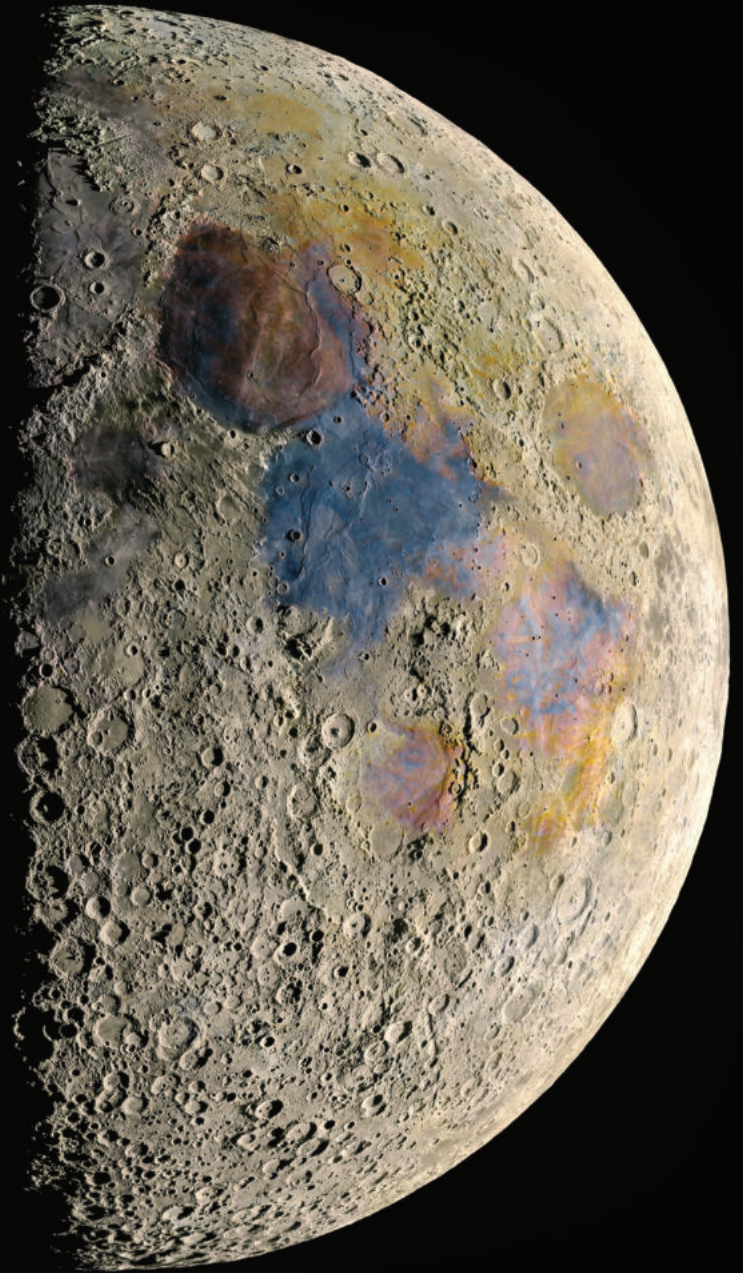


Kurdistan Chronicle

KURDISH
ASTROPHOTOGRAPHER
CAPTURES THE **MOON**
IN STUNNING CLARITY



Defender Protected Tested to Perfection



For enhanced security, the Bulletproof Defender 110 is available with Level 6 ballistic protection. This includes 33 mm thick transparent bullet-resistant glass and fortified key areas such as the windscreen, front and rear door glasses, and tailgate glass. This higher level of armoring transforms the Defender 110 into a mobile sanctuary, capable of withstanding high-calibre threats while maintaining a luxurious and comfortable interior



The Bulletproof Defender 130 exemplifies toughness, versatility, and innovation. This model is designed to cater to both adventurous spirits and those seeking unparalleled protection. The Defender 130 combines the legendary heritage of Land Rover with modern advancements, offering a vehicle that is both formidable and refined.

BULLETPROOF DEFENDER 130



Comfort Line Door Frame Finish Front



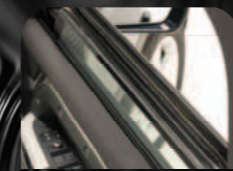
Comfort Line Door Frame Finish Rear



Engine Bay Fire Suppression System



Standard Door Frame Finish



Heavy Duty Window Lifters



INTERIOR CONCEPT



Baghdad: Abu Ja'far Al-Mansour Sq. Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (770) 909 4444

Erbil: Gulan St. Kurdistan, Iraq.
Phone No: +964 (750) 710 4444

www.sta.iq | info@sta.iq
6969

PLAN COMMITMENT SUCCESS

Ongoing Projects

5+

Machinery

410+

Annual Growth

24%

Man Power

2,000+

Get in Touch

info@kavin-group.com

+964 750 408 7779

Kavin Group Building

Duhok International General Terminal | Duhok-Zakho
Highway P.O. Box 1012 BZ | Kurdistan Region. Duhok-IRAQ

The Global City of Tomorrow

The Global City of Tomorrow



Botan Tahseen

Erbil, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in human history, is not only rich in ancient heritage, but is also emerging as a modern cultural and social hub in the Middle East. This ancient city has become the source of hope Kurds from around the world and even minorities across the Middle East, who see Erbil as a haven in difficult times.

Currently, there are over

30,000 Kurds in Jordan, many of whom wield significant political and social influence. They are often regarded as the trusted confidants of the Jordanian king, yet their eyes remain fixed on the rising skyline of Erbil, believing that the stronger the capital becomes, the more secure their own futures will be.

In Lebanon, where the Kurdish population numbers around 150,000, Kurds lack not only parliamentary representation, but even the right to elect a local leader. For them, Erbil therefore represents hope and provides a guiding light. As is often said, the Maronites have France, the Sunnis have Saudi Arabia, and the Shi'a have Iran; the Kurds, meanwhile, look to Erbil for their future security.

Malmimi, a Kurdish artist from Anatolia, left Türkiye 40 years ago and now lives in Germany. His daughter was born there, and she frequently asks him, "If

the far-right gains control in Germany and enforces exclusionary policies, where will we go?" When Malmimi visited Erbil for the first time thanks to an event organized by the Goethe Institute, he immediately called his daughter and reassured her: "Don't worry about exclusion in Germany anymore; we have a homeland with a capital, a flag, an army, and an official language."

Similarly, Christians in the Middle East are convinced that their fate in the region is directly tied to the future of Erbil. For centuries, Christians, Muslim and ethnic and religious minorities and Kurds have coexisted in harmony, while

the Christian presence in Arab societies has declined dramatically over the last eight decades. This has led them to believe that the Kurds offer a more secure future, and that they must work together moving forward.

Employees of a Chinese oil company stationed in Basra often travel to Erbil for weekend getaways. According to the company's director, when they visit Erbil, they feel as though they are returning to their true selves.

Meanwhile, a Syrian businessman from Raqqa who now lives in Erbil expressed his gratitude, saying: "Thank you, Kurdistan. I came

to Erbil as a refugee, but thanks to the blessings and prosperity of this city, I have become a business owner with a house and everything I need. No one here tells us to leave."

These examples only scratch the surface of the cultural and social richness of Erbil, a city growing into a metropolitan hub, where diverse voices and communities can thrive, contributing to a Kurdish identity that honors the city's cultural and historical legacy while providing security and a sense of belonging to all. This is the hallmark of cities that, in the future, will take on a truly global role. ●



CONTENTS



Unleashing Anger Through Percussion

114

Kurdistan Chronicle
 Kurdistan Chronicle
 Kurdistan Chronicle
 Kurdistan Chronicle
 Kurdistan Chronicle

info@kurdistanchronicle.com

Publishers: Botan Tahseen
 Marewan Nasraddin Hawramy
Editor in Chief: Nahro Zagros
Managing Editor: Shamal Abdulla
Editors: John Bowlus

Geoffrey Ballinger
Board Member: Jan Dost
Senior Reporter: Sardar Sattar
Graphic Designer: Hilal Çelik
Features: Qassim Khidhir

Photograph Editor: Safin Hamid
Photographers: Sabr Dri
 Mohammed Dargalayi
Liaison: Aveen Howrami
US Desk: Goran Shakhawan

Kurdistan Election 2024 A Detailed Breakdown 8-13	Kurdistan's Leap into the Digital Age 72-77
Decades-Long Quest Compensation for Anfal Victims 14-19	Investigating Abortion in 91 Days 78-81
Italian Ambassador Highlights Cultural Ties and Cooperation in Kurdistan 20-23	Kurdish Bread and Meat A Culinary Revolution in Europe 82-87
Tackling Water Scarcity in Erbil 24-27	Alone in the Citadel A Sacred Legacy to Protect 88-91
German Support for Peshmerga and Regional Security 28-31	How Kurdish Museums Shaped a Berlin Director's Vision 92-95
Building Bridges Sterling Heights-Ankawa Sister City Program 32-35	Navigating Cultures 96-99
Sterling Heights and Ankawa Establish Sister City Partnership 36-39	A Wedding Tale of Hope and Challenge 100-103
A Special Bond of Friendship 40-43	Flying Kurdistan Flag on Everest 104-109
Kurdistan's First Korean Academic Course 44-46	A Novel Inspired by the Yezidi Genocide 110-113
Chevening Scholarship Driving Change 48-49	Unleashing Anger Through Percussion 114-119
Kurdish Astrophotographer Captures Clearest Image of the Moon 50-55	Halabja Girls' Karate Club 120-123
A Step Backward Iraq's Family Law Amendment 56-59	Poetry 124-125
Iraqis Lose Faith in Democracy 60-63	Wildlife 126-127
Zakho Hospital Setting an Example 64-67	
Nursing and Midwifery Development Center 68-71	



Kurdistan Election 2024 A Detailed Breakdown



Sardar Sattar

is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.

In 1991, in the aftermath of the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait from the former Ba'ath regime of Iraq, the Kurds in the north rose up to finally free their areas from the decades-long systematic oppression of Saddam Hussein. This uprising led the Kurds to establish a semi-autonomous political entity with its own legislative, executive, and judicial bodies.

On May 19, 1992, six months after the historic uprising, the first parliamentary elections were held in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with a minimum threshold of 7% set for representation in Parliament. It was the first chance for the Kurds to vote for their representatives and marked a turning point in the history of the Kurdish struggle for freedom, self-rule, and democracy.

The 1992 election led to the formation of the first Kurdistan Parliament – initially named the Kurdistan National Assembly. The leadership and people of the Kurdistan Region decided to adopt and abide by all Iraqi laws except for those that violated international human rights. The Kurdistan National Assembly convened for the first time on July 15, 1992, and passed Law No. 1, which established the Assembly as the Region's legislature. Over a decade later, in 2009, the Kurdistan National Assembly was renamed the Kurdistan Parliament.

To date there have been five region-wide parliamentary terms, following elections in 1992, 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2018. In

February 2009, several amendments were made to the Kurdistan election law to increase the inclusiveness of all groups. The minimum age of parliamentary candidates was lowered from 30 to 25 years old, and the legal minimum quota of female parliamentarians was raised from 25% to 30% of the legislature.

Kurdistan Parliament's legal jurisdiction

The Kurdistan Parliament, according to the 2005 Constitution of Iraq, passes regional laws, decides on treaties and external affairs, shapes the relations with the federal government of Iraq, votes on nominated prime ministers and government cabinets, approves the national budget, and monitors performance of the executive institutions of the region.

According to the latest updates on the Parliament's official website, the legislature had 19 standing committees during the fifth term of the Parliament, which included legislative, agriculture, finance, culture, education, religious affairs, energy, health, integrity, interior and security, martyrs' affairs, municipalities, Parliament affairs, *peshmerga* affairs, women's rights, investment, international affairs, human rights, and Kurdistan areas outside the Kurdistan Region.

These committees constitute the backbone of the Parliament's work, where lawmakers hold most of their meetings with



A Kurdish man after casting his vote in the 2018 Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections

KURDISTAN REGION PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BREAKDOWN

As of 27 August 2024

	DUHOK	ERBIL	SULAIMANIYA	HALABJA	TOTAL
Total Voters	682,791	933,115	1,008,412	59,300	2,899,578
Female Voters	363,962	494,216	524,538	30,401	1,413,117
Male Voters	373,897	521,372	558,710	32,482	1,486,461
Total Seats	25	34	38	3	100
Minority Seats	Christians: 1	Christians: 1 Turkmen: 1	Christians: 1 Turkmen: 1	0	5
Candidates	226	395	518	54	1,193
Female Candidates	66	118	163	22	369
Polling Centers	297	560	534	28	1,431
Polling Staff	9,878	14,835	16,188	48	40,901

Source: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Report

the government, organizations, and individuals. Members of these committees also draft legislation, investigate issues, and hold consultations.

The parliamentary committees are also mandated to review bills and proposed amendments, consult with experts and stakeholders about bills, and submit their suggestions to the Parliament's Presidency. They also scrutinize the performance of the government and the implementation of laws.

The upcoming election

Following repeated delays, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani in June 2024 issued a regional decree to set October 20, 2024, as the general parliamentary election day, with special voting for security personnel to occur two days earlier.

These elections follow a series of legal and political developments, including a ruling by the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq that restructured the electoral constituencies and mandated specific quotas for women and minorities. Unlike the previous elections, the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission will replace the Kurdistan Region's electoral commission to organize and oversee the vote as the latter's legal mandate has expired and the Kurdish political parties have failed to reach an agreement on the renewal of its mandate.

Key features of the 2024 elections

In a report on August 29, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) provided details about the upcoming elections, noting that the vote is "seen as an essential step in restoring

political stability and legitimacy to the Kurdistan Regional Government."

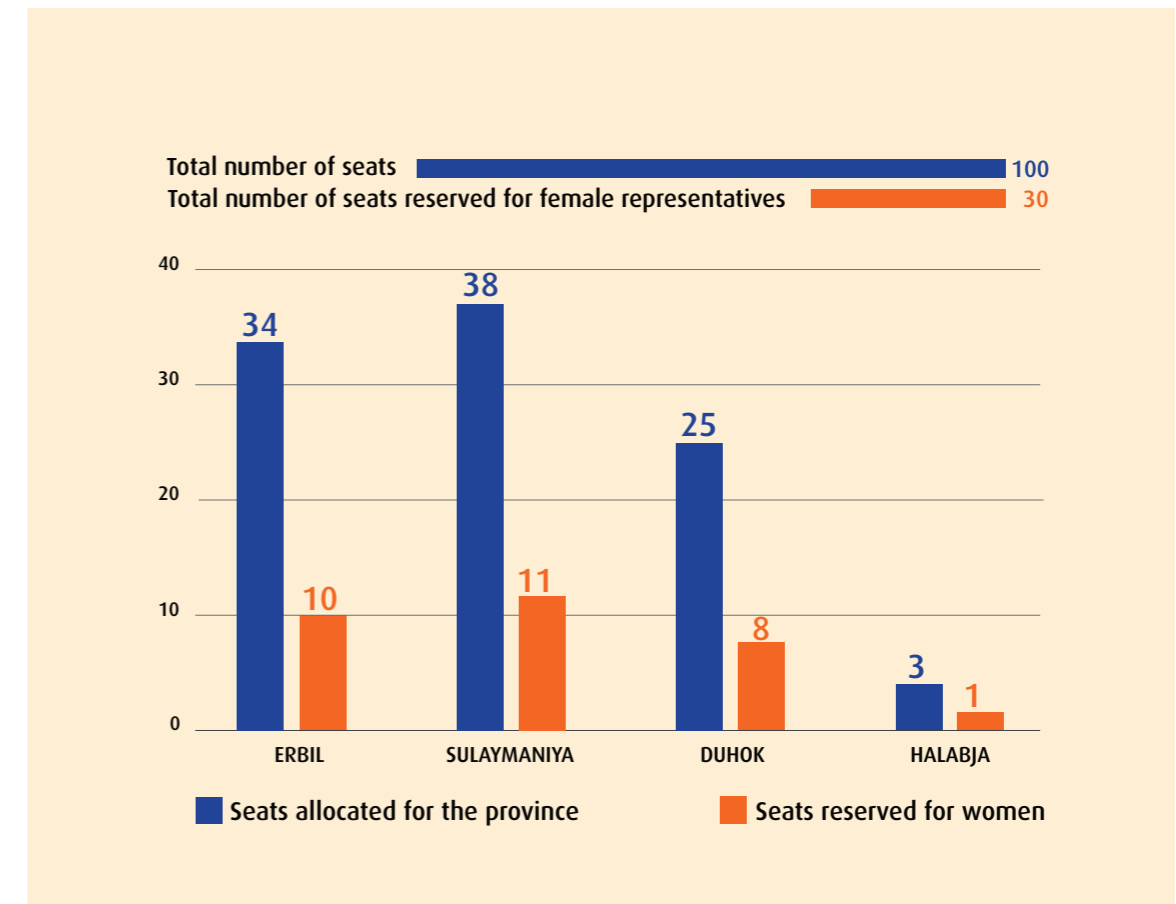
In the wake of internal political disputes arbitrated by the Federal Supreme Court, for the October 20 elections the region will be divided into four single electoral constituencies. In previous elections, however, the Kurdistan Region had a single constituency for the vote.

Furthermore, a minimum of 30% of parliamentary seats are reserved for women, to allow women in Kurdish society to be well represented in the legislature. As for religious and ethnic minorities, the Federal Supreme Court lowered their quota seats from 11 to five, with two seats in Erbil, two in Sulaymaniyah, and one in Duhok. However, the minorities believe that neither the allocated seats nor their distribution across the governorates



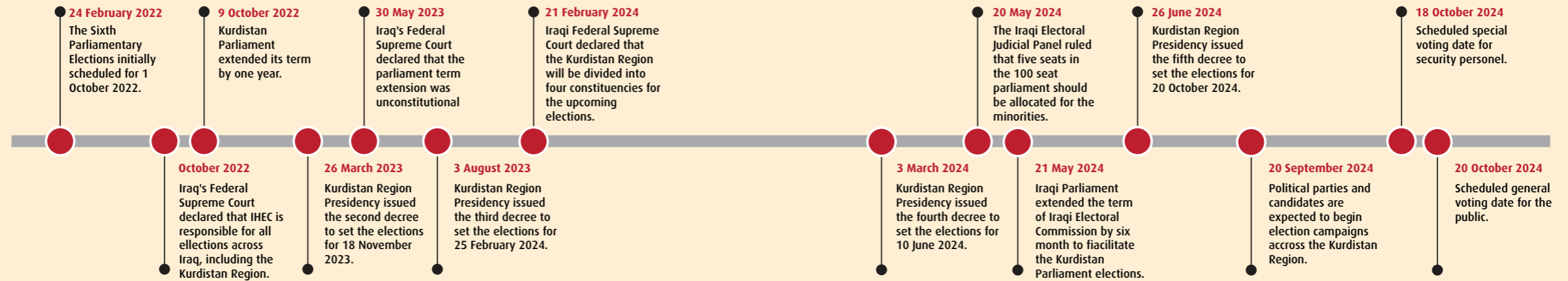
A Kurdish woman taking part in the 2018 Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections

Photo: Sajfin Hamid



TIMELINE

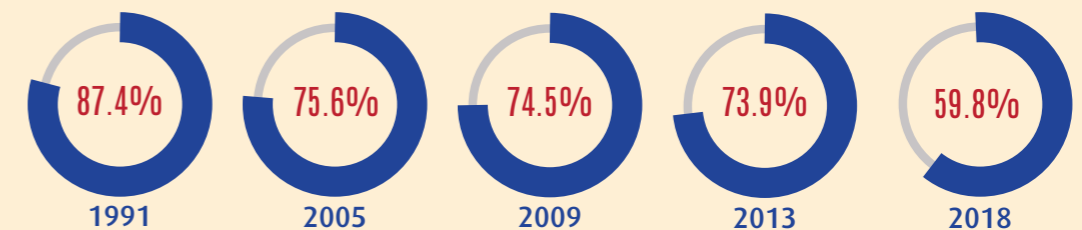
KURDISTAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 2024



A Kurdish man at a voting station during the 2018 Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections

Photo: Safin Hamid

KURDISTAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TURNOUT



reflect their current reality on the ground.

According to the latest statistics, the total number of voters across the four governorates of the Kurdistan Region stands at 2,899,578, including 1,413,117 women and 1,486,461 men. Among them are 215,960 security personnel.

For the upcoming elections, 1,196 candidates (369 women and 827 men) are running for the 100-seat Parliament. The electoral commission has planned to set up 1,431 polling

centers with a total of 7,067 polling stations. To organize the voting and ballot counting procedures, voter verification devices, polling center optical scanners, and results transmission systems will be utilized.

