potential enemy, a threat to national security, if he tries to express views other than the official line dictated to him.

A Kurd has no land, according to official Ba'thist ideology, because the land does not belong to him (even if his ancestors had already lived on it), but to the Arab nation. In certain areas he cannot even buy property.

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\* Spokesman for the Iraqi Kurdistan Front in Europe.



A Kurd is always liable to be displaced or expelled forcibly from his home, and Arab settlers are brought in to occupy his home right in front of his eyes.

A Kurd cannot object to the destruction of his way of life, his cultural heritage, because he will be severely persecuted. His children, his wife and his relatives will be collectively detained and punished. If a Kurd tries to resist this kind of oppression and is caught by the authorities, he will be executed, sometimes on the spot, and he has no right of defense or appeal.

These are, ladies and gentlemen, some of the daily atrocities committed against my people in Iraqi Kurdistan.

I cannot describe to you, while you are safe in your homes, the terror that the Iraqis' use of poison gas had on our community. Just imagine what happened: ordinary people like yourselves were going about their everyday business. Many were already asleep in their beds when the planes came. Within minutes, they were suffering convulsions and paralysis. Within minutes, they were engulfed in clouds of lethal nerve gases and they were dying in Halabja, in Balisan and in Bahdinan. For a parent, there can be no worse sight than seeing his children perish in this horrible manner or, for that matter, a child seeing his life collapse in front of him as his father and mother die in agony before his very eyes. These scenes, ladies and

gentlemen, have been repeated hundreds and hundreds of times in Kurdistan.

The abuses suffered by the Kurds of Iraq are too numerous, and the material on them too ample, not to say that what we are facing is a campaign that has all the hallmarks of genocide: a premeditated and systematic extermination of our population. The sheer scale and severity of Iraq's campaign points to an unashamed attempt to eradicate the cultural and historical identity of the Kurdish region.

Let me just mention briefly the main elements:

- Arbitrary arrests, including thousands of civilians, mass detention without possibility of legal recourse, widespread torture and mass executions, even of children. Amnesty International's reports have documented these violations.

- Disappearances: many thousands of people have disappeared in Iraq. I will mention only two instances. In 1983, the Iraqi army rounded up some 8,000 Barzani Kurds and took them away in trucks, never to be heard of again. In August 1988, 439 Kurds also disappeared.

- Chemical weapons : between April 1987 and September 1988, the Iraqi regime repeatedly bombed Kurdish areas with mustard and nerve gas, killing

mainly civilians. The death toll was nearly 9,000 men, women and children of all ages. Halabja was the peak of this chemical genocide. Thousands more developed irremediable sicknesses.

- Forcible relocation : nearly 1.5 million Kurds were forced out of their homes and forcibly resettled against their will in 110 resettlement camps throughout Kurdistan. Several thousand were deported to the south to desert camps. As many as 4,000 villages, district and sub-district towns and rural communities have been destroyed, and "free fire zones" were declared along the Iraqi-Turkish and Iraqi-Iranian borders. One can safely say that nearly 90% of the Kurdish countryside has been devastated.

- Confiscation of land and Arabisation policy : out of 75,000 sq kms of traditional Kurdish territory, nearly 30,000 sq kms have been Arabised and resettled with Arabs, mainly in the southern plains of Kurdistan and in towns with mixed populations.

- Deportation and refugees : since 1975, up to 250,000 Kurds were deported or made refugees in Iran or Turkey. None of them have any legal protection and they lack material assistance and international aid.

The war in the Gulf has increased and added further suffering to the Kurdish people, because of the heavy-handed policy of security forces in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the persecution of the Kurds in Iraq has intensified during Saddam Hussein's rule, my people's suffering precedes his coming to power and may, sadly, continue after he is gone. The plight of the Kurdish people is essentially a human tragedy.

We, like many others familiar with Saddam Hussein's ways, anticipated the escalation in Iraq's disregard for international law and civilized behaviour. Our only regret is that our earlier pleas to the international community went unheeded, and that action was not taken earlier against one of the most vicious regimes of our time.

I would like to refer you to the Congressional Record Vol. 134 N° 123 (N°/ 23), published on 9 September, 1988, in which Mr. Masoud Barzani, on behalf of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, appealed to the United Nations Security Council and to the international community to intercede with and stop the Iraqi dictator.

International decision makers cannot claim to have been ignorant of what Saddam was up to. Evidence of his brutality was everywhere. Unfortunately, when something could have been done to stop or at least curb him, the decision makers turned a blind eye to the warning signs and continued to support him militarily and economically until he must surely have

felt that he was beyond the reach of international law. There is no longer a shred of doubt that the Iraqi president is a tyrant, but those who now most strongly oppose him must accept their share of moral responsibility for helping create the demon that has been unleashed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting is timely and very significant in view of the war in the Gulf. We believe that the denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Iraq by Saddam Hussein's dictatorship is the root cause of his aggression against Kuwait and the world, since the recognition of human rights is the prerequisite for peace - for external and for internal peace.

Human rights are inborn, inalienable, indivisible and equal, and are an international responsibility. Whenever, wherever and by whomever they are violated, all governments should be held accountable to the world community, notably the government of Iraq.

We believe it is essential that, in any post-war settlement or war crimes tribunal set up by the international coalition against Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, his crimes against the Kurds and his gross and flagrant violations of human rights, which are tantamount to crimes against humanity, should be taken up and that international protection for the

Kurdish people in Iraq should be established. We also believe that formal congressional and parliamentary questions should be stated concerning current events affecting the Kurds. Further, that the current situation and the fate of the Kurds deserve to be a focus of international public awareness, to which this meeting can contribute.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say that it is no coincidence that the recognition and affirmation of human rights stand at the beginning of every major process of change in recent history, from the days of the American and French revolutions to the present movement for democracy that has begun and changed the fate of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. I trust that one day, it will also triumph in Iraq, and will triumph for the Kurds.

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you, and I would particularly like to thank Madame Danielle Mitterrand who has built for herself a very special place in the heart of every Kurdish child, woman and man for her energetic and enthusiastic efforts to raise international awareness of the tragedy of the Kurds. My thanks also go to the Congressional Human Rights Foundation and to our friends in the Kurdish Institute of Paris who organized this meeting.

Thank you.

Why the United States Should Adopt  
the Kurdish Issue:  
A Kurdish-American Perspective

by  
*Dr. Asad Khailany\**

Mrs. Mitterrand, Mr. Chairman, distinguished panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my gratitude to all those who made it possible for our organization, the Kurdish National Congress of North America, to participate in this important conference.

Many of us Kurdish Americans immigrated to our new country, the United States of America, from our old rich homeland not because of economic incentives, but because we were principally attracted by the democratic principles on which this country is built. The comments and expressions of Kurdish men and

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\* President of the Kurdish National Congress of North America.

women, old and young, and their dreams of establishing a democratic system in Kurdistan where Kurds can enjoy their national and human rights, are still fresh in my mind.

Currently, one of the worst nightmares facing the Kurdish people, specifically in Iraq, is to have the current Gulf crisis end without the Kurdish issue being addressed by the international community. The greatest fear is that the Kurdish people will remain at the mercy of undemocratic regimes which have demonstrated a long history of persecution, discrimination and denial of self-determination to their Kurdish populations.

If there is a single word to describe US interests in the Middle East, that word should be STABILITY. However, that stability is closely related to having stable regimes which have the support of their people. Experience in the Middle East and all over the world has proven that in the long run, undemocratic regimes will never be stable, no matter how strong and powerful they seem to be.

The first step for establishing a lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is for the United States to work toward replacing the current cruel and inhuman regime of Saddam Hussain with a democratic system in which the national and human rights of Kurds and of all Iraqis are recognized. The example of the



United States replacing the defeated German and Japanese regimes with democratic systems at the end of the Second World War, outweighs any concerns which may be voiced by Iraq's neighbouring regimes about the idea of establishing a democratic system in Iraq, and which some of them may consider as a threat.

The Kurdish issue cannot be ignored forever. Without finding a just solution to the Kurdish problem, there will be no stability and peace in the area even if the Palestinian issue is resolved. The Kurdish leadership and the Kurdish movement should be given credit for not permitting the perpetration of any terrorist acts by Kurds. But ignoring the Kurdish issue longer and longer may lead to the creation of extremist organizations, which in turn may lead to terrorist actions.

Kurds are free by nature, and they have always considered themselves to be friends of the United States. If the United States adopts the Kurdish issue, we will gain a solid, dependable friend in a very critical, strategic region of the world.

Mr. Chairman,

It is sad to say that thirty million Kurdish people and the Kurdish issue have been completely ignored by the current Administration and to a certain extent by

the media. However, the courageous senators and congressmen who have brought up the Kurdish issue a number of times in the United States Congress, and the untiring efforts of Mrs. Danielle Mitterrand, have kept alive the hope of the Kurdish people that their long festering problem will not be ignored forever.

The following are some of the steps which the Kurdish National Congress of North America sees as necessary to be taken:

1. The United States should support the movement to create a new Iraqi government-in-exile in which the Kurds are full participants.

2. Any international conference on Middle East issues must have the Kurdish issue on its agenda. The Kurdish issue should be adopted by the United States and a Kurdish delegation should be recognized and permitted to participate fully. It was an insult to humanity when the international conference on the use of chemical weapons held in Paris in 1989, prevented the victims of chemical weapons, the Kurds, from participating. Yet the criminal Iraqi regime, which used chemical weapons, was one of the major participants.

3. The United States should take the Kurdish issue to the United Nations. The events of the current Gulf crisis have proved that President Bush and his Admi-

nistration have excellent diplomatic skills and the capability to push for a resolution to protect Kurdish national and human rights in all parts of Kurdistan. The United States should simultaneously push for the creation of a Kurdish observer position to the United Nations, with similar status to that granted the Palestinians. The United States and all other countries who contributed to Iraq's military build-up and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons have a moral obligation to support the Kurdish issue. The Kurds of Iraq have suffered most directly from this misguided policy for the past ten years.

4. Those companies which supplied the products and technology to Iraq to produce chemical and biological weapons should pay compensation to the victims of these weapons, the Kurds, just as Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist regime should be tried as war criminals.

5. The United States should use its influence specifically on Turkey to recognize national and human rights of Kurdish people in Turkey. The United States should also use any influence it has to press the Iranian and Syrian regimes to recognize the national and human rights of Kurdish people under their control.

6. Last summer the United States Congress passed a resolution asking for Voice of America broadcasts in the Kurdish language. To the best of our knowledge,

Voice of America is still not broadcasting in Kurdish. In this historical and critical time, it is essential to start implementing this resolution immediately, which may help to save many lives among the allied forces and the Iraqi people.

7. Since the Kurds do not have a government, they are always at a disadvantage. They will not be treated as equals to those nations who have their own governments. That is why the Kurds never had equal opportunities to immigrate to the United States. The well-known American writer, William Safire, recognized this fact and recommended that the United States allocate 5% of its immigration quota to Kurdish people annually.

Although the American Administration in principle accepted as immigrants between 1,500-3,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees currently in Turkey, who were the direct victims of chemical weapons, to the best of our knowledge none have yet arrived here.

8. Kurdish culture, literature, music, language and art are deliberately neglected and destroyed by the governments who control the Kurdish regions. Several American universities have begun, or are planning to offer, courses of study in the Kurdish language, culture, and history. However, the study of Kurdish culture outside Kurdistan will become a mere academic

exercise if the heart of Kurdish culture is allowed to die.

Mr. Chairman, the Kurdish leadership has continuously expressed its desire to find a peaceful solution to this problem. We in the United States must give full support to their efforts to have Kurdish national and human rights recognized.

