

# Kurdistan Chronicle

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May 2023 Volume 1 Issue 4

## BARZANI MEMORIAL A TALE OF KURDISH NATION





Photo: Muhamad Mrad Akoyi

## MAY EVENTS BEYOND BORDERS



Botan Tahseen

The May edition of Kurdistan Chronicle aligned with several significant political and cultural events. We began the month of May with a momentous international conference on the genocide of the Faily Kurds in Erbil, a Kurdish minority community known for their contributions as intellectual, political, and business leaders in the rich history of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Faily Kurds were subject to a wave of massacres 42 years ago at the hand of the former Iraqi regime merely for their ethnic and religious beliefs. Back then, anyone would have been awarded by the ruthless rulers of Iraq if they voluntarily divorced their Faily wife.

On May 11, many Kurdish, Iraqi, and international leaders convened for the grand opening of the Barzani National Memorial. The occasion not only witnessed words of support and solidarity, but also served as an opportunity to exchange political messages. President George W. Bush penned a letter that extolling the pivotal role of Kurdish legendary leader Mustafa Barzani in devoting his life to safeguard his people's rights. Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani echoed a sense of optimism in his remarks regarding the further consolidation of Kurdish rights within federal Iraq.

Also in May, a high-ranking delegation from the United States led by Mayor John Cooper of Nashville — known as Little Kurdistan — visited Erbil to initiate the sisterhood alliance between the two cities. This will not only foster cultural, academic, and economic relations between Erbil and Nashville but also bestows upon the capital of Kurdistan the distinction

of being the first Asian city to receive the title. On May 27-28, the Kurdish Diaspora Center in Switzerland, in cooperation with the Kurdistan Diaspora Confederation, organized a conference commemorating the century of the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 — an agreement that dealt a devastating blow to the aspirations of Kurdish statehood. While the Governor of Lausanne asserted in a speech that the primary objective of the treaty was to establish peace and stability, President Masoud Barzani emphasized in his statement delivered on his behalf that the agreement symbolized oppression and initiated a dark chapter in Kurdish history.

Another noteworthy occurrence in May was the distinguished arrival of the Duchess of Edinburgh on a royal visit. During the landmark visit and in her meeting with Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, Her Royal Highness Sophie commended the Kurdistan Region for its remarkable progress, stability, religious freedom, and generosity towards the large number of IDPs and refugees.

This month's meaningful events carry significance and meaning both within the borders of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and regionally and internationally. They serve as a timely reminder to the international community that the legitimate rights of the Kurds need to materialize and that the world has to reward the Kurds for their centuries-old culture of peaceful coexistence. It reminds the world that overlooking the rightful plight of the Kurds, especially in the turbulent neighborhood of the Middle East, could exacerbate conflicts of interest and pose a threat to international security.

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# KURDS GATHER IN LAUSANNE

## Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne



Mewan Dolamari

Mewan Dolamari - Journalist, MA in International Studies at the University of Kurdistan - Hewler (UKH).

On May 27, the Kurdistan Confederation (KDC) organized a significant two-day conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne. The event brought together Kurdish organizations and representatives from various parts of Kurdistan, with a powerful speech delivered on behalf of President Masoud Barzani.

Barzani's speech highlighted the struggles and aspirations of the Kurdish people over the past century and eloquently underscored the enduring impact of the Treaty of Lausanne on the Kurdish people in the Middle East. He emphasized the tragic consequences of the treaty, which resulted in the denial of Kurdish self-determination and the division of Kurdish territory among Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. This division subjected the Kurdish people to oppression, marginalization, and displacement.

The presence of the mayor of Lausanne added significance to the conference as Barzani warmly welcomed the guests. During his address, he underscored the original intent of the Treaty of Lausanne, which was to "foster peace" a century ago. Regrettably, the reality unfolded quite differently, as the aftermath of the treaty brought devastating consequences for the Kurds, the Armenians, and the overall peace efforts in the Middle East

The conference also addressed the cultural repercussions of the treaty, as the fragmentation of Kurdish territory led to the separation of Kurdish communities and the assimilation of their culture into different

countries. Despite these challenges, Barzani highlighted the indomitable spirit of the Kurdish people and their ongoing struggle for recognition.

Barzani concluded by calling for a re-evaluation of the strategies and programs of the four regional states in which the Kurds reside and of Kurdish political parties, emphasizing the need for democratic and peaceful solutions. He advocated for collaboration between regional states, influential powers, and international actors and for the reliance on institutions to establish a framework that recognizes Kurdish rights and fosters support. Barzani also acknowledged the vital role of the Kurdish diaspora in advocating for the Kurdish cause and alleviating historical oppression.

The conference concluded with a set of recommendations, reflecting the aspirations and objectives of the Kurdish diaspora and the broader Kurdish community. These recommendations include recognizing the unique issues faced by each part of Kurdistan, preserving the legal and constitutional status of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as an example of stability, and prioritizing Kurdish unity and solidarity to counter historical oppression and achieve progress.

Overall, the conference served as a platform for reflection and analysis, and for formulating recommendations to address the ongoing challenges faced by the Kurdish people. It emphasized the resilience and determination of the Kurdish people and called for unity, international support, and peaceful dialogue to create a brighter future for the Kurdish people and the region.

Panelists commemorating the centenary of the Treaty of Lausanne.



Photo: Azad Guli



The 1923 delegation of the Treaty of Lausanne.

# 100th Anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne

“  
*Lausanne Treaty  
symbolized  
oppression and  
initiated a  
dark chapter in  
Kurdish history.*  
”

PRESIDENT  
MASOUD BARZANI



Photo: Sabr Dri

Lausanne

# The transcript of President Masoud Barzani's speech



Photo: Azad Guli

Shifa Barzani eloquently delivering President Masoud Barzani's speech.

The primary victims of this agreement were the people of Kurdistan, whose fundamental rights and aspirations were disregarded, despite their long history of inhabiting their own land and territories. While the Treaty of Sevres, signed three years earlier in August 1920, initially granted the Kurds the right to independence, the Treaty of Lausanne dashed those hopes and imposed severe limitations.

Consequently, the destiny of the Kurdish people became intertwined with the laws, stereotypes, and fate imposed by the ruling states. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the Treaty of Lausanne did not bring progress, coexistence, or unity to the region's peoples, particularly the Kurds. Instead, it created an unhealthy and unnatural reality, resulting in a complex geopolitical situation and prolonged instability. Regrettably, the countries where Kurds reside failed to recognize their rights and denied their very existence.

Welcome to this gathering of the Kurdish elite, where we discuss a historic event on a significant location. Today, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, a momentous treaty that greatly influenced the fate of the Kurdistan people in the Middle East. It is essential for us to come together and reflect on the far-reaching effects of this treaty, which brought tragedy, deprivation, marginalization, and denial.

Panelists commemorating the centenary of the Treaty of Lausanne.



Photo: Azad Guli



Photo: Azad Guli

Speakers participating in the commemoration of the Treaty of Lausanne's centenary.

In response to this misguided policy by regional states, the Kurds began to defend themselves and their identity, initiating a struggle that continues to this day. The states were unable to destroy the Kurdish people, yet the Kurds could not overthrow the states that divided them. The ultimate losers were the peoples of the region and the prospects for peace and stability. Countless lives have been lost, and much time and energy have been wasted.

Tragically, the states that divided Kurdistan deployed various methods to alter the demographics of the Kurdish people and pursue a policy of denial, repression, and dissolution towards them. The portion of Kurdistan attached to the Iraqi state has been particularly plagued by disasters and tragedies throughout the 20th century.

The Kurdish people have endured degradation, deportation, Anfal campaigns, chemical attacks, and even genocide. However, there have also been more opportunities for agreement and efforts to resolve the

Kurdish issue in Iraq compared to other countries.

The century-long reality of damage and instability highlights the need for both regional states and Kurdish parties to reevaluate their programs and strategies. Instead of war and tension, they should seek democratic and peaceful solutions, addressing each region's problems through dialogue and peaceful means based on their unique characteristics and circumstances.

I am pleased to note that despite the ongoing conflict between the governments of the region and the Kurdish people, the issues at hand have not escalated into a national conflict. The Kurds have always had numerous friends and sympathizers among the nations in the region.

The primary problem faced by the Kurdish people lies with the regimes, their flawed policies, their repression, and their dictatorships—not with the nations and peoples of the region. Regional states, influential powers, international actors,

non-governmental organizations, academic and social institutions, activists, and individuals must collaborate to establish a framework.

The Kurdish diaspora can play a significant role by utilizing their positions in political, social, and academic spheres to highlight the Kurdish cause, convey the truth, defend the rights of the Kurdistan people, forge new friendships and cultivate support among people from different countries, and mitigate the consequences of the historical oppression endured by Kurdistan.

This endeavor requires unity, partnership, and a sense of brotherhood among all of you. In this mission, it is crucial to prioritize Kurdistan above all other interests.

I wish you all the best in addressing the impact and consequences of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Thank you, and may goodwill and happiness be with you all. ■

# THE LAUSANNE TREATY AND THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ'S AUTONOMY



Liam Anderson

Liam Anderson is a Professor of Political Science at Wright State University in Ohio, USA. He teaches classes on International and Comparative Politics and publishes on issues relating to federalism, ethnic conflict, and Iraq.

It has now been 100 years since the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, and by any objective assessment, the treaty created more problems than it solved. While it was only one of many postwar agreements that delineated the national borders in the Middle East, it condemned the Kurds to exist as minorities in states rigidly defined by the identity of an ethnic majority.

In all four of the states in which Kurds constitute a significant minority population, governments adopted a policy of coercive assimilation to “manage” its Kurdish problem. This took various forms from simply denying the existence of “Kurdishness,” nationality correction, ethnic cleansing, and others, until finally, with the Anfal campaigns of the late 1980s, assimilation became extermination.

Some Kurds proved willing to discard their Kurdish identity and Turkify or Arabize themselves, but the vast majority have refused to be coercively assimilated. A century on from Lausanne, assimilation has clearly failed in all four countries, and a shared sense of Kurdish identity remains stronger than ever.

## Division and self-sabotage

The second damaging legacy of Lausanne was to create, and then reinforce internal divisions among Kurds. In different parts of Kurdistan, different groups of Kurds have experienced different shared histories and political experiences and have adopted different modes of resistance to the treatment meted out by their respective governments. These are divisions than can be, and have been, ruthlessly exploited by the region’s major powers including the United States to turn Kurd against Kurd, further reinforcing internal divisions.

At the same time, to blame Lausanne, Turkey, Saddam Hussein, or the United States entirely for the Kurds’ traumatic twentieth century is to ignore that Kurds are often their own worst enemies. For Western scholars and policy-makers who admire and respect the Kurds and fully support their quest for self-determination, the KDP-PUK civil war during the 1990s is difficult to understand, and even more difficult to justify.

A similar pattern of self-sabotage was evident in 2017 when the advisory referendum on independence was clearly not universally supported in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). It is all too easy to characterize the subsequent loss of Kirkuk and the disputed territories to Iraqi government forces as yet another betrayal by the United States, but the Kurds mostly betrayed themselves, and the relevant question to ask is: why would, or should, the United States intervene to defend the Kurds, when the Kurdish parties themselves are unwilling to join forces in defense of the Kurds’ Jerusalem?

## Preserving autonomy

On a more positive note, the achievements of the KRI fully deserve to be acknowledged and respected. There is now an officially recognized political entity that bears the name “Kurdistan” for the first time since Lausanne. While the KRI is obviously not without its share of problems, it is by far the most effectively governed and tolerant region of Iraq. The generosity of the Iraqi Kurds in welcoming and protecting refugees and internally displaced peoples of all religions, sects, and ethnicities from all parts of Iraq and the Middle East is an inspiring story that badly needs to reach a wider audience.



Panelists partaking in the 100th anniversary of the Lausanne Treaty.

Photo: Azad Guli

Fundamentally, the KRI is a beacon of light and hope for all Kurds in the region and beyond, as well as for its many friends in the West. But with this comes grave responsibility. A KRI that self-destructs due to internal rivalries and political power struggles risks losing all that has been gained, and would set the Kurdish cause back another century.

Moving forward, the international response to the events of 2017 made all too clear that the creation of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, let alone a single Kurdish state that transcends existing state borders is a distant dream. There is a compelling moral case for a Kurdish state, but the basic currencies of international politics are power and interest, not morality, and this is the reality within which Kurdish leaders must operate.

A series of speeches by President Barzani, referred to collectively as the “Roadmap to Peace,” are a valuable first step in this direction. With independence off the table, Kurdish autonomy within existing state borders is the next best option. Critically, it is an option that enjoys support in Western capitals including Washington D.C. For Kurds to achieve autonomy in Turkey, Iran and Syria will be a challenge; for Iraqi Kurds, the challenge is to preserve what they have.

## Two constructive suggestions

After working on these issues for more than twenty years, I would tentatively offer two constructive suggestions.

Firstly, avoid use of the term “federalism.” In the minds of many Arabs, the word federalism is synonymous with “partition,” and is viewed as a Western device for dividing and weakening the Arab world. Opinion poll data from Iraq and Syria consistently indicate that “federalism” is opposed by large majorities outside the Kurdish-inhabited areas.

Conversely, these same polls show that “decentralization” enjoys broad popular support among Arabs in both countries. This may seem like a trivial point, but it is not. Both Spain and South Africa function as federations, but intentionally chose not to use the word “federation” in their respective constitutions precisely because of internal opposition to the concept.

Secondly, Iraq’s federal system currently consists of an autonomous KRI, and fifteen completely powerless governorates. It is, in fact, not a “system” at all, which means that on all disputes between Baghdad and Erbil over the issues of most concern to the Kurds – annual budgetary allocations, funding for the peshmerga, oil

and gas resource management, and so on, the KRI stands alone without allies because it is the only autonomous entity in Iraq.

For the Kurds to acquire allies in these fights requires that other regions emerge – via the Article 121 process – to fill out the system, and the Kurds are ideally placed to provide leadership in this regard. A good place to start is Basra, where a sizeable portion of the population supports transitioning from being a governorate to a region. The campaign for this in Basra is well-organized, popular, entirely peaceful, and non-sectarian. Its success will encourage others – Anbar, for example – to follow the same path. It is in the KRI’s interests to do whatever it can to promote this process, because each new region is a new ally for the KRI in its disputes with Baghdad. To reenergize interest in Article 121, the KRI should host a conference and invite not just Western officials and scholars, but also individuals and groups from across Iraq who have demonstrated an interest in regionalization. These people need support and guidance, and Kurdish leaders are ideally positioned to provide this.

The end result will not be the independent Kurdish state that the Kurds both desire and deserve, but it can be a functioning federal system within which the KRI’s considerable achievements can be protected. ■

## THE BARZANI NATIONAL MEMORIAL A SYMBOL OF RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE AND THE KURDISH STRUGGLE



Wladimir van  
Wilgenburg

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.

On May 11, the Barzani National Memorial (BNM), which includes a library and a museum, was officially opened in the presence of foreign dignitaries, Iraqi leaders, religious clergy, and journalists. The design of the museum mirrors the rugged landscape of the mountains that have provided shelter and safeguarded the Kurdish people for decades.

The Barzani National Memorial project was envisioned and led by President Masoud Barzani with construction beginning in 2007 under the supervision of Sirwan Barzani.

The memorial is a tribute to the historical Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979), also known as the "Father of Kurds," and includes historical information about his predecessors Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani (1874-1914) and Sheikh Ahmed Khudan (1896-1969) as well as about the Barzan region.

The museum displays clothes, personal items, and historical documents from these Kurdish leaders. The official website of the memorial also includes a 3D, 360-degree view of the museum.

**"A very unique history"**

Barzan is a small village in size but

became a major target for all the empires and governments that came to the region. From 1892 to 1987, this small village was occupied several times and burned sixteen times.

During the inauguration, President Masoud Barzani fought back tears in expressing how the memorial serves as a poignant testament to the profound historical significance of Barzan.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, Deputy Iraqi Prime Minister Qubad Talabani, Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, and UNAMI head Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert were also present during the event.

"We have the right, just as other nations do, to be proud of our leaders, who have dedicated their lives to their nations in times of national struggle," Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid said in his speech.

President Barzani also underlined in his opening address that the ancestors of the Kurds have "left us a very, very unique history. My request to all these friends is not to equate this great history with the present generation."

"The history and legacy of Barzan should only be measured on the basis of the struggles of Sheikh Abdulsalam, Sheikh Ahmed, and Mustafa

“  
The memorial is a tribute to the historical Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979), also known as the “Father of Kurds”  
”



Photo: Hemin Ranyayi

Personal belongings of Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani exhibited at the Barzani National Memorial



Photo: Hevidar Barzani

An aerial view of the Barzani National Memorial.

Barzani,” he added.

### Sheikh Abdulsalam Barzani and Sheikh Ahmed Khudan

The museum offers comprehensive information about Sheikh Abdulsalam, who took on the position of the spiritual center's new religious leader in Barzan in 1903.

He is renowned for his pioneering efforts in leading the Kurdish nationalist movement, promoting the principles of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and environmental preservation. As a result, hunting and deforestation are currently prohibited in Barzan.

President Masoud Barzani also mentioned that Sheikh Abdulsalam was a pioneer in women's rights in prohibiting the forced marriage of girls in Barzan. He continued his quest until his execution by hanging in 1914 by the Ottoman Empire.

The BNM website mentions that a British diplomat noted in 1914 that Abdulsalam Barzani was sometimes called the “Christian Sheik” as a term of disparagement by other Kurdish tribal chiefs, as he had the reputation

of treating the Christians fairly.

“Sheikh Abdulsalam, although short-lived, was indeed productive; he began a great revolution that was perhaps a hundred years ahead of his time,” President Masoud Barzani underlined.

“He began a fundamental reform to define that the Barzan path does not mean that everyone in the Barzan region was on that path; the path was much broader, bigger, and more inclusive than that.”

He led a Kurdish national movement amidst challenging global circumstances, including the tumultuous periods of both World Wars, which divided the Kurdish people across four different countries.

### Mustafa Barzani

Subsequently, Mustafa Barzani assumed leadership of the Kurdish struggle. In the 1950s, facing persecution and arrest warrants from Iran and Iraq, he embarked on an incredible 700-km journey to seek refuge in the Soviet Union. This perilous escape followed the collapse of the brief Republic of Kurdistan (or the Republic

of Mahabad) in Iran from 1945 to 1946, during which he served as the defense minister.

President Masoud Barzani described this extraordinary feat as nothing short of a miracle. The museum features a map illustrating the remarkable route taken by Mustafa Barzani that eventually led him to the Soviet Union.

Mustafa returned to Iraq in 1958 after a military coup by Abdul Karim Qasim. However, after Qasim reneged on his promises for Kurdish autonomy, he led the 1960 September revolution to push for Kurdish rights.

The revolution carried with it many of the tenets of the reforms of Sheikh Abdulsalam and Sheikh Ahmed, President Masoud Barzani said, “He [Mustafa Barzani] constantly emphasized that our war against the regime is not between two nations (Arabs and Kurds)...our ultimate mission is self-defense.”

During the September Revolution, “many Arab brothers including Turkmen and Christian participated not only as peshmerga, but also as leaders of the revolution,” he added.



The Barzani National Memorial.

### A memorial to coexistence

The memorial thus also represents religious coexistence of the Kurdistan Region. For instance, the museum building includes three domes that symbolize the brotherly coexistence of the three religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Barzan area.

Moreover, when one enters the museum, they are greeted by a mosaic created from different marbles that

showcase various religious symbols, such as churches and Yezidi temples and feature a depiction of Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader.

Synagogues, churches and mosques were built alongside each other, and Muslims, Jews, and Christians were living together. “Regardless of their faith and social culture, the people regarded the Barzani Sheikhs as their guiding source,” the caption said.

To symbolize this reality, the three domes of the museum are directed

toward the Barzani's grave. Visible from an elevated vantage point is the appearance of the wings of a hawk embracing a pearl on the crown of each dome.

“Barzani's resistance against oppression is in itself an indication that their success has historically derived not from their size in numbers or arms but rather their belief in righteousness. It was indeed that same belief that made them live with the thought that dying for this cause is a very normal thing,” President Masoud Barzani concluded. ■

## BARZANI NATIONAL MEMORIAL PRESERVING COLLECTIVE LEGACY



İsmail Beşikci

*İsmail Beşikci* After attending the inauguration of Mustafa Barzani's memorial in the Kurdistan Region last month, I felt compelled to express my thoughts on the matter. It was truly a remarkable experience to witness the unveiling of a memorial honoring a visionary Kurdish leader who devoted his life to the service of his people and nation.



“  
**In 1983, eight thousand Barzani men were rounded up and taken to the deserts of Basra in southern Iraq, where they were thrown into mass graves.**  
”



Guests paying tribute and writing messages to the victims of the Barzani Anfal on the inauguration of the Barzani National Memorial.

The region of Barzan is deeply significant in the history of the Kurds and Kurdistan, not only in Southern Kurdistan, or Bashur, but also in Bakur, Rojhilat and Rojava.

Barzan was destroyed several times in the 21st century, with structures bombed out and leveled to the ground. In his speech at the opening of the Barzani National Memorial, President Masoud Barzani relayed how Barzan had been destroyed sixteen times in a single century. Homes were rebuilt each time only to be destroyed again by the next series of bombings.

In 1983, eight thousand Barzan men were rounded up and taken to the deserts of Basra in southern Iraq, where they were thrown into mass graves. No one ever heard from them again. Looking at the shoes of those

who were buried alive in the deserts, it is understood that there were even children among them.

Mustafa Barzani and his friends returned to Iraqi Kurdistan from the Soviet Union in October 1958. On 19 September 1961, he launched the beginning of the Kurdish national liberation struggle, which since made Barzan a very important center. Undoubtedly, Barzan was already important before this period, most notably during the reigns of Abdüselam Barzani (1868-1914) and even Muhammed Barzani (d. 1903). The opening of a national museum, the Kurdish national museum, in Barzan thus carries great significance.