Finally, the upcoming elections will not only determine the future political landscape of the Kurdistan Region, but also renew the international legitimacy of the region as a semiautonomous political entity. Envoys from most Western countries and UNAMI have welcomed the announcement of these free and fair

elections and offered support to help the repeatedly postponed elections to occur as scheduled.

“UNAMI reiterates its readiness to work with the Independent High Electoral Commission and all other relevant institutions, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2732 (2024), to ensure inclusive, free, and fair elections, with the full participation of women and all other components of Kurdistan Region society,” read a statement from UNAMI from June 26, 2024. ●

Decades-Long Quest Compensation for *Anfal* Victims



Shamal Abdulla

is a journalist with 19 years of experience in the field. He has held a number of prestigious positions, including news director at Kurdistan 24 and the editor-in-chief of BasNews.

During the *Anfal* Campaign, an operation carried out against the Kurds by the Ba'athist regime in Iraq between February and September 1988, thousands of Kurds were buried alive, properties were looted, and women and children were forced into labor camps.

Officials from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have continued to urge the Iraqi federal government to compensate the families of the victims of the tragedy, and for the international community to recognize the *Anfal* Campaign as genocide. On the 36th anniversary of the operation's final phase, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani issued a statement, calling on the federal government to fulfill its legal and moral responsibilities by compensating the families of the victims for the heinous crimes perpetrated by the former Iraqi regime.

Atrocities that must not be forgotten

The *Anfal* Campaign was a series of massacres of Kurds carried out by the Iraqi Ba'athist regime under direct orders from former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein at the close of the Iran-Iraq War. The campaign unfolded in eight phases, beginning on February 23, 1988, in the Dokan district of Sulaymaniyah Governorate, and concluding between August 25 and September 6 in Duhok Governorate.

More than 182,000 people were killed during the campaign. Men were taken to the deserts of southern Iraq, where they were buried alive. In some regions, women and children were also transported to remote areas and buried alongside the men. People from over 8,000 villages across Kurdistan were evacuated by the Iraqi regime, and those left behind

“

More than 182,000 people were killed during the campaign

”

182,000

182,000

Photo: Safin Hamid



Women mourning during a ceremony organized to receive the remains of Anfal victims

Photo: Safin Hamid

– mainly women and children – were confined to forced labor camps, enduring harsh living conditions.

In a statement, Masoud Barzani, a leading Kurdish figure and head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, reflected on the *Anfal* Campaign: “As a result of this inhumane crime, thousands of Kurdish citizens were martyred, disappeared, or displaced, and hundreds of villages were destroyed. The goal of the former Iraqi regime was to break the Kurdish people’s spirit and continue their policy of demographic change in Kurdistan.”

Prime Minister Barzani emphasized that these atrocities must not be forgotten and reiterated the need for the

Iraqi federal government to compensate the Kurdish people for the genocide and the numerous crimes committed against them.

The final phase of *Anfal* targeted areas such as Zakho, Atrush, Zawita, Amedi, Kani Masi, Batifa, Deraluk, and Sarsing in Duhok Governorate and began with chemical attacks on several villages that killed many civilians. One of the most devastating of these chemical attacks occurred on August 24 in the village of Spindari, located at the foot of Mount Gara. Despite the intensity of the bombing, which stretched for 30 kilometers, casualties were relatively low due to early warnings from the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces, who advised the villagers on

how to protect themselves. However, livestock and fields were annihilated.

During the *Anfal* campaign in the Badinan area, over 5,000 people were killed, and approximately 60,000 were displaced. A total of 663 villages were affected, including 40 Christian villages and 81 Kurdish villages, and 79 villages that were bombed with chemical weapons.

In a post on X on the anniversary of the tragedy, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani highlighted that the final phase of *Anfal* not only impacted civilians, but also damaged the region’s environment, despoiling its water, air, and soil. “The Iraqi Supreme Criminal Court has declared

the *Anfal* campaign genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Therefore, we call on the Iraqi federal government to compensate the families of the victims in every possible way,” he said.

President Barzani also stressed the importance of serving the families of the victims and continuing efforts to have *Anfal* officially recognized as genocide by the international community. Additionally, he urged Iraq to learn from its past to protect the rights of all its people, ensuring a better future for all communities.

Crimes that should never be repeated The term “*Anfal*” comes from the eighth *surah* of the Quran, which refers to the spoils of war, and the name was used to describe the military campaign aimed at eradicating the Kurdish population. Ali Hassan al-Majid, the former Iraqi defense minister, justified seizing the wealth of the Kurd-

“
To date, *Anfal* has been recognized as genocide by Iraq, the UK, Sweden, Norway, and South Korea. Many believe more should be done to secure further international recognition

”
ish people, ordering the confiscation of their properties, livestock, and even family members. Some Kurdish collaborators assisted the Iraqi military in carrying out these atrocities.

“The objective of these heinous crimes was to annihilate the Kurdish people,” Prime Minister Barzani stated in his commemoration message. “But the perpetrators of these massacres could not destroy the will and desire for freedom of the Kurdish people.” He vowed that the KRG would continue to support the families of *Anfal* victims.

From August 25 to August 29, 1988, over 75 chemical attacks took place, resulting in the deaths of approximately 500 people. According to the Fifth Corps commander of the Iraqi military, 14,473 people were arrested during the campaign, including 2,252 men, 3,303 women, and 7,847 children. Another 482 people who were classified as ‘disruptors’ were also arrested.

Genocide expert Adalat Omar noted that during *Anfal*’s final phase, 13,553 people were arrested and dis-



Men carrying coffins of Anfal victims after they were exhumed from mass graves in southern Iraq

Photo: Safin Hamid



■ A ceremony to pay tribute to the victims of the Anfal Campaign

Photo: Safin Hamid

appeared, with the number rising to 14,473 following the chemical attack on the village of Berjini.

In 2018, during a ceremony marking the anniversary of *Anfal* in Badinan,

11 bodies that had been exhumed from a mass grave in 2007 and identified as *Anfal* victims were buried at Nizarke Castle. However, some relatives continue to demand that the remains undergo DNA testing.

To date, *Anfal* has been recognized as genocide by Iraq, the UK, Sweden, Norway, and South Korea. Many believe more should be done to secure further international recognition.

Kurdish lawyer Danar Abdul-Ghaffar called on international organizations to ensure these crimes are never repeated. “During Saddam Hussein’s trial, the Iraqi authorities betrayed the Kurds. Instead of convicting and executing Saddam for his crimes against

the Kurdish people, they focused on a Shi’ite case,” he said.

Abdul-Ghaffar emphasized the urgency for the Iraqi government to compensate the Kurdish victims in line with the Iraqi High Criminal

Court’s ruling. He also stressed that the only way to protect the Kurdish people from future atrocities is for international organizations and governments to enact laws preventing such crimes. ●

Italian Ambassador Highlights Cultural Ties and Cooperation in Kurdistan

Kurdistan Chronicle

The outgoing Ambassador of Italy to Iraq Maurizio Greganti told Kurdistan Chronicle that it was easy to promote Italy in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq during his mission due to the great “love for the Italian way of life, culture, design, fashion, and food.”

“I was here almost three years and it’s been a period of great changes in Iraq and in Kurdistan as well. It was not an easy time, but I would say it was very interesting for me and I am leaving with many unforgettable memories. I visited Kurdistan many times during these three years. The natural beauty is stunning. While we have the Alps in Italy, this landscape is different but equally beautiful.”

During his visits, he met with the Kurdish leadership in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and traveled all over the Kurdistan Region. “I saw many places to try to understand the people and culture of the region. To be honest with you, I felt at home. A lot of the values here are similar to Italian culture and traditions.”

However, he says Italy can always do more, especially in bringing Italian companies to the region. “Our Consul General Michele Camerota is doing a great job in this regard. The Consulate General and their team are very active.”

“They recently established Italian language courses in collaboration with the Dante Alighieri Society at the Catholic Uni-

versity in Erbil,” Greganti said. “They also promoted many other activities, including events on cuisine, design, culture, and even an opera concert.”

Archeological richness

There are at least 11 Italian archeological expeditions in the Kurdistan Region, cooperating with local Directorates of Heritage and Antiquities. In 2022, the first archeological park in Iraq was opened in Faida in the Duhok Governorate, followed by the opening of a park in Khinnis in 2023.

“
There are at least 11 Italian archeological expeditions in the Kurdistan Region
”

“It was wonderful to see Italian archeologists working throughout the region and Iraq. I’ve visited many archeological sites and while I knew Kurdistan was rich in history, I hadn’t realized just how rich,” Greganti explained.

“It was a big surprise for me to see how many archeological sites they have here,” he said.

“The Assyrian relief in the ecological park in Faida and Khinnis is truly wonderful. It was discovered by an Italian



Italy's Ambassador to Iraq Maurizio Greganti meeting with President Masoud Barzani in Erbil (March 19, 2024)

Photo: Adnan Barzani



■ Ambassador Greganti delivering a speech at a conference in Dubok (October 12, 2023)

team from Udine University in 2021 led by Professor Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,” Greganti added.

“Another site I really liked was the Neolithic sites, which are more ancient and remarkable. There’s an unbelievable number of tells in the Erbil Plains, most of which were created by prehistoric human settlements. I had the opportunity to visit Tell Helawa with Professor Peyronel Luca from Milan and Asingeran with Professor Marco Iamoni from Udine, and I found the sites incredibly interesting,” Greganti related.

The Italian Ambassador also visited Italian-supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Kurdistan Region.

“It was inspiring to see the work being done by Italian NGOs, such as the hospital in Akre and the important Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration Center in Sulaymaniyah for people who have lost their limbs. There’s significant work being done to combat thalassemia and other common diseases in the region, which we also have experience of in Italy,” Greganti explained. “Our doctors



■ Ambassador Greganti visiting Italian archaeologists at an excavation site in the Kurdistan Region (October 2023)

are helping, and it makes me proud of what we’re doing. Of course, there’s always more we can do, but it was very encouraging to see the progress being made.”

Greganti also visited the Shanidar Cave in Barzan, which was recently featured in the Netflix documentary *Secrets of the Neanderthals*. The cave contains the remains of 10 Neanderthals that were discovered by a team of archeologists from Columbia University.

“This remarkable site is the easternmost site where Neanderthals have been discovered, as they are usually studied in Europe,” he remarked.

Kurdish elections

In June, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani announced that the regional parliamentary elections would take place on October 20, 2024, after two years of delays. The announcement of the election date was widely welcomed by members of the international community.

“The upcoming elections are very important. We are pleased that a date has finally been set and that there is widespread agreement and eagerness to move forward,” Ambassador Greganti said.

“This is crucial, and we will support the Kurdish government to guarantee free, fair, and transparent elections, doing our best to support their success. This is vital for the legitimacy of Kurdish institutions, including the parliament and the government. We believe this is very important for the future of Kurdistan.”

Role of Italian army

Currently, Italian soldiers are based at Camp Singara in Erbil and are training Kurdish *peshmerga* forces, according to a report by the Italian news association Nova Agency.

“We are proud of the work we’ve done, promoting training programs over the years. We’ve been here since 2003 and never left, even in the most challenging moments,” Italian Ambassador Greganti said.

“I’m very pleased with the cooperation we’ve established. We will continue our efforts because we believe this country is strategically important. It is a pillar of stability and is crucial for the Middle East, which remains a priority for us.”

Last year, Italy joined the Multinational Advisory Group (MNAG), which includes the UK, United States, Netherlands, and Germany, and supports the *peshmerga* reform program.



■ Ambassador Greganti and Italy's Consul General Michele Camerota paying tribute to the victims of the Halabja massacre

“We are focused on the Italian army’s role under the umbrella of the anti-ISIS coalition, as well as in the NATO mission in Iraq and through other bilateral efforts. Their primary tasks involve training and supporting Iraqi forces and the *peshmerga*, particularly in security sector reform,” Greganti said.

“For example, in Kurdistan, they are part of the MNAG, which assists the Ministry of *Peshmerga* Affairs in reform efforts. This includes training, security sector reform with the Ministry of Defense and Interior in Baghdad, and other key initiatives.”

Baghdad has also held talks with the United States aimed at ending the mission of the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition. This could also affect the troop presence of other Western countries like Italy in Iraq.

“So far, it’s unclear when and how the transition will take place, but we know that at some point, there will be a shift from the coalition to a presence based on bilateral agreements with the partners of the Kurdistan Region. In any case, Italy will continue to be present in the region, as requested by both the Iraqi and Kurdish governments. We are committed to this, and in the future, we plan to operate in a more structured way once a bilateral agreement is signed,” Greganti underscored. ●

Tackling Water Scarcity in Erbil

Kurdistan Chronicle

Erbil's long struggle with water scarcity may finally see a solution with the announcement of a massive project in September, bringing hope to the residents of the Kurdistan Region's capital and reassuring environmentalists concerned about falling groundwater levels in the region.

On September 8, 2024, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani laid the foundation stone of the \$480-million Erbil Emergency Water Supply Project. As the prime minister highlighted in his speech during the ceremony, the project aims to resolve the Erbil's water supply shortage for at least the next 30 years.

Currently, three water treatment plants – Ifraz 1, Ifraz 2, and Ifraz 3 – supply drinking water to nearly one million residents in Erbil. Technical challenges, including river overflow and pipeline damage, have previously caused long and repeated water cuts, especially during the summer. This new project, according to the KRG, was planned after an international contractor failed to build a fourth water treatment plant to boost the supply volume.

Water demand for 1.5 million people

The Erbil Emergency Water Supply Project will channel water from the Great Zab River to a designated location on the out-

“
Once this project is ready, hundreds of water wells will be closed, which will help replenish groundwater levels

”

■ Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani laying the foundation stone of Erbil Emergency Water Supply Project (September 12, 2024)



Photo: Sahr Dri

Water Intake and Beneficiary Neighborhoods



skirts of Erbil, where 480,000 cubic meters of water will be treated and pumped into the city network. This amount of potable water is said to be sufficient for 1.5 million people. In other words, the project will cover 60% of the capital city's demand, while the remaining 40% will be met by the three preexisting water treatment plants.

With a storage capacity of 300,000 cubic meters, the new project will dispatch water through four different pipelines to at least 20 densely populated

Water Management

The prime minister also touched upon the Ninth Cabinet's strategic plan for water management. The cabinet has spearheaded the construction of several dams and reservoirs over the past few years to address climate change-driven water scarcity in the region.

The Erbil Emergency Water Supply Project, which is being implemented by Hemn Group, is set to be fully functional within 14 months. The contractor said 5,000 people will work on the project around the clock to prevent any delay in its timetable.

According to international studies, Iraq, including



districts of Erbil.

“Once this project is ready, hundreds of water wells will be closed, which will help replenish groundwater levels,” Prime Minister Barzani said during the announcement of the project. “Meanwhile, I have asked for immediate action on water recycling in Erbil to combat environmental and groundwater pollution. The recycled water can be used to water green areas across the city.”

the Kurdistan Region, is considered the world's fifth-most vulnerable country to climate change. While already struggling with many other challenges, the KRG says it is committed to immediate strategic actions to ease the impact of climate change.

Among these actions are building several new dams and dozens of reservoirs, tree-planting campaigns, controlling gas flaring, and developing advanced waste management programs. However, as the situation continues to worsen in central and south Iraq, the Kurdistan Region fears an influx of climate-driven migration toward the mountainous north. ●

German Support for Peshmerga and Regional Security



Wladimir van Wilgenburg

is a seasoned reporter and analyst who specializes in Kurdish affairs, and holds a Master's degree in Kurdish studies from Exeter University, UK.

Colonel Lars Persikowski, the commander of the German Armed Forces in Erbil, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* in an exclusive interview at the Erbil Air Base that the German army has “a very good partnership with the Kurdish forces and the German Armed Forces truly feel welcome in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

“We feel there’s a close relationship between the Kurdish people and the Germans who are here as part of the coalition forces in Iraq in the fight against ISIS,” Persikowski said.

“It is a very interesting mission. As we support the *peshmerga* forces to restructure, my staff can contribute all their expertise and experience to create something new and enhance their capabilities.”

Ten years ago, after ISIS attacked the Kurdistan Region in 2014, Germany supplied the *peshmerga* with weapons like G-36 rifles and MILAN anti-tank guided missiles, as well as armored vehicles and a significant quantity of ammunition. The German Armed Forces also provided training for the *peshmerga*.

Persikowski said that the focus of the training and support has now shifted. “During the first years of the fight against ISIS, it was critical to train them on the German weapons we provided, but now they know how to handle these systems, and there are other training needs that can enhance the sustainability of the *pesh-*

merga forces,” he said.

Germany, together with Italy, Netherlands, the United States, and the UK, supports the *peshmerga* reform program with advisors in the Kurdistan Region as part of the Multinational Advisory Group.

Training and support

Today, German forces are focused on keeping the systems and supplies that Germany has donated to the *peshmerga* in operational condition so that the funds from the Enable and Enhance Initiative can continue to be put to good use. “We want to make sure that what we gave to the *peshmerga* remains in a usable condition for as long as technically possible,” Persikowski noted.

“We focus on four key aspects within the *peshmerga* reform project. The first is logistics. The second is medical capabilities, including the *peshmerga* hospital, equipment, and training. Third, we advise on media operations, and fourth, we support the *peshmerga* in building a non-commissioned officer corps.

“We still conduct training, for example, with mobile medical training teams (MTT) that come into the country from time to time,” he added. In June, one MTT conducted a course in the Kurdistan Region for *peshmerga* medical trainers, enabling them to train *peshmerga* troops in tactical casualty care and combat life-saving. The next course by the German



“
Ten years ago, after ISIS attacked the Kurdistan Region in 2014, Germany supplied the *peshmerga* with weapons like G-36 rifles and MILAN anti-tank guided missiles, as well as armored vehicles and a significant quantity of ammunition
”

Colonel Lars Persikowski, commander of the German Armed Forces in Erbil

■ Colonel Lars Persikowski, commander of the German Armed Forces in Erbil



Photos: Sabir Salih

“

When we deliver equipment, it is always done in conjunction with a training team that will provide the initial knowledge and handling skills to the *peshmerga* so that they can operate the systems and equipment

”

MTT is scheduled for October 2024.

On August 15, the German Armed Forces handed over 400 backpacks with high-quality medical materials and the first batch of warehouse shelf systems. Later this year, six forklifts and four lift trucks for material handling will also be handed over to the Ministry of *Peshmerga* Affairs (MoPA).

Persikowski emphasized that the goal of this aid is to enhance the capabilities of the *peshmerga* to store goods, weapons, and ammunition in a proper and secure fashion.

“When we deliver equipment, it is always done in conjunction with a training team that will provide the initial knowledge and handling skills to the *peshmerga* so that they can operate the systems and equipment,” he said.

Peshmerga reform

A part of the *peshmerga* troops that

fought against ISIS remain split between political factions, with 70 units under the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and 80 units under the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

The goal of the *peshmerga* reform project is to unite these units under the command of the MoPA. Due to distrust and political divisions, this has been a difficult process, something Persikowski acknowledged. “This will take some time, but we have made good progress.”

“From my point of view, success in change is always closely linked to the personal commitment of the individuals directly affected by the changes. Therefore, successful change needs to take personalities, cultures, and customs into account,” he said.

However, he also stated that the degree of achievement always depends on the definition of the desired end state. Minister of *Peshmerga* Affairs Shoresh Ismail Abdulla previously told Kurdistan24 that the forces would be united by September 2026.

“If we are talking about Units 70 and 80 being under the command of MoPA, then this is right. I think this is achievable.”

Persikowski also expects that the upcoming Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections in October – which have recently heightened tensions between Kurdish political parties – will not significantly hamper the *peshmerga* reform process.

Recent events and attacks

Since the outbreak of war in Gaza in October 2023, armed groups have also stepped-up attacks on U.S.-led coalition bases in Iraq and Syria, and tensions have soared between Israel and Iran.

“In Iraq we are geographically right in the middle of this conflict. I had just arrived in Erbil in April, when the rockets and drones flew from Iran to Israel, and Israel responded to this attack. Unfortunately, our camp lies directly underneath the direct flight

paths between these two countries,” Persikowski said.

Nevertheless, he is confident about the safety of his forces. “On this base we are protected by a very capable air defense system.” Additionally, German soldiers are housed in hardened container modules. “Our shelters are designed to protect us against the impact of a drone, mortar, or rocket.”

Coalition forces have also faced drone attacks in the Kurdistan Region that are assumed to originate from armed militia groups fighting against the coalition’s presence in the region. “This has occurred, and might happen again. It is part of the complexity of the security situation in this area,” he said.

“I hope that we can one day convince the elements that attacked coalition forces that these forces are here to help stabilize the security situation in order to make life safer for the people in this country,” Persikowski said.