Again, the Kurdish National Congress extends its thanks to all those who have made such an important and historical conference possible.

Thank you.

# Statement by Amnesty International

*Maryam ELAHI\**

## I. INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, the Fondation Danielle Mitterrand and the Kurdish Institute of Paris for inviting Amnesty International to participate in this conference. It is crucial that, at this critical period, attention be paid to creating and enforcing human rights structures to prevent future crises in the Middle East. This conference provides an excellent forum to reflect on past United States policy towards governments who violate the rights of the Kurdish people, as well as an opportunity to make recommendations to United States policy-makers on effective ways to guarantee that international human rights standards are implemented in countries where the Kurds live.

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\* Program Officer for Europe and the Middle East, Washinton D.C.

For the past thirty years, Amnesty International has actively worked to achieve compliance by all governments with international human rights standards. Amnesty International takes no position on issues relating to political or territorial sovereignty; we are only concerned with ensuring that all political prisoners are accorded fair trials, all prisoners of conscience are immediately and unconditionally released and that torture and the death penalty are abolished in all countries around the world.

Throughout the years, Amnesty International has expressed its concern about the persecution of the Kurds in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. I will briefly touch on Amnesty's concerns in Iran and Syria, but I shall concentrate the focus of my talk on Turkey and Iraq, where Amnesty's concerns about the Kurds are greatest. In respect to Syria, Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concerns about individuals detained solely because they were members of prohibited political parties. Some of these individuals have been detained for more than ten years. Several members of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) were imprisoned in 1973 merely for writing a letter to President Assad. In the letter, they protested the removal of Syria's Kurdish population in Syria's northern border areas and their replacement by Arabs. Seven of the individuals arrested spent more than 10 years in Syrian prisons without ever having been

tried. Torture is routine in Syria, and Amnesty is concerned that the Kurds in detention, like other political prisoners, are being tortured.

Amnesty International has also had longstanding concerns about the persecution of Kurds in Iran. On a number of occasions, Amnesty has expressed its concerns to the Iranian government about the execution of Kurdish opposition party members. We have yet to receive a response.

## TURKEY

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has stated its concerns about routine ill-treatment of detainees in Turkey. Torture is systematic and, in some cases, has resulted in the death of prisoners. The Kurdish minority in Turkey, which is estimated to number some 10 million people who live in southeastern Turkey, has been one of the primary targets of human rights abuses. Amnesty frequently receives allegations of torture and ill-treatment from the Kurdish region of Turkey; torture allegations have increased substantially since the 1980 military coup.

Incommunicado detention of political prisoners is routine in Turkey. It is far more prevalent in the 10 southeastern provinces, where emergency legislation is in force. Under this legislation, the maximum



detention period one can be held for before being formally charged or released is 24 hours; in cases involving three or more suspects or due to the “nature of the crime”, it may be extended to 30-days. The 30 day incommunicado detention is quite regularly invoked in southeastern Turkey, denying the detainee access to his or her lawyers and family members and thereby removing any possibility of monitoring the detainee’s health and treatment. It is during this initial interrogation and detention period that most torture and ill-treatment allegations are reported.

Collective punishment has been invoked against the Kurds by the Turkish government as a means of discouraging support for the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), an insurgency movement. Last year, the security forces evacuated dozens of villages along the Syrian border in an attempt to deprive the guerrillas of food and shelter. Villagers usually do not wish to leave. Threats, destruction of property or foodstuffs and large scale detention are used to force villagers to leave. Villagers with no history of political activity have been interrogated, often under torture, on suspicion of having provided shelter for guerrillas.

Amnesty International received a report during the first week of January 1991 that nomads of the Dideran tribe, who were wintering in Ashlar, were forced by the officer in charge of the gendarmerie to stand

outside the security post in the village for three successive nights till dawn, after they refused to evacuate voluntarily. A number of the women and children subjected to this treatment subsequently became ill. In other similar incidents, villagers have been detained in police stations and tortured.

There have been some recent changes in Turkey in the last year, but they have been only of a cosmetic nature. A permanent Parliamentary Human Rights Commission was founded to investigate allegations of human rights abuses and to propose changes in the law. It has yet to consider any cases. Under a draft law, the Kurdish minority will be permitted to speak their language at home and in the street as, in practice, they do today. However, publication, education or correspondence with branches of the state in Kurdish will remain illegal, punishable by imprisonment and/or fines. These changes are welcome, but do not reflect any real improvement in the human rights situation in Turkey.

In fact, there was no improvement in Turkey's human rights record in the last year. Uncharged detentions of political opponents and incidents of torture continued and there was no attempt to investigate the allegations of torture nor to prosecute the torturers. Since 2 August, there has been an increase in security force operations among the villages of southeastern Turkey. Amnesty has received reports that people, detained

after the Gulf War had begun, were threatened by members of the security forces who claimed that they now had a free hand in their treatment of prisoners. In some cases, detainees were threatened that they would be shot on the pretext of trying to escape.

Amnesty does not take a position on linking human rights records to aid money; nonetheless, we believe it to be critical for donor states to have an accurate picture of the human rights situation in each country, in order to evaluate the impact of the funds given and the nature of the government being financed. We think the human rights records of countries should be factored into all aspects of foreign policy decision-making, but we do not attempt to suggest how countries should act on our information in regard to financial allocations.

United States law, specifically section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act, prohibits providing security assistance to “any country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights”. In the fiscal year 1990, Turkey was allotted around \$500 million in military assistance, and more than \$14 million in Economic Support Funds have been earmarked for Turkey.

Amnesty has routinely informed the members of both Houses of Congress and the Administration

about the dire human rights situation in Turkey. Safeguards need to be implemented in order to put an end to human rights violations in Turkey. The current emergency legislation, extending incommunicado detention to a maximum of thirty days, violates international law. The reduction of the incommunicado period to a matter of days such that individuals would be brought before judicial authorities promptly and charged, is a measure that could effectively limit the occurrence of torture in Turkey.

## IRAQ

For well over a decade, Amnesty International has been documenting thousands of instances in which the fundamental human rights of Iraqi citizens have been systematically denied. The Kurdish population, along with other ethnic groups, has suffered enormously in Iraq. As far back as 1974, Amnesty began raising its concerns with the Iraqi government about the treatment of the Kurds. We urged the Iraqi government to investigate allegations of ill-treatment and torture and the alarming number of reported executions. Amnesty appealed to the then Iraqi President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr for all Kurdish civilians to be accorded the protections guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights, to which Iraq is a State Party. Our appeals have been ignored and the violence has grown over the years.

In 1983, 8,000 members of the Kurdish Barzani clan were arrested and subsequently “disappeared”. Among them were 315 children whose whereabouts are still unknown. On 16 and 17 March, 1988, an estimated 5,000 people were killed and thousands of others wounded as a result of chemical weapons attacks on Halabja. In April 1988, some 400 Kurdish civilians, among them women and children, were reported to have been executed in Sulaimaniya province. The victims were said to have been wounded as a result of chemical weapons attacks in March. They were fleeing and were apprehended by security forces as they made their way to the city of Sulaimaniya to seek treatment.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi forces launched attacks on hundreds of Kurdish villages in northern Iraq, killing hundreds and wounding thousands of unarmed civilians. Chemical weapons were used in these attacks. Thousands of Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran until Iraqi forces closed the border. Many who were unable to escape were reportedly arrested and executed. Some refugees returned after the Iraqi government offered them amnesty. Many who returned were reported to have “disappeared”. Some are known to have been executed.

Amnesty International has made a concerted effort during the past decade to make these concerns known and to bring an end to the torture and killings in Iraq. We have issued numerous reports, and Amnesty members throughout the world have protested the abuses and sought to publicize them within their own countries. Amnesty has appealed directly to the Iraqi government in Baghdad and its embassies in the United States and elsewhere. Unfortunately, all efforts to exert serious governmental and intergovernmental pressure on Iraq failed until the invasion of Kuwait.

In August 1988, Amnesty International appealed to the United Nations regarding the Iraqi government's use of chemical weapons against unarmed civilians. In a statement to the expert body of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Amnesty described the use of chemical weapons as "a systematic and deliberate policy on the part of the government of Iraq to eliminate large numbers of Kurdish civilians".

Amnesty International further cited "grave fears that, in the aftermath of the war, a further significant deterioration in human rights could occur in Iraq if the Iraqi government chose to take further action against its internal critics and opponents". The United Nations failed to undertake any serious action in

response to our appeals. Our fears were soon realized once the cease-fire came into effect, permitting military units to be redeployed to northern Iraq.

By early September 1988, we were receiving numerous reports that hundreds of unarmed Kurdish civilians, including women and children, had been deliberately killed and thousands of others wounded as the result of attacks on Kurdish villages in the region. An unprecedented appeal was issued to the United Nations Security Council, seeking immediate action to halt the massacre of Kurdish civilians. Amnesty International stated that "these killings represent a most serious denial of the purposes of the United Nations Charter and a flagrant contravention of fundamental international human rights norms." Again, the United Nations failed to act. Other efforts in 1989 and 1990 to focus the attention of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the widespread violation of human rights in Iraq ended with no action being taken by the UN.

In 1990, prior to the August invasion, Amnesty International appealed to the United Nations once again. On 19 February, an oral statement was made to the Commission on Human Rights concerning the "disappearance" and execution of Kurdish and other refugees who had returned from Turkey. It is rather troubling that all these years the UN, with full knowledge of the human rights situation in Iraq,

failed to undertake any measure to call for accountability and an end to the abuses in Iraq. Had the UN acted sooner, perhaps the Gulf crisis we are faced with today could have been prevented.

Throughout the years, Amnesty International has also sought to raise its concerns about Iraqi human rights violations with the United States government. It is unfortunate that, until the invasion of Kuwait, our concerns were not taken seriously. In its testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last June, Amnesty International stated that it found a gross and consistent pattern of human rights violations in Iraq. Unfortunately, a spokesman for the Administration refused to concur in our assessment.

In the early 1970s, the United States provided some \$16 million in assistance to the Iraqi Kurdish leadership to bolster the opposition against Iraq. The Kurds were used for political purposes and United States government funds were immediately cut off in 1975, when the intended result had been achieved. Shortly thereafter, the Iraqi government unleashed its terror machinery on the Kurds, some were detained, and for more than a year, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds were deported to the south and other non-Kurdish regions of Iraq.

During the past decade, while hundreds of people were being killed by the security forces in Iraq, and



thousands “disappeared”, the United States government continued to provide economic support to Iraq. In 1983, subsequent to the “disappearance” of 8,000 Kurds in Iraq, the United States Administration extended the Commodity Credits Corporation program to Iraq, enabling it to purchase US agricultural goods. In addition, the US Export-Import Bank gave short-term loans to Iraq which amounted to some \$35 million in 1984 and 1985. Despite the public outcry about Iraq’s chemical weapons attack on Halabja the year before, which was one of a series of attacks by the Iraqi government, in 1989 the United States administration doubled the credits available to Iraq under the Commodity Credits Program to a level exceeding \$1 billion.

## CONCLUSION

Amnesty International has consistently and repeatedly approached the Administration with requests that these concerns be raised with the respective governments of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. In none of the above mentioned countries has the United States raised its concerns about human rights violations of the Kurdish community in the Commission on Human Rights, the appropriate UN body. Raising such concerns in the UN is important, in part because it can lead to the monitoring of the human rights

situation and to assistance in setting up safeguards to prevent abuses from occurring. The United States must act more evenhandedly and forcefully in the United Nations on human rights issues.