### Opening ceremony on May 11, 2023

Hundreds of guests from Bashur

(Kurdistan in Iraq), Bakur (Kurdistan in Turkey), Rojhilat (Kurdistan in Iran), Rojava (Kurdistan in Syria), Europe, the United States, Russia, and Africa were invited and lodged by the Prime Ministry for the opening of the Barzani National Memorial. On the morning of May 11, 2023, these esteemed guests were taken to Barzan by a convoy of hundreds of cars. Along the way, the public greeted the convoy from their balconies. As children watched it pass, they waved Kurdish flags and greeted the guests, who responded to the children with love and attention.

The Barzani National Memorial opened in Barzan that day. Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani, and Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed Al-Halbousi attended the opening, with President Barzani welcoming the guests. KRG Prime

the Kurds and Kurdistan.

Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani also gave speeches, after whom President Massoud Barzani took the floor. The host of the ceremony was Muhammed Ihsan.

### Memories and tributes

After the opening speeches, there was a video screening of the life stories of Mustafa Barzani and his friends, after which the guests toured the memorial. The guests carefully observed the objects exhibited in the memorial.

Later, the guests visited Mustafa Barzani's grave. We visited the grave together with Ibrahim Gürbüz. Standing by the grave, I made the following short speech:

“Dear Mustafa Barzani, today, May 11, 2023, the Barzani National Memorial was opened. As I listened to the speeches of the Iraqi and Kurdistan government officials, the events that have happened since 1961 flashed before my eyes, one by one. The national liberation struggle of the Kurds was carried out in an area surrounded by hostile forces and in great poverty. It was an authentic and devoted struggle.

We, too, as İsmail Beşikçi Foundation (İBV), together with İBV President İbrahim Gürbüz participated. There were also friends from Turkey and Bakur.

At the ambassadorial and consular levels, many states from the Middle East, Europe and the world also joined in the memorial's opening, including the consul generals of Iran and Turkey in Hewler.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and U.S. Consulate General in Hewler Irvin Hicks were among the attendees. Meanwhile, the 43rd President of the United States George W. Bush (2001-2009) sent a message for the occasion, in which he congratulated President Massoud Barzani for his efforts for

the world. The Kurds also understand better every day that Mustafa is one of the main symbols of the Kurdish national spirit.

Today is a happy day. It is also the opening day of the memorial of the immortal national leader Mustafa Barzani. The memorial will contribute to some extent to solidifying the national and historical consciousness. The number of such similar institutions should grow in the future. The immortal leader Mustafa will always live in our hearts. I bow before his memory with respect and love.”

### Oak trees as symbols of Kurdistan

May 11, 2023... Barzan was once again lush and adorned with wildflowers, poppies, daffodils, and pheasant's eyes, with hyacinths and lilacs swaying in the gentle wind. Water flowed from its rivers, while different colors

“

**The Mustafa Barzani National Memorial is a magnificent building, a national monument set in a large garden. It exhibits the clothing, weapons, tools, and daily equipment of Mustafa Barzani and his close friends.**

”

Mustafa Barzani, in my opinion, is the embodiment of the Kurdish spirit. Today, the Kurds who came to Barzan in groups and visited Mustafa Barzani, became one with this spirit. Great successes and gains have been achieved since 1961. Of course, there are and will be other important milestones to reach. I greet Mustafa Barzani with love.”

İbrahim Gürbüz added: “This is the sixth time that I am visiting the cemetery of Mustafa, the immortal leader of the Kurdistan national liberation struggle. İsmail Beşikçi accompanied me on four of these visits. With each visit, I better understood Mustafa Barzani's role in the national liberation struggle of both Kurdistan and

of roses and all other sorts of flowers bloomed. Oaks, pines, and the other trees also grew bigger and multiplied, spreading throughout the land. The houses looked like they were hiding among the trees.

When I saw how big the oak trees were, I remembered a quote by Mus-



tafa Barzani that identified the trees with the Kurds. “The oak is an important symbol for Kurdistan and the Kurds. As long as the oaks live, Kurds and Kurdistan will live too.” He emphasized that the Kurds should protect oak trees and care for them with the utmost attention.

The Mustafa Barzani National Memorial is a magnificent building, a national monument set in a large garden. It exhibits the clothing, weapons, tools, and daily equipment of Mustafa Barzani and his close friends. The exhibition halls are well arranged and brightly lit. Barzani National Memorial meets every need of its visitors with its library, meeting and seminar halls, congress halls, guesthouse and restaurant.

Museums are the memories of a nation. At the end of this article, I mentioned the house where Muhammad Barzani’s (d. 1903) children were born and raised. I also mentioned that the Barzan region, especially this house, was burned to the ground by bombings many times. This house, destroyed by the final bombing, was left as it is, together with the piles of iron, stone, earth and concrete. There is a benefit in leaving the house like this. This will ensure that this memory is passed onto future generations.

### The Anfal Monument

On the way back to Hewler following the opening, we also visited the Anfal Monument, a national monument built in a large area with sections arranged in the form of an amphitheater.

A notebook was placed on the table at the monument so that visitors could write their impressions. I wrote: “Anfal is not a disaster that happened over one or two days. It was a genocide that started in 1983 and spread over time and places. The date of March 16, 1988, was the culmination of the Anfal genocide; it is a date that should never be forgotten. It would be an appropriate time to organize conferences, panels, and seminars on this subject from time to time.”

İbrahim Gürbüz also shared his thoughts: “Mustafa started the Kurdish national struggle 104 years ago and fought until the end of his life. Today, hundreds of intellectuals, politicians, and writers from all four parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora came together to fulfill the epitome of the Kurdish national spirit. The Barzani National Memorial, opened in the name of Mustafa Barzani, will raise the

Kurdish national and historical consciousness. Kurds need science and national consciousness more than anything.

The museum is the most important place of Kurdish memory. Kurdish intellectuals, writers, politicians, diplomats, and the foreign diplomats who converged on Anfal from all over the world symbolizes that the Anfal genocide that is a bleeding wound in our hearts. These historical places are very important in terms of society, history, national consciousness and national memory. Nations without a memory are doomed to extinction.

The Barzani National Memorial, the Barzani Cultural Complex, and the Anfal Monument will leave deep marks in the hearts of all Kurds. These places are also the building blocks of becoming a state and will

make a significant contribution to the development of the Kurdish national consciousness. On this occasion, I condemn the Anfal genocide, the Kurdish genocide that has been going on for a century.”

### A Suggestion

*Here, I would like to suggest the construction of the following elements in Barzan. In an area as close as possible to the original house, another structure representing the house where Muhammad Barzani’s (d. 1903) children Abdüsselam Barzani (1868-1914), Sheikh Ahmed Barzani (1896-1969) and Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979) were born and raised, should be built in the same architectural style with the same materials, tools and equipment.*

*Personally, I have never seen a photograph of this house, but there are un-*

*doubtedly people who have been there, so it can be redesigned with the help of their recollections. Of course, the house should not be filled with modern furniture. Items such as mats, rugs, cushions and pillows used at that time should be selected. Modern furniture can be used in residences, but in a structure that serves as a museum, contemporaneous materials and tools should be used.*

*A few years ago, we were shown a house that was said to be Masoud Barzani’s Headquarters in Çoman. This house, for example, was filled with modern furniture, which makes it lose its meaning. Mustafa Barzani had a house on a mountain in Çoman that he used as his headquarters, a house with a shelter that opens onto a great abyss. There was such a structure in Glala, but we could not enter these spaces. ■*

## PM BARZANI INAUGURATES KURDISTAN'S FIRST SOLAR POWER PLANT



Marewan Hawramy

Marewan Hawramy is a writer and has master degree in diplomacy and international relations.

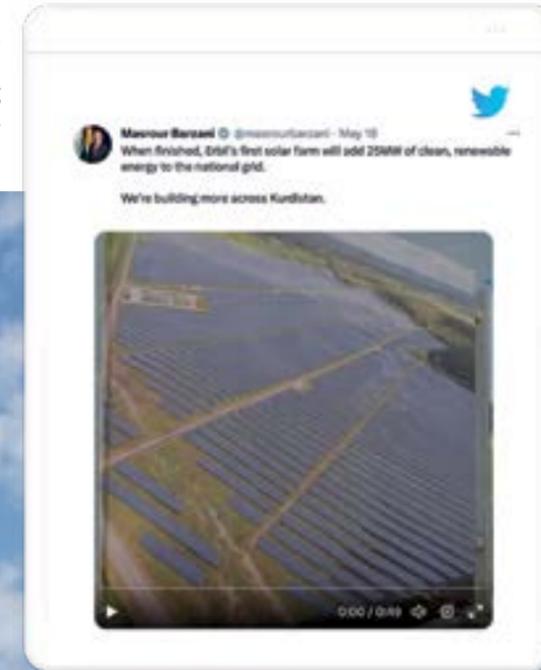


On May 18, the Kurdistan Regional Government's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani marked a significant milestone in the region's energy sector by laying the foundation stone for the first solar power plant in Erbil province. With an impressive capacity of generating 25 MW of electricity per hour, the project represents a crucial step towards developing eco-friendly energy sources

in the Kurdistan Region. During his speech, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the importance of sustainable energy and the Kurdistan Region's responsibilities in managing their energy payments and reducing overconsumption.

### The land of sunny days

The Kurdistan Region is widely recognized for its abundant sunshine, making it ideal for investment in solar energy. With a consistently sunny climate, the region can harnessing solar power as a clean and sustainable energy source throughout most of the year and provide a reliable and renewable source of energy for the region's growing needs.





PM Barzani laying the foundation stone of Erbil's first solar power project.

### A step towards clean and renewable energy

The groundbreaking ceremony for the power plant signifies the KRG's commitment to transitioning towards clean and renewable energy sources. Prime Minister Barzani expressed his gratitude to the Ministry of Electricity and the companies involved (Getting International Energy, Pluto Otto Cycle and Shengland Electric) in this pioneering project, envisioning it as the first of many similar ventures throughout Kurdistan to harness the power of the sun, reduce the region's reliance on fossil fuels, and decrease its carbon footprint.

#### Promoting energy sector reforms

Prime Minister Barzani also acknowledged the Ministry of Electricity's efforts in improving the region's electricity infrastructure and addressing energy violations. To further secure access to reliable, affordable power for the people in Kurdistan, the government has collaborated with the ministry in implementing smart meters, which help reduce electricity waste, improve energy efficiency, and ensure steady supply from the national grid. However, the Prime Minister emphasized that continuous development

and improvement in this domain are essential to ensure around-the-clock power supplies.

### Partnerships for sustainable development

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the importance of partnerships between the Ministry of Electricity and the private sector. These collaborations will facilitate long-term planning and build more sustainable security of supply by integrating solar and other renewable energy sources. By seizing opportunities in the electricity sector and working together, the government and private entities can better serve the citizens and meet the region's growing energy demand.

### Creating an environment for solar energy

The KRG aims to seize the full potential of solar by introducing favorable policies and regulations and is incentivizing investments through tax incentives, advantageous tariffs, and simplified administrative processes. By fostering

an environment conducive to solar energy development, the region can attract a wide range of domestic and international investors and unlock the maximum benefits of this clean energy source.

### Public cooperation for energy conservation

In his speech, Prime Minister Barzani underscored the public's role in managing energy payments and reducing overconsumption, stressing that citizens' cooperation is vital to reducing the government's annual expenditure in the sector. By promptly paying their electricity bills and avoiding wastage, citizens contribute to the government's ability to cover a portion of electricity-production costs. Moreover, the Prime Minister highlighted that the subsidized electricity rates provided by the government are significantly lower than the actual production, transmission, and distribution costs. By cooperating, citizens can help ensure uninterrupted power supplies and reduce reliance on private generators.

### Dual responsibilities

The Prime Minister acknowledged that although the government has made efforts to increase electricity produc-

tion, the region has yet to achieve the goal of providing uninterrupted power supplies. The increase in population, establishment of new factories, and elevated use of electrical appliances have all contributed to the existing supply challenge. He emphasized that both the government and citizens share a dual responsibility in addressing this issue. While the government must provide improved services and bolster the electricity sector, citizens must fulfill their responsibilities by paying their bills promptly, which will enable the provision of constant access to electricity at a cost comparable to private generators.

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**With an impressive capacity of generating 25 MW of electricity per hour, the project represents a crucial step towards developing eco-friendly energy sources in the Kurdistan Region**

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### Investing in solar energy

Investing in solar energy in the Kurdistan Region presents numerous benefits. Firstly, it promotes energy independence by reducing reliance on fossil fuels and external energy sources. By tapping into the region's solar potential, Kurdistan can generate its own electricity and reduce the need for costly energy imports.

By shifting towards solar energy, the region can also mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and improve air quality, leading to a healthier and more sustainable environment.

Furthermore, solar energy can drive sustainable economic growth and create jobs. The establishment of solar power plants requires skilled labor for installation, operation, and maintenance and can lead to the creation of a local workforce specialized in solar energy, providing employment opportunities and driving economic development in the region.

Finally, investments in solar energy infrastructure can attract foreign investors, stimulating economic growth and diversification. The Kurdistan Region can thus position itself as a hub for renewable energy projects, attracting international companies and expertise and fostering technological advancements in the field. ■

## A ROYAL CONNECTION DUCHESS VISIT FORTIFIES KURDISTAN-UK TIES

Kurdistan Chronicle - Erbil

In a warm and cordial reception, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government Masrour Barzani had the pleasure of welcoming HRH the Duchess of Edinburgh, Princess Sophie, to the region. Duchess Sophie, the esteemed wife of Prince Edward who is the brother of King Charles III, visited the region as part of her diplomatic tour.

The visit marked an important occasion to strengthen ties between the Kurdistan Region and the United Kingdom.

The meeting between Prime Minister Barzani and Duchess Sophie was filled with mutual respect and the exchange of cultural goodwill. The Kurdistan Region has a long history of embracing diversity and extending hospitality to guests, and this visit served as a testament to the region's commitment to fostering international relations.

During the meeting, Prime Minister Barzani and Duchess Sophie engaged in discussions covering a wide range of topics, including bilateral cooperation, cultural exchanges, and humanitarian efforts. The Kurdistan Region has been an important partner for the United Kingdom, particularly in the areas of security and humanitarian support. The visit provided an opportunity for both parties to further enhance these collaborative efforts.

As the meeting concluded, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani expressed his gratitude to Duchess Sophie for her visit and conveyed his hope for continued cooperation and friendship between the Kurdistan Region and the United Kingdom. The visit of Duchess Sophie will undoubtedly be remembered as a significant moment in the ongoing efforts to strengthen international relations and foster a spirit of collaboration between the two regions.

### Challenges facing women and girls

On April 21, HRH the Duchess of Edinburgh Sophie embarked on a significant four-day journey to Iraq and the Kurdistan Region with a noble purpose—to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women and girls in the region, particularly regarding gender-based violence. This visit demonstrated her commitment to promoting women's rights, advocating for equality, and supporting initiatives that empower marginalized communities.

As a prominent figure, the Duchess

of Edinburgh recognized the importance of using her platform to shed light on critical issues affecting women and girls around the world. By choosing to visit Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, she aimed to raise awareness about the unique struggles faced by women in conflict-affected areas and to engage in constructive dialogue with local communities, organizations, and leaders.

During the second day of her visit, the Duchess toured schools, hospitals, and refugee camps, engaging in conversations with different individuals. In the evening, the British Consulate in Erbil hosted a reception in her

honor, aiming to facilitate interactions between the Duchess and people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the Kurdistan region.

The presence of community members representing diverse backgrounds highlighted the region's dedication to inclusivity, showcasing its vibrant array of traditions. During the reception, the Duchess emphasized the importance of addressing gender and sexual violence while also witnessing the ceremony to promote two Kurdish female soldiers who recently graduated from Sandhurst military academy



Photo: British Consulate General



Photo: British Consulate General

The Duchess of Edinburgh visiting IDP and refugee camps in Duhok.



Photo: British Consulate General

The Duchess of Edinburgh touring IDP camps in Duhok.



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

The Duchess of Edinburgh alongside PM Masrour Barzani.



### **Cultural understanding and appreciation**

The gathering epitomized the essence of the Kurdistan region's hospitality and warmth, as people from different communities came together to extend their welcome to Duchess Sophie. It served as a powerful demonstration of unity, emphasizing the shared values of respect, understanding, and cooperation.

During the reception, guests were able to engage in meaningful conversations, fostering cultural understanding and appreciation. The exchange of ideas and experiences further deepened the bond between the Kurdistan Region

and the United Kingdom, laying the foundation for enhanced collaboration in various fields.

By engaging with the attendees at the reception, the Duchess acquired valuable knowledge about the distinctive customs and identity of the region. This direct involvement undoubtedly had a profound impact on her, cultivating a heightened admiration for the diverse cultural heritage within the Kurdistan region.

During her speech, she expressed that the region had made an indelible impression on her, affirming that it had left a lasting mark and would continue to hold a special place in her heart. ■

# DIPLOMACY

## THE KURDS HAVE NO BETTER FRIENDS THAN FRANCE



Benoit Drevet

Benoit Drevet is a French freelance journalist in Erbil and correspondent for Radio France, La Croix, and RTS.

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If there is one ally on which the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Kurds more broadly can depend, it is France.

Modern history is full of examples to prove it.

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There are details that do not deceive: in the wake of the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Chia Al Sudani to the Elysée Palace, Masrour Barzani was received on February 16 by French President Emmanuel Macron. If there is one ally on which the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Kurds more broadly can depend, it is France. Modern history is full of examples to prove it.

Few countries can boast of granting as much consideration to a stateless people as France has to the Kurds, of whom it will welcome at least 320,000 nationals on its soil in 2023 according to the Kurdish Institute of Paris. "France is happy with its friendship with Kurdistan and attaches great importance to it," declared Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010 at the occasion of the visit of KRG President Masoud Barzani.

Since then, the receptions of Kurdish officials have followed one another in Paris. Between 2014 and 2017, amid the war against ISIS, François Hollande amplified the movement by receiving Masoud Barzani three times, while the Kurds acted as the West's most reliable ally on the ground. His successor as president of the autonomous Kurdish region, Nechirvan Barzani, will also be invited to the Elysée Palace by the current French president Emmanuel Macron in March 2021.

"When things go very badly for the Kurds, we are there. We can be there militarily, as in the war against ISIS, and we can be there with diplomatic force. After the September 2017 referendum, what broke the diplomatic embargo faced by Iraqi Kurdistan was the invitation in December to the Élysée Palace of Nechirvan Barzani (KRG Prime Minister) and Qubad Talabani (Deputy Prime Minister) by Emmanuel Macron," noted the French consul in Erbil Olivier Decotignies.

Decotignies also recalled that (former French president) François Hollande (in September 2014 and January 2017) and Macron (in August 2021) were "among the only heads of



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

state to have visited Erbil."

**"One of the first countries to open a consulate in Erbil"**

This friendship between the French and Kurdish people does not date

from yesterday. "France is the only country in the world that has integrated the Kurdish question into college and high school and believes that the Middle East cannot be stabilized and developed without taking into account the 40 million Kurds. France opened its doors to the Kurds after the gassing of Halabja and was the first

country to offer mediation between the Talabani and the Barzani to get the Kurds out of the civil war in the 1990s," said Adel Bakawan, founder and director of the French Research Center on Iraq (CFRI) in Paris.

"In 2008, France was one of the first countries to open a consulate in Er-

bil," the Iraqi Kurdish-French political scientist also pointed out.

"You were illegal, you are the legality! You are the future! Be also the model of human rights and democracy," said Mr. Kouchner, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of Health, one of the most fervent sup-

porters of the Kurds since the mid-1970s, when the consulate opened. Moreover, the co-founder of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and Médecins du Monde was the one who signed, in June 2010, a declaration of intent with Masoud Barzani that paved the way to a strengthening of economic, cultural, and commercial relations between France and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Among the phrases that have remained in the pantheon of Franco-Kurdish memories is that of President François Mitterrand in the days following the end of the Gulf War: "If the UN does not intervene militarily in northern Iraq to protect Kurdish civilians exposed to Baghdad's reprisals, it loses its raison d'être."

Mitterrand's struggle led the United Nations Security Council to pass Resolution 688 on April 5, 1991, which led to a no-fly zone over Iraqi Kurdistan and to its de facto liberation from the clutches of Saddam Hussein and the Baathist central government.

**Danielle Mitterrand, "mother of the Kurds"**

François Mitterrand has gone so far as to take the Kurdish cause to Turkish lands during an official visit in April 1992, declaring to the Turkish media who interviewed him: "You will not find a solution and you will not be approved by a country like mine if at the base the Turkish Kurds do not benefit from all the rights that should be theirs."

But it is his wife, Danielle Mitterrand,



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**In 2008, France was one of the first countries to open a consulate in Erbil**  
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Former French President François Mitterrand and Former First Lady Danielle Mitterrand.

who is considered "the mother of the Kurds." It was she who answered the call of the Kurdish people and went to Turkish Kurdistan to visit the refugees of the Halabja massacre; she who in the following months convened an international conference on the Kurds in Paris with the help of the Kurdish Institute of Paris; she who, with Bernard Kouchner, influenced her husband to push for the UN Resolution 688; she who, with her foundation France Libertés, participated in the reconstruction of schools and in the delivery of school books and food aid in a devastated Iraqi Kurdistan in the beginning of the 1990s; she who almost died for her fight for the Kurds because of an attack against her convoy which killed five people in July 1992 near Sulaymaniyah; she who participated in the historic parliamentary session announcing the unification of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 2003; she who has a square named after her in Erbil, a boulevard in Dohuk and whose French schools in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah bear her name; and she whose name always comes up in conversations when one gets into a cab in Iraqi Kurdistan and says that one is French.

The Franco-Kurdish friendship also owes much to Frenchmen Roger Lescot, Pierre Rondot, and Father Thomas Bois, members of the French Damascus school founded by Kurdish brothers Bedir Khan and intellectuals and aristocrats in exile in Syria in the 1930s.

A friendship was then maintained by personalities such as the specialist in Kurdish language Joyce Blau, the couple of journalists nicknamed "Chris Kutschera," the founder of the Kurdish Institute of Paris Kendal Nezan, the French doctor and First Consul of France in Erbil Frederic Tissot, the historian and political scientist Hamit Bozarslan, and many others.