ISIS threat

There has also been ongoing dialogue between Iraqi and U.S. government officials to assess the ongoing threat from ISIS and end the mission of the anti-ISIS coalition advisors in Iraq. But so far, Iraq’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has postponed any announcement of ending the mission.

Moreover, Persikowski warned that, even though ISIS had been defeated

ed militarily in 2017, its ideology remains alive. “There are still people that cling to this ideology,” he said. “ISIS remains a threat for peace in this region, so from my point of view we need to continue to foster the *peshmerga*’s capabilities to independently fight against ISIS.”

“Certainly, one day the military presence of the coalition will no longer be required in this region, but the *peshmerga* reform process is not finished yet. Hopefully, the ongoing dialogue will lead to a consensus that allows for continued advice, training, and support to bring the reform process to a successful end and reestablish peace in this region,” Persikowski said. ●

COLLABORATION

Building Bridges Sterling Heights-Ankawa Sister City Program



Photo: David Lewinski

■ A view of Sterling Heights with the Gold Ring monument



Michael C. Taylor
is the mayor of Sterling Heights, Michigan.

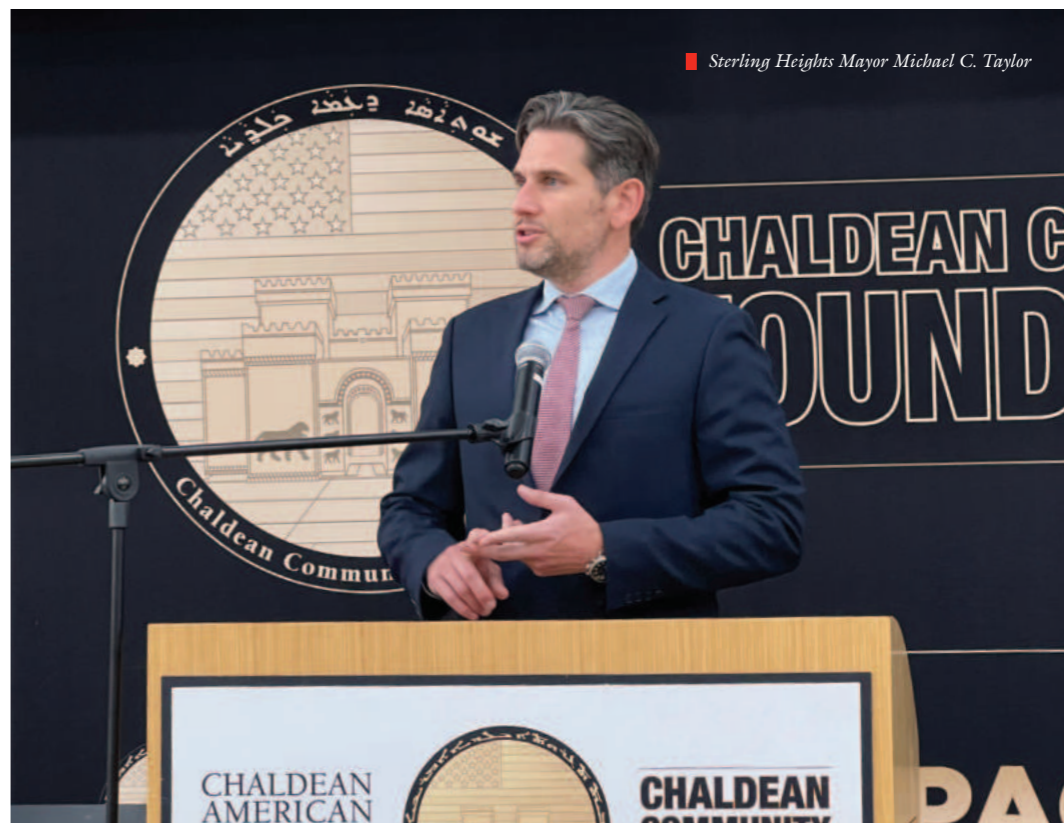
In a world defined by globalization and digital innovation, cities are increasingly looking beyond their borders to forge meaningful connections with international counterparts. That's one of the many reasons Sterling Heights recently launched a sister city program between Sterling Heights in the U.S. state of Michigan and Ankawa in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Our partnership is centered around the pillars of culture and commerce, with a goal of fostering collaboration and mutual growth in a digital-forward world.

The cultural pillar: art, youth, and education exchange

A vibrant cultural exchange is at the heart of our Sister City program, and we look forward to bringing our residents closer through the universal languages of art, culture and education. One of our flagship initiatives will be an art and culture exchange program featuring a digitally

hosted art exchange that allows artists from both cities to showcase their work to each other's communities. We'll also be hosting an annual art contest for residents of all ages that fosters a creative dialogue between our two cities.

We understand that today's youth are tomorrow's leaders, so youth development is also a key part of the cultural pillar. We plan to highlight emerging leaders from both Sterling Heights and Ankawa, offering them opportunities to participate in leadership exchanges. Plans are also in place to create partnerships between universities and colleges from both cities, paying special attention to curriculum development and research collaboration in emerging technologies. We hope these partnerships inspire our young people to engage in the innovative thinking and practical applications of technology that will prepare them to tackle the global challenges of today and tomorrow.



■ Sterling Heights Mayor Michael C. Taylor

Photo: Goran Shakhman



Photo: Goran Shakhman

Officials during the signing ceremony of the sister-city partnership between Ankawa and Sterling Heights

The digital nature of these virtual art exchanges and academic partnerships allows us to be inclusive, giving residents from both cities an opportunity to participate and connect, regardless of geographical distance.

The commerce pillar: training, innovation, and business development

While cultural exchange fosters understanding, the commerce pillar focuses on economic empowerment through a series of workshops, training programs, and business forums. Our goal is to promote sustainable growth in both cities by leveraging each of our strengths and learning from one another.

Workshops will cover a range of critical topics, from emerging technologies and workforce training to cybersecurity awareness and sustainable urban planning. These sessions will be invaluable as both cities look to prepare our respective workforces for a digital and automated future. With rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, businesses in both Sterling Heights and Ankawa will benefit from these knowledge-sharing initiatives that help our workforce adapt to technological shifts.

“
Our greatest hope for this partnership is that it serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when communities come together across borders to build a brighter future
”

I’m particularly excited about the planned keynote speaker series featuring prominent business leaders from both the Chaldean Community Foundation in Sterling Heights and the entrepreneurial community in Ankawa. These digitally streamed sessions will cover topics such as AI, sustainable business practices, and automation – areas that are increasingly vital for companies looking to thrive in a rapidly evolving global market. The series will be similar to a TED talk but will focus exclusively on the

challenges and opportunities facing businesses in our two cities.

Lastly, one of the most transformative programs in the commerce pillar is the plan to establish a business start-up knowledge exchange forum. This initiative will bring together entrepreneurs and business leaders from both cities to share valuable insights, best practices, and lessons learned. By fostering an environment of mutual learning, we hope this forum will create a foundation for innovation and entrepreneurship, providing a roadmap for aspiring business owners in both cities.

The broader benefits of Sister City programs

Sister City programs have a long history of advancing international diplomacy and cultural exchange. In today’s interconnected world, their potential impact has multiplied. Programs like ours are especially significant because they provide a framework for long-term, meaningful collaboration that extends far beyond ceremonial exchanges.

In a digital-first world, where geographical barriers are less relevant, the benefits of Sister City partnerships can be even more profound. Virtual exchanges, workshops, and digital fo-



A street sign in Sterling Heights

Credit: Macomb Daily

ums allow for real-time communication and knowledge sharing between communities thousands of miles apart. Residents of Sterling Heights and Ankawa will be able to form connections not only through in-person delegations, but also through a constant flow of virtual interactions. This collaborative approach allows cities to tackle shared challenges more effectively.

Economically, programs like ours are transformative. Sister City relationships often lead to increased trade and investment opportunities as businesses gain access to new markets and insights. For instance, our partnership’s focus on AI, sustainability, and entrepreneurship aligns with some of the most critical global economic trends, ensuring both cities are better equipped to compete in a rapidly changing world.

Sister City partnerships pool resources and knowledge, creating opportunities for innovation that might not have been possible alone. In partnerships like ours, businesses and governments can work together to share expertise on everything from workforce development to cybersecurity. This collaborative approach allows cities to tackle shared challenges more effectively.

A vision for the future: full launch in 2025

We will use 2024 as our planning and initial implementation phase, with a full launch of the Sterling Heights-Ankawa Sister City program in 2025. By then, both cities plan to have fully operational programs under both the cultural and commerce pillars. The digital art exchanges, workshops, and keynote speaker series will be well established, providing a solid

foundation for continued growth. We see potential for even more expansion of the program in the coming years. As the initial cultural and economic initiatives gain momentum, both cities envision sending delegations to further cement the partnership and explore additional avenues for collaboration. These visits will offer tangible opportunities for leaders and residents to engage face-to-face, solidifying relationships that have been built digitally.

Our greatest hope for this partnership is that it serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when communities come together across borders to build a brighter future. Our Sister City program with Ankawa marks the beginning of a dynamic relationship – one we hope will continue to evolve, adapt, and expand, leaving a legacy of cooperation, creativity, and shared success. ●

Sterling Heights and Ankawa Establish Sister City Partnership



Goran Shakhawan

is a Kurdish-American journalist and author based in the United States. He has covered news for several Kurdish news outlets and was a former senior correspondent for *Kurdistan24* in Erbil and Washington D.C. He has published several books in Kurdish.

Sterling Heights, in the U.S. state of Michigan, has officially established a “sister city” partnership with Ankawa, a district of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region, with the signing of an agreement by the mayors of both cities on September 13, 2024, in Sterling Heights. The sister city agreement was proposed by Martin Manna, president of the Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF) and the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the mayors of Ankawa and Sterling Heights, who had previously met to discuss the initiative.

Ankawa Mayor Ramy Noori Syawish referred to the event as a historic moment. “The project will help both cities exchange cultural and historical knowledge and mutually benefit each other. Our aim is to gain more understanding from them and help our community,” Syawish told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Syawish emphasized that this collaboration will facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise and enhance ties of culture and heritage. The mayor also thanked Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani for his support in this project.

KRG representatives in the United States were instrumental in advancing the project to completion, meeting with Sterling Heights Mayor Michael C. Taylor and the CCF on numerous occasions to discuss the partnership. The partnership connects the predominantly Chaldean city of Anka-

wa with Sterling Heights, where more than 20% of the population is estimated to be Chaldean Christians.

“The partnership between Sterling Heights and Ankawa is very important and historic,” KRG Representative to the United States Treefa Aziz told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

The sister city model

This is the second sister city agreement that KRG representatives have forged. On September 9, 2023, Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, and Nashville, the capital of the U.S. state of Tennessee, officially formalized their sister city status. The agreement was signed by Erbil’s Governor Omed Khoshnaw, and Nashville’s Mayor John Cooper.

In Aziz’s view, the signing of the Ankawa-Sterling Heights agreement holds particular importance because it highlights the involvement of the Chaldean community, whose unwavering support has been pivotal. As these two cities join hands, the initiative aims to bolster people-to-people connections, further solidifying the strong ties that exist between the Chaldean community and the United States.

Ankawa and Sterling Heights share a number of commonalities. With a population of roughly 80,000, Ankawa is predominantly inhabited by Chaldeans, who constitute approximately 92% of its residents. Sterling Heights also has one of the

largest Chaldean communities in the United States.

“This will not just be a cultural exchange; it will be an exchange of business ideas and effective practices for running our cities,” Sterling Heights Mayor Taylor told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

The mayor agrees that the agreement is particularly significant due to the large Chaldean community in his city, which presents an opportunity for mutual learning. He also highlighted that the partnership aims to benefit both communities, enhancing the

“
This will not just be a cultural exchange; it will be an exchange of business ideas and effective practices for running our cities
”

quality of life for residents of both Sterling Heights and Ankawa.

Sterling Heights has already established several sister city partnerships with municipalities in Sri Lanka, Albania, the Philippines, and other countries. Mayor Taylor emphasized the importance of these collaborations. “These partnerships provide our residents with opportunities to explore and learn about the diverse cultures represented in Sterling Heights while fostering a welcoming environment for neighbors from various parts of the globe,” he said.



Ankawa Mayor Ramy Noori Syawish (left) and Sterling Heights Mayor Michael C. Taylor (right) signing sister-city agreement

Photo: Goran Shakhawan



■ Ankawa Mayor Ramy Noori Syawish (left) and Sterling Heights Mayor Michael C. Taylor (right) signing sister-city agreement

Photo: Goran Shakhaman



■ Kurdish and U.S. officials celebrating the sister-city partnership between Ankawa and Sterling Heights

Photo: Goran Shakhaman

A bridge

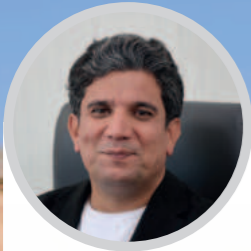
The main goal of this project is to ensure a long-term connection between the two communities, as Dr. Adhid Miri, Director of Projects at the CCE, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “When we say sister city, it is not just a town-to-town relationship; it really is a bridge between organizations, institutions, hospitals, and universities across the world,” he said.

“The big question is how to keep it alive. Many other cities have had sister city partnerships, but most of them end up forgetting the reasons they built those relationships in the first place. The success of this initiative relies on continuity, which requires management, funding, and maintaining relationships through visits,” Miri underscored.

The forthcoming partnership will tar-

get three main stakeholder groups. The first will focus on cultural engagement and involves communities, youth, foundations, and service providers. The second will concentrate on education, which encompasses research entities, media outlets, and donors. Lastly, the partnership will address commerce, incorporating businesses, trade unions, investors, and additional stakeholders. ●

A Special Bond of Friendship



Qassim Khidbir

has 15 years of experience in journalism and media development in Iraq. He has contributed to both local and international media outlets.

In September, I had the honor of attending a celebration marking 20 years of friendship between South Korea and the Kurdistan Region. The event was a beautiful showcase of cultural and diplomatic exchange, with the air filled with the sounds of Kurdish and Korean music and young Kurdish girls performing a charming Korean dance. But the moment that touched everyone's hearts was when Seungcheol Lim, South Korea's Consul General to Erbil, sang the Kurdish song "Baran Barane." His performance was emotional, bridging two cultures in a truly unique way.

As a journalist for *Kurdistan Chronicle*, I was there not to cover the event, but to personally reflect on the deep bond between these two nations. In 2004, fresh out of university with a degree in English literature, I joined the South Korean Army's Zaytun Division as a translator. I witnessed firsthand the beginning of this relationship, one rooted in mutual respect, understanding, and shared efforts. The South Korean Army arrived in Erbil in September 2004 with a simple yet powerful message: "We are your friends." And they lived by those words every day. They did not

■ A Korean soldier in front of the Erbil Citadel



Photo: Safin Hamid



■ Qassim Khidhir together with a number of Korean soldiers of the Zaytun Division (2005)

come as just another military force; they came as partners to help the Kurdish people. They named their military division Zaytun, which means olive in Arabic and Kurdish, symbolizing peace, and that is exactly what they brought with them.

Winning the hearts of the Kurdish people

Before their arrival, Koreans and Kurds were strangers, with no connection or history between them. But that quickly changed.

Most of the Korean soldiers were not fighters. They were engineers, technicians, and medics focused on rebuilding the Kurdistan Region. Shortly

“
By the end of their mission in 2008, over 3,000 South Koreans had served in Kurdistan

”
after their arrival, they introduced a program inspired by South Korea’s Saemaul Undong, or New Village Movement, which was launched by former President Park Chung Hee in the 1970s to modernize rural communities. The South Korean soldiers went out to villages around Erbil,

helping to clean streets, install water systems, rebuild schools, and offer healthcare. What made their efforts special was the way that they worked hand in hand with the local people. They talked to village leaders, school principals, and religious figures to ensure that their help matched the community’s needs.

I still remember how quickly the South Koreans won the hearts of the Kurdish people, who adored them. It was not unusual to see kids running around with their faces painted – one cheek with the Korean flag, the other with the Kurdistan flag. These soldiers did not just help rebuild villages; they built relationships. Every time they finished a project, they would throw a

festival in the village. There were also medical check-ups, traditional Korean performances, and gifts for the children. These moments created memories that people still cherish today. In Kurdistan, where hospitality is a way of life, the South Koreans reflected that same spirit. They respected Kurdish culture and worked with humbleness and dedication. By the end of their mission in 2008, over 3,000 South Koreans had served in Kurdistan.

They did not just provide temporary aid; they empowered the people. They established a vocational training center where young Kurds learned skills like driving heavy vehicles, basic engineering, and even baking. The goal was simple: to help them find jobs and improve their lives. Over 2,300 people received vocational training, of whom 80% went on to find jobs either in the private sector or with the Kurdish government.

The field hospital inside the Zaytun base became one of the most popular in Erbil. Every morning, crowds lined up to receive treatment, with the South Koreans treating more than 88,000 local patients during their time in the region.

Moreover, the Zaytun Division undertook many projects in the Kurdistan Region, including constructing a hydropower plant, building schools and hospitals, equipping government offices with computers and buses, and providing training to *peshmerga* forces.

A sense of purpose

For me, working with the Zaytun Division was more than just a job as a translator. I felt a deep sense of purpose. The South Koreans were not just there to fix things quickly; they were focused on long-term improvements, teaching skills that would benefit people for years to come. Their philosophy was clear: “Teach a man to fish rather than give him a fish.”

“
Many Kurds today are fans of Korean dramas, and some have even learned the Korean language
”



■ A Korean soldier playing with children at a nursery in Erbil

What made their presence even more remarkable was how peaceful it was. While other parts of Iraq were facing daily violence, the South Korean soldiers in Kurdistan enjoyed a peaceful coexistence with the local population. In all their years here until December 2008, they suffered no fatalities. The Kurdish people deeply appreciated their work. In a 2007 survey, over 80% of people in Erbil expressed their support for the South Korean Army and wished they would stay longer. This showed just how much the South Koreans had meant to the region.

At the recent celebration, South Korea’s Ambassador to Iraq Choi Sung-soo, spoke of a “special bond of friendship,” a bond that I, too, feel deeply. Working with the South Ko-

reans back in 2004, I witnessed the beginning of this relationship, and hope it only continues to grow stronger over time.

Beyond their development work, the South Koreans also left a cultural impact. Many Kurds today are fans of Korean dramas, and some have even learned the Korean language. This cultural exchange is just another example of how deeply intertwined our paths have become.

Photo: Safin Hamid

Kurdistan's First Korean Academic Course



Kaveen Shkearvan

is an interpreter and translator based in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region.

Languages – and the human communications they foster – are the bridges that forge global connections and cultural exchanges among peoples. Even the act of learning a foreign language taps into the human desire to create new experiences and strengthen bonds, regardless of and perhaps even because of our perceived differences in nationality and ethnicity.

Salahaddin University-Erbil is tapping into this sentiment by offering the first-ever Korean course in the Kurdistan Region through its Language and Translation Center, created in collaboration with the Korean Council for International Education.

The course, which aims to familiarize students with Korean language and culture, will be fully funded by the university. Interest in the course during the 10-day registration period in mid-September surpassed the expectations of Awaz Othman, the course's instructor. For the 25 available seats, more than 300 students registered in the first three days. "I was surprised by the high turnout in just the first three days. Based on this, we anticipate reaching 600 participants by the final day of registration," said Othman.

Smooth and gradual progress

Othman, who is 35 years old, is an experienced instructor of the Korean language, having taught countless Korean courses over the years with the support of the

Korean Council. Salahaddin University's course, however, stands out as the first academic Korean language program in the Kurdistan Region.

According to Othman, the course is structured to take students from a beginner level to level two proficiency over the span of four weeks, focusing on teaching everyday language. It will follow the Korean teaching system, which is essential given the language's uniqueness. Korean has 40 letters and eight distinct types of syllables. The course will aim to build general language skills without any translation training, since "it is very difficult to learn at this stage" by relying solely on the lecturers' instructions.

Othman emphasized the importance of gradual progress in both learning and teaching to ensure smooth acquisition and fluency. "If a university offers such a course, it indicates that there are bigger and better things to be expected from that university. We plan on creating other courses following this one to help students progress beyond level two," she said.

"And hopefully after that, we will open a Korean language center in the Kurdistan Region, which is my dream," she added.

The main goal of those interested in the course, according to the instructor, is to study the language in Korea itself. She also underscored that learning Korean will create new job opportunities for stu-



Credit: Unsplash/Jeffrey Clayton



Credit: Unsplash/Jeffrey Clayton

dents who are either interested in working with Korean companies or becoming Korean instructors themselves.