The current crisis in the Gulf has taught us that human rights violations, unheeded and unchecked, will lead to much larger crises transgressing beyond national boundaries. The United States can and should play a leading role, at this critical juncture in history, in establishing permanent structures in the Middle East region to monitor and implement international human rights mechanisms. Only then will the rights of the Kurds, a people persecuted in so many countries of the region, be adequately protected.

**Statement  
by the International Federation  
of Human Rights**

*Claude Catz\**

Ladies and gentlemen,

For over twenty years now, side by side with the Kurdish people, the International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR) has been fighting for the recognition and protection of this people's basic rights.

For over twenty years, the IFHR has considered this issue to be one of its top priorities and has continually stressed the need to denounce the plight of this martyred people as being an insult to the conscience of humanity and to international ethics.

The IFHR took action by following its usual operating methods, in particular by means of Judicial Observa-

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\* Deputy Secretary General of the I.F.H.R.

tion Missions and by addressing the main international organizations where it is accredited, notably the United Nations.

Since 1972, we have organized missions of experts comprising magistrates, lawyers and medical specialists:

. In TURKEY, we encountered the least resistance to our investigations of the following :

— violations of the rights of the Kurdish population (summary executions, torture, displacement of the population),

— the fate of the refugees fleeing from Iranian Kurdistan,

— trials of Kurdish dignitaries such as the Mayor of Diyarbakir, the major city of Turkish Kurdistan, and the trial of Mr. Besikçi, Turkish sociologist who defended the right to a Kurdish identity.

The last mission was sent quite recently to Turkey, from 17 to 25 February, 1991. Representatives of Médecins du Monde and of the Movement against Racism, Antisemitism and for Peace (MRAP) took part in this mission. They were able to record cases of consistent ill-treatment and of prolonged pre-trial custody inflicted on citizens of

Kurdish origin, among them 13-year-old children facing the death penalty.

. In IRAQ, during the year 1974, the IFHR carried out one mission in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since then, the Iraqi authorities have consistently refused any further visa applications for other Judicial Observation Missions.

. In IRAN, the IFHR undertook one mission in 1984. But, as in Iraq, no further missions could be carried out due to the authorities' refusal to grant visas.

In 1987, during the session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the IFHR addressed the meeting several times under the agenda item dealing with the *Rights of persons belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic minorities*, and denounced human rights violations in the following countries :

. In SYRIA, where the Kurdish inhabitants number one million, the State has not granted autonomy, not even under Syrian rule. The State further denies these people their cultural identity (publications in the Kurdish language are strictly prohibited) and exercises discrimination against the Kurds who are denied access to positions of higher rank and responsibility in the army as well as in the administration.

. In TURKEY, where approximately 12 million Kurds live, the Constitution prohibits “any expression or publication of Kurdish opinions”.

In its statement, the IFHR also recalled that, since July 1987, the Turkish government has maintained throughout the Kurdish region, a state of emergency under military command empowered to adopt repressive legislation. This military command resorts to massive deportations of the population, arbitrary arrests, summary executions and torture. The IFHR has repeatedly urged the United Nations Human Rights Commission to pass a resolution compelling Turkey to abolish the death penalty in conformity with the recommendations of the Council of Europe, to put an end to its military occupation of the Kurdish provinces and to recognize the existence of this minority with its full cultural rights.

. In IRAQ, the government has conducted a policy of forced Arabisation which was continuously and steadfastly rejected by the Kurdish population. This policy has led to constant and massive violations of the rights of the Kurdish people, such as the destruction of Kurdish villages and forcible displacement of the population, most notably out of the oil-rich zones. Since 1987, hundreds of villages have been burned down or levelled to the ground with bulldozers. The Iraqi authorities did not hesitate

to use chemical weapons, as in March 1988 for instance - thereby massacring several thousand people, notably in the province of Suleimaniya.

. In IRAN Khomeini's government, having literally launched a "Holy War" against the Kurdish people since 1979, denied them any form of autonomy. As in Iraq and Turkey, soldiers are present in massive numbers throughout Iranian Kurdistan (200,000 soldiers stationed in 2,500 garrisons), where tens of thousands of civilians were massacred, wounded or deported, there also, from the oil-rich zones.

The IFHR urged the Human Rights Commission to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the Kurdish populations in Iraq and in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to ask the Iraqi and Iranian governments to give the International Committee of the Red Cross and the humanitarian missions permanent access to the Kurdish regions.

The IFHR also recalled that the forcible displacement of populations violates the 1966 International Pact's provisions relative to Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that "whoever lives legally on the territory of a State has the right to move about freely and choose his residence".

Finally, the IFHR has repeatedly addressed in writing those international organizations and governments

concerned about the violations of the Kurdish people's basic rights, and has participated in various debates and conferences on this issue. For instance, at the International Conference on Chemical Weapons, the IFHR deplored the fact that the Kurdish and Assyrian-Chaldean minorities of northern Iraq were denied access to the conference, as they had been the principal victims of the use of toxic gas by the Iraqi government : 15,000 deaths were counted among the civilian population and 100,000 fled to Turkey as refugees.

At that conference, the IFHR urged :

— that measures be taken and sanctions applied in order to prevent Iraq from committing further aggression through the use of chemical weapons ;

— that the 1925 Geneva Convention, which prohibits the use of toxic gas between states, be extended to prohibit the use of such weapons in internal conflicts within a state ;

— that the Iraqi political leadership and the Western companies which had sold equipment needed to produce toxic gas be made to pay the victims substantial compensation ;

— that the Kurdish refugees in Turkey and in Iran be placed under the protection of international



organizations such as the Red Cross and the United Nations ;

— that independant observers, in particular those representing non-governmental organizations, be allowed to freely conduct investigations in Iraq.

Yet for 20 years now, at the side of our Kurdish friends, we have been facing a strange conspiracy of silence on the part of the international community about the violations of the Kurdish people's basic rights. The reasons are manifold and known by all and sundry. We remain hopeful, however, as we have noticed various encouraging signs such as the holding of the present Interparliamentary Conference in Washington. We are fully aware of their ability to influence the Turkish government's decisions concerning the Kurdish population (half of the total Kurdish population lives in Turkey). The Turkish government's decision to present a draft bill to Parliament, which would authorize the use of the Kurdish language, is a first step, however small, towards the recognition of a Kurdish identity. The fact that, during the Gulf War, the Turkish government also denounced the atrocities perpetrated by the Iraqi government against the Kurdish population in Iraqi Kurdistan is a further encouraging sign. We hope that the international community, which bears a heavy responsibility for the tragedy of the Kurdish people, will at last come to

realize that any plans for the settlement of the problems of the Middle East must necessarily include free self-determination for the Kurdish people. May our Kurdish friends, therefore, rest assured that we will keep fighting at their side for the recognition and the defense of their basic rights as we have been doing for the past twenty years.

# Eyewitness Account from Kurdistan

by  
*Dr. Bernard GRANJON\**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 1984, I have had cause to visit Iraqi Kurdistan on five separate occasions in my role as Vice-President of the non-governmental humanitarian organization, "Médecins du Monde", and as leader of the mission.

For the last seven years, our work has been carried out without interruption. However, the recent Gulf War, during which four of our representatives were detained for several months against their will, has left us no other choice but to suspend it. As a matter of fact, one of our nurses has chosen to stay until circumstances enable us to resume our task.

Our mission began at the end of May 1984 at the request of Doctor Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou

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\* Vice-President of Médecins du Monde.

(IKDP), Secretary General of the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party, which is opposed to the Iranian regime. The mission was inaugurated by Doctor Bernard Kouchner, who is now the French Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs.

Doctor Ghassemlou, who has since been assassinated by the Iranian Secret Service, had asked for help from our organization, in the form of doctors, nurses, technicians, drugs as well as medical and surgical material. Our work was carried out with his government's permission on the Iraqi side of the border between Iran and Iraq, in places which varied according to the events of the war, ranging from the north of the city Sulaimaniya to the north of Arbil. During the course of these seven years, 250 of our people have spent time there, permitting us to observe the situation and gather the information which we are able to give to you today. This information concerns both the acts of violence which we have witnessed and the Kurdish people with whom we have lived and worked.

From our position on the Iraqi side of the border, we have gathered very few eyewitness accounts about the acts of violence of which the Iranian Kurds have been the victims. We are not going to talk about the countless war wounds we have had to deal with during the conflict between Iraq and Iran. We simply intend

reality of what that great man, Doctor Ghassemlou, had said : “Nothing can replace democracy. It is certainly much more difficult to convince people than to order them around, but in the end, it saves time. There’s no need to pass from one rule to another to finally reach democracy, we could do without this intermediate phase...” Those of you who have been to the Third World will agree with me in saying that it is most unusual to come across such speeches and examples.

In conclusion, as a humanitarian doctor, I would like to say that it is of the utmost importance that a peaceful and negotiated solution should be found to the Kurdish problem. The Kurds make up an ethnic minority of more than twenty million people who are split between five countries. Until now, most or all of these countries have refused to recognize any separate sense of identity, not even cultural or linguistic. Our hopes for human dignity demand that an end should be put to this historical injustice as quickly as possible, for the good of all mankind.

# Chemical Warfare and the Kurds

by  
*Dr Alastair Hay\**

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss various investigations I have made to collect evidence about the use of chemical warfare against the Kurdish population in Iraq, as well as an enquiry to discover the cause of mass poisoning in a Kurdish refugee camp in Turkey.

## Mustard Gas Attacks

I have had a long standing concern about chemical warfare, and it was perhaps for this reason that I was contacted by members of the Kurdish community in London in March 1988 and asked if I could help by providing information about chemical warfare agents. At about the same time, I was asked to visit five

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\* Department of Chemical Pathology and Immunology, Old Medical School, Leeds University, England.

Kurdish civilians hospitalised in London for treatment of mustard gas burns.

The five Kurdish civilians I visited at the Cromwell Hospital in London in March 1988 had all been attacked in the town of Halabja on the 16th of March. An estimated 5,000 people were killed when the Iraqis systematically attacked the town with conventional and chemical bombs. Many of the deaths are thought to have been caused by nerve gas and many of you will have seen the distressing pictures of some of those who died in Halabja. Many of those who died had no visible evidence of injury. Nerve gases leave few external signs on the bodies of their victims. And, of course, like all chemical warfare agents, nerve gases are devastating if used against an unprotected population. The Kurds in Halabja had no protective clothing, or gas masks. Many people died where they first inhaled the gas. Others died trying to flee the town.

The five civilians I saw in London were fortunate, if you can call them that, because they survived. The patients I saw had all been attacked, and burned, with mustard gas. I was familiar with the symptoms, having examined, and interviewed, some thirty Iranian soldiers who had also been hospitalised in London between 1984 and 1986, following Iraqi attacks on them with mustard gas in the first Gulf war.

To illustrate the conditions of the Kurdish civilians I saw in 1988, I will refer to two cases. The first is that of Mrs. Amanely Amun who was a Kurdish woman in her fifties. Mrs. Amun had excruciatingly painful burns on her stomach and legs when I saw her in hospital. Given the exposure she had had she was lucky to get away with the injuries she sustained. Some rudimentary precautions helped reduce her injuries. A pouch containing charcoal which she held over her nose and throat - on the advice of one of her daughters who is a nurse - reduced the impact of mustard gas on her nose, throat and lungs. Burns to her skin were also less severe than they might have been, because her son insisted she wash and change her clothes when they reached safety. This she did. Had she kept her clothing on, the mustard gas, which impregnated her garments, would have caused more severe burns and more of the chemical may well have penetrated her skin to the blood stream, where it would attack her immune system. Mrs. Amun showed me her injuries and displayed great dignity, and humour, when she answered the various questions I had about the attack on Halabja, and her own circumstances.