**"Kurdish and French people have the same values"**

Moreover, many of the most famous Kurds of the 20th



Danielle Mitterrand with Kurdish leaders at the Kurdistan Parliament in early 1990s.

century have linked their destiny to Paris.

We can mention the Iranian Kurdish politicians Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Sadegh Sharafkandi, the father of Turkish cinema Guney Yilmaz, the Kurdish-Iraqi director Hiner Saleem, the Turkish-Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya, the ballet dancer and princess Leyla Bedir Khan, the PKK co-founder Sakine Cansiz, and the pioneer of Kurdish culture and nationalism Kamuran Bedir Khan, a key figure in the establishment of Kurdish culture in France, where he was also the personal representative of General Barzani and one of the co-founders of the Kurdish Institute of Paris.

Beyond these men and women, this

cooperation between France and the Kurds continues apace, as the KRG representative in France Ali Dolamari, whom I interviewed for CFRI in March 2022, pointed out: "The Kurdish and French peoples have the same values on democracy, human rights, coexistence, and respect for human rights (...). It is a relationship that is very strong on many levels, and we wish to deepen it further because France has helped the Kurds in very difficult situations. We will never forget that."

For Omar Hussein, a Syrian-Kurdish Francophile and journalist at Rudaw, "France also considers itself concerned with improving relations between Erbil and Baghdad, which is also a Kurdish interest. For its part,

the Kurdistan Region wants France to play a role in promoting the rights of the region within federal Iraq."

And, as if to mark a new act in this relationship that has been patiently built for nearly a century, President Nechirvan Barzani laid the foundation stone of the Franco-German Cultural Institute on January 22, 2023, in Erbil (where there is also a French Institute), a place designed to further promote links between the Kurdish and French peoples, but also German, in the heart of the historic citadel of Erbil. The story continues. ■

## MUSTAFA BARZANI'S PLEA TO DE GAULLE CEASE ARMING IRAQ



Nahro Zagros

Nahro Zagros is the Editor-in-Chief of Kurdistan Chronicle and a senior fellow at Gold Institute for International Strategy in Washington D.C.

Throughout modern history, Kurdish leaders have consistently forged strong ties with their French counterparts to convey their political aspirations.

This practice stems from the legendary Mustafa Barzani, the renowned Kurdish nationalist leader, who was the first to establish a line of communication and appeal to the French for support, urging them not to supply arms to Iraq in the late 1960s.

In the tumultuous year of 1968, the geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East were shifting and, on February 8, Barzani penned a heartfelt letter to French President Charles de Gaulle, imploring him to reconsider France's decision to arm Iraq. This historic letter reflected Barzani's deep concerns about the dire consequences of such a move for the Kurdish people.

In his plea, Barzani made the letter personal and passionate: "General, allow an old man, who has been fighting since his youth for the freedom and dignity of his people, to send you this supreme appeal."

He went on to argue that sending arms to Iraq without acknowledging its brutal treatment of the Kurdish people "would only lead to still further destruction of our country and to the massacre of our women and children."

This pivotal moment in history sheds light on Barzani's astute foresight and unwavering commitment to Kurdish aspirations. Let us delve into the details of this remarkable letter and its implications.

### Barzani's concerns

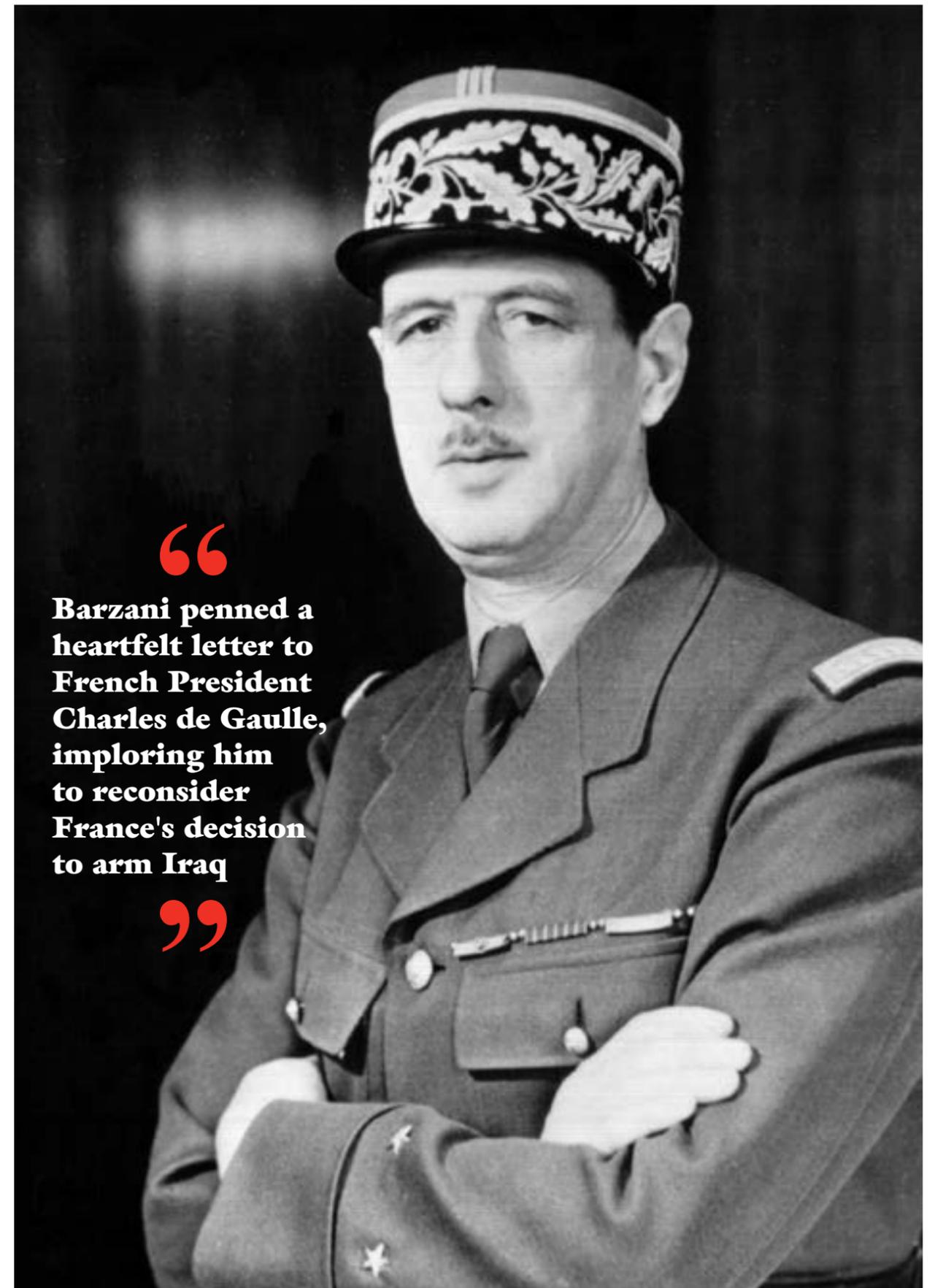
Mustafa Barzani recognized the precarious nature of Iraq's political landscape and its implications for the Kurdish people. In his letter, he highlighted the Iraqi regime's history of discrimination and oppression against the Kurds and expressed his concerns about the potential escalation of violence and suppression if Iraq were to be further armed.

Barzani argued that bolstering the military capabilities of the Iraqi government would ultimately exacerbate the already strained relationship between the Arab-dominated Iraqi regime and the Kurdish population. An increase in arms, he maintained, would embolden the Iraqi government to intensify its repressive policies and endanger the lives and aspirations of the Kurdish people.

### Kurdish aspirations and the geopolitical context

Barzani's plea to de Gaulle should be understood within the broader context of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. The Kurdish people long yearned for an independent state, and Barzani was a fervent advocate for their cause. He recognized that the balance of power in the region directly shaped the prospects for Kurdish autonomy.

During the Cold War, the Middle East was a battleground for influence between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Iraqi government under Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim, and later under President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, aligned itself with the Soviet Union, which sought to expand its sphere of influence in the region. Barzani understood that the



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Barzani penned a heartfelt letter to French President Charles de Gaulle, imploring him to reconsider France's decision to arm Iraq  
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Former French President Charles de Gaulle.

Soviet Union's military support for Iraq would tip the balance against the Kurdish people, potentially derailing their aspirations for self-rule.

### Barzani's appeal to de Gaulle

In his letter, Barzani thus appealed to de Gaulle, one of the most prominent leaders in post-World War II Europe, for assistance: "General, you did not fail to denounce the Vietnam war; I

am sure the fate of the Kurdish people is not less dear to you than that of the Vietnamese."

He implored the French president to reconsider France's military support for Iraq and highlighted the historical friendship between the Kurdish people and France. Here Barzani's letter seems to imply that France showed support for Kurdish self-determination during the Treaty of Sèvres negotiations in 1920.

Barzani expressed the Kurdish people's deep admiration for France's democratic principles and their desire to establish a democratic society in Kurdistan: "... you are President of France, the very nation that gave the world the idea of political freedom and the right of all people to self-determination."

He deeply believed that French support for the Kurdish cause would align with France's values and contribute to stability and peace in the region.

### Outcome and legacy

After Barzani's letter, many prominent French figures issued statements appealing to de Gaulle to halt France's supply of weapons to Iraq or to send the arms on the condition that the Iraqi army would not use them against the Kurdish population. Among these figures were the novelist M. Francois Mauriac, a Gaullist deputy M. Leo Hamon, and M. Wladimir d'Ormesson, who was Director General of the French state's radio and television service.

Barzani's letter helped to raise international awareness about the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. It also exemplified his tireless efforts to seek support and build alliances for the Kurdish cause.

Ultimately, the path towards Kurdish autonomy was fraught with challenges and setbacks. However, Barzani's steadfast leadership and determination paved the way for future generations to continue the struggle. ■

General,

Allow an old man, who has been fighting since his youth for the freedom and dignity of his people, to send you this supreme appeal. You are the greatest resistance fighter in Europe and you freed your country; you cannot but sympathize, therefore, with the almost desperate battle the Kurdish mountain people have been fighting for the last six years in Northern Iraq. Furthermore, you are President of France, the very nation that gave the world the idea of political freedom and the right of all people to self-determination. Last but not least, you are General de Gaulle, liberator of the French overseas countries, a true adversary of all means of oppression and a true friend of all men who fight for freedom.

General, you did not fail to denounce the Vietnam war; I am sure the fate of the Kurdish people is not less dear to you than that of the Vietnamese. We are utterly alone in our fight for national survival; the UN, ignore us and certain great powers compete with each other to supply Iraq with modern arms aimed at our destruction. De Gaulle's France remains therefore our one and only hope.

Iraqis are requesting arms from France. Without a prior settlement of the Kurdish problem, however, the supply of these arms will only lead to still further destruction of our country and to the massacre of our women and children.

The Koran says: "For every man there is a small heaven in the skies towards which he may turn in prayer" You and France are the heaven in our sky.

Mustapha Barzani

Iraqi-Kurdistan  
February 1968

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**Barzani argued that bolstering the military capabilities of the Iraqi government would ultimately exacerbate the already strained relationship between the Arab-dominated Iraqi regime and the Kurdish population**  
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This letter has been published in the 1969 edition of Kurdistan Magazine, which was released in London

## THE FATE OF SINJAR UNCERTAINTY LOOMS AS THOUSANDS REMAIN DISPLACED



Shamal Abdulla

*Shamal Abdulla is a journalist with 18 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.*

**S**injar, a small town located in the disputed territories between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, has been at the center of turmoil and tragedy for several years. The region, home to a diverse mix of ethnic and religious groups including the Yezidi Kurds, Muslim Kurds, Christians, and Arabs, has faced significant challenges and violence, leaving its fate in a state of uncertainty. As the years pass, thousands of people continue to be displaced, with their lives upended and their futures hanging in the balance.

One of the most devastating events in recent history was the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014. ISIS militants swept through Sinjar, launching a brutal campaign against the Yezidi minority, who were targeted due to their religious beliefs. Thousands were killed, while others, primarily women and children, were captured and subjected to horrific acts of violence, sexual slavery, and forced conversions.

The international community was appalled by the atrocities committed in Sinjar, prompting a response to counter the ISIS onslaught. The Kurdish peshmerga, with support from the United States-led coalition, eventually managed to liberate the town in late 2015. However, the damage had been done, and the aftermath of the conflict left Sinjar in ruins and its population dispersed.

### Post-liberation crises

Despite the liberation, Sinjar has struggled to regain stability and rebuild. Political rivalries, competing interests, and disagreements over governance have hampered efforts to establish a unified administration that can effectively address the needs of the population.

This reality complicated the return and reintegration of displaced individuals. Many are afraid to go



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ISIS militants swept through Sinjar, launching a brutal campaign against the Yezidi minority, who were targeted due to their religious beliefs.

Photo: Rostam Aghala

An elderly Kurdish Yezidi in Sinjar. |

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**The establishment of a joint administration involving the KRG and the federal government of Iraq is a step toward consolidating governance and rebuilding the town**  
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The aftermath of war, four years since the liberation of Sinjar.

back to their homes due to lingering security concerns, the absence of basic services, and the lack of clear governance. The devastation caused by ISIS has made the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation daunting, exacerbating the displacement crisis.

In addition to the challenges posed by governance and security, Sinjar also grapples with demographic tensions. The Yezidis, who suffered greatly under ISIS, have expressed concerns over the return of Arab residents who they believe collaborated with the terrorist group. The strained relationships between ethnic and religious groups in the region have further hindered efforts to find a lasting solution and have contributed to the continued displacement of many.

Another significant factor influencing the fate of Sinjar is the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish militant organization. The PKK's involvement in the region has added a layer of complexity to the already challenging dynamics, making the implementation of the Iraq-Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) deal over Sinjar more difficult.

The Iraq-KRG agreement aimed to establish a joint administration and security arrangement for the region, but disputes over the extent of the PKK's influence, its disarmament, and the control of its security apparatuses have stalled progress.

The presence of the PKK has not only complicated the realities on the ground but also led to concerns from neighboring countries. Turkey's military operations and airstrikes in northern Iraq have drawn criticism from the Iraqi government, which fears that these actions may destabilize the region further. The ongoing tensions between Turkey and the PKK, played out in Sinjar, have also strained diplomatic relations and regional cooperation.

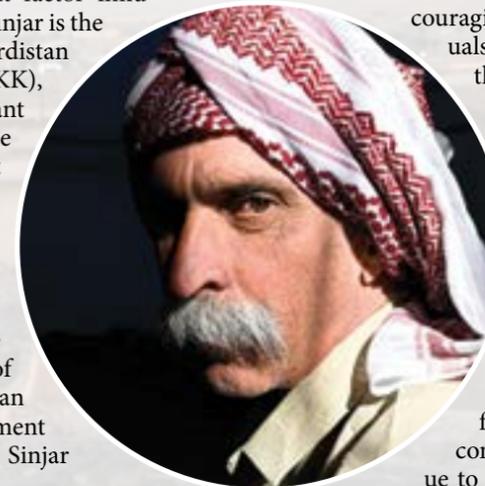
International aid organizations and humanitarian agencies have played a crucial role in aiding those displaced by the conflict in Sinjar. They have worked tirelessly to offer shelter, food, healthcare, and psychological support to survivors, helping them cope with the physical and emotional scars left by the violence they experienced.

### **Despite efforts, uncertainty remains**

Efforts are underway to address the challenges and pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future in Sinjar. The establishment of a joint administration involving the KRG and the federal government of Iraq is a step toward consolidating governance and rebuilding the town. Additionally, efforts to restore basic services and infrastructure are vital in encouraging displaced individuals to return and restart their lives.

However, progress has been slow, and the fate of Sinjar remains uncertain. The wounds inflicted by ISIS run deep, and it will take significant time and resources to heal them fully. The international community must continue to provide support, both in terms of financial assistance and political pressure, to ensure that the needs of the displaced are met and the town of Sinjar can rebuild and flourish.

Ultimately, the future of Sinjar hinges on the collaboration between the local communities and the authorities of Iraq and the KRG to work together effectively and put an end to the presence of the PKK and militias in the region. It is only through persistent and dedicated efforts that displaced individuals can discover a sense of security, reconstruct their lives, and forge a future devoid of the lingering shadows of violence and uncertainty that have plagued them for far too long. ■



## THE BRITISH AND OTTOMAN STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF MESOPOTAMIA



Richard Wilding

Richard Wilding produces award winning exhibitions, films and books that explore the history and heritage of Kurdistan and other regions of the Middle East.

Since 2012, Richard has been Creative Director of Gulan, a charity which promotes Kurdish culture in the UK. In 2021, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London.

Richard is currently producing a film about Shaikh Mahmoud and 100 years of Kurdish / British relations.

In this article, Richard Wilding looks at relations between the British and Ottoman Empires before, during, and after World War I, and the reasons why the British invaded Mesopotamia in 1914. He also examines the disputed status of the Mosul vilayet after the armistice of 1918, which created the opportunity for an independent Kurdish state.



Turkey in Asia, Rand McNally Atlas, 1897

The British public may be familiar with Iraq and Kurdistan through relatively recent events such as the US-led invasion of 2003 and the defeat of ISIS from 2014. But they are less aware of Britain's role in establishing the state of Iraq after World War I and in creating the circumstances that promised and then denied independence for the Kurds.

The Ottomans conquered Mesopotamia in the early 16th century but never gained complete

control. Several semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities existed from the 16th to 19th centuries during the state of continuous warfare between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. In the decades following the Treaty of Erzurum in 1823, the Persian threat was reduced, and the Ottomans brought the Kurdish principalities under more direct control.

In more modern times, from 1867 until 1918, the Ottoman Empire was divided for the pur-

poses of administration into vilayets. The Iraq of today is composed of the former vilayets of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, with the Kurds concentrated mostly in the Mosul vilayet, which was subdivided into the sanjaks of Mosul, Kirkuk and Sulaimani.

At its height, the Ottoman Empire ruled the Middle East, much of north Africa, and south-eastern Europe, but by the late 1800s the empire was in decline. The Ottomans owed more than two million pounds to European banks, and trade had fallen behind great powers such as Britain and France. They did, however, retain many strategic coastlines and ports, which were coveted by the European powers.

Britain seized control of Egypt in 1882, securing the British a route to India via the Suez Canal. British policy in Mesopotamia was to protect the Ottoman Empire against the Russians and other predators, mainly to safeguard the overland British route to India via the port of Basra and the Persian Gulf. However, with the increasing importance of oil to the British Navy, these priorities shifted.

In 1911, Winston Churchill was made First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill sought to modernise Britain's Royal Navy by adopting oil as fuel for its ships instead of coal. The benefits of this were proven, but while Britain's domestic production of coal was plentiful, it had no source for oil, either domestically or within its empire.

In 1911, Winston Churchill was made First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill sought to modernize Britain's Royal Navy by adopting oil as fuel for its ships instead of coal. The benefits of this were proven, but while Britain's domestic production of coal was plentiful, it had no source for oil, either domestically or within its empire.

In June 1914, Churchill convinced the House of Commons to authorize the government purchase of a 51 percent share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company to secure continued access to oil for the Royal Navy. Two weeks later, an assassin killed the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Six weeks after



Overland Route to India, John Tallis, 1851



that, Germany attacked France. The Great War had begun, and by its end, war without oil would be unimaginable.

To secure the safety of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's Abadan oil refinery against possible Turkish attack, the British sent an Indian Expeditionary Force to the Gulf. After winning some minor engagements against Turkish forces, it marched into Basra on November 23, 1914. The safety of Basra and Abadan required defense in depth against the Turks, who still held the rest of Mesopotamia. A display of British military power was also

First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill aboard the Royal Yacht in Cowes, United Kingdom, 1912



Landing party from British ship on Persian Gulf, 1914

deemed necessary to impress the Arabs, and Britain's allies in the Persian Gulf.

This required the occupation of Baghdad, but defeat at Ctesiphon in November 1915, followed by the humiliating surrender at Kut-al-Amara in April 1916 meant the provincial capital was not taken until August 1917.

Meanwhile, secret agreements were being made for the

partition of Ottoman territory in the event of an Allied victory. For the future of Iraq, the most important of these competing claims were those of Britain and France. The French from the start demanded control of Syria, while Britain wanted to control the Persian Gulf and keep possible rivals away from Basra.

Negotiations were led by Sir Mark Sykes on the British side



British troops entering Baghdad, August 1917



General Marshall reading the proclamation of the Armistice with Turkey in the Sersi, Baghdad, 2 November 1918, Imperial War Museum

and François Georges-Picot on the French side. They held discussions during the winter of 1915-1916, even visiting Petrograd in March 1916 to obtain Russian agreement. The result was the now infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement.

A parallel set of proposals had been developed by the British in Cairo, which were later said to be inconsistent with Sykes-Picot. In a series of letters exchanged with the Sharif of Mecca Hussein bin Ali, the British government agreed to recognize Arab independence after the war in exchange for the Sharif and his Hashemite family launching an Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire.

Led by Emir Faisal, the second son of

Sherif Husain, Arab forces expelled the Ottomans from the Hejaz, a campaign later romanticized by T.E. Lawrence. On October 5, 1918, with the blessing of the British General Allenby, Faisal declared the formation of an Arab government in Damascus.

While Faisal's Arab army and General Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force were pursuing the retreating Ottoman forces through Syria, the Indian Expeditionary Force was advancing in parallel up the Tigris River in Mesopotamia.

An armistice was signed with the defeated Ottoman Empire at Mudros on October 30, 1918, and hostilities ceased the following day. At the time, the British troops pursuing the Otto-

man army were then 40 miles south of Mosul, and military occupation of the city did not occur until November 10. Since this occurred after the armistice, the Turks continued to claim until 1926 that Mosul was theirs.