Lifelong dream

Othman's passion for the Korean language started at a young age when she first learned about Korea through the 2002 World Cup, which the country hosted alongside Japan. The differences between Kurdish culture and Korean culture intrigued her and prompted her interest in learning the language. "When I was 13 years old, there weren't any Korean language learning textbooks or courses, so I promised myself that I would learn and teach it one day," she recalled.

Despite the challenges, Othman remained committed and

took the necessary steps to fulfill her dreams, as she saw early on the opportunities and potential of the language.

When asked if she has encountered any criticism, she highlighted people's desire to learn such a challenging language. "I received many messages complaining that the course was limited to Salahaddin students and alumni. One comment under a post that advertised the course claimed that this was only for the wealthy, not the poor," she noted.

"Although the course is indeed only open to Salahaddin students, there will be other courses that everyone can join. After all, the university has the right to make it exclusive for their current and former students and to present a one-of-a-kind opportunity unavailable at any other universities," Othman said. ●



Discover the Kurdistan in America Podcast
The official podcast of the KRG Representation in the US

Your gateway to the rich ties between Kurdistan and the United States

A Special Guest Every Month!

A Discussion on the Kurdistan Deaf Human Rights Initiative



Delovan Barwari

Host

Delovan Barwari is the Director of Academic Affairs and Strategic Initiatives at the KRG Representation in the United States.

This conversation focuses on the Kurdistan Deaf Human Rights Initiatives, highlighting the challenges faced by the deaf community in Kurdistan, including limited access to sign language education and the lack of qualified interpreters. The discussion also covers the progress made in advocating for deaf rights and the future directions for improving the lives of deaf individuals in the region.



Emma DeCaro

Guest

Emma DeCaro is an international development (M.A.) practitioner focused on collaboration with Deaf communities in the Middle East



Dr. Karwan Al-Dosakee

Guest

The Director of Skills Development Duhok Polytechnic University PhD in Educational and Assistive Technology



Scan to listen to episode

Podcast also available at pod.link/KurdistaninAmerica

Chevening Scholarship Driving Change

Kurdistan Chronicle

The article highlights the professional achievements of three notable individuals from the Kurdistan Region: Sawen Hawre Yasin, Peshavan Saadi, and Salah Essa. Each of them has made significant contributions in their respective fields—psychology, humanitarian work, and linguistics—while also being recipients of the prestigious Chevening Scholarship, which supported their advanced studies in the UK. This scholarship not only facilitated their education but also empowered them to bring valuable skills and knowledge back to their communities, furthering progress in mental health, humanitarian aid, and language education.

The Chevening Scholarship is a highly competitive and esteemed global program funded by the UK government. It provides fully funded scholarships for individuals from around the world to pursue a one-year master's degree in the UK. The scholarship seeks to support future leaders, influencers, and decision-makers who demonstrate academic excellence and leadership potential. In addition to covering tuition, it offers a monthly stipend, travel costs, and various other allowances, making it a valuable opportunity for professionals looking to further their education and contribute to positive change in their home countries.



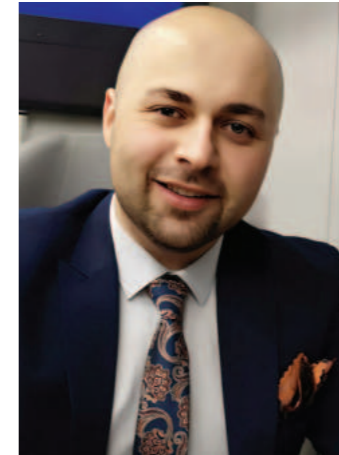
Sawen Hawre Yasin

is a clinical psychologist with an MSc in Clinical Psychology from the University of South Wales, UK. She received the esteemed Chevening Scholarship for the 2020-2021 academic year. Sawen has been committed to delivering mental health and psychosocial support services to those in need in the Kurdistan Region. In addition, she is currently engaged in mental health research, further advancing the field.



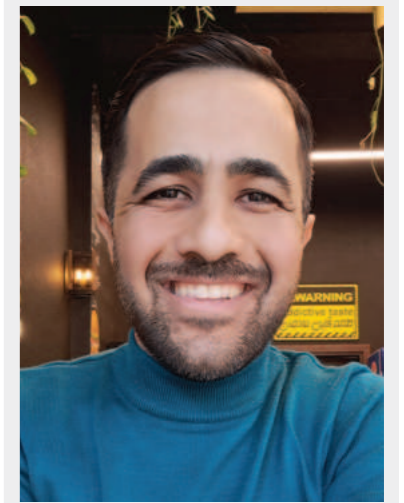
Peshavan Saadi

is a Program Officer with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Erbil. A recipient of the Chevening Scholarship in 2018-2019, he earned his MBA from the University of Huddersfield in the UK. Peshavan has dedicated his career to supporting refugees and internally displaced persons in Kurdistan and Iraq, while also contributing to humanitarian efforts at the UN Headquarters in New York and in the UN's offices in Afghanistan and Sudan.



Salah Essa

is an English language instructor at Amideast, a sociolinguist, and a former translator and interpreter. He was awarded the prestigious Chevening Scholarship in 2020-2021 to pursue an MA in Linguistics at Queen Mary University of London. Salah is also a recipient of the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship, which he is using to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics at the University of Bern.



Kurdish Astrophotographer Captures Clearest Image of the Moon

Kurdistan Chronicle

Most days, when Darya Kawa returns home from work, he follows a routine. After a quick lunch and some rest, around 5:00 pm, he carefully carries his heavy telescopes – each weighing about 25 kilograms – to the roof of his home. He shuts the door behind him, creating a quiet sanctuary where he patiently waits to capture his best astronomy photographs. His favorite subject is the Moon. Some nights, he stays on the roof until two in the morning, but his family never complains. They understand his passion and make sure not to make any noise or climb the stairs, knowing that even the softest footsteps could disrupt the delicate balance of his telescopes.

Darya is an astrophotographer living in Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This year, one of his images of the Moon went viral after he shared it on his Instagram account and an astrophotography page on Facebook. The image generated 100,000 likes on the astrophotography

page, making it the post with the most engagement on the page to date. When Darya published the image on his Instagram, he had 400,000 followers. In just one day, his followers increased by 100,000. He now has more than 882,000 followers. The image has been shared widely by media outlets and social media pages around the globe.

The photo sparked debates among viewers, with many declaring it “the clearest image of the Moon” ever published. Other headlines read “Photographer Takes Clearest and Sharpest Moon Images” and “Photographer Captures Most Detailed Photos of the Moon Ever Taken.”

Comments on social media were overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. One user wrote, “Amazing. No words to describe this!” Another commented, “Outstanding image and loads of work. All credit to you, sir.” Still another added, “I have to print this and hang it in my room.”

“

Early in 2023, NASA contacted him because they wanted to publish one of his Moon pictures

”



M O O N



“If a picture doesn’t shock me, I won’t publish it on my Instagram,” Darya stated confidently.

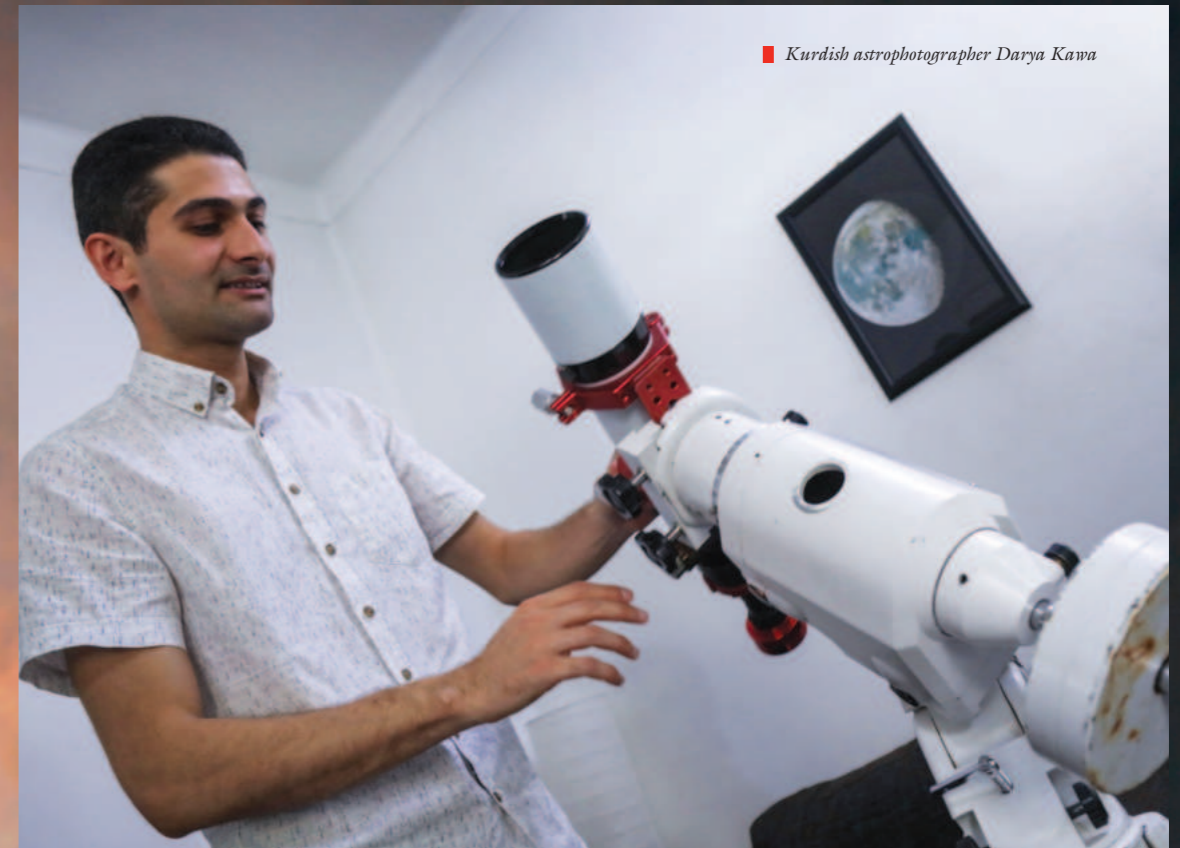
When asked by *Kurdistan Chronicle* whether he believes his photo is the clearest ever taken of the Moon, Darya replied, “I don’t know; I hope so. But now I am dedicating more of my time and energy to astrophotography. My dream is to become known worldwide for capturing the clearest picture not only of the Moon, but also of other astronomical objects.”

Darya revealed that it took him eight days to assemble the photograph. “Taking astronomical images is like building a puzzle, piece by piece. It took me four days of shooting, and then another four days to process the images and assemble them into a single picture,” he explained.

A spiritual passion from childhood

Darya holds a master’s degree in agriculture, water, and soil science and currently works as an administrator at Sami Abdulrahman Park, the largest public park in Erbil. But his love for cameras began long before his professional career. “The first time I saw a camera as a child, I was obsessed with it,” he recalls. In 2007, he was finally able to afford his first camera, a small Canon. He began capturing photos of nature and landscapes during family picnics. “I was always trying to imitate photographers from Iceland and

■ *Kurdish astrophotographer Darya Kawa*



■ *Kurdish astrophotographer Darya Kawa*

Photo: Sajfin Hamid

the United States, constantly studying their landscape photos, especially of places like the Grand Canyon,” Darya shared. A self-taught photographer, he has never received any formal training, mastering camera techniques and editing on his own.

Darya’s passion for the stars also has deep roots. As a child, like many in Erbil in the 1980s and 1990s, he would sleep on the roof during the hot summer months, staring at the night sky, mesmerized by the stars, the planets, and the mysteries of space.

In 2017, his fascination with the cosmos led him to purchase his first telescope from Amazon – a simple children’s model, as it was all he could afford at the time. The telescope was confiscated at Erbil International Airport, and it took him three months to

“
Darya is working to expand his horizons, with his sights set on capturing the clearest picture of the Sun

”
obtain security clearance to retrieve it. Once he had it, he started taking photos of the Moon and quickly noticed how much people appreciated his work.

Early in 2023, NASA contacted him because they wanted to publish one

of his Moon pictures as the Astronomy Picture of the Day under the title “Moon Enhanced.”

“It was the happiest day of my life,” said Darya. He added that NASA reached out because they wanted more detailed information about the picture before they could publish it. Following this recognition, another Kurdish astrophotographer, Hasan Begzadeh, reached out to Darya and gifted him an advanced camera and telescope, urging him to keep pursuing his passion.

“Hasan’s support was huge; it was a major upgrade for me,” Darya acknowledged.

Now, Darya is working to expand his horizons, with his sights set on capturing the clearest picture of the Sun. ●

Iraq's Family Law Amendment A Step Backward

Kurdistan Chronicle

In early August 2024, thousands of Iraqi women took to the streets to protest a proposed amendment bill that could roll back women's rights in Iraq and, as argued by critics, fan the flames of sectarianism in a country that has already seen far too much ethnic violence.

Days before the protests, the Iraqi parliament completed its first reading of a bill that seeks to amend the country's Personal Status Law, allowing Muslim families to marry according to either secular law or religious law. Those preferring the latter would be required to follow the sharia legal system of either the Sunni or Shi'a sects of Islam.

Human rights advocates and, especially women's rights activists, believe that the amendment – more specifically the requirement of applying sharia precepts – would legalize child marriage and could strip women of their basic rights by replacing the judiciary with religious law, the same religious law that is often criti-

cized for its purely patriarchal approach to all matters of people's daily lives.

But that's not all. If passed into a law, the amendment would not only govern marriage, but also divorce, child custody, inheritance, and many other aspects of social life, primarily affecting women and weakening if not altogether dismantling their legal rights.

International watchdogs are concerned

On August 16, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report that expressed concern over the proposed amendment, saying that it “would have disastrous effects on women's and girls' rights that are guaranteed under international law by allowing marriage for girls as young as nine years old, undermining the principle of equality under Iraqi law and removing protections for women regarding divorce and inheritance.”

Sarah Sanbar, Iraq researcher in the Middle East and North Africa Division of HRW, was quoted in the report as describing the amendment as “a devastating step backward.”

“Formally legalizing child marriage would rob countless girls of their futures and well-being. Girls belong in school and on the playground, not in a wedding dress,” Sanbar was quoted by the HRW report, which warned that the arrangement could effectively establish separate legal regimes with different rights accorded to different religious sects.

“Women's rights activists, believe that the amendment – more specifically the requirement of applying sharia precepts – would legalize child marriage and could strip women of their basic rights by replacing the judiciary with religious law

Sanbar further urged Iraqi lawmakers to reject the amendment bill, warning that if it is passed “current and future generations of Iraqi women will remain strangled by an oppressive patriarchal legal system.”

“It would further enshrine sectarianism in Iraq, undermining the right to legal equality for all Iraqis found in article 14 of the constitution and in international human rights law,” the report stressed.

Meanwhile, according to the HRW, the amendment would violate multiple UN conventions

Women protesting the proposed Personal Status Law amendment in Baghdad



Credit: AFP

that Iraq joined decades ago, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

In a recent reaction to the amendment bill, the U.S. State Department's Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel urged Iraqi lawmakers to engage in dialogue while respecting freedom of religion and women's rights equally.

"We are concerned about proposed amendments to the Iraqi Personal Status Law that could undermine the rights of women and children. We urge Iraqis to engage in a civic dialogue in full respect of both freedom of religion or belief and the rights of women and children," Patel wrote in a statement published on his official X feed on August 20.

The current law and the amendment

The current Personal Status Law No. 188 was passed in 1959. At the time, it was considered the most progressive and protective of women's rights in the Middle East. The law prohibits marriage of individuals under the age of 18, except for "extenuating circumstances," when women as young as 15 are allowed to marry if they have permission from a judge and the parents.

“

The amendment also undermines the rights of women during and after a divorce

”

In the proposed amendment, marriages conducted by local clerics and not the court or official government institutions would still be considered legal. The amendment argues that many marriages are officiated by Muslim clerics anyway, and that this amendment could serve as a legal structure to align the law with current societal practices.

Critics, however, believe that the amendment would allow controversial



■ Iraqi parliament members at the House of Representatives in Baghdad



■ Protests in Baghdad against the proposed Personal Status Law amendment, with the a placard reading "I am not a slave; I am free."

Credit: AFP

and contradicting interpretations of religious laws. For instance, Islamic laws allow the marriage of girls as young as nine, while the current law bans children under 18 from entering marriage, at least through the legal procedures that are already in place.

The amendment also undermines the rights of women during and after a divorce. According to the current Personal Status Law, if a husband requests a divorce, the wife will be granted some rights, including a three-year residence in their marital house at the husband's expense, two years of spousal maintenance payments, and the payment of the current value of her dowry.

If, on the other hand, a wife requests a divorce, she can be awarded only some of these benefits depending on the circumstances that would be decided upon by a judge.

The political dimension

Some critics believe that the proposal of the amendment by a Shi'a lawmaker is more a political bargaining chip in the face of a previous amendment bill that was put forward by the Sunnis.

Political tensions continue between Shi'a and Sunni Arabs, despite a federal system in Iraq that many observers deem as a failed structure in practice. Mohammad Ali Alhakim, who previously served as the country's foreign minister, argues that such controversial bills are introduced when the two major components – the Shi'a and the Sunni – cannot find common ground on specific political issues.

"Proposing this amendment to the Personal Status Law at this sensitive time is an attempt to stand up against

the General Amnesty Law amendment that was proposed by the Sunnis," al-Hakim told *Kurdistan Chronicle*. "The move aims to prevent the passage of the General Amnesty Law by putting pressure on the rival political parties. That means, in the end, none of the laws will be passed or at least they will not be passed easily."

The General Amnesty Law paves the way for the release of thousands of inmates, many of whom were arrested under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law. The Sunnis believe that the majority-Shi'a government in Iraq arbitrarily arrested Sunnis in the aftermath of the war against ISIS. The amendment, however, remains controversial for even the Kurdish Yezidis, who argue that former ISIS members who participated in atrocities against the religious group could escape accountability. ●

Iraqis Lose Faith in Democracy



Saman Shali

is a Political and Economic Analyst based in the Kurdistan Region.

Iraq's journey toward and through democracy has certainly been tumultuous, marked by significant challenges and setbacks, and begs the question of whether the Iraqi people have lost faith in it. This article explores the current state of democracy in Iraq, the factors contributing to disillusionment among its citizens about democracy, and the broader implications for the country's political future.

Democracy is not simply holding elections and changing governments – rather, a central pillar of democracy is whether the elections themselves are free and fair. Under the Ba'athist regime, elections were held, and governments changed, but they were ultimately authoritarian governments.

The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 following the U.S.-led invasion was supposed to usher in a new era of democracy for Iraq. Indeed, the subsequent establishment of democratic institutions and processes, such as holding multiparty elections, marked significant milestones. Nevertheless, implementing democracy in Iraq has been fraught with difficulties, despite the drafting of a new constitution for which over 80% of Iraqis voted.

Factors contributing to disillusionment

1. Political instability and violence: Since 2003, Iraq has faced significant political instability and violence. Sectarian

“

The journey toward a stable and functioning democracy is long and arduous

”

Credit: AFP



■ Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad



Credit: AFP

Al-Tabrir Square in Baghdad

conflict, the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, and ongoing insurgencies have created a volatile security environment. The constant threat of violence has clearly undermined the stability that is necessary for a functioning democracy.

2. Corruption and governance issues: Corruption remains a pervasive problem in Iraq. Government institutions are often seen as corrupt and inefficient, leading to widespread distrust among citizens. The lack of transparency and accountability in governance has eroded public confidence in democratic processes.

3. Economic challenges: Iraq's economy has struggled due to various factors, including war, sanctions, and fluctuating oil prices. High unemployment rates, poverty, and inadequate public services have left many Iraqis feeling disillusioned with their government's ability to deliver on the economic promises of democracy.

4. Sectarianism and ethnic divisions: Sectarian and ethnic divisions have deeply degraded Iraq's political landscape. The dominance of sectarian parties has often led to governance that prioritizes sectarian interests over national unity. These ethnic divisions have, in turn, fostered a sense of exclusion and marginalization among various groups.

5. External influences: The involvement of external powers in Iraq's internal affairs has also contributed to weakening its democratic institutions. Foreign interventions and influence have often exacerbated internal conflicts and undermined the sovereignty of the Iraqi state.

6. Constitution: The 2005 Iraqi Constitution is considered one of the most comprehensive governing documents in the region. The federal government's slow implementation of the constitution and neglect of its principles has disappointed Iraqis, who regard it as an umbrella for the inclusion of all its citizens.

Public perception and disillusionment

The factors mentioned above have collectively contributed to a growing disillusionment among the Iraqi populace. Surveys and reports indicate that many Iraqis have lost faith in democratic processes.