The second case I wish to discuss is that of Mrs. Kochar Ali, a 22-year-old female student. Mrs. Ali was in Halabja when the town was bombed by the Iraqis. During the bombing she stayed indoors, but in



a lull in the fighting she managed to escape from her house. She left the city and hid under a bridge for hours until the attacks stopped. It was whilst she was waiting under the bridge that aircraft dropped mustard gas bombs and this was how she was exposed to the gas. She did not realise at the time that she had been exposed; she only discovered this later on. Under cover of darkness, Mrs. Ali managed to escape to the mountains with other refugees on a cart pulled by a tractor. It was during this first evening that she felt burning on her arms, thighs and abdomen. She also vomited in the night. On the second day, huge blisters appeared on her arms, legs and abdomen. When she crossed the border into Iran, Iranian revolutionary guards took her to a first aid station for treatment. From there she was taken by helicopter to Pava Hospital. At Pava, they removed her clothes with scissors and gave her intravenous fluids. Shortly after this, she was taken to Tehran for treatment.

After two weeks in hospital in Tehran, she was told that she was to be sent abroad for further treatment. She had no idea where she was to be sent. When I saw Mrs. Ali, she had the most severe burn on her thigh with the skin stripped from the knee to the groin. Her skin was heavily pigmented, and she still had a burning sensation in her eyes. Victims of mustard gas exposure may have this gritty feeling in the eye for up to 4 weeks; they say it is like having sand in their eyes.

On some parts of her skin, Mrs. Ali had no sensation, suggesting that she had sustained fairly deep burns and it was at that this stage that they were deciding whether she would have to have plastic surgery. I believe that subsequently she did have skin grafts.

During her escape, Mrs. Ali said that she had seen many bodies alongside the road. There were also dead bodies at the first aid station where she was first treated. None of the victims, Mrs. Ali said, had any sign of injuries caused by explosives. She said that it looked as if people had fallen as they were running away.

These two ladies were survivors of a savage bombing. The town of Halabja was packed with refugees at the time, many of whom had fled from Iraqi troops. The Iraqi authorities must have known that an attack with poison gas would cause many deaths and injuries. The evidence suggests that about 5,000 people died in the attack on Halabja and about 12,000 were injured.

#### Poisoning at Mardin refugee camp

In June 1989, I was involved in an incident involving Kurdish refugees at Mardin camp in Turkey. Reports from the camp suggested that some 2,000 of the 15,000 refugees in the camp had been poisoned with an unknown agent. The refugees had fled from Iraqi

government forces and we were told that many people in the camp were experiencing diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, disturbance of speech, disorientation, an inability to walk in a straight line, general weakness, and a temporary paralysis of the limbs. We were also told that their recovery was slow.

The symptoms suggested some neurotoxic agent might be to blame. Two colleagues of mine, Mr. Gwynne Roberts and Dr. John Foran, visited Turkey and managed to collect blood samples from some of the refugees, and a sample of bread (thought to have been the vehicle for the poison). Blood was taken from 20 very sick men, women and children aged 2-50, five days after the occurrence of symptoms. Because of the difficulty of smuggling the samples out of Turkey, it was only possible to transport eight blood tubes back to the UK. In Britain, exhaustive tests were carried out for various neurotoxic heavy metals in the blood and bread. Screening for fungal toxins in the sample of bread was also done, but none were found.

Six of the blood samples were used up in screening for the heavy metals. The results for this part of the investigation suggested that heavy metals were not to blame. At this stage, we were left with only two blood samples to test for other agents. We decided therefore to look for organophosphates which are also nerve toxins. This family of chemicals is the basis of many insecticides and also the chemical warfare nerve

agents. Exposure to these substances can be assessed by measurement of an enzyme in the blood called cholinesterase. The remaining two blood samples were duly screened for cholinesterase and the results indicated that the enzyme activity in the blood was greatly reduced and far below what you would expect in a healthy, reference population.

In view of this finding, both the blood and bread were screened to identify what organophosphates might be present; none were found. The fact that no traces of an organophosphate agent were found in blood might be explained by the time delay between poisoning and blood collection. Although bread had been singled out as the most likely source of the poisoning, we could find no evidence to support this claim. It is possible that the bread sample we received may not have been representative of the bread in the camp. It is also possible that a toxic organophosphate originally present in the bread may have been degraded in some way. No detailed investigation was possible in the camp and so the source of the cholinesterase inhibiting agent remains unknown.

It was our conclusion that the symptoms reported by the refugees were consistent with poisoning by a neurotoxic agent. Commercially available organophosphorus pesticides are an improbable source of the poisoning because of their low toxicity. Their

foul smell and taste would make it difficult for anyone to consume sufficient quantities to cause the symptoms reported and the depression in the cholinesterase which we recorded. We could not rule out the use of some sort of chemical warfare nerve agent. These chemicals would cause the same symptoms that were reported. Some other equally toxic organophosphate agent may also have been responsible.

The evidence we collected suggested that something very sinister had happened. It is our belief that we are not talking about poisoning by a common commercially available chemical. We also believe that the chance of it being accidental poisoning was remote. We strongly suspect that the poisoning was deliberate.

Before our investigation, it was not possible for independent doctors to visit Mardin refugee camp. Following the release of our findings we were pleased to hear that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees had been granted access to the Kurdish refugee camps in Turkey.

#### Evidence for Mustard gas bomb

The Iraqi government has consistently denied that it attacked the Kurds with chemical warfare agents. To obtain evidence that it had, Gwynne Roberts entered northern Iraq in November 1988 to collect samples

from an area reputed by Kurdish refugees to have been attacked with chemical warfare agents. Mr. Roberts visited a site some 16 kilometres west - south west of the confluence of the frontiers of Iraq, Turkey and Iran. There he found a large thin-walled metal bomb embedded in the ground. The bomb had ruptured. Soil, metal fragments, and a sample of sheep's wool found in the vicinity, were all collected and placed in specimen jars for transport to the UK.

All of the samples remained with Gwynne Roberts until his return to Britain. On arrival in the UK, they were subsequently analysed by a commercial laboratory in the City of Birmingham, and by the UK Ministry of Defence's Chemical Defence Establishment, at Porton Down.

Both laboratories reported the presence of breakdown products of mustard gas which are formed when mustard gas is heated. Heating occurs when a bomb explodes. The Chemical Defence Establishment also reported the presence of high concentrations of mustard gas itself in one of the samples, as well as some explosives which would have detonated the bomb. The Chemical Defence Establishment concluded that the one sample was "relatively heavily contaminated with sulphur mustard and related decomposition products or impurities". The results could not have been more specific. Mustard gas had been used in this bomb.

The samples in this investigation were collected some 10 weeks after the bomb had been dropped. It is likely that burial protected the chemicals from further breakdowns, and it is known that sulphur mustard will persist in soil for weeks if the temperature and rainfall are both low.

## CONCLUSION

These three separate investigations of mine leave me in no doubt that Iraq has used chemical weapons to kill and terrorize its Kurdish civilian population. I hope that the evidence I have presented helps to convince you that chemical attacks did indeed take place. More details about these investigations can be found in the references. I have copies of these with me.

The Kurds have suffered a terrible injustice at the hands of the Iraqi authorities. Many thousands of Kurds have died in gas attacks carried out by the current Iraqi regime. Chemical warfare is forbidden by the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Sadly, that protocol covers the use of chemical warfare between countries. It makes no reference to the internal use of chemical warfare, if a country decides to use it against sections of its own population.

The international community rightly abhors the use of chemical warfare. It is my sincere hope that, at the end of the current hostilities in the Gulf, we will be able to see the final outlawing of chemical warfare. I hope that the suffering of the Kurdish community in Iraq will be used as evidence to support that aim and that the community of nations will act swiftly to make it happen. An international treaty outlawing the stockpiling and use of chemical warfare remains an urgent priority. A draft Chemical Weapons Convention which has all of the necessary policing powers is currently under discussion at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. The treaty could be agreed very soon if countries, such as the US and the Soviet Union, made the final commitment to see it through. I hope that commitment will be in evidence very soon.

Thank you very much.



# Iraq's Use of Poison Gas Against Kurdish Civilians, August 1988

*by*

*Robert Mullan Cook-Deegan,\**

Presented before the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Fondation Danielle Mitterrand and the Kurdish Institute of Paris

Thank you, Madame Chairman. My name is Robert Cook-Deegan. I represent Physicians for Human Rights, a Boston-based group of health professionals committed to preventing human rights abuse throughout the world. I was one of three doctors who went to Turkey from the 6th to the 17th of October 1988 to investigate allegations that Iraq used poison gas against its civilian Kurdish population in late August 1988. The others were Howard Hu, an epidemiologist at the Harvard Medical School, and Asfandiar Shukri, who is chief of Emergency Medicine at Northwest General Hospital in Detroit and who

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\* Physicians for Human Rights.

served as translator (he speaks Kurdish). I will first describe what we found in an abstract sense, and then put the events in more directly human terms.

The impact of a trip like this is difficult to describe. To review the situation in the fall of 1988, Kurds flooded across the border from northern Iraq into southern Iran and southeastern Turkey during the last week of August. This unprecedented movement of Kurdish populations out of their homeland was initially reported as caused by Iraqi attacks, but subsequent accounts cast doubt on the initial reports. Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) became concerned about allegations of poison gas attacks against civilians with the attack on Halabja in March 1988. We were unable, however, to gain entry to Iraq or Iran. With another alleged poison gas attack on civilians in August 1988, PHR decided to send a team to investigate. We sought entry into Iraq and Iran, but were again denied entry visas. We therefore went to Turkey, where visas were not required. The best scientific approach was to undertake an epidemiologic survey of those who had been attacked, because we could not directly investigate the sites of the attacks (Iraq never denied attacking the Kurds, only having used poison gas to do so).

We travelled directly to southeastern Turkey and entered two of the five refugee camps housing Iraqi

Kurds at that time. These camps, in Mardin and Diyarbakir, contained 5,100 and 13,100 people respectively. We found consistent descriptions of poison gas attacks, with bombs dropped from aircraft, hitting the ground with a “poof” (rather than a loud explosion expected of high explosives) and releasing a foul-smelling yellow-grey cloud. Small animals and fowl died within minutes, and people near bomb bursts began to die soon after. Their skin turned dark, and blood-tinged fluid oozed from their noses and mouths. Their skin became thick and leathery as they died. Eyewitnesses did not describe many injuries from shrapnel or bullets, and we saw only a few cases of injury from conventional arms among those we examined.

Those who survived the initial attacks, and the long and difficult trek into Turkey, described a different set of symptoms, consistent with chemical burns. The burns we saw, still healing five to six weeks after the events, were remarkably similar to those described in survivors of poison gas from World War I, in the classic texts by Vedder and others. Survivors described a complex of symptoms: difficult breathing; burning throat; eyes burning and watering; runny nose; dizziness; nausea; vomiting; and headache. Their skin itched, oozing a clear yellowish fluid, and then formed large blisters filled with clear amber-colored fluid. The full symptom complex was reported by over 65%

of the 27 people who completed a 120-item questionnaire. We defined a "severe" profile of injury to include at least (1) symptom of eye irritation; (2) shortness of breath or painful breathing; (3) skin blistering; and (4) vomiting. Just under half of those within 250 meters of bomb bursts (8 of 17) had all four symptoms. Those further away described milder symptoms.

These are the symptoms one would expect from poison gas. The consistent reports of injuries contrast starkly with the inconsistencies in "yellow rain" reports from southeastern Asia. The Kurds' reports were consistent among those interviewed within each camp, and more convincingly, between Kurds originating in the same village in Iraq but isolated in different refugee camps in Turkey. To our knowledge there is no infection or other endemic illness that would thus simultaneously affect the lungs, skin, eyes, and intestinal tract in a pattern so closely resembling chemical burns.