To counter Turkish claims in the Mosul vilayet, the British hoped to establish one or more Kurdish provinces to be loosely attached to whatever administration might ultimately be established in Baghdad. In 1919, Britain appointed Shaikh Mahmoud, from one of the leading Sufi dynasties of Kurdistan as ruler in Sulaimani. The following year, Britain installed Emir Faisal as King of the newly created state of Iraq. The contrasting fortunes of these two rulers is, however, another story. ■

# HKN ENERGY'S ROLE IN KURDISTAN'S THRIVING OIL SECTOR



**Aveen Howrami**

*Aveen Howrami is an American Kurdish activist with a decade of experience in the education field. She has provided assistance to numerous local NGOs, schools, and educational institutions in their internationalization efforts and technical expertise.*



The Kurdistan Region, renowned as a safe beacon amidst a turbulent Middle East, has emerged as a symbol of hope and prosperity over the past three decades. Its remarkable progress can be attributed in large part to the abundant reserves of oil and gas hidden beneath its surface.

In 2007, the Kurdistan Region, leveraging its rights granted by the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, enacted the first Law of Oil and Gas, opening the doors for international companies to participate in its thriving oil sector. These companies have since invested billions of dollars, not only securing a stable source of income for the region but also making significant contributions to the global oil market.

Among the prominent players in the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) oil industry is HKN Energy Ltd., an American company that has dedicated substantial resources to oil production in the Sarsang Block of Duhok province. Kurdistan Chronicle had the privilege of conducting an exclusive interview with HKN Energy's Vice President of Government Affairs Mathew Zais, who discussed various aspects of the KRG's energy sector, investment potential, existing challenges, and the recent suspension of oil exports.

Mr. Zais, a seasoned military veteran, brings over two decades of experience to HKN Energy. His previous roles in-

clude serving as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of International Affairs at the U.S. Department of Energy and as the Director for Iraq and Kurdish Affairs on the National Security Council in the White House. As Vice President of Government Affairs at HKN Energy, Mr. Zais oversees the company's interactions with elected officials and its engagement in public policy matters. He holds a B.S. in Economics from the Unit-

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**It is truly remarkable that the KRG was able to increase oil production from 0 barrels to 450,000 barrels per day**  
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ed States Military Academy at West Point, as well as an MPA and Ph.D. in International Relations from Princeton University.

Below is the transcript of the interview slightly edited for clarity and length.

**Kurdistan Chronicle (KC):** *What was your initial perception of the Kurdistan Region before your first visit, and how has that perception evolved or changed over time?*

**Zais:** Before visiting Kurdistan Region, my perspective was shaped by my experiences as a soldier crossing the border from Mosul to Duhok in 2003. Throughout my time in Iraq, I was primarily based in Mosul, but I arrived there having operated from

rektor at the White House and later held positions at the Department of Energy before joining HKN. HKN's involvement in the region dates to 2007, following intense discussions between Ross Perot Jr and Hillwood regarding investment opportunities in Kurdistan. Eventually, after receiving positive feedback, a partnership was formed with the KRG, leading to the first production contract in Sarsang.

From 2007 to 2023, HKN has become the largest U.S. investor in the Kurdistan Region and the largest private investor in all of Iraq. It's worth noting that their projects have also received financing from the U.S. government.

HKN views Kurdistan as a valued partner and has faced and overcome various challenges alongside the KRG, including those posed by ISIS, the referendum, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the recent pipeline shutdown. Despite these hurdles, production has never been significantly impacted until the recent pipeline shutdown.

**KC:** *What are the key distinctions that HKN perceives when it comes to working and investing in the Kurdistan Region compared to the rest of Iraq? Does this differentiation primarily relate to the business environment or the available opportunities?*

**Zais:** HKN's approach to investing in the Kurdistan Region was based on a perspective of all of Iraq as a whole,

## MATHEW ZAIS

Kuwait and through Baghdad and Haditha. The border crossing from Mosul to Duhok felt like an international border, emphasizing the distinctiveness of the region. Furthermore, Kurdistan's significance was not lost on me during my time at Princeton University, where I focused my research on Iraq.

Subsequently, I served as the Iraq di-

and a distinction of the unique investment opportunities and environment in the Kurdistan Region. While many Western companies are seeking to withdraw from federal Iraq, Kurdistan offers more attractive investment models than those of the federal government. It is truly remarkable that the KRG was able to increase oil production from 0 barrels to 450,000 barrels per day (bpd) without any domestic financing. This economic mir-



acle was made possible through the creation of economic partnerships, a feat that has garnered the trust and belief of additional investment groups who see the potential in Kurdistan and its people. And it has been done on a investment model that has proven successful around the world. That is why you are seeing the terms of the recent 5th bid round in federal Iraq resemble the model in Kurdistan much more than the legacy models that are more common there.

**KC:** Having spent numerous years working and residing in Kurdistan, how would you describe the sen-

**timent or experience when flying from Iraq to the Kurdistan Region?**

**Zais:** Since my time as a government official, I have not visited Baghdad. However, I personally believe that Kurdistan offers a distinct and desirable environment, making it an attractive place to visit or even live part-time. I have even mentioned about how the Iraqi officials have homes in Erbil, which serves as evidence that many people have trust in this region, including Iraq officials.

It is important to note that competi-

tion for capital, especially in the oil and gas sector, is highly competitive both locally and globally. Companies will choose to invest in Iraq not because it is Iraq per se, but because Iraq presents a competitive landscape. For instance, Qatar has invested significantly in natural gas production in America because it is a competitive investment environment. Ideally, Iraq is similarly competitive and attracts these types of investments. Because commercial terms and ease of business in federal Iraq has been challenging, investments tend to flow to other locations rather than Iraq. It is worth mentioning that investing in Iraq can be challenging, particularly due to its complex borders, making Iraq investment contracts some of the most difficult to navigate.

**KC:** Drawing from your experience working in top government institutions in the United States, how would you evaluate the performance of the KRG in managing the energy sector?

**Zais:** Whenever there is a change in the cabinet, be it here or anywhere else, there are bound to be growing pains. However, I am confident that we share a mutual vision with the KRG, and we are dedicated to being good partners and face these challenges together. The main challenge

lies in realizing what is expected when going from zero to producing 400,000 bpd. Once achieved, managing such production becomes another hurdle, followed by taking it to the next level of further increasing production. How can we most effectively partner with the KRG to expand this production to another phase.

Additionally, there is the transition of the next phase into gas development, which holds three key advantages: first, it will increase electricity availability; second, it will facilitate the supply of gas to the federal government, providing a strategic advantage; and third, it will enable gas exports to Turkey. These goals require significant capabilities from both the KRG and HKN, and we are ready to contribute our expertise to help achieve them.

**KC:** Since Prime Minister Masrour Barzani assumed office, have you observed any notable changes in the energy policy of the KRG?

**Zais:** I don't perceive any significant changes, but it's important to acknowledge that any cabinet change signifies a new chapter. Adjustments are necessary when there are government changes.

The only misperception regarding the KRG lies in oil development potential. Currently, the some believe it has reached its upper production limit of 400,000 bpd, and this perception is not entirely accurate. We Believe that production can reach 600,000 bpd or even 700,000 bpd, but for that to happen, there must be a more favorable environment that provides investors with greater certainty. The uncertainty for the region is somewhat beyond the control of the KRG, as some responsibility rests with Baghdad. The only way the KRG can become more self-sufficient is by demonstrating that it doesn't rely on financial transfers from Baghdad. As long as the region depends on the federal budget, uncertainties will persist for potential investors who must make financial decisions on how reliably they can recoup their investments. HKN strives to assist the KRG by exploring different alternatives and proposing solutions.

**KC:** In light of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, which has presented global challenges regarding gas supply, do you believe that the KRG has the potential to emerge as a global supplier?

**Zais:** I firmly believe that in terms of resources, the KRG has the potential to become one of the leading gas suppliers in the region. While the potential lies beneath the ground, there are numerous challenges above ground that need to be addressed. These challenges include issues between Baghdad and the KRG, attracting the necessary investments, and the need for a strategic plan to facilitate development. However, there have been positive developments, such as the resumption of operations in certain gas fields, as well as ongoing efforts to address commercial terms. With the right approach and actions, the KRG can undoubtedly become a significant contributor to the regional and global gas market.

**KC:** Given Iran's opposition to Iraq's increased gas production, do you believe that the KRG has the capability to challenge Iran's stance and pursue its own gas production goals?

**Zais:** The influence of Iran in Iraq's gas production poses a challenge for both federal Iraq and the KRG. One of the key issues in Iraq is the problem of subsidies, as they lead to runaway demand since the costs are not passed



on to consumers. As Iraq promotes more electricity usage, the lack of cost responsibility leads to increased consumption. Iraq currently ranks as the second-largest gas flaring nation globally after Russia. Notably, Iraq flares 1.5 billion square feet of gas and imports an equal amount from Iran. It is also evident that Iraq serves as a satellite for Iranian influence, dependent on its electricity and gas.

Iran has a vested interest in preventing Iraq from developing enough on its own gas to maintain this artificial dependency. The KRG has faced pressure from Iran through various means, including rocket and drone attacks from Hashad al-Shaabi [pro-Iran Shia Popular Mobilized Forces], missiles originating from Iran, and overall influence exerted through Iraqi politics and legal actions.

Iran has multiple avenues to influence both the KRG and Iraq, which they have done and continue to do. It is crucial for the United States to remain actively engaged in both Baghdad and Erbil to uphold Iraq's sovereignty and ensure it acts independently, rather than being influenced by neighboring countries.

HKN takes pride in being the largest American investor in Kurdistan and values their relationship with the region. The history between HKN and the KRG predates the current situation, and HKN has invested \$1.8 billion in the region, indirectly creating a significant amount of employment opportunities.

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**KC:** Can you provide specific examples of how HKN has contributed to supporting Kurdistan through its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives?

**Zais:** HKN's CSR initiatives have had a significant impact on the community. Notably, it has contributed \$22 million to build the largest school in Duhok. In addition, HKN has undertaken the task of paving over 60 kilometers of roads, enhancing transportation infrastructure. HKN has made a pledge to employ local businesses, recognizing the importance of supporting the local economy.

Furthermore, HKN has taken up projects to renovate schools, ensuring that educational facilities are in optimal condition. The company's commitment extends to creating parks and sports grounds, providing recreational spaces for the community. HKN's focus is on projects that can

have a widespread impact, benefiting a significant number of people in the region. HKN is proud that over 75% of our workforce is local employees because our goal is to build a Kurdish Iraqi oil company.

**KC:** What is your assessment of the disputes and future outlook for oil exports from Iraq to Turkey?

**Zais:** The Iraq-Turkey pipeline dispute has had significant implications. Despite the shutdown, production was not halted until now. However, scaling down staff and the

resulting impact on businesses employed by the pipeline have been challenges for local Kurds.

The inability of Baghdad and Ankara to reach a settlement led to an ICC ruling from Paris. The complex power dynamics within Baghdad, with its coalition of different political parties, make it difficult for them to negotiate as a unified entity. Out of the five claims put forward by Baghdad, only one claim regarding the legality of the KRG



Mathew Zais delivering President George W. Bush's message to President Masoud Barzani

Photo: Farhad Ahmad



Photo: HKN

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**HKN's approach to investing in the Kurdistan Region was based on a perspective of all of Iraq as a whole, and a distinction of the unique investment opportunities and environment in the Kurdistan Region.**

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Photo: HKN

loading crude oil onto ships was won.

The ICC did not rule on the legality of the KRG's ability to produce or sell oil. Baghdad claims that Turkey violated a specific bilateral treaty, the Iraq-Turkey pipeline agreement of 1973, which was amended in 2010. This treaty is set to expire in 2025, with Article II specifying that either party can negotiate a new amendment two years before the expiration date (starting from September 2023) or terminate the agreement one year

before expiration (September 2024).

Before negotiations can commence between Ankara and Baghdad, changes are required to reach an agreement, particularly considering the recent ICC ruling. The challenge now is that oil provides for 80% of the KRG's revenue, and with the current shutdown, the KRG is suffering an economic crisis while there is no financial incentive for other sides to resume exports.

Interestingly, the crude oil price in-

creased after the shutdown, and even more so after the recent OPEC production cuts. Iraq, despite the shutdown, was making a higher net profit than when the pipeline was open due to the significant increase in prices.

Meanwhile, Baghdad could face instability if it continues to halt KRG's exports and raises questions about the region's role within the Iraqi government if it is not allowed to export its oil or receive budget transfers. ■

# THE PLIGHT OF SYRIAN KURDS REFUGEES, EXILES, AND HOPE AMIDST HARDSHIP



**Mohammad Dargalayi**

*Mohammed Dargalayi is a journalist and photographer, who has been working for nearly 13 years. He is a member of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists and the Kurdistan Photographers Association. He is a member of IFJ Global.*

The Kurds have endured immense suffering under successive dictators in Syria, including during the hardships that afflicted the entire nation following the 2011 revolution. Despite the liberation of their hometowns from the Islamic State (ISIS), many Syrian Kurds still find themselves displaced. This unfortunate situation is often attributed to the current governing authorities in Syrian Kurdistan, referred to as “the brothers.”

When violence erupted in 2011, thousands of Syrian Kurds migrated to Europe, while a larger number sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region. Yet, even though ISIS has been defeated on the ground, most Syrian Kurdish refugees are hesitant to return. In fact, the flow of refugees from Syrian Kurdistan to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has not ceased, primarily due to the military governance imposed by Kurdish factions in the region.

According to the Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCC) of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), there are currently 20,641 refugee families totaling 92,184 individuals, who reside in camps and host communities within the Kurdistan Region.

## Missing home but scared to return

A Kurdish journalist and political activist from Syria, identified by the initials S.D. for security reasons, left Qamishli in northeast Syria in 2018 with hopes of finding a more promising future in Germany, where he could freely engage in activism. In a recent interview, S.D. revealed that he continues to publish articles under a pseudonym due to concerns for the safety of his family, who remain in Syrian Kurdistan.

Presently, Syrian Kurdistan is governed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), an operational political entity led by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which includes fighters associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The governing parties face frequent criticism for human rights violations, the use of child soldiers, limited democracy, and restricted political freedom beyond the ideologies of the PKK.

According to S.D., the armed forces and governing political parties in Syrian Kurdistan have severely restricted political activism, causing numerous activists to seek escape routes with little hope of ever

returning home. This unfortunate reality transforms refugees into exiles, exacerbating the challenges of living apart from home and family. Most of these exiles still reside in the Kurdistan Region. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) reports that most Syrian refugees arrived in the Kurdistan Region between 2010 and 2014, coinciding with the onset of the conflict in Syria. The year 2013 saw the highest reported influx of refugees.

However, not all Syrian refugees live within the camps of the Kurdistan Region. After almost a decade of residing in the region, nearly half of the refugee population has integrated into local communities. According to the JCC, a total of 49,000 Syrian refugee households currently live in host communities outside the camps. This means that out of the total 246,810 Syrian refugees, approximately 154,626 individuals have chosen to make their homes in the towns and cities of the Kurdistan Region, with Duhok and Erbil being the primary locations.

“Our homeland is Rojava; we grew up there. It’s what we love the most,” said Amina, a Syrian refugee residing in

Domiz Camp in the Kurdistan Region. “We can’t return due to the dire situation there. Our children have grown up, and if we return, they will be forced into compulsory military service.”

## Living under the AANES

The local Kurdish authority in Syrian Kurdistan is often criticized for its military-like rule and the repeated accusations of recruiting child soldiers and committing human rights violations.

released three months after the agreement was signed, stated, “Despite pledges to stop the practice, the YPG [the PKK-affiliated People’s Protection Units] has recruited children, including girls, and utilized them in hostilities. The YPG must immediately demobilize children in its ranks and cease recruiting children.” The report also highlighted that these recruited children are mostly taken from vulnerable families residing in displacement camps under the YPG’s control. Abdullah, another Syrian Kurdish refugee living in Domiz Camp in Duhok, expressed his longing to have one more chance to meet his mother

olations. The 2023 report pointed out that: “the SDF continued to unlawfully detain individuals affiliated with or perceived to be affiliated with political parties opposing the PYD or AANES. The detainees included opposition members, civil society activists, and media workers.”

While opposition political parties are strictly limited, if not excluded, from influencing the region’s policies and administration, many of them consistently call for an end to the violations committed by the PYD. Their primary focus remains on the release of their imprisoned members held in



Photo: Safin Hamid

■ Kurdish refugees who escaped ISIS but are prevented from returning to their homes by current conflict in their region.

In 2019, after facing extensive pressure and criticism, the SDF finally signed an agreement with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, to cease and prevent the recruitment of children as soldiers. However, reports indicate that this practice has not yet been eradicated, as armed groups affiliated with the PKK continue to enlist children under the age of 18 for military training and deployment to conflict zones.

A report by Human Rights Watch,

again. Playing a musical instrument and singing a melancholic melody, Abdullah shared, “Life in a refugee camp is challenging, but we still prefer it over returning to Syria. The political and security situation there is difficult, and the economy has made life extremely challenging for its citizens.”

Despite strong military cooperation between the US-led Coalition and the Kurdish-led SDF in their joint fight against ISIS, a recent Human Rights Report by the US State Department criticized the local Syrian Kurdish authorities for their human rights vi-

PYD prisons. However, this plea has received little response due to the ruling parties’ refusal to demonstrate any flexibility, leading to failed attempts to revive the “Kurd-Kurd Dialogue” in Syria.

Despite enduring ongoing hardships, Syrian refugees have not lost hope. They believe that a brighter future will eventually allow them to return to their homes and reunite with their families. However, this can only be realized when there is no longer a fear of imposed ideologies and economic conditions improve. ■

## THE NASHVILLE-ERBIL SISTER CITY INITIATIVE BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN COMMUNITIES



**Azad Sameen**

*Azad Sameen is a Kurdish-American who co-founded the Kurdish Youth Festival and the Kurdish Arts Festival in Nashville, Tennessee. He currently serves as the co-founder and regional director of the Kurdish-American Cultural Institute.*

Nashville, Tennessee, is home to a vibrant and thriving Kurdish community, affectionately known as Little Kurdistan. This community has a captivating history, with Kurdish immigrants first arriving in Nashville in the late 1970s and early 1980s, seeking refuge from political persecution and war in their homeland.

Over the years, the Kurdish population has grown significantly, making Nashville one of the largest Kurdish settlements in the United States, with an estimated 20,000 residents. As a result, Kurdish culture has become an inte-

gral part of Nashville's diverse landscape, with Kurdish restaurants, markets, and cultural centers adding to the city's cultural fabric.

The Kurdish community in Nashville has actively worked to preserve and promote Kurdish culture, language, and history in the United States. They have organized various events, exhibitions, and festivals that celebrate their heritage and raise awareness about the Kurdish cause. Despite the challenges faced by many Kurdish immigrants, the community has thrived in Nashville, enriching the city in numerous ways.



Photo: Gailan Haji

### The Kurdish-American Cultural Institute

In 2013, the Kurdish American Cul-

tural Institute (KACI), a nonprofit organization based in Nashville since its establishment in 2000, took the initiative to bridge the gap between Kurdistan and America by proposing

the idea of a sister city relationship. A sister city relationship is a long-term alliance between two cities, symbolizing their commitment to cooperation and mutual benefit.

The Mayor of Nashville speaking at a ceremony held in Erbil Citadel.



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

PM Masrour Barzani receiving a delegation from Nashville.



Photo: Gailan Haji

Nashville Mayor and a number of Kurdish officials.



Photo: Gailan Haji

To bring this vision to life, KACI sought support from various stakeholders. They approached the Public Affairs office at the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil, gaining their endorsement. They also met with Erbil's former Governor Nawzad Hadi, who expressed enthusiasm for the idea. Additionally, they engaged with former members of the Nashville Sister City Committee, highlighting the interest and support from the Erbil Governorate and the U.S. Consulate General.

However, several obstacles delayed the project, including financial crises, the rise of ISIS, the conflict between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi Central Government in 2017, and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Nevertheless, KACI persisted in their efforts, and in 2020, they resumed discussions with the U.S. Consulate General. Former U.S. Consul General Rob Waller held two meetings with the late former Governor of Erbil Dr. Firsat Sofi, demonstrating their commitment to the project. Tragically, Dr. Firsat Sofi contracted Covid-19 and passed away, causing a delay until a new governor was elected.

### An exchange of visits

Eventually, with the appointment of Governor Omed Khoshnaw, KACI revisited the sister city proposal. In May 2022, a delegation from Erbil's local government, led by the Governor of Erbil, visited Nashville. During the four-day trip, the delegation engaged with Nashville city officials and organizations, including the Tennessee Governor's Chief of Staff, the Mayor of Nashville, the Vice Mayor, the legislative body head, the Nashville Metropolitan Council, the Sister City Committee, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Tennessee State University, the Downtown Nashville Public Library, a group of lawyers, and the Music City Center.

In August 2022, the Nashville Sister City Committee convened, and a majority voted to continue the Nashville-Erbil Sister City initiative project, recognizing the tremendous success of the May 2022 trip. As a result, a delegation from the Sister City Committee of Nashville embarked on a visit to Erbil in May 2023 to familiarize themselves with the city.

Between May 20 and 25, Mayor John Cooper of Nashville spearheaded a delegation to Erbil. Accompanying

him were members of the city council, along with the chairman and representatives from the Sister Cities of Nashville Board. During their visit, they met various people from the KRG, including with Governor Omed Khoshnaw of Erbil. Both sides successfully formalized the sister city agreement between Erbil and Nashville through a signing ceremony.

The Sister City partnership between Nashville and Erbil offers a multitude of benefits for both communities, including increased cultural awareness in both cities, fostering educational collaborations that encompass joint research and teaching programs. The partnership also stimulates business, tourism, and trade, facilitating the exchange of valuable resources and approaches in business, education, culture, and technology. Moreover, it raises the international profile of both cities, showcasing the accomplishments of local governments and attracting more investments to bolster the local economy.

It is worth acknowledging the significant and effective role played by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil in ensuring the success of this project. ■

# ECONOMY

## WATER SECURITY IN KURDISTAN A VISION BEYOND THIRST



Sardar Sattar

*Sardar Sattar is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.*

As long as water is essential for human survival, crises related to this limited and vital resource are always right around the corner. While comprehensive solutions to water security are complex, the underlying causes are surprisingly simple — climate change, inefficient water management, deforestation, and geopolitical conflict, to name just a few. As the disruptors of nature, humans are the reason behind all these factors; as the ‘guardians of the civilization’, we bear the responsibility to address them.