1. Low voter turnout: Recent elections have seen lower voter turnout, reflecting widespread apathy and skepticism about the electoral process. Many Iraqis feel that their votes do not lead to meaningful change.

2. Protests and social movements: Iraq witnessed many protests and youth movements that demanded improved governance, transparency, and accountability but ended in the deaths of many people. These movements highlight the population's frustration with the existing political system.

3. Emigration: Many Iraqis, particularly the youth, are seeking opportunities abroad, disillusioned by the lack of prospects and stability in their home country. This brain drain further weakens the country's potential for democratic and economic development.

The way forward

While the challenges are immense, the path forward for democracy in Iraq is not entirely bleak, and several measures can help restore faith in democratic processes.

1. Strengthening institutions: Building robust and transparent institutions that can effectively deliver public services and uphold the rule of law is crucial. Key measures include judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, and the empowerment of independent regulatory bodies.

2. Promoting inclusive governance: Addressing sectarian and ethnic divisions through inclusive governance

representing all groups can foster a sense of national unity. Political reform that promotes power-sharing and equitable resource distribution is essential.

3. Enhancing civic engagement: Encouraging civic engagement and political participation through education and awareness campaigns can help rebuild trust in the democratic process. Empowering civil society organizations and the media to hold the government accountable is also vital.

4. Economic reforms: Implementing economic reform that creates jobs, reduces poverty, and improves public services can alleviate some economic grievances contributing to disillusionment. Diversifying the economy away from oil dependency is particularly important.

5. Addressing security concerns: Ensuring security and stability is fundamental for any democracy. This security requires not only military and policing efforts, but also addressing the root causes of violence, such as political and social grievances.

6. Clarity of the constitution: Addressing some articles and clarifying and amending others are crucial to serving the rights and unity of Iraqis, especially the judiciary's powers, which have become a consideration above all.

Whether Iraqis have lost faith in democracy reflects a broader disillusionment with the current state of governance. While the challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. By addressing the underlying issues of political instability, corruption, economic hardship, and social divisions, Iraq can work toward restoring faith in its democratic institutions. The journey toward a stable and functioning democracy is long and arduous. However, with concerted efforts and genuine reform, it remains a possibility for Iraq's future. ●

Zakho Hospital Setting an Example



*Nawfal Rasheed
Hussein*

*is a professor of
infectious diseases,
currently serving as
the Dean of College
of Medicine, Zakho
University.*

Prior to 2003, the healthcare system in Iraq was plagued by war, and it has struggled to recover in the subsequent political instability following the liberation process. The system is facing momentous challenges due to the long-

term shortage of supplies, attrition in the number of medical staff, and decaying infrastructure, all of which are bringing the system to a breaking point exacerbated by a rapidly expanded population.

■ *A view of Zakho Hospital*



Photo: Mohammad Majid



■ A Medical Profession working on an MRI scan at Zakho Hospital

The situation grew worse after 2014, when ISIS occupied large swathes of Iraq and destroyed many hospitals and healthcare facilities. The healthcare system in the Kurdistan Region has also suffered from the weaknesses and failures of the broader system in Iraq. Despite all this, the city of Zakho in the Kurdistan Region, which has made tremendous positive strides in healthcare, presents a story of will-power and strong leadership that kindles hope for a much better future.

Visionary leadership

The progress on healthcare in Zakho was not an accident; it resulted from conscious planning and an unrelenting commitment toward building better healthcare. Having realized the size and scope of the problem, the independent administration in Zakho made concrete plans to overcome the shortcomings in healthcare that had plagued the city for so long.

To start, the city of Zakho established a board of healthcare professionals to craft a strategy to turn things around. Two foundational pillars directed the plan. The first was to reduce the need for patients to leave the city to seek

“
The healthcare success in Zakho testifies to what can be achieved with vision, strong will, determination, and collaboration
 ”

medical care elsewhere. Previously, residents suffered an additional emotional and financial burden in having to travel considerable distances just to get treatment. To deal with this problem, the board’s plan aimed to upgrade local healthcare facilities, obtain new medical technologies and equipment, and attract skilled healthcare professionals. These efforts have already started to bear fruit, as the numbers of residents leaving the city for care has fallen by more than 50%.

The second pillar of the board’s plan was to attract patients from outside the city, to make Zakho a healthcare destination by establishing key facilities such as the city’s liver transplant center. This ambitious undertaking,

which is still underway, could transform Zakho into a hub of medical services and bestow indirect benefits beyond the healthcare system, such as value-added growth and the development of the city’s economy and reputation.

Continued financial support is essential to realizing these goals, of course, but the signs of growth are encouraging. Permission has been granted, for instance, to attract patients from surrounding areas to receive positron emission tomography scans and treatment at the liver transplant center.

However, these positive inroads do not mean that the healthcare needs of Zakho’s residents – or of the Kurdistan Region as a whole – are being met. Much remains to be done to ensure access to quality healthcare for all residents, but the administration remains conscious of such oncoming challenges and committed to strengthening its efforts.

Zakho as model for the region

The success story of Zakho’s initiatives in healthcare is inspirational for

Photo: Mohammad Majid



■ Doctors working at Zakho Hospital



the Kurdistan Region, and its plan could be adopted as a model by other cities facing similar challenges, most notably in developing local health services and capacity-building.

One of the most critical lessons learned from the plan and its implementation is that local leadership and community involvement are essential ingredients for the development of

local initiatives. The healthcare initiatives in Zakho are characterized by a combination of intimate knowledge and firm resolve to see them through to completion, which ultimately produces effective and sustainable solutions.

The healthcare success in Zakho testifies to what can be achieved with vision, strong will, determination, and

collaboration. With so much more yet to be done, Zakho’s progress has created a template to inspire the Kurdistan Region in healthcare. It can also serve as a foundation upon which the future of the region is built. Sound planning can increase access to quality healthcare, reduce socioeconomic inequalities, and help nurture the ambitions of its people. ●

Photo: Mohammad Majid

Photo: Mohammad Majid

Nursing and Midwifery Development Center

Perched on a small hill in Baharka, on the outskirts of Erbil, the Nursing and Midwifery Development Center (NMDC) stands ready to fulfill its mission. Opened in January 2024 after years of dedicated effort, the NMDC is set to provide continuing education aimed at improving the access, safety, and quality of healthcare for everyone in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The need

to enhance healthcare in Kurdistan is clear, as the sector has encountered significant challenges over the years.

The NMDC distinguishes itself in the region by offering clinical simulation labs that serve as the gold standard for healthcare professionals' continuing education. By practicing clinical care in a safe, simulated environment, learners can master both practical and

communication skills before engaging with real patients and their families, an approach that is crucial for ensuring the delivery of high-quality healthcare.

The NMDC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) registered with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Department of Non-Government Organization. It provides train-



Eva Said

MSc, BSc, RN, Certified Global Nurse Consultant (CGFNS International, USA) is a UK-registered nurse, nurse educator, and the Director of the NMDC. She is also a EMRO Region facilitator of the Global Nursing Leadership Institute of the International Council of Nurses, Geneva, Switzerland.

Photo: Saifin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid

ing for the staff of public hospitals and primary healthcare centers and community services free of charge, ensuring that anyone with an interest or need has full access to these opportunities.

The NMDC's activities encompass a wide range of initiatives, including continuing education, the advancement of nursing and midwifery professions, research, advisory and consultancy services, and advocacy. Notable projects include a Cancer Screening Mobile Unit, set to launch in October 2024, which will provide free breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screenings, and a home-based Palliative Care Service currently under development. These efforts are just a glimpse of the potential to enhance the health and well-being of people in the Kurdistan Region.

The NMDC's expansive facilities boast 11 state-of-the-art clinical simulation laboratories, covering all major nursing and midwifery specialties. The laboratories include a first-aid and life support simulation lab; an ambulance simulator; an emergency room; an operating theater; adult and neonatal intensive care units; adult, pediatric, and midwifery units; a clinical skills lab; and a community laboratory. Additionally, the NMDC is equipped with modern classrooms, a library, and a computer lab featuring the latest technology to enhance practical training. The conference section can accommodate up to 250 participants, offering extensive opportunities for events and activities tailored to healthcare professionals and the local community.

Outdoors, the 10,000-square-meter lot, generously allocated to the NMDC by the Erbil Governorate, awaits the development of the Emergency Preparedness and Response training field. This future facility will enable the NMDC to train healthcare providers and community members in effective first-response techniques for both natural and man-made disasters and emergencies.

Supported by two NGOs, Latter-day Saint Charities and the Stirling Foundation from the United States – both of which have a long-standing commitment to improving healthcare, education, and emergency response in the Kurdistan Region – the NMDC aims to make a meaningful and lasting impact. The Center aspires to elevate the education and skills of healthcare providers and ensure that this new knowledge is effectively applied in practice.

“
What began a decade ago as a dream to establish a professional framework for training Kurdistan's nurses and midwives has evolved into an organization with a modern facility that meets international standards
”

The NMDC relies on funding and donations to perform its services. To ensure its financial stability and sustainability, a charitable foundation was established under section 501(c)3 of the tax code in the United States to support the Center's work. Non-financial support comes from the NMDC Board of Advisors and a strong network of local and international organizations and individuals who believe in the NMDC's vision.

The Board of Advisors comprises international nursing experts from five countries who determine the Center's strategic direction and ensure

that the NMDC performs its purposes for the public benefit. The Board also oversees the Executive Team, which is headed by a UK-registered nurse consultant who is responsible for operations and the achievement of NMDC's objectives.

At the NMDC, a strong and capable team has established processes that enable the delivery of large-scale continuing education and the pursuit of international accreditation. Collaboration with international educational and healthcare institutions, as well as health professionals, is central to the NMDC's mission. This ethos of working together for the common good brings global expertise to the Kurdistan Region through a trusted local partner, ensuring long-term, context-sensitive engagement in the area.

Cooperation with local and regional partners is critical for the success of the NMDC and its work, as meaningful improvements in healthcare delivery can only be achieved through the joint efforts of NGOs, governmental entities, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and on-the-ground healthcare providers. To accomplish these objectives, the NMDC maximizes the use of its facilities by also hosting and facilitating projects and activities led by governmental and non-governmental partners. By offering its space to these organizations, the NMDC extends the reach of its world-class facilities, benefiting as many users as possible.

What began a decade ago as a dream to establish a professional framework for training Kurdistan's nurses and midwives has evolved into an organization with a modern facility that meets international standards and carries a vision to transform health services in the region. Through the ongoing education of healthcare providers, the NMDC is poised to make a significant impact on improving healthcare delivery in Kurdistan. ●

Kurdistan's Leap into the Digital Age



Saman Lawe

is an author, technology leader, coach, and mentor. He currently serves as the Head of Infrastructure for Navico Group in the Asia Pacific region. He has published two books "Building Service Agility" and "Achieving Organizational Excellence".

In an era where digital interactions have become the norm, governments around the world are under increasing pressure to modernize and adapt to the needs of their citizens. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is no exception. Recognizing the importance of keeping pace with technological advancements, the KRG has introduced a strategy designed to revolutionize the way that public services are delivered across the region.

The proposed Digital Public Service strategy represents a bold vision for the future of governance in Kurdistan. It aims to transform the delivery and execution of public services through a modern, agile, and user-centered system that meets the needs of today's citizens and businesses and is equipped to handle the challenges of tomorrow. This comprehensive plan seeks to leverage the power of digital technology to create a more efficient, accessible, and responsive government, one that truly puts people at the center of its operations.

A vision for a modern Kurdistan

At the heart of the Digital Public Service strategy is a simple yet profound idea: government services should be as convenient and intuitive as the best offerings from the private sector. In a world where people can manage their finances, shop for groceries, and even conduct business online, there is an expectation that interactions with government should be

just as seamless. The KRG's strategy acknowledges this shift in expectations and sets out to not only meet, but eventually exceed these new demands.

The strategy's vision is one of a fully digital government that offers high-quality services tailored to the unique needs of each Kurdistan. This means moving away from the traditional, often cumbersome, methods of delivering public services and embracing a new, digital-first approach. Whether they are applying for a business permit, accessing health care, or simply seeking information, citizens will be able to access services quickly and easily, without the need to navigate through multiple agencies or repeatedly provide the same information.

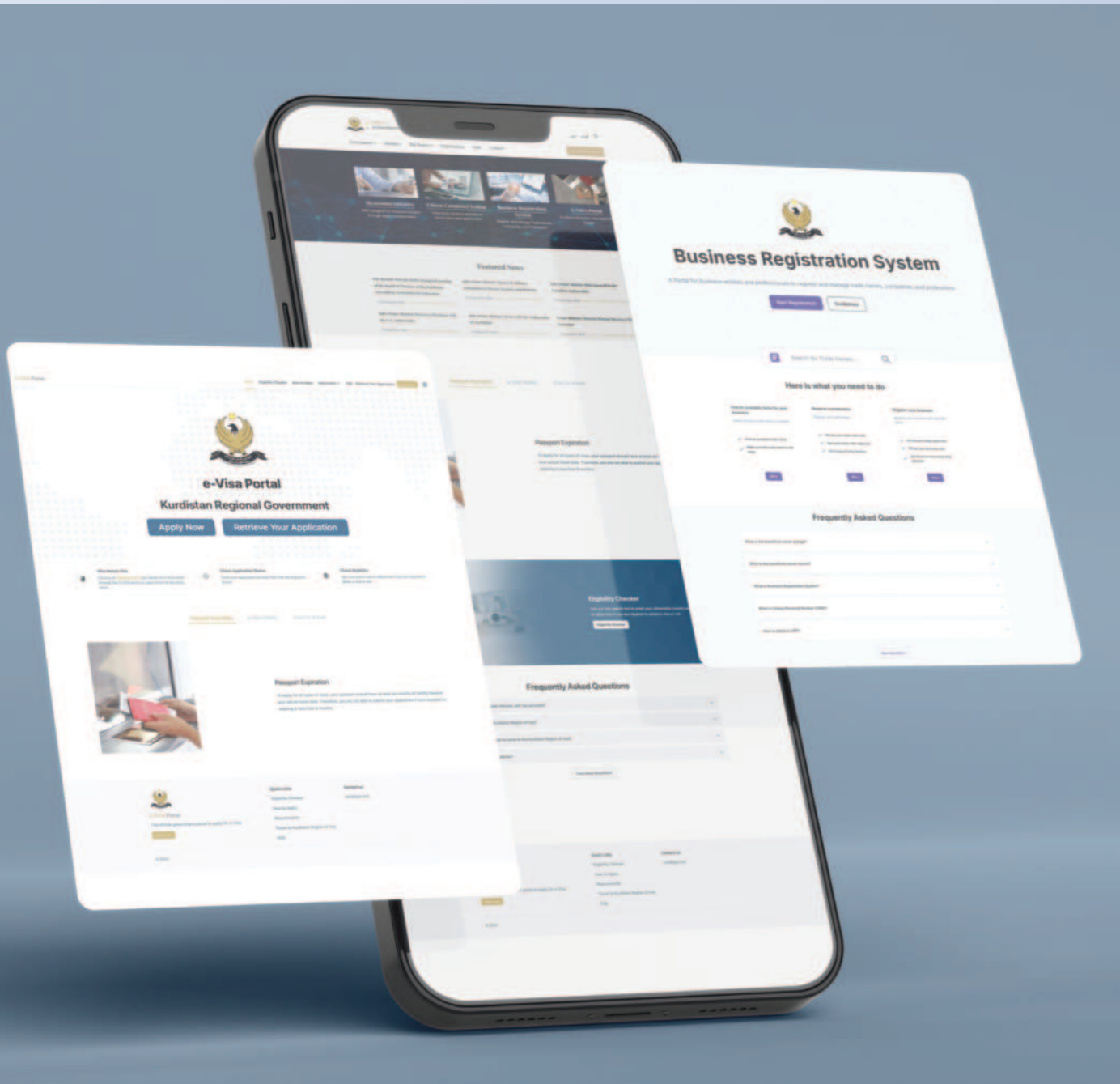
Core principles guiding the strategy

To achieve this vision, the Digital Public Service strategy is built on several key principles:

1. User-centricity: The strategy places a strong emphasis on designing services that are centered around the needs of users. This means creating experiences that are not only seamless and intuitive, but also accessible to all citizens, regardless of their location or circumstances. By putting people first, the KRG aims to ensure that every Kurdistan can interact with the government in a way that is convenient and meaningful to them.



The entrance to the Kurdistan Regional Government's Department of Information Technology



2. Interoperability and integration:

One of the major challenges of modernizing public services is ensuring that different systems and platforms can work together effectively. The strategy highlights the importance of interoperability, where services are designed to be integrated across various government agencies and departments. This approach will help eliminate the siloization that currently exists, making it easier for citizens to access the services they need without having to navigate multiple bureaucracies.

3. Security and privacy: As services move online, protecting personal information becomes more critical than ever. The KRG's strategy includes robust measures to safeguard user data, ensuring that citizens can trust the digital services provided by their government. This commitment to security and privacy is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring that the transition to digital services is both safe and successful.

4. Innovation and adaptability:

The fast-paced nature of technological change means that the KRG must remain flexible and open to new ideas. The strategy encourages continuous learning, experimentation, and quick adaptation to new technologies and methods. By fostering a culture of innovation, the KRG aims to stay ahead of the curve and ensure that Kurdistan's public services are always on the cutting edge.

Addressing challenges and building capacity

While the Digital Public Service strategy is ambitious, it acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead. One of the most significant hurdles is the digital divide: the gap between those who have access to digital services and those who do not. Ensuring that all citizens can benefit from the new digital services, regardless of their location, socioeconomic status, or technical literacy, is a priority for the KRG. The strategy outlines target-

ed digital-inclusion efforts aimed at bridging this divide and ensuring that no Kurdistani is left behind.

Another critical challenge is managing the cultural shift required to embrace digital transformation. Transitioning to a digital-first government is not just about implementing new technologies; it also requires a fundamental change in how public services operate. This includes rethinking traditional leadership models, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and empowering public servants to adopt new ways of working. The strategy emphasizes the importance of change management and the need for strong leadership to guide this transition.

To support these efforts, the strategy focuses on building the necessary capacity within the public services sector. This includes developing the skills and knowledge needed to support digital transformation, both at the leadership level and across the broader public sector workforce. By investing in training, education, and development, the KRG aims to create public services that are not only equipped to handle the demands of the digital age, but also capable of driving innovation and delivering better outcomes for all Kurdistanis.

Collaboration as the key to success

One of the defining features of the Digital Public Service strategy is its emphasis on collaboration. The KRG should recognize that transforming public services is not something that can be achieved in isolation; rather, it requires cooperation across all sectors of society, including partnerships with private sector organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies, as well as collaboration between different levels of government.

By working together, the KRG and its partners can leverage a wide range of expertise, resources, and perspectives to create a more robust and

innovative digital infrastructure. The strategy highlights the importance of co-creation, where services are developed in partnership with the communities they are intended to serve. This approach ensures that digital services are not only effective, but also aligned with the needs and aspirations of Kurdistanis.

A vision grounded in the Kurdistan context

The Digital Public Service strategy is not simply a copy-paste of digital strategies from other parts of the world; it is a framework that is deeply rooted in the unique context of Kurdistan. We have taken inspiration from global best practices, including New Zealand's Digital Government Leadership Group, but have tailored these insights to fit the specific needs and challenges of Kurdistan.

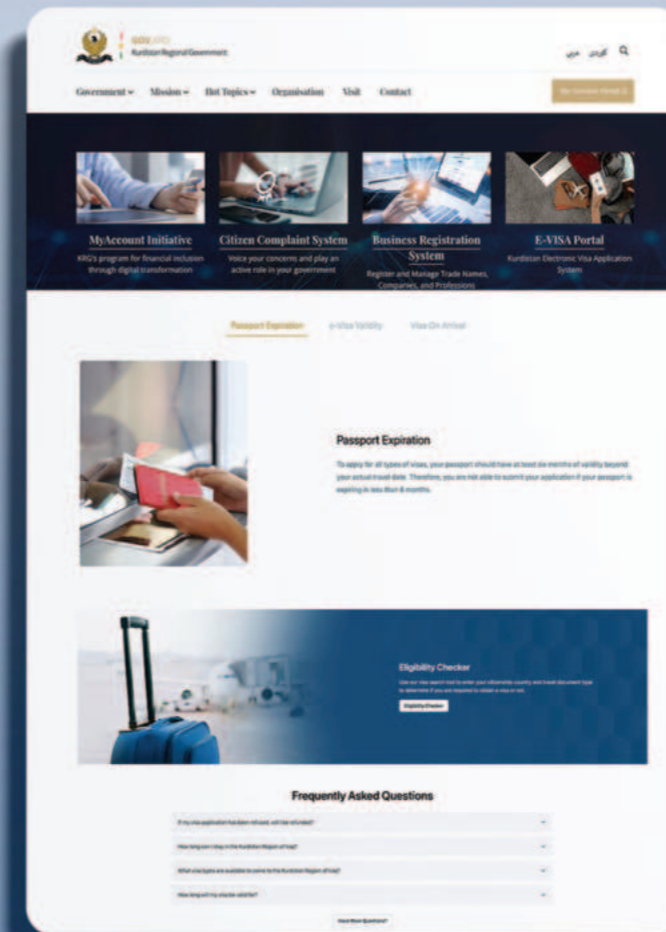
For example, the strategy acknowledges the region's complex political, social, and economic landscape and emphasizes the need for a flexible and adaptive approach. It also recognizes the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the Government of Iraq, ensuring that Kurdistan's digital transformation is aligned with broader national objectives and priorities.