You can begin to imagine the agony of the victims if you think about having all these symptoms at the same time. We spoke with people who had endured a horror that must be experienced to be understood fully. Using the lowest estimates from each of the 9 villages represented in our survey, at least 65 people died. One Iraqi official, interviewed by a group of

several dozen journalists, stated that 200 villages were attacked (although he denied that chemical weapons had been used). Obviously, we saw only the tip of the iceberg. But it was enough to hint at the immensity of the devastation.

Reports of symptoms and physical finds are cold and abstract. It is also important to imagine the human experience of being ravaged by poison gas. Civilian populations had no gas masks, no means to protect themselves. The experience is best captured in the survivors' own words. Put yourself in the position of a 70 year-old woman :

“All of a sudden my eyes became blurry, my nose started running, my skin started itching and I became short of breath and felt very very weak. There was a bad smell like garlic and my mouth tasted bitter. About two minutes later the symptoms started and the skin burning followed that. I saw a lot of animals die before I felt the effect — birds, chickens, hens, cattle, sheep, and goats. And then I started having difficulty breathing, with skin and eyes burning and runny nose. There was watery fluid oozing from my skin, my face and hands. The fluid was coming out yellowish; later there was a severely burning sensation and itching too.”

Aagiza was an 8 year-old girl in the village of Ekmala. When we met her in October, she had not spoken for

five weeks since the attacks. She began to recover psychologically just a few days before we visited Mardin refugee camp. She recounted her experience to us. At the time of the attack, she was several hundred meters away from her home tending livestock. A bomb hit her house, near her mother, father, and 20 year-old brother :

“I saw two airplanes overhead and they dropped a bomb, it made smoke, yellowish-white smoke. It had a bad smell like DDT, the powder they kill insects with. It had a bitter taste. After I smelled the gas, my nose began to run and my eyes became blurry and I could not see and my eyes started watering too. And I still have some of the effects like my blurry vision and I have skin blisters over my chest. I saw my parents fall down with my brother after the attack, and they [pointing to her grandmother and older siblings] told me they were dead. I looked at their skin and it was black and they weren’t moving. And I was very scared and crying and I did not know what to do. I saw their skin turn dark and blood coming out from their mouths and their noses. I wanted to touch them, but they [siblings] stopped me and I started crying again.”

We can only begin to appreciate the impact of such violence. An 8 year-old watched her parents disfigure and die before her eyes. These weapons are serious

serious impediments to prepared troops, but they caused relatively few fatalities in World War I compared to other weapons. Among unprotected and unprepared civilians, however, they proved devastating and supremely inhuman.

We concluded that lethal poison gas was used against the Kurds on 25 August 1988 (other groups from different parts of Iraq described attacks on other dates, but were not included in our survey). Several weeks after we returned to the United States, we learned of another investigative team's findings. Gwynne Roberts, a freelance journalist for British television, surreptitiously entered northern Iraq and took soil samples from areas allegedly attacked. Analysis at two laboratories in Britain showed mustard gas and degradation products of sulphur mustard (yperite). Some of these details will be evident when his videotape is shown this afternoon. This made clear that mustard gas had been used sometime in the recent past.

Mustard gas is a blistering poison gas that the Germans began to use in the middle of World War I. Our findings are consistent with the use of mustard gas, but mustard gas alone does not explain all our findings. We received consistent reports of death within minutes among those close to points of detonation. Mustard gas is not lethal so quickly even in massive doses.

Something else was clearly at work. Many other agents are consistent with this finding and we cannot tell which from our data. We conclude only that mustard gas was used with at least one other rapidly fatal agent. Uncertainty about exactly what was used should not obscure the more important fact that Iraq used lethal poison gas against its own citizens.

On this trip, we encountered the aftermath of a premeditated public health disaster. We rediscovered the horror of poison gas. It had devastating psychological consequences, leaving injuries still unhealed after six weeks. As physicians, we urgently appeal for an end to this man-made scourge; we call for a total ban on the development, manufacture, deployment and use of poison gas.



# The First Victims of Saddam Hussein

by  
*Peter Galbraith\**

Today the world focuses on Saddam Hussein's latest victim, the people of Kuwait. The Kurds, however, were his first and longest suffering victim. Sadly, much of what the Kurds endured occurred in places inaccessible for political and geographic reasons to the world media. I had a brief window on some of what has happened to the 3 million people of Iraqi Kurdistan and this is the focus of my remarks today.

In connection with Senate Foreign Relations Committee assessments of the Iran-Iraq war, I twice had occasion to visit Iraqi Kurdistan, in 1984 and 1987. Between those visits, I was able to witness the sharp deterioration in the treatment of the Kurdish population by the Iraqi government.

In 1988, the plight of the Iraqi Kurds burst onto the international consciousness, first with the graphic reports of a poison gas attack on the Kurdish town of

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\* US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Halabja and then with the massive outflow of refugees from northern Iraq in September, bringing with them tales of a broad chemical weapons offensive by the Iraqi army.

In connection with legislation that Senator Pell introduced to sanction Iraq for this use of chemical weapons against the Kurds, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asked me to lead a mission to report on and document the use of chemical weapons.

First, to restate the principal conclusions of our fact-finding mission, we found overwhelming evidence that Iraq did use chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq in a major offensive that began on 25 August, 1988. The offensive was intended to break the Kurdish insurgency, and it accomplished that objective.

These chemical weapons attacks were part of an Iraqi military policy intended to depopulate large parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. Elements of the policy include: (1) the destruction of villages and towns throughout Kurdistan; (2) the relocation of the Kurdish population into concentrated new settlements where military control can be exercised; (3) the deportation of Kurds to areas outside of Kurdistan; and (4) the use of terror tactics, including lethal poison gas, to drive civilians out of the areas to be depopulated.

The policy has been carried out with great brutality and with a cynical disregard for world opinion and international law. Our fact-finding mission documented chemical weapons attacks on 49 villages; we believe the actual total to be much higher. The chemical weapons attacks were followed by military operations in which many survivors who chose to remain in Iraq (or could not reach Turkish sanctuary) were massacred. Drawing on interviews, we estimated that the total cumulative civilian casualties from the chemical weapons attacks and the follow-on military operations were in the thousands. However, our information comes from only that part of Iraq where Kurds had access to refuge in Turkey. If the same kinds of military operations took place deeper in Iraqi Kurdistan as took place in the border areas, the Kurdish death toll could have been in the tens or hundreds of thousands.

We do not know the total casualties. We do not know with any degree of certainty what has happened in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1988. Since Iraqi soldiers sealed the border with Turkey at the beginning of September 1988, a deadly silence has descended on Iraqi Kurdistan.

In the last week of August and the first week of September 1988, some 65,000 people came unexpectedly across the Iraq-Turkey border. Although

they came from many different villages spread over a very mountainous terrain, they described essentially the same pattern of attacks. Let me say a word about what these attacks were like.

Beginning around dawn on 25 August 1988, Iraqi warplanes and helicopters dropped bombs containing chemical weapons on villages in the Duhok, Zakho and Amadiyah regions of Iraq. The aircraft would drop four to eight bombs each. The bombs, often described as green canisters, created a weak sound as they detonated, and then a cloud spread out from the center of the explosion. The cloud was alternatively described as white or yellowish. The air then filled with the smell of bad garlic, rotten onions, bad apples, or rotten parsley.

Those exposed to the gas dropped dead instantly or very quickly. The bodies, according to some, appeared frozen and, in some case, turned blue or black. Living or dying was often determined by where one was standing and/or by the direction of the wind. On one occasion, I heard from a mother whose children had perished 20 yards away while she emerged physically unscathed.

According to the survivors, livestock died and birds fell out of the sky. Later, troops wearing protective clothes entered the villages. In some places, such as the village of Baze, Iraqi forces opened fire with

machine guns on the survivors and then bulldozed the bodies into mass graves.

This general description is a synthesis of hundreds of interviews conducted by my team with survivors in all the principal camps and gathering areas. The interviews took place within two weeks of the events described and included all sorts of people: Kurdish insurgents (the Pesh Merga), civilian men, women, and children. We had no trouble finding witnesses; indeed, I would estimate that one-half to three-fourths of the refugee population were eye-witnesses to the events I described.

Under our system of law, eye-witness accounts are usually considered the best evidence. However, there was also physical evidence of the attacks. A team of American doctors examined wounded survivors and found systems consistent with the use of chemical weapons. A British television crew, led by Gwynne Roberts whose film we will see later, entered Iraq and unearthed bomb fragments containing traces of mustard gas. When, on 8 September 1988, Secretary Shultz denounced Iraq's use of chemical weapons, he did so, according to the press, on the basis of technical information available to him.

Indeed, while the issue of an appropriate response to Iraq's chemical weapons attack was hotly contested between the Senate which favored tough sanctions

and the Reagan Administration which favored no action at all, there was never any disagreement about the facts of Iraq's use of chemical weapons.

Let me make two further points about Iraq's use of poison gas against its Kurdish minority. First, these attacks began 25 August 1988 - that is to say, five days after a ceasefire went into effect in the Iran-Iraq war. Second, the targets of the attacks were not the Kurdish insurgents. The insurgents were located in bases in the mountains in the northern part of Iraq. It is a treeless and barren terrain and presumably the insurgent camps were visible from the air. However, the Iraqi regime chose to attack the villages in the valleys. Thus, the victims were overwhelmingly women, children, and non-combatant men.

Iraq's chemical weapons attacks were gratuitous. The Kurdish insurgency could have been suppressed without the use of chemical weapons and without massacring innocent civilians. Instead, Iraq chose to punish a population it saw as disloyal by the most brutal and most inhumane means possible.

Sadly, poison gas was only one part of Iraq's Kurdish policy. During my September 1987 trip, on the road from Baghdad to Jalawla to Darbandikhan to Sulaimaniya to Kirkuk, I counted more than forty Kurdish villages that had been destroyed recently. This part of Kurdistan provided an eerie landscape

where utility poles, graveyards, and abandoned orchards were the main reminders of recent human habitation.

These villages were not in remote areas. They were on the principal roads of Iraqi Kurdistan. As such, there was no military rationale for the destruction of the villages. Rather, it was another example of a punitive policy aimed at innocent civilians.

Kurdish leaders have documented 3,897 villages that have been destroyed along with thousands of schools and hundreds of ancient churches and mosques. The population has been relocated to the handful of surviving cities, to new townships that are in effect concentration camps under the supervision of the Iraqi military, and in some cases, to new settlements in the southern desert, far from mountainous Kurdistan. It is impossible for me to estimate the death toll of such a policy, but one can reasonably conclude it must be high. The depopulation program was certainly cruel and destructive of an ancient and rich culture.

Finally, I would note that the Kurds have been particularly victims of the kinds of human rights abuses that have afflicted all Iraqis. This includes summary execution, torture, detention without trial, and denial of basic freedoms. A particular Iraqi innovation is the torture and murder of children as a

means of punishing or pressuring their parents. Amnesty International has documented cases where parents have been obliged to pay money for the return of the mutilated corpses of their young children.

In the case of the Kurds, Iraq quite literally got away with murder. By and large, the world community has reacted to the destruction of Iraqi Kurdistan, and even to the use of poison gas against innocent civilians, with silence. As many of you know, in 1988, immediately after receiving the reports of the massive chemical weapons attacks on the Kurds, Senators Pell and Helms introduced legislation to impose comprehensive financial and economic sanctions against Iraq. That legislation, "The Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988" passed the Senate one day after its introduction, a speed of action almost unprecedented for this body. Sadly, however, "The Prevention of Genocide Act" did not become law. It was opposed by every special interest that did, or wanted to do, business with Iraq. It was vehemently opposed by the Reagan Administration and failed due to parliamentary maneuvering on the final day of the 100th Congress.