In recent years, global warming has become a tangible crisis for every corner of the world, and the Kurdistan Region is no exception. Environmental scientists have already warned that Iraq is one of the 19 global hotspots where freshwater levels have been depleted to dangerously low levels. In 2019, the United Nations Environment Program identified Iraq as the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to “decreased water and food availability and extreme temperatures, which will negatively affect food security, water security, social security, and health security.”

## The state of water in the Kurdistan Region

While international efforts are afoot to prevent the situation from worsening, reversing the depletion of freshwater level requires a greater collective commitment. This is why the Kurdistan Region has rolled up sleeves to save this lifeblood for the next generation.

In line with this vision, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has devised comprehensive strategies to nip the looming water crisis in the bud by introducing new water management policies, constructing dams, building ponds, reviving groundwater, and raising public awareness.

In addition to rainfall and groundwater, the Kurdistan Region gets much of its water from the Khabur, Great Zab, Little Zab, Awa Spi, and Sirwan Rivers, which have a total combined length of 1,695 km. Nearly 60% of these rivers lie within the region's borders. However, these resources may not meet the demands of a growing population and

available water resources. The total capacity of the region's current dams is 9,950 billion cubic meters. The largest of the current dams is Dukan Dam, which holds only 2 billion cubic meters of water despite having a capacity of 7 billion and provides drinking water for nearly three million people.

## Constructing new dams and managing water

Since the onset of the 9th Cabinet led by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, the Kurdistan Region has begun constructing 15 new dams, including nine strategic ones whose reservoir capacities range from 1 million to 100 million cubic meters, according to Abdulrahman Khani, Director General of Dams in the KRG.

In addition, the Iraqi Federal Government has outlined plans to construct 49 dams throughout the country as farmlands in central and southern provinces continue to shrink each year. Of these 49 dams, 20 will be built in the Kurdistan Region.

million cubic meters). The official further noted that five other dams are currently under construction, with two over 90% complete.

Despite the deep concerns around water security in the region, the KRG's Director General of Water Resources Karwan Sabah Hawrami believes that the region is still in a more secure position compared to Iraq and neighboring countries.

Speaking to Kurdistan Chronicle in an exclusive interview, Hawrami explained that the Kurdistan Region has the necessary water resources but needs international support to improve its infrastructure to preserve these resources through a more comprehensive and modernized management plan.

"We have no ability to arrest the accelerating pace of global warming that we witness today around the world, and are paying the price. This is why we need international support to prevent a water crisis in the re-

gion," Hawrami pointed out, noting that giving the Kurdistan Region the necessary means to tackle the issue would also secure the future of Iraq.

According to the official, 85% of the water in Kurdistan's dam reservoirs is used to support people living downstream outside the region, and 65% of other water resources freely flow into Iraq without any blockage in the Kurdistan Region.

## Ponds and groundwater

Apart from dams, the KRG has implemented additional measures to address future water scarcity. Recognizing the extensive cost of dam construction, the regional government has taken the initiative to construct numerous ponds throughout the region.

These ponds serve multiple purposes: preventing flash floods, providing water for agricultural projects, promoting tourism, and most im-

portantly, replenishing groundwater. Over the past three decades, the region's groundwater has been severely depleted due to the excessive use of water wells. The construction of these ponds aims to restore and rejuvenate the groundwater resources of Kurdistan.

In 2022 the KRG approved the construction of 41 new ponds, whose capacities range from 200,000 cubic meters to over 800,000 cubic meters. Once these ponds are built, the total number across the region will reach 149.

"Ponds also encourage reverse migration to revive rural areas, which could play a significant role in the food security of the region. There were villages with less than 15 households prior to the construction of the ponds; now they are populated by more than 40 households with thousands of livestock and active agricultural production," Hawrami added. ■

## Kurdistan Rivers

River	Length/km	% Inside Kurdistan Region	% Outside Kurdistan Region	Yearly Water Million m3
Khabour	160	42	58	160
Great Zab	473	58	42	473
Little Zab	456	64	36	456
Awa Spi	220	100	0	220
Sirwan	386	40	59	386
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,695</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>1,695</b>

much-needed agriculture sector, a reality acknowledged by Kurdish policymakers who have already begun constructing more than a dozen dams and scores of ponds.

There are currently 17 dams across the four provinces of Erbil, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah, and Hallabja, where a population of over 6 million people heavily relies on all the

According to Khani, four new dams with an overall capacity of 28.6 million cubic meters were completed in May 2023. The Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources said the dams included the Dewana Dam in Sulaymaniyah (19 million cubic meters), the Khans Dam in Duhok (6.7 million cubic meters), the Tourajar Dam in Garmian (1.7 million cubic meters), and the Chamrga Dam in Erbil (1.2

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Photo: Safin Hamid

# PESHMERGA HOPE FOR A NATION

I first met Khairi Hussein, a middle-aged *peshmerga* commander of average height with fearless eyes, during the operation to liberate Sinjar, which is home to many Yazidis. Even though he was a lieutenant, he always carried a rifle and wore his uniform, never removing it for a second, even when asleep.

Following the liberation of Sinjar from ISIS on August 3, 2016, I returned to the town to report on the aftermath. Hussein was the first person to take me on a tour of ISIS's longest underground tunnel, a story that before that time had not been covered by local or international media. The 3-km tunnel had been used to supply by ISIS to supply bases throughout the city center and for protection. "ISIS forced Yazidi prisoners to build the tunnel to safeguard themselves from coalition air strikes," Khairi explained.

The tunnel triggered reactions across international media, prompting The Mirror to write that "the long tunnel of ISIS is only 100 meters away from the base of the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces."

As Khairi led me through the tunnel, the stench of the rotting bodies of ISIS members abounded. His courage spoke volumes; he was fearless of death. "The meaning of *peshmerga* is within itself: those who face death," he said with a smile.

## What it means to be *peshmerga*

I stayed in Sinjar for three days. My conversations were mostly with Khairi, and we

discussed a variety of topics. He was an avid reader, and I noticed that he stay up late into the evenings, reading under dim light.

I asked him when and how he had become *peshmerga*, and what it meant to him. "Being *peshmerga* is an honor that every single Kurd is proud of," he answered without hesitation.

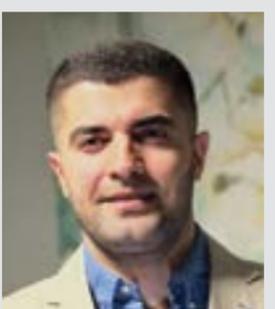
Khairi's passion for being *peshmerga* arose from his anger towards Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, which had martyred and banished several members of his family including two of his cousins and an uncle. He had spent most of his youth in exile. In our conversations, he recounted the many stages of the Anfal campaign, the chemical attacks on Halabja, the displacement of thousands of innocent Kurds, the complete destruction of roughly 5,000 villages, and the murder of 182,000 civilians, most of whom were buried alive by Saddam and his regime throughout the 1980s.

## Getting to Mosul

In 2014, ISIS, with a force of only several hundred fighters, had defeated one of Iraq's, strongest, largest, and well-equipped military divisions in Mosul. As a result, it had easily seized the city, Iraq's second largest, and declared Mosul its capital.

The group then turned to attacking the borders of the Kurdistan region. The *peshmerga*, led by President Masoud Barzani and whose strongest weapon was the kalashnikov, was the only ground force to respond. With the support of the Coalition Forces, it came face to face with ISIS.

When ISIS changed its course of action from occupying Baghdad to attacking the borders of the Kurdistan region, the operation in Mo-



Goran Shakhawan

*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 several published books in Kurdish.*



Photo: Safin Hamid

sul began. I was covering the war as a journalist at this time, reporting from Makhmur, Gwer, and Khazir. With the same intent, I traveled from Bahdinan to Keske and then to Al-Qosh. I later moved to Zummar and finally to Sinjar.

As a war correspondent, I documented and reported on ISIS's attacks and the victories of the peshmerga. During those three unsettling years, 2,000 peshmerga were martyred and more than 12,000 were wounded, including Lieutenant Khairi, who lost his left eye to a sniper bullet. I recently spoke to Khairi, to check up on him and see how he was doing. "I don't enjoy reading as much as I used to," he said.

## Paving the way for the Iraqi army

I clearly remember that gloomy morning on the top of Mount Zartik. I was huddled in a warm and cozy sleeping bag. The plan for the day was for the peshmerga to attack from three different locations. The Halgord command forces would attack from Khazir front, while the Safin and Zerevani command forces, with whom we were guests, planned to sneak around Mount Zartik to get to Bas-Khira village. As for the third force, it had to leave the Bashiqa border and move in our direction. All three forces planned to meet at the Bartella gate.

ISIS played tricks on the *peshmerga* by leaving expensive ammunition stores behind and filling them with explosives, so that they would explode when the *peshmerga* attempted to confiscate them. ISIS used similar tactics for the windows and doors of houses as well as for the dead bodies that had been left behind.

The command force with which I was travelling reached its intended destination just in time. Suddenly a speeding vehicle was headed right towards us, when we heard a peshmerga shout: "suicide car...it's going to explode...everyone take cover."

These words shook me to the core, like an alarm warning me of something treacherous that was about to take place. The truck was packed with explosives and getting closer by the second. All of a sudden, we were surrounded by a blazing fire. Rocks and pieces of metal fell on us like rain. I passed out for a second and woke up to a shouting voice in my ear. As I opened my eyes, I was so relieved to see a *peshmerga* standing over me. Everything around me had been destroyed, as if an earthquake had just hit. The windows of the cars had been shattered, and we were covered in dust.

The nightmarish sound of the explosion was still ringing in my ears as I heard a fierce voice shouting: "they are all alive, they are all alive." As I regained consciousness, the *peshmerga* was still standing over me, making sure I was safe and immediately reassuring me: "never be afraid if you have a *peshmerga* by your side."

The *peshmerga* represented the world on the battleground and in the fight against ISIS, ultimately degrading and repelling their forces and handing the keys of the gates of Mosul city back to the Iraqi army. ■

## THE STATUS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE KURDISTAN REGION



Archbishop Bashar M. Warda

Bashar Matti Warda is a Chaldean Catholic cleric and the current Archbishop of Erbil.

**A** commentary on the status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq must begin with a recognition that much of the historical Christian lands in northern Iraq continue to exist in a disputed status, the sovereignty of which remains undetermined between the central Iraqi Government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil.

In particular, the Christian towns and lands of the Nineveh Plain remain highly problematic. The ongoing lack of resolution on this matter colors all discussion for the Christians in northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, and the many areas of concern stemming from it cannot be minimized. Overall, the issue of security, especially in the Nineveh Plain, remains a fundamental concern for Christians.

### A center for Christianity in Iraq

Nevertheless, certain conclusions can be drawn from the recent experience of the Christians living in the undisputed areas of the Kurdistan Region, primarily in the greater Erbil region. This population at present includes not only the indigenous (pre-2014) residents, but also the internally displaced persons (IDP) Christians of Nineveh, who fled to the safety of the Kurdistan Region after the ISIS attacks of 2014. Altogether, this represents well more than 150,000 Christians, making it the single

largest center of Christianity remaining in greater Iraq.

Important to note here is the willingness of the KRG leadership to consistently engage in acts of public solidarity with the Christian population. These examples of tolerance and respect are of great significance. Moreover, especially in the aftermath of the ISIS war, continued vigilance and leadership must be shown at all levels of government to ensure that hateful ideologies are not allowed any space to take root. The Christians in the Kurdistan Region will continue to look closely for unwavering support in this area.

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**Important to note here is the willingness of the KRG leadership to consistently engage in acts of public solidarity with the Christian population**  
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### From faith comes service

Fundamentally, the future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region rests on the freedom to practice their faith. Here, we must acknowledge that the KRG has protected the freedom for communities to practice and live their faith openly. Since the crisis in 2014, new churches, schools and health clinics have opened, and a new university was established, the Catholic University in Erbil. At the same time, the KRG allowed Christians to administer and manage the humanitarian needs of their displaced families in various sites throughout the greater Erbil region and provided land and security to support the efforts of the Church. In all these cases, the KRG has allowed for the building and operation to take place in a manner that respects and supports Christian traditions and beliefs.



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**The KRG allowed Christians to administer and manage the humanitarian needs of their displaced families in various sites throughout the greater Erbil region and provided land and security to support the efforts of the Church**  
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This ability to practice one's faith in real terms is of critical importance if Christianity is to have a meaningful future in the Kurdistan Region and greater Iraq. In stating this, we refer to the historical role of Christians as peacebuilders, especially in the field of education and health care. These roles are fundamental to Christian identity worldwide, and nowhere more so than in Kurdistan. The value of these Christian roles to the greater community, including all other faiths, is well established.

However, the ability to provide this critical role, as peacebuilders, educators and health care professionals, is for Christians ultimately based upon the ability to live out their faith. For it is from their faith that their service-based view of the world originates. Thus, without freedom to practice their faith, Christians are essentially denied the ability to live out their lives of service to others.

### The future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region

Assuming the greater community of the Kurdistan Region values these contributions, as we hope and believe they do, how can we gauge the potential future for the Christians now living there?

Key to the ongoing viability of any community is economic stability. Can people find jobs? Can they support their families? In this, it is important to understand that the Christian communities of the greater Erbil region have been accepting IDPs not merely since 2014, but for much of the prior decade, as many Christians were forced to leave the persecution that had become so widespread in southern Iraq. Indeed, as of 2010, over 3,000 displaced Christian families in Erbil had already been forced to flee violence elsewhere in Iraq.

Since 2014, the number of Christian IDP families in Erbil has increased by more than 10,000 additional families. As we look to the coming year, these numbers remain fluid, with many seeking to return to their former homes in the Nineveh Plain. Yet a significant number of these families may choose to stay in the greater Erbil region for the foreseeable future.

Whether they ultimately choose to stay in the Kurdistan Region or join the diaspora of Iraqi Christians across the world will largely depend upon the region's economic prospects. This in turn will depend upon the leadership shown by both the public and private sectors in providing opportunity and access for all segments of the population, including Christians.

### Culture and education

Another key factor in determining the future of Christians will be the quality of education that can be provided to the young generations. In this, we hope that the Christians will play an important role in the reforms that must take place in the field of higher education if the Kurdistan Region and Iraq are to take their proper places in the modern world. The holdover paradigms from the centrally controlled educational system of former governments must be replaced by a new era of flexibility and internationally competitive excellence in education. While this is a matter of great concern for Christians, it no doubt speaks to the concerns of all in the Kurdistan Region.

In closing, we remind the world that the Christians of northern Iraq have lived here for nearly two thousand years. These are ancient people with a unique and important culture, who pray that they will be able to stay in their historic homeland, recover from a long history of persecution, and live in peace with their neighbors. After this painful and violent history, the future for Christians in Iraq today rests not so much on the actions that they might take, but by in power in Baghdad and Erbil and outside powers whose foreign policy decisions have so often ignored the consequences for Christians and other threatened minorities.

In these times, Christians stand ready to participate as full citizens with equal rights in a proper sovereign government legitimately chosen by the people, in which valid measures of local autonomy are sufficient to ensure that the historical demography and cultures of the region are protected. ■

In these times, Christians stand ready to participate as full citizens with equal rights in a proper sovereign government legitimately chosen by the people, in which valid measures of local autonomy are sufficient to ensure that the historical demography and cultures of the region are protected. ■



Photo: Safin Hamid

Photo: Safin Hamid

## **FAILI KURDS UNVEILING GENOCIDE URGENT INTERNATIONAL ACTION NEEDED**

Kurdistan Chronicle

The international scientific conference on the genocide of the Faili Kurds was held in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, from May 2 to May 4, 2023. This groundbreaking event aimed to shed light on the tragic genocide perpetrated against the Faili Kurdish community and to seek recognition and justice for the victims.

Through powerful testimonies, presentations, and scholarly research, the conference put forth irrefutable evidence of the systematic targeting,

displacement, and killings of the Faili Kurds. By recognizing the genocide, the conference sought to break the silence surrounding these atrocities, ensure that the truth is known and acknowledged, and raise national and global awareness about the genocide.

Participants included international human rights activists, scholars, and policymakers who united to amplify the voices of the victims and shed light on this tragic chapter in history. By creating a platform for international dialogue, the conference aimed

to foster solidarity and garner support for justice and recognition of the genocide.

### **History of the Faili Kurds**

The plight of the Faili Kurds, a minority group within the Kurdish population, has often been overlooked in discussions surrounding the Kurdish struggle. However, the recent conference "Genocide of the Faili Kurds" in Erbil aimed to bring attention to

President Masoud Barzani addressing the International Scientific Conference on the Genocide of Faili Kurds in Erbil.

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The plight of the Faili Kurds, a minority group within the Kurdish population, has often been overlooked in discussions surrounding the Kurdish struggle  
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Photo: Farhad Ahmad



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

Deputy Parliament Speaker of Iraq, Muhsin Mandalawi, delivering a speech at the Faily conference.

the genocide unfolding against the Faily Kurds. This article sheds light on this tragic situation and highlights the immediate need for international intervention to halt the atrocities being committed against this vulnerable community.

The Faily Kurds, also known as Shias of Kurdish origin, are a distinct group within the larger Kurdish population. They are primarily found in regions spanning Iraq and Iran. The term "Faily" is derived from the Persian word "Fayli," which refers to the Faily Kurds' historical connection to the Fayli tribe.

The Faily Kurds are ethnically Kurdish but adhere to the Shia branch of Islam, distinguishing them from other Kurdish groups, who are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Their unique religious identity sets them apart and has often made them targets of discrimination and marginalization.

Historically, the Faily Kurds have faced various challenges and hardships due to their minority status. In Iraq, under the regime of Saddam Hussein, they experienced severe repression and persecution. Many were forcibly displaced, and their properties were confiscated or destroyed. The Iran-Iraq War also resulted in displacement and casualties among the Faily Kurdish population.

Despite the difficulties they have faced, the Faily Kurds

have preserved their distinct cultural heritage, including their own dialect, traditions, and customs, and have made significant contributions to Kurdish society, particularly in the fields of art, literature, and intellectual discourse.

### Forced displacement and exile, property seizures, and the missing

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Faily Kurds faced a devastating tragedy as successive Iraqi regimes implemented a deliberate and systematic policy to target the community, which included a campaign of forced displacement and exile.

Nearly 600,000 Faily Kurds were uprooted from their homes and forcibly sent to Iran, resulting in the disruption of families, the loss of livelihoods, and the tearing apart of social fabric within the Faily Kurdish community. The homes, lands, and businesses of those displaced were also confiscated, which left the Failis without their means of sustenance and stripping them of their assets and further exacerbated their plight and contributed to their long-term marginalization.

Tragically, during this period, approximately 22,000 Failis also went missing during the forced displacement and exile, leaving behind a legacy of pain and unresolved questions. These individuals disappeared without a trace, leaving their families and loved ones searching for answers and

living with the anguish of uncertainty. The lack of information or inability to gain any type of closure regarding the fate of these missing individuals has perpetuated the pain and grief for the Faily Kurdish community.

The forced displacement, property seizure, and loss of thousands of Faily Kurdish lives have had far-reaching consequences. The community continues to grapple with the trauma and challenges of rebuilding their lives. The unresolved issue of the missing Failis adds an additional layer of pain and unresolved justice, demanding attention and action from the international community.

### Seeking justice and recognition

It is imperative that the international community recognizes and acknowledges the suffering endured by the Faily Kurdish community. Efforts should be made to seek justice for the victims and their families, ensuring that those responsible for the forced displacement, property seizure, and disappearances are held accountable for their actions. The families of the missing Failis deserve answers and closure, and steps should be taken to investigate and shed light on their fate.

The forced displacement, exile, and tragic disappearances of Faily Kurds in Iraq during the 1970s and 1980s represent a dark chapter in history that demands attention and recognition. The international community must stand in solidarity with the Faily Kurdish community, advocating for justice, accountability, and reparations. Only through acknowledging the past injustices and addressing the ongoing consequences can we hope to heal the wounds of the Faily Kurds and ensure a more inclusive and just future for all.

### The Genocide of the Faily Kurds conference

The conference in May sought to shed light on the escalating violence and targeted attacks against the Faily

Kurdish community. It brought together human rights activists, scholars, journalists, and representatives of the Faily Kurdish community to raise awareness about the severity of the situation and to call for urgent international intervention.

The conference participants presented compelling evidence of systematic human rights abuses and acts of violence targeting the Faily Kurds. Reports of

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**Nearly 600,000 Faily Kurds were uprooted from their homes and forcibly sent to Iran, resulting in the disruption of families, the loss of livelihoods, and the tearing apart of social fabric within the Faily Kurdish community**

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mass killings, forced displacements, arbitrary detentions, destruction of property, and sexual violence were shared, painting a grim picture of the dire circumstances faced by this vulnerable minority group.

### Urgent need for international action

The international community must acknowledge its responsibility to protect vulnerable populations and ensure the human rights of all individuals are respected. The conference in Erbil highlighted the pressing need for immediate international action to address the genocide of the Faily

Kurds and to halt the ongoing genocide, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure justice for the victims. Here are crucial steps that should be taken:

**International Awareness and Advocacy:** The conference played a significant role in raising awareness about the plight of the Faily Kurds. It is essential to continue advocating for their rights on a global scale, urging governments, international organizations, and human rights bodies to take notice and respond with urgency. **Humanitarian Aid and Support:** The international community should provide immediate humanitarian aid to the affected Faily Kurdish communities. This includes access to essential resources such as food, clean water, medical assistance, and shelter. Collaborative efforts between non-governmental organizations, governmental bodies, and international organizations are vital to ensure the delivery of much-needed aid.

**Accountability and Justice:** Perpetrators of the genocide against the Faily Kurds must face accountability for their actions. International bodies, such as the United Nations and relevant human rights organizations, should conduct thorough investigations into the atrocities and support the establishment of legal mechanisms to bring the perpetrators to justice.

**Empowering Faily Kurdish Communities:** To safeguard the future of the Faily Kurds, it is crucial to empower their communities. This includes promoting their cultural heritage, ensuring equal access to education and employment opportunities, and creating an inclusive environment that respects their rights as citizens.