Looking to the future

As Kurdistan embarks on this digital journey, the Digital Public Service strategy promises to enhance the country's social, economic, and environmental well-being. By modernizing public services, the KRG should be laying the groundwork for a future where the government is not just a provider of services, but a true partner in the lives of its citizens.

The strategy's focus on user-centricity, collaboration, security, and innovation reflects a commitment to creating a public service that is responsive, inclusive, and accountable. As the KRG moves forward with the implementation of this vision, the eyes of

“
 As the KRG moves forward with the implementation of this vision, the eyes of the region – and indeed, the world – will be watching to see how Kurdistan leads the way in digital governance
 ”



the region – and indeed, the world – will be watching to see how Kurdistan leads the way in digital governance.

The Digital Public Service strategy represents a significant step forward for Kurdistan. It will become a clear indication of the KRG's determination to embrace the opportunities of the digital age and create a government that is truly fit for the future. With strong leadership, collaboration, and a focus on the needs of its citizens, Kurdistan is poised to become a model for digital transformation in the region and beyond. ●

Investigating Abortion in 91 Days



Shazin Jaf

is Executive Assistant and Chief of Staff at Canada's House of Commons and holds a bachelor's degree in Diplomacy and Public Relations.

Abortion is one of the most contentious topics of the day, intersecting with profound medical, legal, and personal dimensions. It is not merely a medical procedure, but a deeply personal decision that raises fundamental questions about the role of the state and society in individual health choices.

The debate surrounding abortion varies widely across different countries and legal systems. In many countries, abortion has been subject to strict regulation, while in others, it has been more accessible. Debates on abortion rights encompass historical, cultural, medical, and legal perspectives, each influencing individual beliefs and societal norms. The medical discourse addresses safety, procedural, and health implications, while legal frameworks vary significantly, often reflecting broader societal tensions between women's rights and governmental authority.

On a personal level, decisions about abortion are shaped by women's circumstances, including personal beliefs, socioeconomic status, and health considerations, with significant emotional and psychological effects. In Iraq, abortion is illegal under the penal code, with a severe penalty for doctors performing the procedure. In the Kurdistan Region, abortion is permitted under the Patient's Rights and Responsibilities law. In life-threatening cases, patients must obtain consent from their husband and approval from a committee of five physicians.

Released in 2024 and edited by Savan Abdulrahman – a distinguished writer, researcher, translator, and founder of the Tema group – *91 Days* offers a thorough exploration of abortion through an interdisciplinary lens and is, most importantly, written in Kurdish. The book spans 14 chapters, each examining a different facet of abortion: from historical, philosophical, and political perspectives to medical, psychological, and legal insights, along with real-life narratives and artistic reflections. This comprehensive approach aims to foster a nuanced dialogue about abortion in society.

91

The book begins with a historical chapter that traces humanity's earliest discussions on abortion, from ancient texts like the Ebers Papyrus and the Code of Hammurabi to the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle. The chapter on philosophy then challenges readers to reconsider ethical and moral questions surrounding abortion, prompting a deeper reflection on longstanding beliefs. The chapter on

politics reveals how abortion has been used as a political tool throughout history, influencing public opinion and electoral outcomes. This is then followed by a chapter on demographics, which examines population trends and statistics related to births, deaths, and income.

In the chapter on sociology, *91 Days* constructs a theoretical framework

realities, comparing different medical systems and exploring health implications and procedures, and the stories chapter shares real-life experiences of women who have faced abortion, adding a personal and emotional dimension.

The final chapters include a manifesto that provides a feminist perspective and a discussion on how literature

I had the opportunity to interview Savan to gain further insight into the work and its impact. Here is what she shared:

Shazin Jaf (SJ): *What motivated you to commission a book on abortion and reproductive health, and how did personal experiences or societal issues shape your decision?*



that reflects diverse social perspectives on abortion, while the legal chapter clarifies the regulations governing abortion, helping readers understand the complex legal landscape. A dedicated chapter on religion explores various religious views on abortion, while the data chapter presents public opinions and societal attitudes. The medical chapter addresses myths and

and art have shaped societal views of abortion, illustrating how these creative forms reflect and shape public opinion. The final chapter on education emphasizes the importance of comprehensive sex education in fostering informed and thoughtful discussions about abortion.

In the process of reviewing *91 Days*,

Savan Abdulrahman (SA): Working on *91 Days* brought significant personal growth. Our focus group discussions with youth revealed that issues like freedom of speech and choice were closely tied to unwanted pregnancies. I realized that addressing reproductive health could also highlight broader themes of personal freedom. By exploring reproductive

choices, we emphasized that controlling one's decisions is fundamental to personal freedom and extends to other areas of life.

SJ: *How has the reception of the book affected your perspective on reproductive health or your role as an author?*

SA: The reception has been a transformative journey. Over the four years of working on it, despite my extensive knowledge and multilingual skills, I encountered new insights and deepened my understanding of reproductive health. Engaging with experts and readers has significantly broadened my perspective, making the project a profound learning experience.

other works or voices you think complement or contrast with yours?

SA: In Kurdistan, *91 Days* is unique because comprehensive work on abortion is scarce. Our book, with its 14 chapters, offers an in-depth exploration of the topic. While a few organizations in Erbil and Dohuk are making efforts to raise awareness, our book fills a crucial gap by fostering understanding and debate in a region where such discussions are limited. Its depth and coverage in a field with few resources stand out.

SJ: *What barriers prevent Kurdish women from accessing information about reproductive health?*



Savan Abdulrahman next to the poster of her documentary titled *Abortion at the Threshold*

SJ: *What barriers did you face writing this book?*

SA: I faced several barriers, primarily societal resistance to discussing abortion. Many people dismissed the topic as taboo, shutting down conversations with arguments and judgments. Financial constraints also posed a challenge. My team and I worked voluntarily for most of the project, and only in the final year did we receive humanitarian funding. Balancing this with our professional careers was demanding, and it felt like managing two full-time jobs.

SJ: *How do you see your book fitting into the larger conversation about reproductive health and rights? Are there*

SA: Key barriers include lacking educational resources and information in schools and universities. Unlike other parts of the world where sex education starts early, Kurdish education systems do not cover reproductive health. Additionally, there is a shortage of information in Kurdish, making it hard for many to access critical information. Our book aims to bridge these gaps by providing comprehensive information on abortion in Kurdish.

SJ: *How do you think the landscape of reproductive health might change in the coming years, and how could future editions or follow-ups to your book address these changes?*

SA: It's uncertain how the landscape will evolve, but creating a discussion platform is essential. I hope future publications build on this foundation and that more people will advocate for reproductive rights. The book provides a base of knowledge that can support future actions and strategic plans to advance the topic.

SJ: *Have there been any unexpected reactions or feedback from readers that you found particularly meaningful or surprising?*

plinary approach and the diverse expertise of its contributors. It offers valuable insights for Kurdish women, helping them understand their experiences within a broader historical and societal context. The book also fosters understanding among Kurdish men, promoting respect for women's choices. The collaboration among authors from various fields enhances the book's credibility and provides a holistic view of the topic. Ultimately, this book serves as a timely and relevant resource, particularly in societies where cultural and social taboos often

strategy could be strengthened. Engaging more actively with younger demographics through social media and community events could enhance its visibility and impact.

Despite these areas for improvement, *91 Days* is a significant achievement in addressing a complex and sensitive topic. It combines empirical data with personal narratives to foster a deeper understanding and empathy. The final section, which recounts personal stories of women affected by abortion, is particularly moving and underscores



Posters of Savan Abdulrahman's documentary on display at the cinema hallway

SA: Yes, some feedback was surprising. Some worried that the book would encourage irresponsible behavior among youth. However, our goal is to provide accurate information to help people make informed decisions, not to promote abortion. We aim to offer guidance on preventing unwanted pregnancies and making thoughtful choices about when to have children.

91 Days stands out for its interdisci-

plinary approach and the diverse expertise of its contributors. It offers valuable insights for Kurdish women, helping them understand their experiences within a broader historical and societal context. The book also fosters understanding among Kurdish men, promoting respect for women's choices. The collaboration among authors from various fields enhances the book's credibility and provides a holistic view of the topic. Ultimately, this book serves as a timely and relevant resource, particularly in societies where cultural and social taboos often

the human cost of restrictive policies and societal pressures.

I recommend this book to politicians, policymakers, scholars, and general readers. It thoroughly examines abortion from multiple perspectives and can inform discussions and decisions in both academic and practical contexts. Ultimately, *91 Days* is a vital resource for those seeking comprehensive and compassionate insights into the multifaceted topic of abortion. ●

Kurdish Bread and Meat A Culinary Revolution in Europe



Osman Mehmed

is a journalist and translator based in Ankara. He has published three poetry books.

Mustafa Rodi Demirkurek, the visionary founder of Alzarro Doner, has emerged as a prominent figure in the culinary landscape of Europe. With 16 years of dedicated knowledge and experience in the food industry, Mustafa has meticulously crafted a brand that not only honors traditional doner recipes, but also introduces innovative concepts that have yet to be explored in Europe. He describes his venture as a 'revolution' within the doner market, emphasizing a unique format that sets Alzarro Doner apart from its competitors.

In an exclusive interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Mustafa shared insights into the journey of Alzarro Doner during our meeting in Gera, Germany. As the brand gains momentum and visibility on supermarket shelves across Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, it is poised to become a global name. Mustafa's commitment to quality and authenticity resonates with consumers seeking both traditional flavors and modern dining experiences.

Mustafa describes Alzarro as a fresh entrant in the doner market. However, he emphasizes that the concept has been in



“
Alzarro's 250,000-square-meter factory aims to introduce both their innovative doner and a variety of doner dishes to markets in Germany and Europe
”

development for more than 16 years. Alzarro offers a unique ready-made product that combines meat, salad, and sauce, all encased in dough and designed for convenient packaging and retail purchase.

Mustafa embarked on his journey in 2008, dedicating years to refining doner recipes through extensive experiments. After nearly a decade of research, his efforts culminated in the founding of his company in 2017. With over 30 years of experience in the doner industry, including managing numerous restaurants and shops, Mustafa identified a growing need to



innovate and transform the dish, given its increasing popularity and consumption worldwide. This realization fueled his commitment to reimagining doner for a modern audience while maintaining its traditional roots.

A 16-year quest

Proudly announcing the patenting of his revolutionary product, Mustafa elaborated on the inspiration behind it: “The journey began during my visits to supermarket chains, where I noticed a growing trend toward ready-made doner and convenience foods. Despite Germany being

“ Reflecting on his childhood fascination with fireflies, he shared how their glow provided guidance in the darkness of his village, where electricity was absent

”

the largest consumer of doner globally, there was a notable absence of ready-made options available in stores. My years of experience running doner shops allowed me to observe customer behavior closely. I often saw ingredients spilling out or poorly sealed packaging leading many customers to enjoy their doner cold after taking it home. This sparked my desire to create a solution that addressed these issues by offering a finished product that retains its warmth and integrity. Thus, I conceptualized this idea in 2008, culminating in production in 2024.”

Mustafa has dedicated 16 years to perfecting his doner, utilizing robotics for every stage of production. “Our product is entirely crafted without human intervention,” he explained.

By employing fresh ingredients and producing daily, they have eliminated the need for a warehouse. The doner is

dispatched on the same day it is made or the following morning, ensuring it remains a fresh product rather than a frozen one. Mustafa has also played a pivotal role in designing many of the machines used in this automated process. Currently, they are developing their doner machine for international markets including Japan, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Türkiye, Denmark, and France, with Mustafa actively involved in every step of this global endeavor.

Mustafa revealed that their factory is currently operating at just 10% capacity, producing between 10,000 and 15,000

ready-packaged doners daily. These products are distributed to major supermarket chains including EDEKA, Kaufland, and Glabus across Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and other Scandinavian and European countries. Mustafa anticipates that once the factory reaches full capacity, production could soar to an impressive 200,000-250,000 ready-made doner kebabs each day.

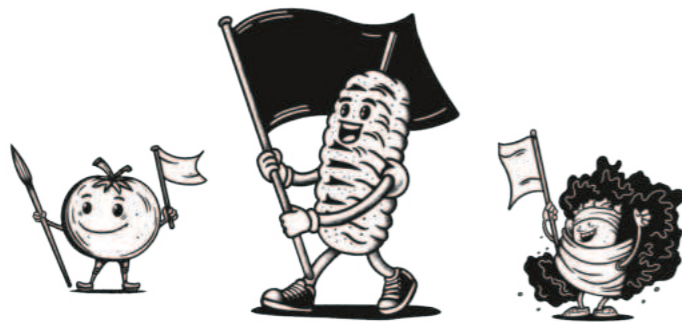
Mustafa, who has previously crafted products like ayran and beer under Kurdish names, identified a significant gap in the doner sector. He aims to fill this void as a proud Kurd and establish a global brand. “I wanted to demonstrate that a Kurd can transcend traditional roles in doner shops and achieve success on the international business stage,” he remarked.

This ambition is not just about personal success; it carries a deeper message of hope for Kurdish children, showcasing

that they too can aspire to greatness beyond conventional boundaries.

A global enterprise

Mustafa announced the debut of his products at an international food fair in 2024. This pivotal event catapulted their brand into recognition across Germany and Europe, all achieved without any advertising costs. The overwhelming response at the food fair caught the attention of both attendees and media outlets, highlighting the significant



Mustafa Rodi Demirkurek at his office



interest in their offerings.

Mustafa revealed that the brand name Alzarro is a heartfelt tribute to his three children: Ali Ser, Zarife, and Robin, with each child's name contributing its initial to the brand. "The logo features my face, symbolizing a deep connection to my family and personal history," he shared.

Furthermore, Mustafa highlighted that the German government holds a 15% stake in their company, providing essential support as they navigate the challenges of being a newly established enterprise. His efforts have not gone unnoticed; he proudly

the Kurdistan Regional Government, noting that their attendance would be a great honor for such a landmark occasion.

"I visited the Kurdistan Region, and what struck me most during my initial visit was the warm embrace of the local culture. The police in Erbil greeted me in Kurdish, a gesture that resonated deeply. Passport control officers and civil servants also communicated in Kurdish, which left a lasting impression on me," Mustafa said. He noted his delight in witnessing foreigners embracing the Kurdish language, expressing his eagerness to return to this vibrant region.



■ Mustafa Rodi Demirkurek taking part at a food festival in Germany with the Kurdistan flag in the background

mentioned receiving an award from the Minister-President of the German state of Thuringia for the company's achievements and contributions through the factory.

Mustafa announced that the official opening of their factory is approaching, with plans to welcome prominent figures such as Germany's President, Prime Minister, and several ministers. He highlighted their desire to invite the President and Prime Minister of

Alzarro's 250,000-square-meter factory aims to introduce both their innovative doner and a variety of doner dishes to markets in Germany and Europe. The factory will produce an array of offerings including doner pizza, doner pide, doner pasta, and doner on rice. These products are set to feature prominently in the food services of the German parliament and ministries, particularly on airplanes, trains, hotels, and gas stations.

A significant portion of the facility is automated, with robots handling much of the production. A small team of 50 employees operate during a single shift, but this number is expected to rise to 250 as the factory reaches its full operational capacity. The management team is notably diverse, with 70% of its members hailing from Germany and a workforce that includes individuals from 10 different countries such as Afghanistan, Czech Republic, Poland, and Türkiye. In addition to production capabilities, Mustafa emphasized that the new factory will feature social amenities like a nursery, tennis courts, and spa facilities for employees.

Mustafa has also announced plans to create the Firefly Foundation, an organization aimed at supporting children in need across all regions of Kurdistan and throughout the Middle East. "My primary goal is to instill hope," he explained. "I believe that, despite severe poverty, hope can prevail. Our mission is to embody that hope." Reflecting on his childhood fascination with fireflies, he shared how their glow provided guidance in the darkness of his village, where electricity was absent. "The light they emitted was crucial for us," he noted. The Firefly Foundation will focus on fulfilling the educational needs of diligent yet underprivileged children, particularly within their homeland, ensuring they receive the support they need for their education.

Who is Mustafa Demirkurek?

He hails from Mazgirt in Dersim (Tunceli) Province in Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye). He completed his primary and most of his secondary education in Dersim before seeking refuge in Germany in 1994. Since 1995, he has been active in the doner industry, owning various doner shops and restaurants. He previously produced ayran under the brand Gundi and launched a beer named Miran. Currently, he aims to promote Alzarro Doner on a global scale. ●

Alone in the Citadel A Sacred Legacy to Protect



Riband Saadallah

is a professional photographer and seasoned journalist. He is a member of the Union of Journalists in Finland.

For over six millennia, the Erbil Citadel has been a symbol of human civilization and endurance. Today, however, it stands nearly deserted, with only one family continuing to inhabit this ancient fortress. For the past 18 years, Rebwar Mohammed, his wife Nazanin Qadir, and their four children have borne the unique responsibility of keeping the citadel alive – a legacy that stretches back 6,000 years. In their hands lies the preservation of an unbroken chain of life within the citadel, even as wild animals roam the empty streets.

Located in the heart of Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, the Erbil Citadel rises 32 meters above the city, covering an area of 102,000 square meters. This once-bustling hub is

now largely empty, save for a large Kurdistan flag that flies in the center. Out of the 500 homes that once occupied the citadel, only one remains inhabited – a small house near the southern gate where the Mohammed family lives.

In 2006, the Kurdistan Regional Government evacuated the citadel's 840 families as part of a preservation effort, but one family was asked to stay to fulfill a historical duty. "I never imagined that one day I would be living here alone, responsible for upholding a tradition that has lasted for millennia," says Rebwar, who was born on the citadel in 1986. His family has now become the sole guardians of this ancient site, continuing a legacy that began in the Sumerian period.

A journey to Erbil

Rebwar's parents arrived in Erbil in 1978, moving from the villages of Harmk and Mergasar in the Balisan Valley, 75 kilometers north of Erbil. Struggling with poverty, they settled in an abandoned hut in the citadel, paying just 10 Iraqi dinars a month for rent (roughly equivalent to \$10 today).

For nearly two decades, Rebwar, Nazanin and their children have lived in two small rooms connected by a glass patio. The modest space is a blend of old and new, decorated with flowers and religious books. It serves as a reminder of their deep roots within the citadel and their commitment to preserving its legacy.

Rebwar fondly recalls a happy,

Photo: Mohammed Dargalayi

■ A bird's-eye view of Erbil Citadel



■ *Rebwar Mohammad and his family chatting outside their home inside the Citadel of Erbil*

Photo: Riband Saadallah

simple childhood on the citadel, surrounded by a close-knit community. “To me, the citadel wasn’t just a collection of neighborhoods and streets – it was one big family,” he says. However, in 2006, everything changed. As part of an effort to restore and excavate the citadel, authorities evacuated its residents. The only exception was Rebwar’s family, who were tasked with ensuring that the citadel would remain continuously inhabited – an unbroken tradition for 6,000 years.

The hardships of solitude

This historical responsibility weighs heavily on Rebwar. While he acknowledges the challenge of being isolated from society, he understands that his family’s role is vital. “It may be difficult for us to adjust to modern life again after so many years of solitude,” he admits. “But we’ve kept the citadel’s legacy alive, and that’s something we’re proud of.”

Nazanin, Rebwar’s wife, was only 16 when she moved to the citadel. Adjusting to life in the ancient fortress was not easy, especially after growing up in the bustling town of Bahirka, just 16 km away. The eerie silence of the abandoned citadel often left her unsettled. “There were nights when the wind howled like a wolf,” she recalls, adding that she later learned that there were cemeteries scattered throughout the citadel’s homes.

In addition to isolation, the presence of wild animals complicates life in the citadel. “I had to learn to kill snakes and rats to protect our home,” Nazanin says. Over time, she became accustomed to the challenges,

but the responsibility of being the last family left in the citadel has never left her mind.