"The Prevention of Genocide Act" was the only attempt in any place in the world to respond concretely to Iraq's appalling violation of Kurdish human rights and of international law. Few other countries went



even as far as the United States, which through Secretary Shultz at least condemned the poison gas attacks.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, he clearly believed the world would not respond in a forceful manner. Perhaps our failure to act when he gassed his own people contributed to that belief.

As Kuwait's independence is restored, I hope we will not forget Saddam Hussein's first and longest suffering victims, the Kurds. It is improbable that Kurdish rights can be accommodated within an Iraq headed by authoritarian regimes. Kurdish cultural survival, and indeed the physical survival of the Kurds, depend on enduring arrangements for Kurdish autonomy. Autonomy was guaranteed to the Kurds by the instruments that ended World War I and by the League of Nations when it terminated the mandate over Iraq. The world community, however, was neither willing nor able to enforce those guarantees. Perhaps in the context of the broader post-war settlement, more binding international arrangements can be found to protect the Kurdish minority in Iraq.

More fundamentally, Kurdish rights are best protected in an Iraq that respects the human and political rights of all its citizens. The usually fragmented Iraqi opposition including the major Kurdish parties has come together with the outlines of a democratic

political program in a post-Saddam Iraq. I believe this initiative is promising. I certainly believe the United States and its coalition partners should do what they can to encourage a democratic alternative in Iraq. Such an alternative provides the best hope for the Kurds.

I grew up in the aftermath of the holocaust and, as we learned about these terrible events, I remember well the resolution of my generation: never again. By this we meant that such evil events should never again go unnoticed and unopposed.

No one can encounter a tragedy of the magnitude of that which occurred in September of 1988 and remain unmoved. I have many images of the five days I spent along the Iraq-Turkey border: in a high mountain valley, a woman seated atop a small bundle constituting all her possessions, waiting for a very uncertain future; donkeys with gaily woven saddlebags wandering aimlessly after being abandoned by their refugee owners; an old man crying as he told of the deaths of his children and grandchildren. These are images that will remain with me as long as I live. And I hope that we will never again let such suffering go unnoticed and unopposed.

Statement  
by  
Timothy Savage

*for*  
*David Atkinson, British M.P.*

Firstly, please allow me to convey the apologies of David Atkinson, Member of Parliament, who is presently attending an important meeting in Paris with Soviet parliamentarians on Baltic Jurisprudence. He is profoundly disappointed he is not able to address you personally, as those of you who know of him and of his work both in the House of Commons and on the Council of Europe, know that the Kurdish issue —and indeed the larger issues of human rights and self-determination for all people— is foremost in his mind.

As you will be aware, he is one of a very small group of MPs who have intervened to argue the Kurdish issue on the floor of the House of Commons. And within the Council of Europe, he pressed for the

Subcommittee on Refugees to visit southeastern Turkey in order to prepare a report on the resettlement of Kurdish refugees and has argued for a full debate on that report to be held. It is for those reasons he has asked me to present to you this speech.

I should very much like to address the Kurdish issue and prospects of its redress as a part of a larger post-Gulf War Middle East peace process.

The August 2nd invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq shocked a world which believed that the problems in the Middle East were solely a function of the Arab-Israeli dispute and the status of the Palestinians. The world has come to know that this is a region rife with myriad untenable problems, all of which demand concerted attention. The Iraqi invasion has completely shattered the illusion of Arab unity and destroyed the concept of a greater Arab state spanning from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, from Syria to Yemen. It has exposed a plethora of regional problems : an increase in the salinity of the water and a lack of water supplies ; not one, but several arms races between the region's kingdoms, and regimes; massive wealth and resource disparities; and, not least, a complete lack of institutional protection of basic human rights and individual freedoms. It is this latter problem which is most salient to our context.

The post-Gulf War Middle East peace process, and I

shall address one possible format later, offers to the Kurdish plight the greatest chance of redress since the end of World War I and the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. Before the Gulf War has been concluded — successfully I should add — the debate about a Middle East peace process has already begun. In their respective halls of power, each allied capital is convinced it must win both the war and the peace which follows war. Therefore each allied capital is pressing its experts to take national and international representations in order to build the template for a postwar peace process.

Let me tell you of one such debate that occurred in the most recent Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Mr. Atkinson was asked to prepare an opinion on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, of which he is a member and rapporteur, for the Parliamentary Assembly's debate on a postwar peace process. The document he prepared, N° 6378, under the heading *The Kurdish Nation*, states :

“The plight of the Kurdish people and their demands for self-determination, as promised in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, have since been ignored. As a result, the Kurds have been the subject of persecution and have been denied human rights in all of the countries in which they are located: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and

the Soviet Union. A few Kurds have resorted to terrorism, as in Turkey by the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). This is an internationally unacceptable attempt to draw attention to their demands.

But it is obvious that there will be a Kurdish problem for as long as their demands for self-determination are ignored and denied. It is a matter which must be on the agenda for resolution following the Gulf War.”

Needless to say, in an assembly which includes as a full member Turkey, I can assure you that this document has caused many repercussions. Indeed, the leader of the Turkish delegation wrote personally to Mr. Atkinson, demanding, because of the international invalidity of the Treaty of Sèvres, that the official document be edited and re-submitted.

In defence, Mr. Atkinson stated that while the Treaty of Sèvres is indeed internationally invalid by virtue of it never having been ratified by Turkey, it is nevertheless historically relevant, both because it was officially negotiated by the powers of the time and because, like the most important document to arise from World War I, the Treaty of Versailles, it recognizes the Kurdish plight and provides a means for its amelioration. Like the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, both of which are no longer internationally valid but are historically relevant, the Treaty of Sèvres can act as a foundation upon which

can be built a process to ameliorate the plight of the Kurds.

I tell you of this debate because I think it is an example of the resistance that will be encountered when the issue of the Kurds is raised during the Middle East peace process and when the very necessary Kurdish representations are made to the respective national governments regarding the future of the Kurdish people and culture.

And like the debate itself, Turkey is an example which represents both one of the largest obstacles to institutional protection of the Kurdish people and one of the greatest opportunities to ensure that institutional protection. As we know, Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is a member of the Council of Europe, is an observer seeking full membership to the Western European Union, and of course is soon to tender its application to the European Community. Membership to these organisations represents a prime opportunity to ensure Turkey enacts legislation for the institutional protection of its Kurdish minority.

For a specific example, membership to the Council of Europe requires Turkey to ratify and to adhere to the European Convention on Human Rights. While the Convention is only a supplementary to national guarantees of fundamental rights, it does provide a

means to redress grievances in an international venue, the Court of Human Rights, which is competent to make judicially binding decisions on the parties to the action. Although Turkey has used the Gulf War and the terrorism sponsored by the PKK as pretexts for suspending the *de jure* applicability of the Convention to southeastern Turkey, I have no doubt that the Turks will either return to or be forced to return to the *status quo ante bellum*; that is, *de jure* applicability of the Convention to the whole of Turkey.

In addition, Turkey's desire to join the EC and its membership in NATO give certain governments like the United Kingdom the ability to affect Turkish domestic policy in positive ways.

Let me expound upon what Mr. Atkinson feels is the best format for a postwar Middle East peace process. The maintenance of peace in the region will require new instruments to resolve disputes peaceably, to guarantee security and to encourage co-operation. The region's nations must avoid those defence alliances which have hitherto been highly unsuccessful and unproductive. Such aims, of course, reflect the Helsinki process and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (the CSCE).

It has been suggested that a process similar to the CSCE should be established in the Middle East, a so-called Conference on Security and Co-operation in



the Middle East , a CSCME process. This process must involve all the nations of the Middle East, especially Egypt and Israel. The benefit of such an enlarged process is that it can encompass certain important aspects of the current major Middle East peace plans, including the Camp David process, the Shamir peace plan and the idea of an international peace conference convened on the Palestinian issue. I would note that all of these plans, unto themselves, are non-starters in certain important regional nations.

The basis of the CSCME process must be the basis of the CSCE process: territorial integrity and the inviolability of frontiers. The recent history of Europe has shown this basis to be not a hindrance but a prerequisite for change and reform, as it provides the stability necessary for lasting and comprehensive agreements. Such a process removes a pretext of their repression and persecution: the threat of foreign intervention and domination.

Like the CSCE, the CSCME would have three areas of concentration: security and co-operation; economic development; and human rights. The latter basket would provide for the ratification and application of national legislation and international conventions on the protection of human rights and individual freedoms. One of the most fundamental protections must be the preservation of unique language and cultures, like Kurdish, and must permit those who

wish to study, learn and speak the language of their choice to do so. Such legislation must protect ethnic minorities from persecution and ensure a method of redress if persecution occurs. In other words, the Kurdish people, its language and its culture must be protected from persecution through national legislation and international convention. Such would be possible under a regime like the CSCME.

Finally, allow me to offer this caution to certain Kurdish aims: do not attempt to seek that which is clearly neither internationally achievable nor regionally acceptable. This means that I do not believe an independent Kurdish state, Kurdistan, will arise from any postwar peace process. I think it is safe to say that representations seeking such a state will largely be ignored, for in a world of realpolitik, a Kurdistan simply is not feasible.

I do believe nevertheless the Kurdish people have learnt many lessons over the decades, one of which is to keep its aims, and the representations that arise from those aims, modest. One of these modest aims must be to seek some form of local autonomy for the Iraqi provinces of Mosul, Kirkuk and Arbil. One of these modest aims must be to seek to use the new entente between the West and Syria and Iran to ensure an end to the government-sponsored Kurdish persecution in those countries. And certainly one of these modest aims must be to ensure that Turkey

adheres wholly and indiscriminately to the *de jure* applicability of the European Convention on Human Rights and to ensure it enacts legislation providing for the institutional protection and preservation of the unique Kurdish language and culture.

At the same time, the PKK must end its internationally illegitimate terrorism in Turkey. I understand well that those with little to lose, lose little however they choose to act, and those standing on the precipice of complete despair are pliant to messianic myths of salvation. This neither condones nor excuses the terrorism employed by the PKK to call international attention to the Kurdish plight.

I can assure you, it earns little sympathy abroad and does not demonstrate that the Kurds are capable of autonomy. Indeed, it is used as a pretext for further repression, which in turn creates more hardship and further terrorism. All of this merely gives rise to a cyclical process in which each iteration brings further misery, pain and death.

So allow me to end this speech by imploring you to make the proper governmental representations now, at this moment - for it is now that the future of the peace process is being shaped. Let those representations be both internationally feasible and regionally acceptable, for it avails nothing if they are neither. And finally, I would implore an immediate end to the

terrorism sponsored by the PKK. It earns nothing but international consternation.

On behalf of David Atkinson, I thank you for allowing me, and indirectly, him, the opportunity of addressing this august gathering. He and I would like to wish you the greatest speed in achieving your aspirations for the protection and preservation of the Kurdish people, its language and its culture, for as humans, with dignity, honour and, above all, inalienable rights, they deserve no less.

## Turkish Kurdistan in Wartime

by  
*Claudia ROTH* \*

At the beginning of February I spent ten days in Turkey. There was a lot of talk about peace, in a country where things are not really very peaceful. There was a lot of criticism concerning the role of Turkey in the war. This is the context for the announcement of plans for democratization. At the end of January, according to Özal, there were 12 million Kurds living in Turkey. That is something new in official pronouncements. Up to then, they simply didn't exist as Kurds, as an official ethnic group. Their language is now supposed to be legalized, and Articles 141, 142 and 163 of the Turkish Criminal Code, which have been used to send countless people to hundreds of years in prison, are to be abolished. That would indeed be very desirable, if Article 142 could no longer be used to "punish with between 5 to 10 years imprisonment" anyone who "carries out

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\* Member of the European Parliament.

propaganda, in whatever form, with the intention of destroying national feeling.”