By raising awareness, providing humanitarian aid, advocating for accountability, and empowering Faily Kurdish communities, the international community can contribute to a brighter and more inclusive future for all Kurds, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. It is time to act decisively and protect the fundamental rights of the Faily Kurds who have suffered for far too long. ■

## BOOK INDUSTRY IN KURDISTAN



Jan Dost

Jan Dost is a prolific Kurdish poet, writer and translator. He has published several novels and translated a number of literary Kurdish masterpieces into Arabic.

After the 1991 uprising and the liberation of Kurdistan, the Kurdistan people genie slowly emerged. Freed from the bottle that they had been imprisoned in by the Ba'ath regime, life began to flourish in all its political, social, economic, and urban aspects, but the rise of culture and knowledge in Kurdistan was also clearly manifested.

Initially, many magazines and newspapers appeared that reflected various intellectual, literary, and political currents and movements. Cultural activities burgeoned, and institutions interested in such activities appeared, including the Sardam Foundation in Sulaymaniyah, the Aras Publishing House in Erbil, and the Spirez Printing and Publishing House in Dohuk.

Despite the lack of modern printing presses in Kurdistan at that time, many interested people established publishing houses across Kurdistan to cover the need for the book, which is a civilized product of knowledge and necessary in any civilized and prosperous society. In order to learn more about the current state of the book and publishing industry in Kurdistan, Kurdistan Chronicle contacted a number of publishers in Erbil, Soran, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah to learn their perspectives on the challenges associated with publishing, printing, and marketing physical books.

### Shifting generational habits

Azad Barzanji, writer, translator and head

of the Sulaymaniyah Sardam Printing and Publishing, spoke to *Kurdistan Chronicle* about his pioneering institution. According to Barzanji, Sardam was founded by a group of writers in late 1998 and began publishing books in 1999. The demand in the first ten years was strong. There were up to 1,000 copies published for each edition, and these all sold within months, which prompted us to publish again. But, over the last ten years, things have changed.

Barzanji, whose foundation has printed more than 1,500 books, attributed the decline in interest in books to the “tyranny and impulsiveness” of modern social communication and its associated media platform.

Furthermore, he complained that the younger generation lacked interest in books and stressed that most readers hail from older generations. He also explained how there is a lack of book fairs, with only an annual fair in Sulaymaniyah and exhibition in Erbil, and highlights how religious books were the most popular at them. He noted that it was essential to publish in the Kurdish language and underscored the importance of Arabic-language books as a bridge for introducing Arab readers to Kurdish literature, history, and society.

Yet the financial crisis caused this segment of readership to decline further. As for English books, Barzanji said that they are only of interest to the old generation. Barzanji’s pessimism paints a bleak future for physical books, saying: “consumer culture prevails.” Social media networks have impaired the uptake

“The English language is witnessing great demand, so we opened a special branch in Dohuk to sell books that have only been issued in English”

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and absorption of the physical book as has the decline of the intellectual and cultural movement.

### Who are the readers?

Yaran Hiwa, an active young man who founded Cultural Café with his friends in downtown Erbil, and spoke with *Kurdistan Chronicle* about his ambitious project: “We established the Mm and Zain Cultural Center in 2018, which welcomes its patrons, who are interested in literature and culture, every day. Academics and writers also meet and discuss various intellectual and cultural issues.”

When asked about the age groups who attend the center, Hiwa said that youth constitute the majority of the center’s visitors. As for the type of books that receive the most interest, he said: “Classic books, such as the Collections of Nali, Mahwi and Malai Jaziri, are generally the most popular. We have books in six languages including English, Arabic, and French and print ten to 15 books a year. The physical book industry is faltering due to the tyranny of the e-book and the advent of digital books.”

Meanwhile, Salim Mustafa Chali, director of the Ahmad Khani Cultural Association Library in Soran, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the library was established in 1993 and now publishes many books – 105 in total – that cover political, social, psychological, and other fields.

Chali stressed that most of the library’s visitors are university students who look for books

on history, law, and religion. He complained about the lack of visitors during the Erbil International Book Fair last March, which he attributed to the economic situation. He remains optimistic, however, about the future of the book, provided that the government’s interest in education and books translates into support for publishers and their projects.

### Supporting literature

Awab Abdul-Hamid, director of Jaziri Publishing House based in Dohuk, offered further color on the publishing industry, telling *Kurdistan Chronicle* about the publishing house’s origins and vision: “My father, Ahmed Abdel Hamid, founded Jaziri in 1988, and I have managed it since 2010. We have printed 580 books, most of which are religious, with psychology and human development textbooks coming in second.”

The publishing house also supports a young readership interested in literature: “In recent years, the number of novels and novelists has increased in Duhok governorate; most of the visitors to our library are young people up to the age of 35.”

Regarding the languages that are widely spread among readers, he said: “The English language is witnessing great demand, so we opened a special branch in Dohuk to sell books that have only been issued in English. Our library started in 2019, with nearly seventy books published annually. There is strong demand for books translated from international languages into Kurdish, as readers prefer translated books – for their themes and

styles – more than books originally written in Kurdish.”

### A challenging industry

Emad Mohammad Hassan, a writer, translator and lawyer who runs Rosa Printing and Publishing, spoke to *Kurdistan Chronicle* about his foundation: “Since the establishment of Rosa in 2015, the demand for our books has fluctuated, which is due to two factors: the first is the quality of the readers and publications, and the second is economic conditions.

We initially focused on introducing the Kurdish reader to world literature and tried to publish works of international writers that were unnoticed here in Kurdistan. Thus, out of 60 initial publications, 50 dealt with world literature. Translated novels are our bestsellers. We have been able to attract part of the readership to our publications and, despite difficult financial conditions, have managed to publish 150 books.”

Hassan noted that “the young generation and students make up the majority of our readers.” On readers’ desired language, he said: “Arabic has elite readers, while English is favored by the young people in general.” Hassan underlined that the book industry has been declining since the end of the twentieth century due to modern technology. Regarding the situation of the physical book in Kurdistan, he also sounded pessimistic, saying “the demand for a physical book is gradually declining. If there is no serious attention to it, I see the future as bleak.”

Still, at the Erbil International Book Fair held in March 2023, he witnessed a positive atmosphere and energy after a long break and hoped that the exhibition would continue to build on this momentum. ■

## THE IMPORTANCE OF KURDISH MEDRESES



**Michiel Leezenberg**

*Michiel Leezenberg teaches in the philosophy department of the University of Amsterdam. He has held visiting positions at, among others, INALCO/Sorbonne in Paris and at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. He has published widely on the Kurds.*

The medreses, or Quranic schools, of Kurdistan may seem a thing of the past, having been officially banned in Turkey since the 1920s and rendered obsolete elsewhere by the rise of modern, state-funded (and, more recently, private) elementary and higher education models. Yet medreses have played an important role in the cultural life of the Kurdistan Region and have arguably helped to make Kurdish culture what it is today.

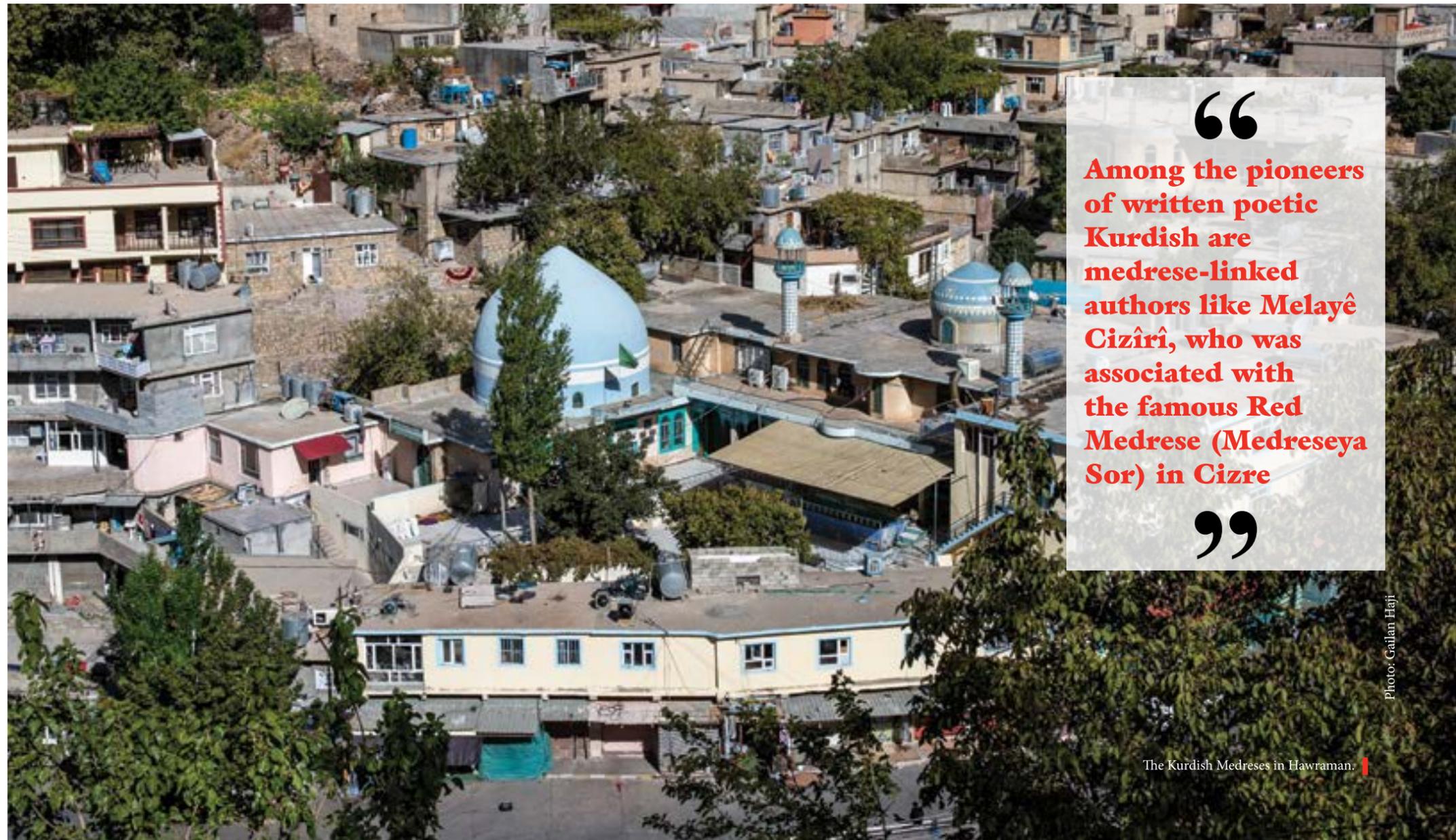
Obviously, the medrese education primarily consisted of Arabic-Islamic religious learning, starting with the memorization of the Qu-

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**Elsewhere, the term medrese usually denotes specific institutes of higher learning, but in the Kurdish-inhabited region, it generally refers to institutions of religious learning in general**

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ran and the principles of the faith, and then proceeding to the details of Arabic grammar, the study of hadiths or prophetic traditions and Quranic exegesis – in short, the sciences of arabiyya (i.e., of religious knowledge and



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**Among the pioneers of written poetic Kurdish are medrese-linked authors like Melayê Cizîrî, who was associated with the famous Red Medrese (Medreseya Sor) in Cizre**  
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Photo: Galan Hajji

The Kurdish Medreses in Hawraman.

linguistic expression in the Arabic language); but in early modern times, medrese education in Northern Kurdistan developed a specifically Kurdish character.

Elsewhere, the term medrese usually denotes specific institutes of higher learning, but in the Kurdish-inhabited region, it generally refers to institutions of religious learning in general. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the term hujra (literally referring to a room for instruction adjacent to a mosque) appears to be used more frequently than medrese. The early history of the medreses in Kurdish towns and cities largely

remains to be written and, about the history of rural medreses, we are even more in the dark.

### Evliya Çelebi

Yet there are several important sources on the history of medreses. Among the earliest is the Seyahatname (Book of Travels) of the seventeenth-century travel writer Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682). This huge work has left us with invaluable information on the cultural and intellectual life, and on the spoken languages, of the early modern empire – and with a good deal of exaggerated tall tales of an often rather

obscene character.

Evliya also spent a substantial amount of time at local princely courts in Kurdistan, and in predominantly Kurdish-inhabited cities or towns like Diyarbakir, Bitlis, and Amadiya, for which he gives interesting, and often surprisingly precise, bits of information about local medreses, spoken dialects, and so on. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have traveled to the Kurdish-inhabited areas further South or East. One would have been interested to read Evliya's observations at the Erdelan court in the city of Sina/Sanandaj in the neighbouring

Qajar empire, for instance.

Interestingly, Evliya writes that in the urban Kurdish medreses that he visited, only Arabic and Persian were used. He does make a few short comments about Kurdish-language poets at the court of Amadiya but otherwise appears to see Kurdish primarily if not exclusively as a spoken language.

### Xanî and other sources

Shortly after the time of Evliya's visits, however, we see the first signs of a momentous shift in Kurdish medrese life: from the later seventeenth century on, we have evidence of the use of (Northern) Kurdish not only as a medium of oral and written instruction, but also as a written language of poetic expression and even as an object of linguistic learning.

Among the pioneers of written poetic Kurdish are medrese-linked authors like Melayê Cizîrî, who was associated with the famous Red Medrese (Medreseya Sor) in Cizre.

Even more importantly, however, are the writings of Ehmedê Xanî, who explicitly indicated that his use of written Kurdish in a medrese setting was an innovation if not a heresy (bid'a). For beginning Kurdish-speaking medrese pupils, Xanî composed the Nûbihara piçûkan (First Fruits for the Young Ones), a short, rhymed Arabic-Kurdish vocabulary, and the Eqîdeya êmanê (Profession of Faith), a brief profession of the faith. Both works were written in rhymed verse, undoubtedly with the aim of facilitating rote learning.

Xanî's masterpiece, of course, is the long romance poem, Mem û Zîn (Mem and Zin), about two ill-fated lovers who are not given permission to marry and gradually pine away as a result. Although this work today is read primarily as a political allegory of the fate of the Kurds, it appears to have originally been written specifically for a medrese audience. It also appears to have been widely read in the medreses of Northern Kurdistan: a substantial number of manuscripts of this poem has survived, almost

all of which are simple and modest works that lack the ornamentations and elaborate – and expensive – miniatures that are characteristic of manuscripts composed for, or commissioned by, local princes let alone emperors.

Finally, several Kurdish-language works dealing with grammar – and partly cover aspects of the grammar of Kurdish – dating most likely from the eighteenth century have survived and, in fact, continued to be used in Kurdish medreses.

All of this suggests that the origins of Kurdish learned literary culture should be sought in rural medreses rather than in urban centers or at princely courts; that the original audience of this Kurdish literature con-

sisted of medrese pupils and mystics rather than princes or town dwellers; and finally, and intriguingly, that this development is specific to Northern Kurdistan. In the regions further South, Arabic appears to have remained the primary if not exclusive language of education in the hujras.

### Why are medreses forgotten?

There are two major reasons that the rich literary, cultural, and intellectual life of the Kurdish medreses has not received the attention it deserves. First, of course, there was the repression of all medreses in the newly founded republic of Turkey. In 1925, the Law for the Unification of Education led to the closure of all me-

drese in the country. Clandestinely, however, many medreses continued to operate, especially in the Kurdish provinces, and these played a crucial role not only in preserving Kurdish literary heritage, but also for creating and reproducing a written linguistic standard.

Another reason for the relative neglect of Kurdish medrese life is the fact that secular Kurdish nationalists were not greatly interested in the religious antecedents of their national culture; accordingly, for example, many modern readings of Ehmedê Xanî's Mem û Zîn tend to downplay or ignore its religious and mystical dimensions.

Fortunately, things are changing. We have a few recent descriptions of

medrese life in Northern Kurdistan through a book by Sadreddin Öztoprak in Turkish and one in Kurdish by Zeynelabidin Zinar as well as a memoir by the famous Muhammad Sa'îd Ramazan al-Buti in Arabic called Hadha Walidi (This is my Father), which provides insights into Kurdish medreses before the 1920s ban in Turkey. Remarkably, the commentary of these authors on the medrese curriculum, or rêz, rather consistently suggests that the works mentioned above were widely used in rural medreses all over Northern Kurdistan.

### Paths for future inquiry

The open question is whether we can discern similar developments elsewhere in Kurdistan. It seems that the

rise of Sorani, or Central Kurdish, in the nineteenth century was not as crucially linked to the medreses as that of Kurmanji, or Northern Kurdish. Likewise, the historian Muhammad Hawrami, who among others has written a book on cultural and intellectual life in Hawraman region, once told me that he was not aware of any medrese works written in the Hawrami vernacular, and that in the local medreses, Persian and Arabic rather than Hawrami was used in medrese education.

More recently, however, I have met several Kurdish scholars based in Iran, who assured me that the works in Hawrami of just such a nature can



Photo: Gailan Haji

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**Whatever future discoveries await us, the importance of medrese life for creating a modern Kurdish language and literature – not to say anything of forging cultural identity – can hardly be overstated**

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indeed be found in libraries in Tehran. At present, I know nothing more of these works; plainly, the last word has not yet been written about these matters.

Whatever future discoveries await us, the importance of medrese life for creating a modern Kurdish language and literature – not to say anything of forging cultural identity – can hardly be overstated. ■

# YAŞAR KEMAL

## RENOWNED KURDISH AUTHOR AND TITAN OF TURKISH LITERARY WORLD



Baker Shwani

*Baker Schwani is a Kurdish writer and translator based in Germany. He has published several acclaimed novels into Kurdish. Schwani was born in Kirkuk and studied geology in Baghdad before moving to Germany and obtaining a degree in oriental studies at the University of Bonn.*

**K**emal Sadık Gökçeli, known by most as Yaşar Kemal, achieved legendary status through an extensive body of literary works including numerous short stories and novels. His creations delved into the intricate struggles and hardships faced by socially and culturally marginalized villag-

ers in Anatolia. Regarded as the very heart and conscience of Turkish literature, Kemal's profound voice left an indelible mark.

His writing career began in the 1940s, after which he soon gained recognition for his poignant and evocative storytelling and exploration of the complex social, cultural, and political dynamics of Turkey.



His novels and short stories vividly depicted the harsh realities faced by peasants, laborers, and outcasts, often shining a light on social in-

justices and advocating for the marginalized. Through his compelling narratives, Kemal delved into themes of poverty, land disputes, political unrest, and the resilience of the human spirit.

gnant and evocative storytelling and exploration of the complex social, cultural, and political dynamics of Turkey.



### Anatolian roots

Born on October 6, 1923, in the village of Hemite in Osmaniye province in southeastern Turkey to Kurdish parents from the shores of Lake Van, Kemal began his primary education in the village of Burhanlı near his hometown and later completed primary school in Kadırlı. He moved on to high school in Adana, where worked in a cotton-cloth factory, but dropped out towards the end and worked as a clerk, teacher's assistant, librarian, tractor driver, cotton gatherer, cocoon driver, and farm supervisor. In the early 1940s, Kemal became acquainted with leftist artists and writers such as Pertev Naili Boratov, Abidin Dino, and Arif Dino, and was

imprisoned for the first time at the age of 17 for political reasons. In the year 1943, he published his first book *Ağtlar* (Lullaby), which contains a handful of Turkish folk poetry collected by the author during his explorations through the villages of Anatolia.

After completing his military service in 1946, he moved to Istanbul, where he worked as a gas receipt clerk for a French company, but returned to Qadirli in 1948 to work as a border guard and later as a complainant. He was arrested in 1950 on charges of spreading communist propaganda and imprisoned at Kozan prison in Adana. After his acquittal in 1951, he moved to Istanbul again and worked as an editor and columnist for *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic) newspaper until 1941.

### Finding his voice

Kemal published his first collection of short stories in a book entitled *Sarı Sıcak* in 1952 before publishing the first of his four-volume series *İnce Memed* (Memed the Slim) in 1955, which gained him great fame. Kemal also joined the ranks of the Turkish Workers' Party in 1962 and was a member of the Executive Committee and Central Executive Committee, as well as a founder of the socialist magazine *Ant* in 1957.

Kemal became a member of the Turkish Writers Union in 1973 and served as its president from 1974-1975 and later became the first president of the newly formed PEN club in 1988. Kemal was tried and acquitted

by the State Security Court in Istanbul for an article published in the German magazine Der Spiegel in 1995. In the same year, he was sentenced to one year and eight months in prison because of an article entitled "Black Clouds in Turkey's Sky" that was published in the British magazine Index on Censorship, but his sentence was suspended.

As a writer, Kemal's amazing ability to describe poetic language made him a prominent figure in Turkish and world literature, and he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973. The author has written more than 40 novels and dozens of other books of poetry and essays, and most of his works have been translated into nearly 50 world languages, including Kurdish. So far, he has received

19 major awards in and outside of Turkey, the most prominent being the Légion d'honneur in France. Kemal was also awarded the Peace Prize in 1997 at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Turkish Cultural Prize by President Abdullah Gul in 2008, the Battalion of Glory of the French Republic in 2011, and the Armenian Grigor Narektsi Award in 2013.

The two books – Binbir Çiçekli Bahçe (The Yard of a Thousand and One Roses) and Bu Bir Çağrıdır (This One is a Local) – were published in recent years and contain all of Kemal's articles and theses about these issues.

■ Beker Shwani and Yasar Kemal at his home in Beykoz district, Istanbul.



## A humanitarian at heart

Kemal was a great advocate of resolving the Kurdish question and democratizing Turkey, openly calling for a solution to the Kurdish issue at conferences.