In 2008, the couple welcomed their first child, a son named Redar. With no neighbors, markets, hospitals, or schools nearby, raising a child was no easy task. Three daughters followed: Hanar, born in 2010, Rahel (who was born with paralysis) in 2014, and Hanasa, who is now 10. The children have grown up without the companionship of other kids or the usual childhood experiences of playing in the streets. The ongoing restoration work on the citadel has confined them largely to their home.

A legacy to protect

The Erbil Citadel’s long and storied past spans thousands of years, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited places on Earth. In 2006, a team from the University of West Bohemia, in collaboration with Salahaddin University, identified different historical layers within the citadel, each corresponding to various eras of Erbil’s history. The High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization worked with UNESCO and the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to secure the citadel’s inclusion on the World Heritage List in 2014. Since then, efforts to restore the site

area for artisans and farmers.

For Rebwar and his family, the task of preserving the citadel’s 6,000-year legacy is both an honor and a challenge. As the sole remaining inhabitants, they carry the weight of history on their shoulders. While restoration efforts continue and the citadel’s future remains uncertain, their presence ensures that its long tradition of uninterrupted habitation remains intact. “It’s a responsibility that we didn’t choose, but one that we’ve accepted with pride,” says Rebwar.

And so, as the winds howl through the empty streets and the ancient



■ *Riband Saadallah (left) visiting Rebwar Mohammad (right) at his home inside the Citadel of Erbil*

Photo: Mohammed Dargalayi

Despite these hardships, Rebwar views their unique circumstances with a sense of duty. “At least they’re free from the troubles of street life,” he says. But he admits that the isolation has taken its toll, particularly on their eldest son Redar, who had no children his age to interact with and adopted many of his father’s behaviors early on, acting more like an adult than a child.

have been ongoing, with Erbil Governorate contributing \$13 million to the restoration project.

In the early 20th century, the Erbil Citadel housed three mosques, a church, two schools, and a bathhouse. It was divided into three main neighborhoods: Sara, home to aristocratic families; Takya, where religious leaders lived; and Topkhana, the

stones of the Erbil Citadel continue to weather the passage of time, one family’s commitment keeps its legacy alive – a legacy stretching back to the dawn of civilization. ●



Photo: Mohammed Dargalayi

How Kurdish Museums Shaped a Berlin Director's Vision

Kurdistan Chronicle

Enno Lenze during his visit to the Kurdistan Region

In 2017, Enno Lenze, a German museum director and frequent visitor to the Kurdistan Region, established a groundbreaking museum in Berlin called Hitler - How Could It Happen? Housed in a 6,500-square-meter bunker not far from the one where Hitler spent his final days, the museum was partly inspired by Lenze's experiences with museums in the Kurdistan Region.

No stranger to the museum world, Lenze gained early experiences that helped pave the way for Hitler - How Could It Happen? "In 2010 I ran a very small museum of 250 square meters about Berlin's 800 years of history, but it was my first attempt at creating a museum and was not very successful," Lenze told *Kurdistan Chronicle* during his latest visit to Erbil. "It was great to learn what doesn't work and gain experience in setting up a museum."

Lenze's ties to Kurdistan, meanwhile, date to 2011, when he first visited. He was introduced to the region by Siegfried

Martsch, a German politician and family friend who had worked with the Kurds in the 1990s. "I grew up hearing stories about Kurdistan and how quickly it was growing and developing with an international airport, a racing track, and cafes. It was completely different then from today," he said.

Lenze returned to Kurdistan in 2013, when Kurdish refugees were pouring into Kurdistan from Syria, and again in June 2014, when ISIS took over parts of Iraq. "It wasn't just news to me - it was personal. I knew people there, and it felt different. I wanted to understand what was happening, so I came to Erbil to get closer to the situation. Soon after arriving, through local connections, I was introduced to *peshmerga* fighters and got a firsthand look at the frontline of the conflict.

"What struck me the most was how, despite the brutal war and the presence of the largest terrorist group of our time, the Kurds remained incredibly open and friendly. Even in the face



of such horror, they would gather around bonfires, play music, and treat refugees with kindness and respect. It amazed me how they maintained their humanity. That's what kept me coming back several times a year, even after ISIS was defeated," Lenze said.

Inspired by Kurdistan

It was also in Kurdistan where Lenze got inspiration for a new museum. "After my visit in 2014, I noticed some interesting museums in Kurdistan. Shortly after, the Museum for the Martyrs of the War against ISIS (ISIS Museum) opened in Sulaymaniyah. They already had the small *Anfal* Museum in Barzan, and it was expanding. There was also Amna Suraka (Red Prison) in Sulaymaniyah and the Halabja Memorial."

Speaking with people who had built museums in Kurdistan stoked new ideas for Lenze. "We often discussed simple yet significant things," he said. "For example, when I visited the ISIS Museum in Sulaymaniyah, I saw items from the group. It made me wonder – should we display Nazi symbols or insignia in the same way?"

"Of course, ISIS is not the same thing as the Nazi regime, but it raised similar questions: how do you address the horrible things that happen to your people or to others?" Lenze said. "Saddam Hussein followed a similar playbook as Hitler, ISIS, and even the East German regime. So, I decided to create a museum. Germans typically design museums so as to remain impartial and show both sides, even when it comes to the Nazi regime. But I have a very clear view on

the Nazis. I know who the bad guys were."

He was particularly inspired by the ISIS Museum in Sulaymaniyah, which showcases photos of those who died fighting ISIS, and by the Halabja Memorial, which is dedicated to the victims of the Iraqi Ba'ath Regime's 1988 chemical weapons attack on Halabja that killed 5,000 Kurds.

"They are very simple in design and use basic elements like pictures, figures, paintings, and a few videos, but they are incredibly powerful. Seeing these museums helped me realize we didn't need flashy lights or gimmicks. Today's museum planners in Germany often think everything needs to be interactive and high-tech, but I disagree. If you have a story to tell, pictures and maps work well. German museums might win awards for animation, but that doesn't make them good museums," Lenze argued.

With his curator Wieland Giebel, he visited numerous museums around the world that focus on genocides and terrorism to understand their approaches. "Over several months, we developed an idea about what we wanted to do and how to approach it. We debated the scope of the Nazi regime's history, wondering whether we should only cover the period of their rule during World War II or include their early rise to power and other details," Lenze explained.

"We had to carefully consider which aspects to include, such as propaganda, their rise to power, the Holocaust, and the regime's downfall. With around 100 rooms, deciding which

pictures, videos, and stories to feature was complex. We aimed to balance impact without overwhelming visitors with too much horror," he said.

Other projects

After extensive planning, *Hitler - How Could It Happen?* opened in Berlin in 2017, and now attracts about 500,000 visitors annually. It is ranked among the top ten most visited museums in Berlin.

The museum, however, remains an evolving one, thanks to the insights Lenze gained from his visits to Kurdistan. "We left some space intentionally empty for future exhibitions. For instance, as the situation in Ukraine worsened, we created a small special exhibit on Ukrainian issues, but later realized it was too small and decided to focus on broader topics like propaganda, including how Russia still uses Soviet-style propaganda," Lenze said.

Lenze shared that he is also considered organizing exhibitions about ISIS or the *peshmerga* forces that fought ISIS. "But I think the timing for a German audience might have passed. We should have started earlier. Lenze has also considered establishing an ISIS museum in Germany. "We have thought about special exhibitions to draw people in, but if I had been able to set up the museum 10 years ago, I might have included an ISIS museum or special exhibition. It took two to three years to get my own project up and running, and by then, the opportunity to establish another had passed. I am not sure if Western audiences would still be interested in this topic today," Lenze pondered. ●



■ Enno Lenze in a Roman-style amphitheater in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region

Navigating Cultures

Kurdistan Chronicle

Kurdish-Austrian director Kurdwin Ayub recently won the Special Jury Prize for her film *Moon* at the 77th Locarno Film Festival, held from August 7-17. Her films frequently address the fight against patriarchal power structures and the struggle for women's rights. "I write stories, and these themes just naturally come out," she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Ayub was born in 1990 in Duhok in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. "In 1991, when I was just a baby, my parents and I fled Iraq due to the war. We spent several months in a camp at the Turkish border before we were able to make it to Austria. It was a very traumatic journey for my parents. My mother gave birth to her second child in the camp, but sadly, the baby died there," she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

When she was a child, she always wanted to tell stories. "I grew up in front of the TV, watching all kinds of films and series. It was the only path I wanted to pursue. I studied painting at the University of Ap-

plied Arts in Vienna. Initially, I made animated films and later performed in front of the camera myself. I started small, but step by step, my crews grew larger, and I was able to tell more complex stories."

"My most important awards include the First Feature Award for *Sun* at the Berlinale Film Festival 2022 and the Jury Prize at the Locarno Film Festival 2024 for *Moon*."

Moon and Sun

Her latest movie, *Moon*, is about former martial artist Sarah, who leaves Austria to train three sisters from a wealthy Jordanian family. "I chose to shoot it in Jordan because it's a very liberal country. The theme of the movie isn't specifically about Jordanian women," Ayub told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

"Andria Tayeh, a famous actress, plays Nour, the main daughter of this family. She speaks Jordanian Arabic, so I cast all the other family members as Jordanians as



Kurdish-Austrian director Kurdwin Ayub with the poster of her film *Sonne* (Sun) in the background





■ Kurdish-Austrian director
Kurdwin Ayub



■ Kurdish-Austrian director
Kurdwin Ayub at the 77th
Locarno Film Festival

“
I wanted to rebel
against being the ‘nice
Kurdish girl’

”

well, even though the parents of the family in the film live in the Gulf.”

“The movie is about an Austrian woman, whom you might expect to be the ‘white savior’ that rescues girls from a powerful Middle Eastern crime family. But these expectations are misleading. The film is about money and power, but also about patriarchy,” she said.

Ayub underlined that “gender inequality is still an issue in Middle Eastern countries – and European countries too! In the end, *Moon* is about the patriarchal similarities between the West and the East.”

Another film, *Sun*, is about three friends who shoot a music video in Austria while wearing burqas, which makes them famous overnight, especially among Kurdish-Muslims.

“The idea came to me when I discovered a girl band that sang Muslim songs and became famous. At first, I wanted to make a documentary about

them, but they never responded,” she said.

“So, I thought about my own life and experiences as an immigrant girl who wanted to be famous. I remembered how I felt different from my Austrian friends, and that this difference wasn’t always negative. Some of them wanted to be like me – but a better version. The movie is about cultural appropriation and how it feels to be the person whose shaky identity gets ‘stolen’ for fame.”

Mixing identities

Her feature documentary *Paradise! Paradise!* (2016), which won the best camera honor at the Diagonale – Festival of Austrian Film, follows the story of her father, who returns to Kurdistan from Austria to buy an apartment in the Kurdistan Region as an investment.

“It wasn’t difficult for me to make this movie because I was alone with my father. I didn’t have a crew with me,

and Kurdistan was relatively safe, even during the war against ISIS. When we went to the front line, it felt surreal because I wasn’t scared,” Ayub said.

“Having a camera with you, looking through the lens, makes everything feel like a movie, even when you’re filming real life. I guess that was my method to avoid fear. It was very important for me to make this movie, so I had to find ways to be strong enough to do it,” she added.

Ayub said that despite living in Austria, she visits Kurdistan a lot. “I guess I have a kind of lost or mixed identity. I grew up with my parents, who are culturally Kurdish, while my friends in school were typical Austrian,” she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “I feel that I carried the trauma of my parents and the warmth of Kurdish culture, but at the same time, I wanted to rebel against being the ‘nice Kurdish girl’ because I saw the freedom my Austrian friends had.” ●

A Wedding Tale of Hope and Challenge



Riyadh Al-Hamadany

is an Iraqi journalist who has worked with numerous local and international media outlets.

No one willingly leaves their home and city to seek refuge elsewhere – unless they are forced to do so by circumstances outside of their control. This was the situation for Basil Shawqi Al-Hasaniyeh, who left his hometown of As-Suwayda, which lies 100 kilometers south of Damascus, and opted for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq over Europe. This decision was driven not only by the lower cost of living in the region, but also by the facilities provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to asylum seekers.

After settling in Erbil with his family, Basil, a 28-year old who adheres to the Druze faith, decided to get married in the city that had become “closest to his heart.” He and his bride, Rama Fatin Shaqir, a 27-year-old also from the Druze community, celebrated their marriage in front of the historic Erbil Citadel. “I chose to get married in Erbil because it is a safe place to settle down and an ideal environment to build a family,” said Basil with a smile.

Choosing Erbil over Europe

In an interview with the Arabic-language version of *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Basil shared that his family and relatives have been living in Erbil for nearly a decade. “Ever since, I haven’t moved... My heart is attached to Erbil as if it were my motherland,” he said.

Basil emphasized that he chose Kurdistan over Europe because the region has “an

Eastern touch that is not found in Europe, and its people are conservative and adhere to their customs and traditions, which I see as close to our own.”

“Erbil, without exaggeration, is so beautiful because of its people and government. If I wasn’t happy here, I would have left,” Basil added. “My love for Erbil grew even more when I met my beloved Rama.”

“Basil emphasized that he chose Kurdistan over Europe because the region has an Eastern touch that is not found in Europe”

Basil’s father, Shawqi Al-Hasaniyeh, also expressed his gratitude: “Kurdistan has embraced us for years. We have not felt any religious or ethnic discrimination and move freely without any hindrance.”

On July 10, 2024, during a ceremony to announce new regulations for asylum seekers in the Kurdistan Region, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani highlighted the region’s longstanding hos-



Basil Shawqi and his bride Rama Fatin taking their wedding photos at the historic citadel of Erbil

“Kurdistan is a safe haven for those in need, better than any other country in the region by far”



■ Basil Shawqi and his bride Rama Fatin in downtown Erbil for their wedding photoshoot

pitality. “The region has embraced thousands of people seeking safety without any religious, national, or ethnic discrimination,” Prime Minister Barzani said. Despite facing challenges like the ISIS attacks and financial crises, the KRG continues to support numerous refugee camps and uphold its commitments.

Basil’s wife Rama was a teacher in Syria with a diploma in electronics. About three years ago, she and her family sought refuge in Erbil because “the situation had deteriorated in every aspect in Syria, and my father chose Erbil because it is the best place in the Middle East.”

A cultural and historical connection

As-Suwayda is an open-air museum of historical landmarks, some dating back to the Stone Age. The area is home to Roman, Nabataean, Byzantine, and Greek monuments scattered across its villages and cities, including Shahba and Salkhad.

Basil, who studied tourism and hospitality in Syria, chose to hold his wedding in Erbil because of the cultural connection between the two cities. “Erbil’s architectural heritage is different from As-Suwayda’s, but both cities share a similar layout with their castles, despite the differences in design,” Basil explained. He sees a clear connection between the heritage of his homeland and that of the country that welcomed him.

Druze marriage traditions

The Druze community is tightly knit and insular, with strict customs regarding marriage. It is rare to find a Druze married outside the sect, and polygamy is forbidden. Druze religious leaders, known as *uqqal* uphold this rule to maintain gender equality.

Rama recounted how she met Basil: “Our fathers met by chance, and my father invited his family to visit us. During their visit, I met Basil, and we began talking on Facebook Messenger for a short time. Shortly after, he proposed, and I accepted.”

Rama explained that, traditionally, a group of *uqqal* writes the marriage contract, but due to their distance from Syria and the absence of *uqqal* in Kurdistan, their marriage was solemnized online. “Our marriage was conducted through proxies for both the bride and groom, along with witnesses from both sides,” she said. The official contract is certified by the state, according to Rama.

After the contract is completed, Druze women don their traditional dress, a colorful garment covering the entire body. They accessorize with a piece of fabric tied around the waist called the mamluk and a fez adorned with a silver disc and gold pieces, covered by a thin white cloth, revealing only the face and hands.

Kurdistan: A safe haven

Rama expressed her gratitude to the KRG for its support of Syrian refugees, emphasizing that “Kurdistan is a safe haven for those in need, better than any other country in the region by far.” However, she also highlighted the challenges that refugees face, particularly with residence permits and the high cost of renewal.

Rama agrees with Basil that they will not leave Kurdistan for another coun-

try. “It is better here than any place we could have gone to,” she said.

The story of Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region is different from their experiences in neighboring countries. The couple likened it to seeking refuge with a brother, where they find themselves enjoying full rights without feeling any discrimination. As the couple noted, those who abide by the law will find a decent living and a respectable job, and enjoy freedom of movement. Refugees find

shelter, whether in camps or within the cities and towns of the Kurdistan Region, and often find not just a temporary refuge, but also a place they can call home.

The Kurdistan Region remains a safe haven for many Syrians of various ethnicities and religious groups, who can open their own businesses and enjoy full rights to work, live, and receive an education, much like any other citizen. ●



■ Basil Shawqi and his bride Rama Fatin in downtown Erbil for their wedding photoshoot

Flying Kurdistan Flag on Everest

Kurdistan Chronicle

On a sweltering August day in Kadikoy, a district of Istanbul, my university friend Abdulhalik introduced me to a remarkable individual. At first glance, I assumed he was a journalist or documentary filmmaker, given his outdoor attire, backpack, and warm smile. However, as our conversation unfolded, I discovered that he was none other than Mehmet Sah Gozen, a professional mountain climber from Diyarbakir.

Gozen made history as one of the first climbers from Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye) to conquer

K2, the world's second highest and most perilous peak. At an altitude of 6,100 meters on K2, he proudly raised the Kurdistan flag. Now, with his sights set on Mount Everest – the highest mountain on Earth – Gozen aims to wave the Kurdistan flag there this fall.

Gozen was born in 1964 into a prosperous family in Dercimt (Yesilbure) village of Diyarbakir's Lice District. In 1974, his family relocated to central Diyarbakir. He completed his primary education in Lice and attended middle and high school in Diyarbakir.

■ Mehmet Sah Gozen holding the Kurdistan flag on Mount Everest



■ Mehmet Sab Gozen at the base camp of Broad Peak

“
My mission is to
highlight that our
identity extends beyond
warfare
”

However, the 1980 military coup in Türkiye interrupted his academic journey, leading him to join the Kurdish political movement. Between 1982 and 1983, he endured imprisonment in Diyarbakir Prison, notorious for its harsh conditions. After his release, he ventured into trade in Istanbul and later worked as a contractor in Bodrum before returning to Diyarbakir with his wife and three children: Servan, Berfin, and Rotinda.

The mountaineering spirit of the Kurds

Gozen reflects on his deep-rooted passion for mountaineering, attributing it to the rugged landscape of his homeland. “I was born in a mountainous village, and every chance I got, I ventured into the mountains,” he explains.

This love for exploration has been a part of him since childhood, and he believes that Kurds inherently possess a mountaineering spirit. His adventures began in earnest in 2015 when

he and his wife attempted to climb Mount Suphan. Unfortunately, they were thwarted by a dead phone battery that left them in darkness before reaching the summit. However, Gozen persevered and later successfully conquered Suphan in 2018, solidifying his bond with the mountains.

Gozen has since traversed the breathtaking landscapes of Türkiye and several regions of Greater Kurdistan. His passion for mountaineering led him to conquer iconic peaks such as Mount Agri and Cilo, in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Beyond the rugged terrain of Kurdistan, Gozen has also scaled Mount Erciyes, standing at a height of 3,927 meters in Central Anatolia, and Damavand, Iran’s highest peak at an impressive 5,610 meters.

Gozen believes that mountains serve as sanctuaries for all people, and particularly Kurds. He reflects on their historical significance: “Whenever the Kurds are in trouble, they have taken refuge in the mountains; I think the mountains protect and embrace the

Kurds.” His adventurous spirit has led him to climb all major peaks in Kurdistan since his initial ascent of Mount Suphan.

A journey of self-discovery

In July 2024, Gozen achieved a remarkable feat by summiting K2, the world’s second-highest mountain at 8,611 meters, nestled in the tri-border region of Pakistan, China, and India. As part of an unprecedented expedition representing both Türkiye and Kurdistan, Gozen and his team reached the base camp at an altitude of 5,100 meters. The entire ascent and descent spanned an arduous 23 days.

Reflecting on his experience, Gozen expressed profound emotions upon witnessing such majestic peaks. “Conquering these formidable heights evokes a unique joy,” he shared. “Mountains compel us to confront our place in the universe; they reveal how small we truly are.”



■ Mehmet Sab Gozen and his colleagues climbing a mountain

For many mountaineers like him, climbing is not merely a physical challenge, but a journey toward self-awareness and understanding. “Through mountaineering, I’ve gained deeper insights into myself,” he concluded.