It would be fine if it were no longer a “separatist” crime to write about Kurdistan and the Kurds, as Dr. Ismail Besikçi has done, and for which he has been almost constantly in prison or on trial.

However, even if these three articles were abolished, which is doubtful given the failure to act upon previous announcements concerning the death penalty or torture, this would be quite insufficient. Look at the case of Veli Yilmaz. Before the military putsch, he published a left-wing newspaper and after the putsch he was sentenced to a total of 748 years in prison. Take away Articles 141, 142 and 163, and there are still 300 years left because Articles 158, 159, 311 and 312 were also used against him.

When the Turkish Minister of Finance speaks of economic perestroika, that is yet another statement intended above all to sound like music to Western ears, the better to prepare Turkey’s much-desired integration into the European Community. But there are doubts as to what this means for democratic rights. It is already obvious that Özal intends to put through a so-called “Sultan’s edict” with far-reaching special powers to issue decrees in administrative, judicial and economic affairs without consulting parliament.

The Kurds above all have a painful experience of such decrees. *Insan Haklari Dernegi* of the Human Rights Association in Diyarbakir recounts the bitter history of the oldest people in the Middle East, divided between four countries after the First World War by France, Britain, Iran and Kemal's Turkey. In Iran there are 5.5-8 million Kurds, in Iraq 4-4.5 million, in Syria 1.5 million and in Turkey 20 million Kurds. Add to that over a million in the Soviet Union and about a million in the European Community, especially in Germany. In Turkey, they have lived 58 years, out of the republic's 70-year history, in a state of emergency.

In 1983, the State of Emergency Law N° 2935 went into effect, and provided for : a ban on public assembly, on driving cars in certain places and at certain times, on printing, distributing newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets or posters; control and occasional prohibition of speaking, writing, filming and recording. In addition, the law forbids leaving the country, and keeps out persons or groups that could endanger security or expels those already there.

On 19 April 1990, the situation became worse. Through the new "Government Decisions with Force of Law", the already meagre rights in the Kurdish state of emergency zones were eroded still further and the Super-Governor of the region was given practically unlimited powers. The conservative journalist Nazli

Ilicak wrote that with these laws, “a dictatorship without any legality” could be imposed. She coined the expression “SS decrees”, *Sürgün* and *Sansür* (deportation and censorship), making the comparison with German fascism.

According to N° 424, changed in December 1990 to N° 430, any printing, reproduction or publication that “falsely reflects activities in the state of emergency zones or contains untrue reports or commentaries”, which seriously disturbs public order, incites the population or impedes the security forces in the fulfillment of their duties, can be banned by the state of emergency Governor regardless of whether the material is printed inside or outside the emergency zone. If necessary, a decision can be taken to close the printshops responsible for the material.

The magazines *2000'e Dogru* and *Deng* are regularly confiscated and banned. The courage of publisher Süleyman Yasar and of the former teachers and officials of the TÖB-DER (the Turkish Teachers' Union) which was banned after the 1980 putsch and whose officials were given heavy prison sentences, is no longer enough. The repression makes it harder and harder to find printers that will take the risk of publishing a book or magazine. Not only the authors end up in prison, but the publishers also receive prison sentences (that are mostly turned into fines).



The announcement that the use of the Kurdish language will soon be authorized has at least meant that Kurdish is being discussed. But on closer examination, the announcement turns out to be a bitter deception. Many see a danger that it will make things even worse. According to Law N° 2932, people in Turkey whose mother tongue is not Turkish are not allowed to speak or write in their own languages. This ethnocentric racism could only be enforced in part. Lullabies were sung in Kurdish just the same. So were the Kurdish songs of the hunger strikers last autumn, and cassettes play Kurdish songs on the squares of Diyarbakir and Cizre. As Kurdish names were banned and still are, many parents simply stopped registering their offspring at birth.

Now the *status quo* should be allowed, that is, what can't be forbidden will be allowed, the speaking of Kurdish and Kurdish folksongs. But only sung. Song books with texts under the notes remain illegal. What is new is that what is punished is made explicit : Kurdish on the radio or television, in all printed publications, in education and research, in administrative uses and in court.

The sociologist Dr. Besikçi deems the new law to be totally meaningless and by no means amounting to a lifting of the ban. A language must exist on all its levels. The Kurdish member of parliament Nurettin Yilmaz, a member of Özal's conservative motherland

party ANAP, complained of the racist intentions of the law and was insulted by his fellow party members.

Finally, it seems clear that in the shadow of the Gulf crisis, the situation of the Kurds could deteriorate. The special powers of the Super-Governor in Diyarbakir can be compared to British colonial rule in India, but in Kurdistan it is much worse than in a colony. A colony at least has boundaries and laws. Here, one man has the courts of the region at his disposal and can "move" people and whole villages. In recent months, hundreds of villages were burned and destroyed systematically in regions where the resistance is strongest. The repression against the Kurdish people has greatly increased in recent years. Houses are plundered and destroyed more and more often by soldiers. Arrests and torture are an everyday occurrence. Even children are imprisoned. In Diyarbakir, two 13-year-old boys were accused in November of belonging to a banned terrorist group, the PKK. They spent months in prison. In 1981 and 1982 alone, 65 people were killed in prison in Diyarbakir. The Human Rights Union has conclusive proof. Prisoners were forced to eat mice and excrement.

The crisis of recent months created new fears of a massacre of the Kurdish people in the shadow of the Gulf War. The population on the border with Iraq

was completely unprotected and uninformed about the dangers.

Dagistan Toprak, the Deputy Mayor of Diyarbakir, wondered aloud whether he should be sad about a war between people who oppressed the Kurds. But he does not want people to die. He does not want war, he wants a stable peace in the region. And that can come only when the Kurdish question is resolved, when this question is properly addressed in a Middle East conference by Kurdish representatives themselves, not by others speaking on their behalf.

The human rights associations in the region make the following demands:

1. Recognition of the existence of the Kurdish people.
2. Lifting of all obstacles to the use of the Kurdish language.
3. Full right of association and organization for Kurds.
4. The right of the people to have a say in the exploitation of mineral resources. The revenues from these resources are currently not invested in developing the region. Instead, prisons and police stations are built, and the people benefit from their wealth in the form of bombs falling on their heads.

5. The right of the Kurdish people to self-determination.

There is already much speculation, especially among non-Kurds, over the so-called post-war scenarios : an independent unified Kurdistan, an autonomous region inside a state, a federalist model with a federal state Kurdistan or a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. At the end of 1986, the Pentagon already had its so-called Kurdish scenario, as the petroleum installations took on significance in the hottest phase of the Iran-Iraq Gulf War. And word went around that Turkey, on the recommendation of the United States, could march on Mosul and Kirkuk. This scenario could become important.

A friend said to me: "I don't want to speculate, I want to live, as a Kurd. A little less torture, fewer tears, less death". Another said: "We don't say that we Kurds are courageous people, but oppression has made us that way. Only when we break the unjust laws, and defend ourselves, will anything change. It is a bloody war, but seventy years of peace have brought nothing to the Kurds".

## Concluding Remarks

by  
Ann Clwyd \*

In concluding this Conference today, can I say that the speakers this afternoon have struck a particular chord with me since the representatives from Turkey spoke of their distress in not being able to register the birth of their children in their Kurdish native language. As a Welsh speaker in the U.K. we too have had to fight for similar rights and equal treatment for the Welsh language alongside English.

As many speakers have pointed out today, in the past both Britain and the USA have betrayed the Kurdish people and used them for their own ends. If previous pledges to protect Kurdish rights had been honoured, I believe that young Britons, Kuwaitis, Americans and Iraqis perhaps would not have had to die in a war caused by Saddam Hussein. Neither would the voteless people of Iraq have had to endure the heaviest air

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\* Member of the British Parliament.

attacks in history and the trauma of the “Mother of Battles.”

As long ago as January 1918, the US President Woodrow Wilson, in his famous Fourteen Points, stated that nationalities under Turkish domination should be assured “an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development” in the event of an Allied victory in World War One.

In 1926, Iraq’s British-backed Arab Prime Minister declared that the Kurdish areas of Iraq should have Kurdish civil servants, both Kurdish and Arabic as official languages and an education in Kurdish for Kurdish children, but these provisions were only ever half-heartedly carried out.

In 1930, Britain agreed to give up its mandate powers over Iraq and supported the country’s application for independent status at the League of Nations. Behind the scenes the British reneged, however, by means of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which contained no guarantees of Kurdish or other minority rights.

The autonomous Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, proclaimed in January 1946 but forced to surrender to Iran less than a year later, was one of the first casualties of the Cold War.

It was only when the Iraqi people threw off the British

colonial yoke in 1958 that they were able to draft their own constitution, stating that “Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Iraqi homeland, and their national rights are recognized within the Iraqi state”. The granting of genuine Kurdish autonomy was, however, to prove impossible for the fragile regime of Abdul Karim Qassem.

He was overthrown in 1963 in a Ba’thist-nationalist coup. Any hopes that the new regime would promote Kurdish autonomy were soon dashed. Kurdish armed struggle against Baghdad continued.

Since 1979, the British Committee against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq (CARDRI), of which I am the chairperson, has campaigned to expose the violation of human rights in Iraq and to develop solidarity with Iraqis struggling for democracy. It was uphill work. The 1980s were years when more and more Iraqis, including thousands of Kurds, were fleeing Iraq if they possibly could, and trying to warn the world of the consequences of supporting an Iraqi dictator who was “killing us like sheep”, as one Iraqi woman living in exile in Britain put it to me. Deaf ears were turned to these warnings.

Until 2 August 1990, Saddam Hussein’s regime was perceived as a bulwark against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men sacrificed their lives in the eight-year war against

Iran. In the course of that war Iraq was transformed from a prosperous nation to yet another Third World debtor. For the West, Saddam's Iraq was a war-machine to be pitted against Iran. For the East, it was a client state for which no thoughts of 'perestroika' were ever entertained.

For the world as a whole Iraq was, and is, a potentially vast market. The attractiveness of that market does not, however, justify indifference on the part of governments and world opinion towards the barbarity of the Saddam Hussein regime against the Iraqi people, particularly Iraqi Kurds. Such indifference in the past gave Saddam Hussein the political space to develop his dictatorship and in due course to slip the leash of external influence and make his bid for leadership of the Arab world and domination of the Gulf by invading Kuwait.

The people of Iraq are hungry for democracy and they deserve it as much as anybody. For outsiders with interests in the area, democracy can seem dangerous because democratic countries make their own decisions. But democratic countries can also engage in dialogue with other democratic countries. By contrast, the nurturing of a heavily-armed tyrant, in the name of security, must lead to a confrontation between military machines such as we have witnessed.



Saddam Hussein, as is common knowledge, is not the only tyrant or undemocratic ruler in the Middle East. His is not the only regime guilty of human rights abuse in the area. The Israeli treatment of the Palestinians is perhaps one of the worst.

In the aftermath of this Gulf War there has to be a Middle East conference. Those who involve themselves in determining the destiny of the Middle East should try, if they want peace and stability, to see the situation through the eyes of those who live there. These include the women and children of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Is it too soon for democracy in Iraq and genuine autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan ? Why should it be ? Why should Iraqi people be told that for them accountable government is an impossible dream ? They've been through the nightmares of colonialism and totalitarianism. Isn't it time they too were allowed what so much of the rest of the world takes for granted ?