In his later years, he had a great desire to visit the Kurdistan Region and, in the summer of 2010, at his request and at his home in Istanbul, we planned a trip to Kurdistan (Region). The plan was to stay in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah for a week. A plane ticket was purchased. However, the author's deteriorating health made the trip impossible, and doctors later prohibited him from traveling. This way his wish to visit Kurdistan went unfulfilled, but we talked on the phone at least once or twice a month and exchanged ideas about the situation in Kurdistan and Turkey, his books, and literary works. Kemal also wished that all his works would be translated into Kurdish. For this very purpose, he officially asked me to supervise the translation of his novels and other books into the Southern Kurdish Dialect. Now, I am constantly trying to find financial resources to translate them but also to obtain the copyrights for these translations in order to combine all of the author's works in a single source. Due to my closeness to Kemal and my acquaintance with his humanitarian

way of thinking, working to translate his works has been the truest manifestation of the Kurdish loyalty to a son whose fate obliged him to live in a different culture and language, a language of another nation that became his medium of writing.

## Tapestry of vibrant characters

Yaşar Kemal's literary voice resonated deeply with readers, both in Turkey and around the world. His prose was characterized by a rich tapestry of vibrant characters, poetic language, and a deep understanding of human nature. His storytelling prowess earned him numerous accolades and awards throughout his career, solidifying his status as one of Turkey's most esteemed literary figures.

Beyond his literary contributions, Yaşar Kemal was also a staunch advocate for human rights, freedom of expression, and the preservation of cultural heritage. He used his platform to shed light on the plight of the marginalized and often spoke out against social and political injustices.

Yaşar Kemal's literary legacy continues to inspire and captivate readers to this day. His works have been translated into numerous languages and have garnered international acclaim. As a Kurdish writer, he played a significant role in promoting cultural diversity and raising awareness about the Kurdish experience.

Kemal died on February 28, 2015, at the age of 92 in Istanbul and was to rest in Zincirlikuyu Cemetery in Istanbul, but his words and profound insights live on, ensuring that his contributions to literature and social consciousness will endure for generations to come. ■

# MY THREE-DAY EXPERIENCE IN KURDISTAN



**Maria Flygare**

*Maria Flygare is an attorney lawyer in Finland and women's rights campaigner.*

**G**reetings from Erbil! My visit to this stunning city coincided with the unforgettable celebration of International Women's Day.

It was an honor for me to engage in a discussion on women's rights alongside Dr. Basir Al Haddad, Deputy Spokesman of the Iraqi Parliament, and Ms. Khanim Latif, Director of Asuda, an organization supporting women who are victims of violence.

We delved into the legal aspects of women's rights, shedding light on Kurdistan's desire to enact laws that further protect women's rights. However, these efforts were hindered by the Iraqi government, which has already abolished some of Kurdistan's regional laws aimed at ensuring gender equality within society. Mrs. Latif emphasized the importance of enforcing the approved laws and regulations in practice, as mere legislation alone cannot provide the necessary protection.

### **Celebrating our shared humanity**

As someone hailing from Europe, specifically Finland, a country recognized for its advancements in women's rights, I sensed a shared



desire and necessity for change in achieving gender equality. My perspectives on legislation and equality were met with curiosity and acceptance, understanding that change takes time and that equality is a continual process, not inherent everywhere in the world.

I approached the opportunity to meet my fellow panelists and engage in an open dialogue on a topic deeply personal to me as a woman



and a professional. I could never have anticipated that three professionals with diverse backgrounds could have such a captivating conversation rooted in mutual respect and a commitment to supporting women's rights as an integral part of human rights. The engaged audience exuded positive energy, making it one of the most memorable International Women's Day experiences I have ever had.

This event itself served as proof that, regardless of our heritage or life circumstances, we all share common concerns and joys. We all experience pain and yearn for happiness, security, respect, and love. Keeping this in mind, I find that people often fear differences and the unknown, leading to unnecessary barriers in dialogue. Ultimately, our origins do not define us; we all share a common thread—we are all human. The dialogue and the event were truly a celebration of our shared humanity.

### **Exploring Erbil**

During my brief yet unforgettable trip, I also had the opportunity to explore the beautiful city of Erbil and discovered a modern city adorned with exquisite hotels, restaurants, and parks.

The history of Erbil and Kurdistan

fascinated me, as it was unfortunately not taught in schools. Through the news and personal connections with Kurdish individuals, I learned that the region and its people have endured significant challenges but have emerged stronger. The city now exudes a sense of peace, attracting both locals and visitors from outside Kurdistan who come to enjoy the city's offerings. Despite official recommendations from various countries, I must emphasize that I felt safe throughout my stay, witnessing the local government's unwavering commitment to ensuring everyone's safety. Conversations with representatives from other European countries revealed a high level of cooperation between Kurdistan and Europe, making communication with the local government more accessible.

### **Legislating inclusivity**

One of the most memorable highlights of my trip was the visit to the Kurdistan Parliament in Iraq. As a lawyer myself and having had the privilege of participating in the legislative process of the Finnish Parliament, I was keenly interested in understanding the local legislative procedures. During the enlightening guided tour, I discovered that the structure and legislative process of the Parliament shared

fundamental pillars with the Finnish and "European" models. We were graciously received by Mrs. Muna Kahveci, the Secretary of the Parliament, whose professionalism and position were truly inspiring.

Our conversations focused on the crucial topic of women's rights, and it was an honor to meet such an accomplished woman in such a high-ranking position. Additionally, it was remarkable to learn that the Chairman of the Parliament, Mrs. Rewas Fayaq, is also a highly educated woman. Kurdish Laws stipulate that at least 30% of parliamentary members should be women, making the Kurdistan region potentially the only country in the Middle East that strongly promotes women's involvement in politics. Moreover, the legislation ensures representation for minorities, reflecting our shared values and inclusive approach.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the people of Kurdistan, who warmly embraced me and made me feel welcome and comfortable throughout my visit. The hospitality I experienced was truly unparalleled and held immense value. I eagerly look forward to the opportunity to reunite with the wonderful people of Kurdistan in the near future. ■

# EXPLORING THE ENCHANTING SHEREZ CANYON



Photo: Saral Erfani



Saral Erfani

Saral Erfani works as a legal advisor with her practice located in Sina.

Sherez Canyon, a hidden gem that has remained largely unknown, is gaining popularity as trekking in Kurdistan grows in popularity, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In their quest for freedom and a genuine connection with their primal roots, people are increasingly seeking solace in the embrace of nature. Among trekkers, Sherez has emerged as a coveted destination, captivating hearts and minds.

## A sensory experience

Situated in the Kurdish region of Iran – known as eastern Kurdistan among Kurdish people – Sherez proudly stands as a geopark and ancient natural museum, nestled at the convergence of Kurdish towns and the regions of Kermanshah, Ilam, and Lorestan. This remarkable landscape lies a mere 55 kilometers northeast of Kuhdasht and is easily accessible from the nearest city. Locals claim that the canyon’s name comes from the Kurdish words "shiv" and "rez," meaning the valley of grapes. However, today the valley no longer bears any trace of vineyards.

Sherez holds the distinction of being one of the world’s three natural canyons, alongside the renowned Grand Canyon in the United States and Kings Canyon in Australia. As trekkers embark on their journey, the road from Kuhdasht unfolds into a captivating spectacle, offering a sensory experience of the ever-changing forms and topography of the surrounding mountains.

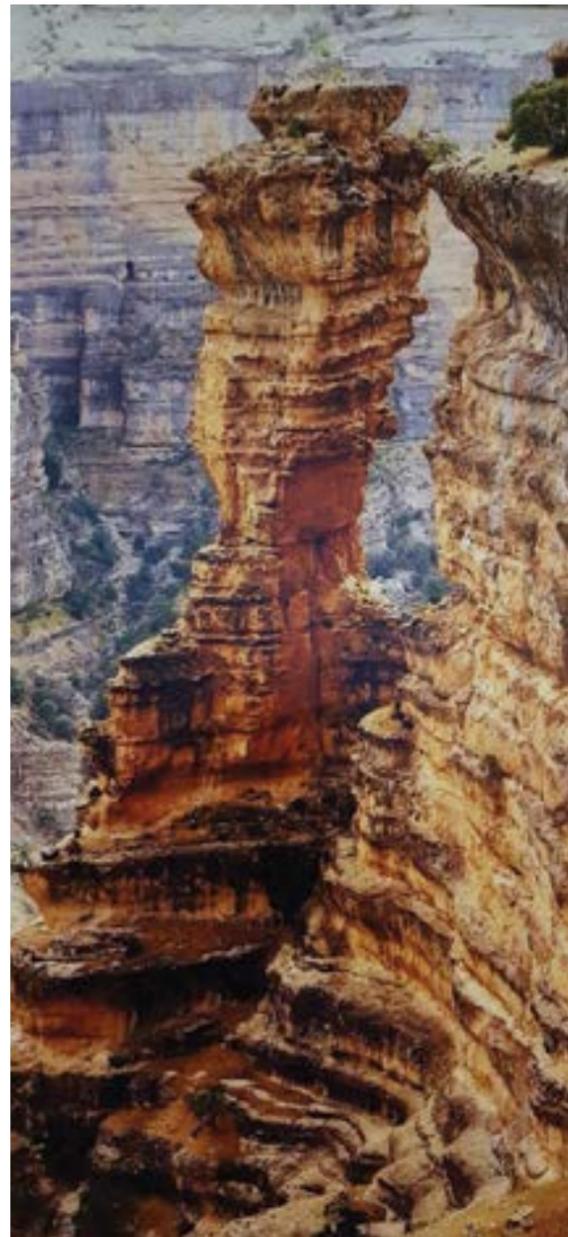


Photo: Saral Erfani

The majestic peaks of the mountain ranges stand tall like formidable walls, as if heralding an entry into a realm of unparalleled beauty. The fabric of the terrain is woven with sedimentary rocks, creating a diverse landscape that evolves with each passing season—a major allure for visitors. In April, nature paints a unique tapestry of vibrant red and yellow flowers amidst lush greenery that evokes an atmosphere of rejuvenation that is aligned with the season. Let us not forget the vital role played by the dominant oak trees that grace the Zagros Mountain range.

## “Ring the bells for my beloved”

As trekkers shouldering their backpacks arrive at the entrance of the valley, their senses come alive. The very first step on this hallowed ground compels them to gaze skyward, inevitably succumbing to the ancient narrative etched into the heart of the Zagros mountains. The familiar melodies of "Bezeran Bezeran," a cherished Lori folk song by the renowned Reza Saghaei, resonate in their ears. The poignant lyrics, "Ring the bells, ring the bells for my beloved," stir emotions, setting the tone for the adventure ahead.

Within a few strides, the iconic minaret of Sherez proudly emerges, extending a warm greeting to intrepid trekkers. The initial leg of the journey leads across a hundred steps, accompanied by the rhythmic sway of suspension bridges traversing the rivers. The stone formations take on

a terraced appearance, harmonizing effortlessly with the interplay of light and the grandeur of the mountains.

By midday, trekkers arrive at a natural cave, where cool waters gently caress their knees. Venturing through the cave, spanning a length of 115 meters, and feeling the refreshing chill of the river, invigorates the weary traveler, readying them for the second phase

“While the hike is not particularly arduous, there may be moments when trekkers must rely on their hands to conquer certain rocky obstacles

of their expedition—the ascent of the mountain.

## Ascending the summit

As trekkers ascend from the depths of the valley to the summit, a breathtaking panorama unfolds before their eyes, punctuated by the meandering

river below. The steep climb commences with careful navigation of the shallow riverbed, delicately treading upon glistening stones. While the hike is not particularly arduous, there may be moments when trekkers must rely on their hands to conquer certain rocky obstacles. Despite the midday sun in April, its warmth proves gentle and comforting.

With each upward step, trekkers pause to savor the awe-inspiring vistas. The view of the valley is simply mesmerizing, offering an ideal setting for peaceful contemplation and meditation. After an hour of hiking, trekkers reach a small Kani or spring, where they can replenish their water bottles and find respite under the welcoming shade of trees. As they approach the mountaintop, the path circumnavigates the valley, granting a new perspective on the sights they had beheld from below in the morning. The trail then becomes more forgiving, offering a softer terrain. Finally, as trekkers reach the journey’s culmination, the magnificent minaret once again stands tall, a beacon of beauty. Just before the minaret, they discover a delightful spot, perfectly positioned to witness the breathtaking sunset and set up camp.

Trekking has increasingly become a favored pursuit among younger generations seeking solace and escape from the chaos of urban life. However, venturing into Sherez elevates the experience to extraordinary heights, one that will forever remain etched in the trekker’s memory, cherished and treasured. ■

# KAKAI PEOPLE HIDDEN PRACTICES AND STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION



Omar Aziz

Omar Aziz is a journalist and videographer from Halabja, specializing in Kurdish media since 2012. With a media degree and a passion for storytelling, he captures impactful moments and sheds light on important issues through his work.

*This story delves into the captivating narrative of the Kakai Kurds, also known as Kakais or Ahl-e Haqq. As a religious minority residing predominantly in the Kurdistan regions of Iraq and Iran, they uphold a unique and ancient belief system that intricately weaves together components of Islam, Zoroastrianism, and ancient Mesopotamian traditions. Renowned for their syncretic faith, the Kakais embrace mystical practices and engage in spiritual rituals that are shrouded in secrecy, offering a glimpse into their enigmatic and deeply rooted cultural heritage.*

Rangin Marf, 45, looks more stylish in her Kurdish outfit and a cap. With a soft smile, she talks about the pot of yogurt in front of her, which she had brought to the Masti Qalati (the Castle of Yogurt) ceremony in Hawar village.

The Masti Qalati ceremony, also known as the Giving Day ceremony, is a significant occasion for the Kakai religious community. Held annually in May, it has religious and social significance for the Kakais who live in the Hawraman Lhon region, specifically in the villages of Hawar, Hawarakon, and Daratwe in Halabja province.

"Masti Qalati (Giving Day) is a special and important occasion for us Kakais, so we prepare ourselves in the most beautiful way," says Rangin.

As members of the syncretic religion, Kakais are also known as Ahl-e Haqq or People of the Truth, found in Kirkuk, Halabja, Nineveh, and Iranian Kurdistan. The Qalate ritual, so named because it takes place in the Qalate area overlooking the shrine of Mir Askandar, a respected Kakai religious figure from the past, entails a meeting of Kakai people who bring milk and other crops for contribution. As a result, it's known as the Castle of Yogurt.

During the ceremony, the Kakais visit sacred sites and shrines in addition to exchanging dairy products and livestock. Families also practice reconciliation and exchange visits, as well as provide grain, wheat, and food for birds and animals.

Rangin notes that the ceremony used to be held exclusively in Qalate due to the small number of Kakai households in the three villages. However, with the increase in the Kakai population, the ceremony now is held in Hawar village as it attracts Kakais from Halabja and other cities, as well as some Muslims.

“**During the ceremony, the Kakais visit sacred sites and shrines in addition to exchanging dairy products and livestock. Families also practice reconciliation and exchange visits, as well as provide grain, wheat, and food for birds and animals**”



Photo: Omar Aziz

A Kurdish Kakai man in traditional attire.



■ A woman participating in the Kakai traditional festival

### Concealed practices

Apart from Masti Qalate, the Kakais have other religious ceremonies, although they are not openly celebrated.

Ako Shaweis, a 53-year-old Kakai, reveals that religious events are held in hidden locations known as Jam Khana among the Kakai community. The reasoning behind this concealment is that they believe religion is a private matter between individuals and their God that does not require public disclosure.

According to Ako, the Kakais believe that the more hidden and concealed the religious ceremonies are, the more acceptable they become, strengthening the relationship between individuals and their God.

The historical oppression faced by minorities justifies the Kakais' choice

to keep their ceremonies secret. Ako highlights the importance of concealment in avoiding rivalry and probable

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**The threats towards Kakais escalated significantly after the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017**  
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persecution from the majority religion. As he puts it, "These rituals have always been kept secret, and Kakais have the right to do so because minorities have always been oppressed.

To avoid such persecution, these rituals should be performed in secret, as they are intended for God, not for humans."

Ako goes on to say that the Kakais are a marginalized group in their own country. "In this country, the Kakais are an oppressed class. This, I believe, is in part due to the Kakais' inability to communicate their demands to the government. At the same time, I believe the Shiites and Islamic groups have sought to avoid portraying the Kakais as a distinct branch of Islam."

Although there are no accurate statistics on the Kakai population, the head of the Mithra Organization for the Development and Culture of Yarsani Kakais estimates that there are 120,000 Kakais living in Iraq and the Kurdistan region. Even though the Kakais are Kurdish, it is noteworthy that 70% of them reside outside the administration of the Kurdistan Re-

gional Government.

Rajab Asi, also known as Rajab Kakai, the president of the Mithra Organization for Yarsani Development and Culture, states that Kakais have no barriers in practicing their beliefs in the disputed areas between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region. These locations include the Bainan villages in Nineveh province, the villages of Daquq in the south of Kirkuk province, and Khanaqin in the north of Diyala province.

### Ongoing threats

Kakais are free to practice their faith within the confines of their homes. However, Rajab stated that extremist groups in the region continue to pose a threat to Kakais.

Rajab categorizes these radical organizations into two sorts. The first comprises of radical Salafi factions that despise the Kakais and reject anyone with opposing ideas. The second category comprises the Iraqi Shiite political parties, which Rajab considers to be more dangerous. They aggressively encourage Kakais to

convert to Shiism and engage in confrontations with Kurds and Sunnis, even if they do not resort to physical violence. Rajab emphasizes that these Shiite political groupings endanger not just the Kakais but also Kurdish national security.

The threats towards Kakais escalated significantly after the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017. As a result, Kakais were forced to evacuate a village in Khanaqin and eleven villages in the western Daquq district of southern Kirkuk province. Rajab attributes these threats to political and security motives, citing the expansion of Shiite influence in these areas as a concern.

Rangin, a participant in the Masti Qalate ritual, emphasizes her strong desire for Kakais to be recognized as an independent religion in the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi constitutions.

"As Kakais, we wish that Kakais be recognized as an independent faith in the constitutions of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq; this is not only my wish but that of every Kakai," said Rangin. ■



■ A Kurdish Kakai man dressed in traditional attire.

# ARDISHIR RASHIDI-KALHUR

## COURAGE, HISTORY, AND SCIENCE



Rahim Rashidi

Rahim Rashidi, a Washington DC-based Kurdish journalist, is widely recognized as "Mr. Kurd." He is focused on Kurdish affairs in Kurdistan and abroad.

**A**rdishir Rashidi-Kalhur's journey from Iranian Kurdistan to becoming a leader engineer and inventor in aeronautical design in the United States is a testament to fearlessness, hard work, ingenuity, and obviously brilliance. His life is the quintessential American immigrant success story, but it also traces the contours of Kurdish history, bringing to life the hardships that Kurds have faced over the last several decades.

### Early life

Born on October 22, 1953, into the distinguished Rashidi-Kalhur family in Gilane Gharb in Rojhalt, Kurdistan, Rashidi-Kalhur's his ancestral land was a region called Kufravour. He attended elementary school from the first to third grades there but, upon his father's retirement, moved to Sarpole Zehab, where he finished the fourth grade, before returning to Kufravour for the fifth and sixth grades. Since there was no high school in Kufravour, he returned to Sarpole Zehab to complete seventh grade and then attended high school in Dezful, Khuzistan, living with his elder brother who was serving in the Iranian Air Force at the time.

Summers were spent in various parts of Kermanshah in Rojhalat, visiting families and witnessing the lives and living conditions of the Kurdish people for whom he developed a great love and incredible respect. Like the rest of the people in Iran, they lived under the oppressive dictatorship of the Shah's regime, who ruled the entire country with an arrogant pomposity, imposition of fear, injustice, and economic and cultural discrimination.

### Leaving Iran

After high school, and having witnessed the deteriorating living conditions under the Shah as well as the coming signs of the 1979 revolution, he decided to leave in 1974 to emigrate to Turkey. Of course, he had big dreams for his future, while his love for and memories of the peoples of Kurdistan imbued him with such an energy that propelled him to be fearless in the face difficulties and hardship along his journey.

Upon arriving in Istanbul, he went to the university cafeteria to meet other Iranian students

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**It was at the German language school where he met his future wife Wendy Miller, now Dr. Wendy Rashidi, to whom he has been married for 48 years**

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and introduced himself as being a Kurd from Iranian Kurdistan. At the mere mention of the word Kurdistan in front of Turkish students, he encountered a sudden change of attitude and outright hostile aggression, which surprised him. Threats almost came to physical blows – one young man against a gang of

hoodlums who were supposed to be educated Turks.

Upon returning to his hotel, he concluded that living in such an unreasonable culture was untenable, so the next day he purchased a bus ticket to make his way toward Germany, arriving in Munich in October 1974. From there he went to Berlin, which had a reputation as an international city replete with great universities. There he worked extremely hard and, within a matter of two months and much to the surprise of both foreign and Iranian students, became conversational in German.

for 48 years. His deep love for her drove him to learn English and, after three months of traveling together throughout Europe and with her help, he gained admission to Eastern Illinois University in the United States.

After receiving a student visa, Rashidi-Kalhur arrived in Chicago in September 1975. Wendy and he married and then graduated four years later, with him receiving a bachelor's degree in physics and Wendy in biology with high honors. From there, they moved to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in 1981, where he received a second degree in mechanical engineering and Wendy completing her medical degree in 1984. By this

treat equipment.

In 1984, the family moved to Southern California, where Wendy completed her residency in family medicine at Kaiser Permanente. With his previous work in the Midwest, Rashidi-Kalhur was hired by aerospace companies that designs flight instruments, including altimeters, air-speed indicators, and pressure sensors and switches. In 1991, he received the Engineer of the Year award from the Thorn-EMI Company for designing a depth sensor for the U.S. Navy's Mark-50 torpedo program.

In 1992, Rashidi-Kalhur joined GM Enterprises as their chief engineer.



Ardishir (left) with Jack Schmitt, Apollo 17 astronaut.

### American success story

It was at the German language school where he met his future wife Wendy Miller, now Dr. Wendy Rashidi, to whom he has been married

stage, they had two sons: seven-year-old Aryan and five-year-old Arjang. It was during this time that Rashidi-Kalhur laid the groundwork for his vision, working as system design engineer and designing induction heat

There, he designed and patented a vacuum heat-treating furnace with a movable hot zone with high energy efficiency and rapid quench capabilities, a first-of-its-kind invention. Five years later, in 1997, he started his own



Michael Sarafin, Artemis Mission Manager NASA, Ardishir Rashidi, President of RDI Engineering, Former NASA Astronaut Dr. Lee M. Morin, Orion Spacecraft Cockpit Display and Control Designer.

consulting company, RDI Engineering, and worked with a company in Burbank, California as designer and program manager, designing fluid control devices for the International Space Station, JAXA (the Japanese equivalent of NASA), and the Lockheed Martin Orion Program, to develop new mission safety valves based on heritage technologies.