According to Gozen, the history of mountaineering dates to the 1800s. Initially a hobby mostly done by the wealthy, mountaineering has evolved over time into a professional sport. Gozen emphasizes that mountaineers must go through a long training and preparation phase, that fitness is important, and that climbs are made with special equipment that is resistant to the cold so that it does not freeze. He says that they carry a load of 10 to 20 kilograms on their backs during the climb and that they are accompanied by mountain people, or sherpas, who guide and carry loads during the climb.

Kurdish pride on an iconic peak

“I want to fly the Kurdistan flag on the summit of Everest,” declares Gozen. Having conquered K2 on July 2, 2024, he has already set his sights on the next prize. Known as the second-highest and most perilous mountain in the world, K2 is often referred to as the “cursed mountain” due to its high fatality rate; approximately 20% of climbers attempting this formidable peak do not survive. Despite these daunting statistics, some 300-350 climbers successfully reach its summit each year.

During his expedition, Gozen proudly hoisted the Kurdistan flag at Concordia Camp, situated at an elevation of 6,100 meters. However, his ultimate aspiration lies in scaling Mount Everest, the tallest peak on Earth. He plans to visit Everest’s base camp this year with hopes of witnessing its majestic summit next year. This journey is not only a matter of personal achievement, but also of representing Kurdish pride on one of the world’s most iconic mountains.

When asked about the significance of this act, the mountaineer passionately shares his thoughts: “The Kurds often find themselves abandoned and unprotected in a world that frequently overlooks their existence. Through these symbolic gestures, I aim to raise awareness about my people and our homeland. By standing at such heights, I want to assert that Kurdistan is real and that we, too, have a place in this world. While the narrative surrounding Kurds often revolves around conflict and valor – which is undeniably true – we also thrive through our achievements in art, literature, sports, and mountaineering.

“My mission is to highlight that our identity extends beyond warfare; we are a vibrant community with diverse contributions. I believe these efforts will significantly enhance the visibility and recognition of our culture,” Gozen said. ●

A Novel Inspired by the Yezidi Genocide

Kurdistan Chronicle

Author Suzan Khairi, a Yezidi from Sinjar, was deeply affected by the genocide against the Yezidis perpetrated by ISIS in August 2014, during which thousands of Yezidis were killed, kidnapped, and displaced.

This tragedy that befell her community inspired her to write her second novel, *Thirst: A Story of a German ISIS Member & Her Yazidi Victim*, which was published in March 2024.

“The genocidal attacks by ISIS profoundly affected me, as they did every Yezidi. The pain, loss, and trauma experienced by our community, including the stories of innocent children like the one in my book, motivated me to write

■ *Kurdish writer Suzan Khairi*

“

The story of this five-year-old Yezidi girl represents the horrific reality faced by many Yezidis during the genocide

”





■ Kurdish writer Suzan Khairi holding her latest novel titled *Thirst*

and advocate for justice. Even though I was not in Sinjar during the attacks, the suffering of my people has deeply influenced my life and work,” she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

German ISIS members, both men and women, have faced trial in Germany for abusing Yezidi women and committing genocidal crimes against Yezidis. Additionally, ISIS male fighters were involved in the sexual abuse of Yezidi women.

“This book is based on a true story, detailing the real-life experiences of a five-year-old Yezidi girl who

“
Despite the passage of
10 years, more than
2,000 Yezidi people
remain missing
”

was a victim of an Iraqi ISIS member and his German wife,” Khairi said. “Since the story is true, the choice of topic was driven by the need to document and share the harrowing experiences of this Yezidi girl, highlighting the atrocities committed by ISIS members from different backgrounds.”

Bearing witness

“Through its unflinching portrayal of the Yezidi genocide and the heinous acts perpetrated by ISIS, this novel serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and the resilience of those who refuse to be silenced in the face of evil,” the book description reads on Amazon.

“As readers bear witness to the girl’s plight, they are compelled to

confront the darkest depths of human depravity and to stand in solidarity with those who continue to suffer at the hands of tyranny and oppression.”

Khairi added that she decided to write the book “because the story of this five-year-old Yezidi girl represents the horrific reality faced by many Yezidis during the genocide.”

“It was important,” she noted, “to document this true story, not only to honor the victim but also to shed light on the atrocities committed by ISIS, so that the world may never forget.

“The process involved extensive research and a commitment to telling the truth about the experiences of Yezidi survivors,” she added.

The book was published by Westphalia Press in the United States. “Reaching a publisher in the United States was challenging due to the competitive nature of the publishing industry and the sensitive nature of the subject matter. However, I was determined to find a platform to share this important story, which eventually led to its publication,” she added.

Khairi previously published another book titled *The Gift of the Feast* in 2016, which is a story about a young Yezidi man who survived ISIS. “Both books focus on the resilience and suffering of the Yezidi people under ISIS,” she said.

More needs to be done

On August 3, 2024, the 10th anniversary of the Yezidi Genocide was commemorated during an event in Erbil and Sinjar. Despite the passage

of 10 years, more than 2,000 Yezidi people remain missing, and many are still displaced in camps or trying to flee to Europe.

During the event in Erbil, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan said that over 5,000 Yezidi individuals were brutally murdered and buried in 100 mass graves.

Additionally, more than 6,400 Yezidi females, minors,



committed to this cause, providing the necessary resources and support to ensure justice and healing for the Yezidi people.”

Moreover, she stated that the international community has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that foreign ISIS members are held accountable for their crimes, especially those involving the abuse and genocide of Yezidis.

“Countries like Germany have already made significant strides in prosecuting

ISIS members, but much more needs to be done on a global scale. These trials are essential for justice, not only for the victims, but also to send a clear message that such atrocities will not go unpunished. More countries should follow suit, and there should be coordinated international efforts to bring these perpetrators to justice.” ●

“Despite the efforts that have been made, much more needs to be done to find and rescue the missing Yezidi women and girls who were abducted by ISIS,” Khairi said. “It is crucial that the international community remains

Unleashing Anger Through Percussion



Mevlüt Oğuz

is a journalist, poet, and activist working in the fields of civil society, culture, and the arts. He is a member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Kurdish PEN affiliated to International PEN, and the Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association (İHD).

“Engaging with percussion is a bold expression of my emotions. Striking the instrument with intensity may seem unconventional for women, but that’s precisely why I am drawn to it. My anger fuels my creativity, and I constantly seek new avenues to channel these feelings. Music became a vital outlet for me, and using percussion instruments to articulate my anger feels incredibly liberating.” These powerful reflections come from Dilan Yesilyaprak, a talented percussionist and educator who embraces the rhythm of her emotions through her art.

Born in the vibrant city of Diyarbakir, Yesilyaprak has family roots from the picturesque village of Ewina (Surgucu) in Mardin. In 1997, she and her family relocated to Izmir, where she spent her formative years. Yesilyaprak pursued her academic interests in sociology before immersing herself in Turkish music studies at a conservatory in Istanbul from 2011 to 2019. During her time there, she honed her skills under the tutelage of renowned percussionist Misirli Ahmet, dedicating six years to mastering the darbuka.

Her passion for rhythm took her to Egypt in 2015, where she underwent three months of intensive training in various darbuka techniques. To further refine her artistry, Yesilyaprak sought guidance from numerous masters across different percussion disciplines. Today, she proudly represents Gawharet El Fan, one of the globe’s premier darbuka manufacturers, which has launched a special series featuring her signature.

The timeless echo of the darbuka in Middle Eastern music

Percussion encompasses a vast family of instruments, with countless variations found across the globe. Each culture boasts its own distinctive percussion instruments, reflecting its unique heritage and traditions.

Yesilyaprak specializes in Middle Eastern percussion, a rich field that includes an array of traditional instruments. In addition to her expertise in this area, she has also explored Western percussion and drums, as well as Latin and Indian rhythms. Among the diverse array of Middle Eastern and Mesopotamian percussion instruments, Yesilyaprak primarily focuses on the darbuka, bendir (frame drum), hang drum, tef (tambourine), and def (erbane). To enhance her skills further, she actively engages in training with instruments from various cultures, striving to become a more versatile and accomplished percussionist.

The darbuka, a traditional percussion instrument, resonates through the annals of history, with its earliest manifestations appearing in Egypt. However, its rich presence is equally noted in the ancient records of Mesopotamia, the broader Middle East, and particularly within Kurdish musical traditions. As highlighted by Yesilyaprak, the darbuka has become a vital part of cultural expression across these regions.

Despite its historical significance, the

“

As I engaged with my students, I discovered a profound joy in teaching that inspired me to create a dedicated music workshop

”

■ Dilan Yesilyaprak





■ Dilan Yesilyaprak playing drums during a concert

“

My ambition extends beyond local stages

”

realm of music has often seen a gender imbalance, with women frequently sidelined. Yesilyaprak recalls her own journey into percussion beginning in 2010, when there were only a handful of female percussionists in Türkiye – namely Selda Ozturk and Diler Ozer – who made their mark as members of the Kardes Turkuler group. Their contributions were pivotal in challenging the male-dominant-

the capability to express themselves through such forceful means. Engaging in percussion is often viewed as a bold choice, one that challenges traditional gender norms. The notion of hitting with vigor and adopting an assertive posture can feel incongruous for many women.

“However, this very challenge is what draws me to percussion. I am com-

percussion, I find comfort in channeling my feelings into rhythm and sound, making it a powerful medium for self-expression,” Yesilyaprak said.

A workshop born from solidarity

During the pandemic, Yesilyaprak established a vibrant workshop in the heart of Beyoglu, Istanbul, transforming it into a hub for artistic expression and women’s solidarity. This space not only offers training and performances, but also fosters a strong community among women. To date, Yesilyaprak has imparted her knowledge to thousands of aspiring artists. Remarkably, four or five of her initial students have blossomed into professional musicians and performance artists, now capable of captivating audiences of thousands of people. These talented individuals continue to collaborate with Yesilyaprak, enriching the workshop’s legacy by teaching alongside her and inspiring the next generation of performers.

“In the midst of the pandemic, I found myself teaching online lessons to women confined at home,” Yesilyaprak explained. “This was a particularly challenging time, as reports of domestic violence surged and many women felt trapped in an environment that stifled their spirit. Even the kitchen – once a rare sanctuary for many – became a space of confinement. My motivation for teaching stemmed not only from financial necessity, but also from a desire to provide these women with a breath of fresh air amid their struggles.

“As I engaged with my students, I discovered a profound joy in teaching that inspired me to create a dedicated music workshop. Prior attempts to find my place in other art workshops had been unsuccessful; I often felt sidelined because I didn’t have strong financial motivations. However, the vision of establishing a solidarity network among these women remained strong, even if it was initially met with resistance. The workshop soon be-



■ Dilan Yesilyaprak performing during a concert

ed landscape of music and inspiring future generations.

“The underrepresentation of women in percussion stems from societal perceptions linking the act of striking instruments with power, authority, and masculinity. This association fosters a belief that women may lack

pelled to embrace the act of striking, not just as a form of musical expression, but as a statement against societal expectations. My desire to defy conventions fuels my passion; I thrive on doing what others suggest I shouldn’t. My anger becomes a catalyst for creativity, and music serves as an outlet for that emotion. Through



■ Dilan Yesilyaprak in Kurdish clothing



■ Darbuka drums on display in a shop

came a beacon of support. For instance, when one participant confided about her impending divorce and the challenges of her marriage, a fellow member – a lawyer – stepped in to assist with her case. Similarly, another student, working as a real estate agent, helped find housing solutions for those in need. This collaborative spirit exemplifies the power of community and shared resources among women,” she said.

A vision for unity and expression

Yesilyaprak envisions the formation of a dynamic percussion performance group that will bring together Kurdish youth, fostering a vibrant community through music. She notes that her student demographic predominantly comprises women and white-collar professionals. “They are open to all colors and ideas, eager to collaborate and learn from one another. Most of them are Kurdish women.”

In her role as both an educator and performer, Yesilyaprak collaborates with notable Kurdish artists such as Mehmet Atli, Harun Elki, Gulbahar Kavcu, Berfin Aktay, and Kajin Dara. She passionately identifies as a performance artist who thrives in live settings, emphasizing the importance of direct engagement with audiences. Yesilyaprak dreams of launching a collaborative percussion project that not only showcases the talents of Kurdish youth, but also celebrates their cultural heritage through rhythmic expression.

“In a vibrant vision for the future, I aspire to create a dynamic percussion ensemble composed of Kurdish youth, featuring 30 to 50 talented individuals wielding an array of diverse rhythmic instruments. My ambition extends beyond local stages; I envision this group captivating audiences at international festivals, sharing our rich cultural narratives through the power of percussion. While major festivals are a key goal, I am particularly eager to showcase our artistry in the cities of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, where our performances can resonate deeply within our community,” Yesilyaprak shared. ●

Halabja Girls' Karate Club



Peshraw Mahdi

is a freelance journalist and photographer with substantial experience in the field, having worked for numerous media agencies over several years. He has won multiple awards in photojournalism.

Karate, a martial art that originated in Okinawa, Japan in the 17th century, emphasizes self-defense, discipline, and respect. It harnesses the body as a weapon, incorporating strikes, blocks, kicks, and punches. Over the centuries, karate has evolved into a global phenomenon, celebrated not only for its physical techniques, but also for its ability to cultivate mental strength and discipline. Its competitive aspect has further contributed to its widespread popularity.

“

These girls are now ready to compete not just in Asia, but on the world stage

”

In recent years, karate has gained significant traction in the Kurdistan Region, with many cities and towns embracing the sport. The region's efforts in promoting the martial art have also helped yield impressive results, with athletes excelling at both national and international competitions.

One remarkable example is the Halabja Girls' Karate Club, which has achieved exceptional success since its establishment. Founded in 2016 by head coach Ayub Kamal, the club began modestly with just a handful of girls. Now, eight years later, it has emerged as a powerhouse, producing top-tier athletes who have dominated competitions across Iraq and beyond.



Two young girls at the Halabja Girls' Karate Club

Photos: Peshraw Mahdi



Photos: Peshraw Mahadi

Iraq's finest

The Halabja Sports Club's girls' karate division is organized into four categories: children, youth, juniors, and the advanced under-21 division. This structure facilitates thorough training and development across different age groups, resulting in impressive achievements.

The club consistently ranks first in national competitions, with its teams clinching top honors in both kata (forms) and *kumite* (sparring). Most notably, at the latest national championship in Sulaymaniyah, the Halabja girls claimed first place in Iraq under-21 division.

Their success extends beyond Iraq. In the youth, junior, and under-21 divisions, the Halabja girls have proudly represented their country on the international stage, securing over 30 gold, silver, and bronze medals in prestigious tournaments, including those in Iran.

Coach Ayub Kamal is deeply proud of the club's accomplishments. "The goal of establishing the girls' karate department in Halabja was to prove that these girls are no less capable than those from other Iraqi provinces or neighboring countries," he said. "Today, our athletes stand as the top karate school in Iraq, with nine of our karateka representing the Iraqi na-

tional team. These girls are now ready to compete not just in Asia, but on the world stage."

Kamal also advocates for more girls in Kurdistan to take up karate, emphasizing its benefits for both mental tranquility and physical health. The club's training regimen is rigorous, with four intensive sessions per week, each lasting between two and two and a half hours. This disciplined approach has cultivated a robust roster of over 60 advanced karateka, many of whom hold international certifications and black belts.



Photos: Peshraw Mahadi



Photos: Peshraw Mahadi

The resilience of Halabja

Halabja, a city in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is tragically known for the chemical attack it endured in 1988 during the closing days of the Iran-Iraq War. In what became one of the most horrific acts of the conflict, the city was bombarded with chemical weapons, killing thousands of civilians and leaving deep psychological and physical scars on the survivors. This atrocity remains a painful chapter in Halabja's history, symbolizing the resilience of its people, who have since rebuilt their city and continue to strive for progress, as evidenced by the successes of initiatives like the Halabja Girls' Karate Club.

The Halabja Girls' Karate Club stands as a symbol of determination and success, inspiring young women in Kurdistan and Iraq to pursue excellence in martial arts while breaking barriers and making their mark on the global stage. ●

POETRY

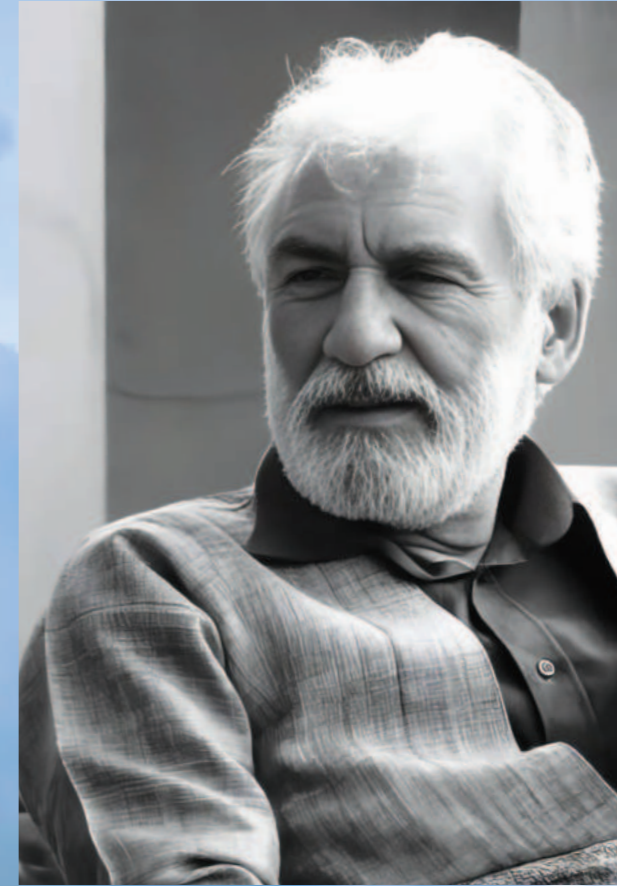
My Lady

Have you been told how far the sky reaches?
I love you as vast as the distance to the sky.
Have you been told how deep the sea is?
I love you as deep as all the oceans combined.
My soul, you are a written script,
Each stanza as delicate as the hair on your brow.
For four years, I have been reading you,
Yet I constantly lose myself in thought.
Neither do I ever get enough of you,
Nor do I ever fully understand you.

خاتونه که م

بیستووه ئاسمان چهند دووره؟
من بارتەقای دووری ئاسمان، خۆشم دهوئی
بیستووه ده‌ریا چهند قولە؟
به‌قه‌د قولی گشت ده‌ریا‌کان خۆشم دهوئی
گیانه‌که‌م تۆ نووسراویکی
دێرت به‌قه‌د تالی په‌رچهم
من چوار ساله‌ ده‌تخوینمه‌وه
چهند بالی بیرم لیک ده‌ده‌م
نه‌ تیر ده‌بم، نه‌ تیت ده‌گه‌م

Abdullah Pashew



Translated by Nahro Zagros



glossy ibis

Plegadis falcinellus

The hidden beauty of Kurdistan includes birds like the glossy ibis. This striking bird, known for its iridescent colors that change in sunlight, is a rare sight in Kurdistan, as it migrates widely after breeding.

Belonging to the family Threskiornithidae, which includes spoonbills, the glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) is named after its sickle-shaped bill. These birds build twig nests above water, laying about four eggs. Both parents incubate the eggs for 20-23 days, and the young fledge after roughly 28 days.

With a long, curved bill and dark, shimmering feathers, this social bird thrives in marshes and wetlands.

Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Threskiornithidae
Genus: Plegadis
Species: P. falcinellus



Mohammed Ghafoor Majeed

Mr. Mohammad Khoshnaw founded Das Food Industries in 2020. He is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Erbil-based manufacturing compound, which is the largest wheat-based food production factory in Iraq.

His leadership ensured Das Food Industries great success despite the company's young portfolio.

He has been essential to developing Iraq's wheat trade, quickly becoming a leading figure in the wheat trade both in Iraq and the region.

DAS is a subsidiary of Khoshnaw Company, which is well known for its successful businesses for more than four decades.



Das Food Industries

DAS Food Industries comprises of 2 flour millings with a capacity of 2000 tons per day, 2 bulgur mills with a capacity of 400 tons per day, a seed preparation factory with a capacity of 120 tons per day and a 400 tons per day feed mill, in addition to grain storage and handling facility with capacity of 100,000 tons.

In second phase, DAS will have more factories for pasta, biscuit, cakes, rice mill, maize mill, and more storage capacity.

This ambitious project is absolutely vital for the agri-industry's growth in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, and hence the farmers benefit immensely, it also provides employment for the younger generation. The company's main goal is to restore the most substantial local capital that was sent abroad up to now in an effort to revitalize the local economy through high-quality local products.





Success in Diversity



+964 771 448 7733
info@khoshnawcompany.com