## A Message to the Conference

*from*  
*Lord Avebury\**

I am sorry that a debate in the House of Lords on the question of Tibet, another nation which has been denied the right of self-determination, prevents me from joining you in Washington to discuss the problems facing the Kurdish people.

This is a moment when the democratic powers could atone for their failure to honour promises made to the Kurdish people more than seventy years ago. President Woodrow Wilson, in his Fourteen Points, assured the Kurds of "an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development", and this undertaking was endorsed by the British. In the Treaty of Sèvres, provision was made for a plebiscite in Turkish Kurdistan, and if that territory voted for independence, the Vilayet of Mosul, now the northern part of Iraq and inhabited by Kurds until they were brutally

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\* House of Lords, Chairman of the United Kingdom Parliamentary Human Rights Group.

deported by Saddam Hussein, was to be allowed to join the new state.

When the allies were expelled from Turkey by Mustafa Kemal, they deserted the Kurds. The revised settlement of the Treaty of Lausanne does not even mention them. Britain used all her diplomatic skill, however, to ensure that the Vilayet of Mosul, where oil had been discovered, was glued on to her artificial new client state Iraq. But if the Treaty of Sèvres could be torn up after three years, the Treaty of Baghdad of January 1926, which determined the fate of the Mosul Kurds without any pretence at consultation, may be consigned to the waste paper basket after 65 years.

There is nothing sacrosanct about Iraq's borders, and it was not helpful for Presidents Bush and Gorbachev to say that they should remain untouched in any peace settlement at the end of the Gulf conflict. The so-called principle of territorial integrity prevents the United Nations from addressing many long outstanding problems which threaten peace, but some boundaries will have to be altered in the Middle East if the Palestinian question is ever to be resolved. Yet it would be wholly unacceptable if Palestine is on the agenda of any conference to determine a new order for the region, but Kurdistan is excluded.

The allies have been terrified of discussing war aims,

beyond the requirement of UN Resolution 660, calling for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The logic of the situation demands the removal of Saddam Hussein, because he would be a continuing threat to peace in the region. Mr. Baker suggested that the Iraqi people might like to get rid of him, but only the military could do it. A new regime in Iraq might be no more democratic than Saddam, just as the restored Kuwaiti government may still be under the thumb of the Emir.

Yet surely the allies are not fighting this war exclusively to restore the monarchy in Kuwait, on the principle that territory must not be occupied by force? The international community did not lift a finger when the Chinese occupied Tibet, the Indonesians annexed East Timor or the Indians occupied Kashmir. The UN actively encouraged Indonesia to occupy West Papua, and Ethiopia to occupy Eritrea. They have done nothing about the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic States and Moldavia in 1940. Why should Saddam Hussein's violation of Chapter IV of the UN Charter be singled out as a worse crime than any of these?

The Gulf conflict should persuade the world to think more carefully about the meaning of self-determination, a right supposedly conferred on people by Article 1 of Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights. It cannot be denied that the Kurds possess all the attributes of a people except a recent history of independent statehood, and that is hardly their fault. The reason why nobody wants to think about their claim is the risk of antagonising Turkey, Iran, the Soviet Union and Syria, and this explains the Americans' concern to safeguard Iraq's borders. They do not want to introduce a question that could split the coalition. But threats to peace arise from multiple standards. Saddam Hussein probably calculated that after a little huffing and puffing, the United Nations would let him get away with his crime, because others had escaped punishment for the same offence. South Africa is the only perpetrator of local imperialism to have been forced to relinquish the colonial and alien domination of a small neighbour by international pressure.

If the rule of international law is to be strengthened, the United Nations will have to develop procedures for evaluating and processing claims to self-determination, and the Middle East after the war could be the test bed for these mechanisms. The new order should provide for an impartial authority, say the UN High Commissioner for Self-Determination, to receive claims, to have the power to disallow those which are manifestly ill-founded, and to refer those which are judged admissible to an appropriate Committee of the United Nations. By what criteria

would the High Commissioner decide on admissibility? The governing instrument might require him to have regard to the factors I have already mentioned: previous history of statehood, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, existence of institutions, and evidence of the wishes of the people. The Committee to which the High Commissioner reports could be a reconstituted Decolonisation Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities - rather than as representatives of their governments.

It may be objected that states would never agree to procedures which are likely to breach the so-called principle of territorial integrity. But the purpose is only to implement the United Nations' own principle, set out in the Universal Declaration and in both Covenants, and these should take precedence over the lines drawn on maps. As a UN Rapporteur has expressed it:

“If, beneath the guise of ostensible national unity, colonial and alien domination does in fact exist, whatever legal formula may be used in an attempt to conceal it, the right of the subject people concerned cannot be denied without international law being violated”.

The colonial and alien domination of the Kurds existed under the Ottomans and has continued for 70 years under their successors. At only one moment in

history, at the end of the Great War, did the statesmen of the world have the vision to declare a just solution to the problem, and then immediately they lost their nerve. As we approach the end of another devastating conflict, there may be another fleeting opportunity to make amends. Perhaps we shall at last fulfil the dream of that great American prophet, Woodrow Wilson:

“National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their consent. Self-determination is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril”.

23 February 1991.

## A Message to the Conference

*from*  
Wilfried Telkämper\*

Thank you very much for the invitation to the International Parliamentary Consultation on Kurdish Human Rights in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, my obligations to the European Parliament in Strasbourg and Brussels prevent me from being able to take part. Nevertheless, I would like to take the opportunity to convey my attachment to the Kurdish people and my support to this gathering.

The Gulf War has not only drawn world attention to this region, but also exposed the unsolved problems and suffering of its people. The Kurdish people, whose population of 20 million is divided between four countries, is entirely robbed of its cultural, social and political rights, and endangered in its very existence.

The 1988 Halabja massacre, of which I reminded my colleagues in the European Parliament and the public

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\* Vice-President of the European Parliament, Member of the Green Group.



on its anniversary in March 1990, could now be repeated at any time.

All decision makers must remain aware of the stolen rights and of the oppression suffered by the Kurdish people, which must be overcome if either justice or lasting peace are to be achieved.

I send greetings to all my colleagues and best wishes for the success of this meeting on behalf of the just demands of the Kurdish people.

## A Message to the Conference

*from*  
*Flaminio PICCOLI\**

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Both personally and on behalf of all the members of the Commission, I would like to commend this initiative which focuses international attention on a problem that has been unjustly set aside by the progression of the Gulf Crisis.

The respect of human rights is the inviolable goal of every foreign policy, of every government, and it is the duty of every Parliament to ensure it is fully complied with.

This assumes even greater importance when, as in the case of the Kurdish minority, the group lacks any form of international representation and any connection to state bodies that would defend its rights.

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\* Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, Italy.

Because neither I, nor any member of the Commission, are able to leave Rome at this particular time, I would be appreciative, Mr. Chairman, if you would convey this message of agreement to the participants in the Conference. I have further pleasure in informing you that in its session of February 22nd last, T.H. Giulio Andreotti, President of the Council of Ministers, acting on behalf of the Government, accepted the resolution enclosed herewith.

## Press Release

1 March 1991

At the initiative of the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Fondation France-Libertés, and the Kurdish Institute of Paris, an International Parliamentary Consultation Conference took place on 27 February 1991 in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Room, Washington D.C. The conference was co-chaired by Madame Danielle Mitterrand, Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Claiborne Pell, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

After hearing testimonies by prominent Kurdish witnesses and several non-governmental organizations—Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, Médecins du Monde, Middle East Watch and Physicians for Human Rights—the conference came to the following conclusions:

— The tragic fate of the Kurdish people calls for immediate and urgent attention by the international community, which has a moral and historical responsibility to this people, martyred for 22 years by Saddam Hussein's dictatorship;

— All efforts towards establishing a stable order in the region, based on justice and the respect for international law, must include a just solution to the Kurdish issue;

— The European and American parliamentarians and dignitaries who attended the conference insist that the allied governments, in particular the United States, British and French governments, put the Kurdish issue on the agenda of any further peace talks. They will continue their multi-faceted efforts to ensure that this courageous and victimized people will not be forgotten and sacrificed once again.

## Pell Discusses Post-War in Gulf

*The following is a statement  
by  
Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.)*

“The war in the Persian Gulf now appears to be over. It has been a stunning triumph for American arms and for the forces of our coalition partners. I would like to commend our brave servicemen and women who served with such professionalism and with such commitment in the Gulf. All Americans salute them for their rôle in the liberation of Kuwait.

“We are also very grateful that American and coalition casualties have proved to be extremely light. Never in history has such a major military campaign been waged with so much damage inflicted on the enemy and so few lost by the victorious side. However, my heart goes out to the families and friends of the seventy-nine men and women who died for our

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\* Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

country and for freedom in Operation Desert Storm. The world deeply appreciates their sacrifice.

“We also sympathize with the terrible suffering from which the people of Kuwait have now been delivered. They have endured unspeakable hardships over the last seven months. And we should not forget Saddam Hussein’s other victims: the Kurds who have been attacked by poison gas and seen their villages destroyed by the thousands.

“And I would also like to offer a thought for the people and ordinary soldiers of Iraq. They too are victims of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi people have been subject to aerial bombardment and have seen services in their cities go back nearly a century, all because of Saddam Hussein’s megalomaniacal ambitions. The ordinary Iraqi soldier was a conscript, he was poorly fed and subject to fire from his own side to keep him from surrendering. He too is a victim of Saddam Hussein.

“Now, however, our attention must shift to the post-war situation. We will profit little from the success of our arms if we fail now to secure the peace.

“First on our list of post-war issues must be the political future of Iraq. In my view Saddam Hussein’s days are numbered. He has brought unprecedented misery on his own country, first through an eight year war with Iran that cost 250,000 lives, pulled down his

country's infrastructure, brought about the destruction of his military force and produced thousands of Iraqi deaths. This is a record no leader can long endure.

“We should do what we can to encourage a democratic alternative to Saddam Hussein. Already there is a coalition of Kurdish, Shi'a Arab and other groups which has outlined a program for a democratic alternative in Iraq, an alternative that also guarantees autonomy for the long suffering Kurdish minority. We should encourage these efforts. And above all we should not accept the fifteen percent Sunni Arab minority who will run yet one more authoritarian Iraqi regime. The government of Saudi Arabia is sponsoring its own alternative to Saddam Hussein. While I have the greatest admiration for our Saudi allies, theirs is not a government that knows about democracy. Their alternative for Iraq should not be ours.

“Our next priority in the post-war world must be to contain the unrestrained transfer of weapons to countries in the Middle East. It is ironic that all the countries that supplied Iraq with its vast arsenal of modern weapons formed part of the international coalition against Iraq. These arms sales to Iraq may have encouraged Iraq to be more aggressive ; they certainly have made an aggressive Iraq more dangerous. The countries in the Middle East should be devoting



their resources to their own development; it is the diversion of scarce resources to wasteful and dangerous military expenditure that is the cause of so much instability in the region.

“Finally, in the post-war period we must redouble our efforts to find peaceful solutions to regional problems: the Iraq-Kuwait dispute, the Arab-Israel conflict, the civil war in Lebanon and, I would add, the legitimate aspirations of the Kurdish people.

“Mr. President, this has been a great triumph for America and for the United Nations. Now we face a new challenge. I hope our policy makers can show the same courage and same professionalism as did our servicemen and women in the Persian Gulf.”

*If we are to achieve the new world order of which we hear so much, we must stand up to injustice wherever it occurs. Perpetrators of repression, torture and other violations of human rights must be called to account. Unless and until we accept that fundamental principle, there will never truly be a new world order.*

*Edward M. Kennedy*