In 2015 his company RDI Engineering received a contract from Lockheed Martin to work on NASA's Artemis program components for the Propulsion and Reaction Control System. The successful mission of the Artemis



I, was accomplished between November and December of 2022, operating with RDI Engineering designs on board of the Orion Capsule and the European Space Agency built Service Module.

### Kurdish American Education Society

Along with his professional activities, Rashidi-Kalhur started a non-profit organization (NGO) in 1997 called the Kurdish American Education Society (KAES), which aimed to promote awareness of Kurdish history and society to the American public and political leadership. This organization also



worked to help Kurds become the rightful owners of their cultural heritage, land, and natural resources as well as the wealth that comes with it. KAES sought to improve both the Kurds' physical and spiritual life as

well-being of the world.

The drive to establish KAES was borne from the tragedy of Halabja, committed in 1988 when the world, especially the American pub-



well as promote knowledge of the culture through educational programs, writings, and forming friendships with churches and NGOs, in order to contribute to the betterment and

lic, became aware of the deplorable genocidal attack by Saddam regime against the Kurdish population in his attempts to eradicate them. In its 25 years history, KAES has held many

cultural and educational programs a partial list of which is available from KAES. With its annual budget, KAES gives out annual scholarships and provides humanitarian assistance to many just causes.

In 1997, Rashidi-Kalhur joined a local Chapter of the UN Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) and served as president of the organization at every regional level and nationally as a distinguished Board member. In this capacity, he was able to hand over to the UN the results of the 2005 Kurdistan Referendum Movement calling for Kurdistan's independence. When the UNA-USA merged with the UN Foundation, he served as the bylaw committee chair and proposed the establishment of new standard operating procedures.

In 2004, he was elected as President of the Claremont University Club, where he also served as Program Chair for five years.

In 2019, KAES planned a conference that would have been held at the California Institute of Technology to address the problems and issues facing Kurdish society, seeking solutions from the most highly educated and professional Kurds living in the United States. This event was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but KAES published a series of PowerPoint slides titled "Barnamay Bardawami Kurdistan" alongside the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Currently, he works as the owner and President of RDI Engineering and continues to work on future missions for NASA, most notably and recently with the Artemis Program, which is destined to land the first woman on the moon by 2025 and has further aims to launch missions to the Mars by 2030.

In his spare time, Rashidi-Kalhur likes to write historical poetic fiction. ■

# The art of Wine

## FAKHRIA ELIA'S HOMEGROWN DELIGHT IN KURDISTAN

*This is the story of a woman who achieved fame by crafting exquisite wines in one of the most enchanting towns in the Kurdistan Region.*

Nestled in the picturesque town of Shaqlawa, just a 40-km drive from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, lies a hidden gem that has been captivating wine enthusiasts for decades. Fakhria Elia, a 76-year-old winemaker, who greets visitors with a warm smile adorning her face, has gained fame throughout Kurdistan and Iraq for her exquisite homemade wine. What sets her wine apart is not only its exceptional quality but also the fact that it is made entirely from grapes cultivated in her own vineyard.

As we entered Fakhria Elia's humble abode, as always, she greeted us with a warm smile and invited us into her house, which boasts a backyard overlooking a breathtaking valley overseen by the majestic Mount Safeen. In one corner of her



Photo: Saffin Hamid

backyard, several wooden barrels stand proudly, a testament to the nearly 50 years that she has spent perfecting her craft.

### A local craft

Recalling her early days of winemaking, Elia revealed that she used to produce wine by placing the grapes on a cloth and crushing them with her own feet. It was a laborious yet enjoyable

# The art of Wine

process that added a personal touch to her creations.

However, as the years went by and her children noticed the toll of ageing on their beloved matriarch, they decided to modernize her winemaking operation, ensuring that her passion would continue to thrive.

Elia's vineyard, situated just across from her home on a sloping hill, now benefits from modern winemaking equipment. With these new tools at her disposal, she can uphold her commitment to excellence and create wines that require an average aging period of seven years. Holding up a sealed bottle of her renowned Shaqlawa wine, she explained, "If you seek a decent wine, then seven years should suffice."

Elia's wine can be found not only in the family's adjacent liquor store but also in selected stores and bars across Erbil and other cities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Despite belonging to a Christian minority in a predominantly Muslim region, Elia and her family have never felt unsafe running a business that goes against the conservative beliefs of some.

## Alcohol in Iraq

Although alcohol production is typically associated with Christians, other non-Muslims, and non-practicing Muslims in the Kurdistan Region, Fakhria Elia and her family's unwavering dedication to crafting exceptional wine has garnered widespread admiration from individuals of various backgrounds and beliefs. Fakhria believes that the commitment to quality and the art of winemaking transcends religious boundaries, captivating the hearts and palates of people from all walks of life.

In March, the Iraqi government implemented a ban on the production, export, and import of alcohol throughout the country. However, this ban does not extend to the Kurdistan Region.

As a result, Elia sees an opportunity to expand her sales beyond Kurdistan and Iraq, particularly given the challenging economic conditions in the region. She dreams of exporting her wine to countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, from which she has received on-demand requests from enthusiastic customers.

## Passion and perseverance

With pride in her voice, Elia expressed her desire to see her wine become a product that everyone in the region can be proud of. Her determination to produce exceptional wine, coupled with her unwavering dedication to her craft, serves as an inspiration to wine lovers and entrepreneurs alike.

Fakhria Elia's story is, moreover, a testament to the power of passion, perseverance, and the ability to overcome societal barriers to create something truly remarkable.

Fakhria aspires to persist in crafting exceptional wine while imparting her wisdom to future generations. However, amidst her generous sharing of her winemaking expertise, there was one intriguing secret she held close to her heart, and the hidden ingredient that imparts a unique hue to her wine: a mysterious soaking stone.

Fakhria's resolute commitment and passion for winemaking have magnetized individuals from diverse regions, including the Kurdistan Region, to visit her town. In this enchanting place, they not only explore the intricacies of wine production but also unravel the profound Christian heritage of Shaqlawa.

Witnessing its transformation into a thriving multicultural center within the Kurdistan Region creates a captivating experience for visitors from all walks of life. ■

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**What sets her wine apart is not only its exceptional quality but also the fact that it is made entirely from grapes cultivated in her own vineyard**

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Photo: Safin Hamid

# LUNE

## LIGHTS UP GLOBAL MUSIC LANDSCAPE

Kurdistan Chronicle

*This is the tale of LUNE, a youthful vocalist hailing from Germany, known by her birth name Mailan Ghafouri. Born on September 25, 2002, in Heidelberg, Germany, LUNE comes from a Kurdish family rooted in the Ghafouri tribe, originally from Koy Sanjaq. Escaping the challenging cir-*

*cumstances in Iraq, her parents made the courageous decision to immigrate to Germany in 1995, affording LUNE a vibrant upbringing encompassing diverse cultures. This unique experience has left an indelible mark on her musicality and artistic expression.*



# LUNE





In the lurid constellation of the international music scene, a captivating narrative emerges, set to the beat of a prodigious talent. Allow me to introduce Mailan Ghafour, globally recognized as Lune. This luminary artist has been blazing a trail through the musical universe with her distinct voice, a compelling stage presence, and a spirit deeply rooted in her Kurdish heritage. At the sprightly age of 18, she signed an auspicious deal with Warner Music Central Europe, rocketing her career on an extraordinary trajectory.

Firmly grounded in Hamburg, yet part of the vast network of the New York-headquartered Warner Music Group, Lune's affiliation with Warner Music Central Europe has been an instrumental catalyst in her meteoric rise. This association bestows upon her an enhanced prestige, putting her in the same echelon as global stars like Bruno Mars, Ed Sheeran, and David Guetta.

### **A transnational star**

Lune, despite her tender years, has swiftly ascended to the apex of Ger-

many's young hip-hop and pop generation. She brings her cultural identity to life in her music, selling out concerts across Germany and proudly flying the Kurdish flag during performances, thereby reinforcing her deep-rooted connection to her lineage.

In addition to her artistic prowess, Lune possesses a linguistic versatility, performing effortlessly in both German and French. This linguistic dexterity enhances her global appeal and propels her music across borders. Collaborations with international art-

ists, such as David Guetta and Nej, have further augmented her global footprint, leading to hit songs like "Family" in 2021 and "Nour El Ain" in 2022.

Her debut single "Gebe Auf" achieved Gold status in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, firmly establishing her as a force to be reckoned with in the music industry.

In 2023, Lune added to her illustrious discography with a groundbreaking single titled "Steht auf 2023." Reverberating with her signature powerful vocals, the song serves as a clarion call for justice and humanity. Clad in traditional Kurdish attire, Lune demonstrates that she remains fiercely tied to her roots and consistently infuses her music with her cultural identity.

### **Activist and cultural diplomat**

"Steht auf 2023" is more than just a song – it symbolizes Lune's unwavering commitment to strengthening women's rights and protesting against injustices, particularly in Iran. The song pays a poignant tribute to Zhina Amini, who tragically lost her life three days after her arrest by the Iranian moral police. Lune uses her influential platform to shed light on Amini's tragic case and raise awareness about human rights issues globally.

Lune transcends the traditional mold of an artist; she is an activist wielding the power of her music to inspire hope and instigate change. Her commitment to human rights and social justice permeates her songs, rendering her a critical voice in the global music landscape.

Behind the veneer of Lune's professional triumphs is a profound commitment to her heritage. As the



descendant of a revered Kurdish revolutionary who served under the likes of Mustafa Barzani, Idris Barzani, and Massoud Barzani, Lune harnesses her musical influence to champion recognition and respect for Kurdistan on the global stage.

Although not born and raised in Kurdistan, Lune's familial upbringing has ensured her roots remain close to her heart. She seeks to honor her grandfather's legacy through her music, viewing her voice as an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

Lune mesmerizes audiences with her unique artistry and unfaltering dedication, inspiring a new generation to take pride in their cultural heritage. Her concerts are more than just musical spectacles – they are exuberant celebrations of cultural heritage and powerful exhibitions of human spirit. Her ability to perform in German and French elevates her global appeal and showcases the potential of cultural

and linguistic diversity to make a global impact.

### **Enduring connection to homeland**

Separated by geographical distance from her homeland, Lune's Kurdish roots nevertheless remain firmly entrenched, a testament to her family's influence. This deep connection fuels her ambition to leverage her position in the music industry to drive change and serve as an ambassador for her people.

Lune's remarkable 2021 song "Alles Verdient," whose video was filmed in Erbil, Kurdistan, narrates the story of her parents, who fled Saddam's tyranny and built a new life in Germany. The music video stands not only as a tribute to her family's past but also a testament of her enduring connection with Kurdistan.

Lune's music is not only the core of her identity but also an expression of respect and love for her people. With her songs, she aims to shed light on the richness and diversity of the often-misunderstood Kurdish culture. She seeks to bridge the gap between her homeland and the rest of the world, acknowledging the history and contributions of the Kurdish people.

With her captivating voice, authentic music, and passionate message, the future promises many more successes for Lune. As she continues to stay true to her roots and to inspire people worldwide with her music and dedication to her culture, we can expect to see her shine even brighter in the years to come. It remains to be seen what impact her music and cultural advocacy will have globally, but one thing is certain: Lune will continue to illuminate the music industry and beyond. ■

# KURDISH FEMALE BODYBUILDER SHATTERS GENDER BARRIERS

Kurdistan Chronicle



Photo: Safin Hamid

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**Embracing her belief that muscles can enhance women's beauty, Kamal dedicates four hours every day to intense training at a gym in Erbil**  
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**S**hylan Kamal, an Iraqi Kurd, defies stereotypes and challenges gender labels through her remarkable journey as a bodybuilder.

As a young girl, she would assist her mother in kneading bread, gradually realizing the transformative power it had on her muscles, a discovery that she found intriguing at the time. Now a 46-year-old mother herself, Kamal views her passion for bodybuilding as a crucial step towards achieving gender equality in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

Embracing her belief that muscles can enhance women's beauty, Kamal dedicates four hours every day to intense training at a gym in Erbil. During an interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, she confidently claimed, "Bodybuilding allows us to manifest our beauty through physical development."

"Why can't women be both beautiful and strong at the same time?"

Returning to Kurdistan from Germany three years ago, Kamal encountered a conservative and patriarchal society that raised eyebrows at her commitment to bodybuilding. However, undeterred by societal opinions, she asserted her autonomy, disregarding the traditional standards of beauty imposed on women.

Unfazed by criticism, Kamal proclaims, "I don't care at all what people say; I have my own opinions." Re-

jecting the notion of women as inferior or mere objects of desire, she challenges the status quo and questions, "Why can't women be both beautiful and strong at the same time?"

Kamal's journey in bodybuilding commenced at the age of 22. On Instagram, she fearlessly showcases her muscular physique and poses in bikinis, capturing her participation in bodybuilding competitions throughout Europe. Sometimes, she proudly waves the flag of Iraqi Kurdistan, signifying her unwavering pride in her homeland.

Her training routine includes a warm-up followed by a combination of weight machines, dumbbell exercises, and push-ups. With her powerful shoulders adorned by cascading hair, she exemplifies strength and determination.

Recently, Kamal participated in three competitions across Britain and Germany, consistently securing third place. One such notable event was the FIBO Global Fitness show in Cologne in mid-April.

## Promoting gender equality

Kamal laments the prevalent prejudice in her homeland, where people are unaccustomed to witnessing women flaunting their muscles in bathing suits. She also encounters surprise from individuals abroad when they discover her Iraqi origins.

Photo: Safin Hamid



Originally hailing from Sulaymaniyah, the second-largest city in Iraqi Kurdistan, Kamal emigrated to Germany at the age of 14, accompanied by her uncle. Two years later, she got married, and now has three children in their twenties. While in Germany, Kamal pursued higher education and established a career as a photographer, working in a studio in Duesseldorf.

Kamal expresses gratitude for the unwavering support she has received from her family throughout her journey. Reflecting on her childhood, she states, "Since I was a kid, I've been full of energy, and always need an outlet for that energy." She first found solace and happiness in the discovery of her developing muscles while assisting her mother in kneading dough to make bread.

Acceptance of women's sports in Iraqi society has been growing. In recent years, more women have started participating in football, boxing, kickboxing, and weightlifting. The stability experienced in the Kurdistan Region, with hardly any conflict compared to other regions of Iraq since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, has facilitated the development of sports infrastructure.

Ranjbar Ali, who trains alongside Kamal at the same gym, expresses his elation at witnessing women like Kamal dismantle barriers and overcome preconceived notions to attain excellence on a global scale. With his muscles bulging beneath a black singlet, Ali wholeheartedly supports Kamal's endeavors in promoting gender equality in bodybuilding. ■

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In recent years, more women have started participating in football, boxing, kickboxing, and weightlifting

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## BANGLADESHI COMMUNITY CULTIVATING A TASTE OF HOME IN ERBIL



**Qassim Khidhir**

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

Every Friday, a unique and vibrant market comes to life in the heart of Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. This bustling market near the Baghi Shar Garden is not your typical bazaar. It is the Bangladeshi market, where Erbil's Bengali community gathers to connect, shop, and enjoy the flavors of its homeland.

Habib Abdulrahman, a 39-year-old Bangladeshi resident who has called Erbil home for several years, passionately explains the significance of this market beyond its commercial value. "It is more than just a market for us to buy vegetables and food; it is our meeting place," Habib says with a warm smile.

### **Fish, spices, and more**

With approximately 5,000 Bengali residents in Erbil, the weekly market serves as a hub for the community to greet one another, engage in conversations, inquire about each other's well-being, and stay updated on news from Bangladesh.

Habib points out the unique vegetables, fish, and spices that are only found in Bangladesh and other South-east Asian countries as he walks through the market. "This is Lalshak (red amaranth), which is traditionally served

with fish. Mula (white radish), Kasa Morris (chili), and Ilish fish, the most popular fish in Bangladesh and often referred to as the 'King of Fishes', are here," he enthusiastically shares. "Food is synonymous with fish and vegetables for the Bengali community, and these familiar flavors evoke a sense of home," he adds.

Most of the fish sold in the market is flown in from Bangladesh.

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**With approximately 5,000 Bengali residents in Erbil, the weekly market serves as a hub for the community to greet one another, engage in conversations, inquire about each other's well-being, and stay updated on news from Bangladesh.**

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Among the vendors, one stall attracts a steady stream of Bangladeshi customers. Shahab Rajab, 27, specializes in selling Bangla Pan Betel leaves, which are chewed for an extended period until the mouth turns orange. "Pan Betel leaves are delicate and beneficial to digestion and dental health. They strengthen teeth. Every day, I consume four to five leaves," he explains.

### **A place for cultural exchange**

The Bangladeshi Friday market, founded in 2011 by the Bengali community, began as a place for Bangladeshis to shop and socialize. It has, however, attracted visitors from other communities over time, including Indians, Filipinos, Nepalese, and a few curious Kurds who have developed a taste for Bangladeshi vegetables, spices, and cuisine.



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Nonetheless, Kurdish visitors remain a minority at the market, often driven by curiosity rather than regular shopping.

The Bangladeshi market stands as a testament to the cultural exchange taking place in Erbil, where diverse communities can explore and appreciate each other's culinary traditions.

Several food stalls across from the Bangladeshi grocery and fish market serve delectable dishes such as ilish curry fish fried in oil and Sambusa, as well as a variety of sweets popular not only in Bangladesh but also in India. Pantua, a milk, semolina, ghee, khoya, and sugar delicacy, and Lang-

cha, a fried flour and khoya sweet dipped in sugar syrup, are both available to visitors.

### **Farming Bangladeshi ingredients in Kurdistan**

To ensure a steady supply of traditional ingredients, the Bangladeshi community has taken up farming in the Kurdistan region, importing seeds from Bangladesh and cultivating their own vegetables.

Kurdistan Chronicle visited one such farm in Arabkand, a village on the outskirts of Erbil.



■ Bangladeshis in their community market in Erbil.



Ibrahim Farouq, a local farmer of 26 years, took the bold step of leasing two hectares of his land to a Bangladeshi group, allowing them to grow their own vegetables. Initially hesitant due to cultural differences, Ibrahim now speaks highly of his decision, praising his Bangladeshi tenants' hard work, calmness, and constant smiles.

Ibrahim's family has grown fond of the distinct flavors of Bangladeshi groceries. They particularly enjoy the rich flavor of Bangladeshi eggplants,

though the chili peppers are a little too spicy for their tastes.

During the visit, it was clear that the Bangladeshi farmers had developed a well-organized routine. They spent their afternoons tending to their bountiful vegetable crops after finishing their blue-collar jobs in the morning. Around ten Bangladeshis were spotted on the farm, each working tirelessly to ensure the success of their agricultural venture.

One of the farmers, Mohammad, spoke with remarkable Kurdish fluency, conveying the farmers' ambitions to export their produce beyond Erbil. He explained that they not only supply the local market in Erbil but also other major cities such as Baghdad and Sulaymaniyah. These cities, which have large Bangladeshi communities, now enjoy the flavors of their homeland thanks to their efforts. ■

# EMBODYING THREE CULTURES



Nazanin Sapan

*Nazanin Sapan is a Stockholm-based writer and journalist with a diverse cultural background rooting in Kurdistan, Europe, and Russia.*

I often get asked what it's like to be a part of three different cultures and if I identify more as Russian, Kurdish, or Swedish. My answer is always the same: there is no one culture that I identify with more than another.

But there is also no simple answer to this question. Instead, I try to help people understand that all three cultures have influenced my identity and shaped me into the person who I am today.

In people's confusion by the mix of cultures, they sometimes try to place a label on me. However, there is no such label, as I am simply a mixture of all three. For a long time, I used the analogy of going to a candy shop: I get the chance to choose the sweetest candy from all the options.

The same applies in my life, I get to pick and choose the best aspects of each culture.

## Russian

Since my mother is Russian, I feel a close connection to the culture. During my childhood I spent many summers in the Russian village where my mother grew up and learned Russian customs and traditions from an early age. Russian culture is a rich and diverse mix of



traditions, customs, and beliefs that have been shaped by a long history. The people in Russia value literature, classical music, and art.

During my childhood my mother always took my siblings and me to different museums. She

made sure that we learned to play different musical instruments and took us to concerts. My mother also read bedtime stories for me every night and encouraged me to read books.

Even though I did not enjoy those things then as much as my mother would have hoped, I now realize that they have influenced me as an adult. I enjoy going to The Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm, watching ballet concerts, and visiting museums. I know that my interest in music, literature, and art has been strongly influenced growing up in Russian culture.

## Swedish

Having been born and raised in Sweden, I was also deeply influenced by Swedish traditions and values. Even though Swedish culture differs considerably from Russian and Kurdish cultures, I appreciate the contrasts.

Swedish culture is characterized by equality (equity) and nature. In school we always talked about the importance of equality in society and how a perfect society was free from discrimination. For as long as I can remember, I have always believed in equality, both between genders and different social groups.

Besides learning about equality, the Swedish people place a high value on nature. It is common for Swedish people to spend time outdoors, hiking, skiing, or doing other activities. In school I spent a lot of time in nature, and our teachers took us on field trips to lakes or forests. Even though I don't visit nature as often as I did when I was a kid, I still feel a close connection to it. When I visit forests, sit by

the ocean, or hike in the mountains I feel at peace, which I think stems from the amount of time I spent in nature as a child.

## Kurdish

Since my father is Kurdish, I also feel a close connection to Kurdish culture. Kurdish norms, traditions, and values have had a big impact on my childhood, and my father made sure that we inherited them.

In comparison to Russian and Swedish people, Kurdish people are very f a m i -

highly valued, and families typically extend warm welcomes to guests and visitors.

The Kurdish family is also characterized by strong familial bonds. The family is considered the cornerstone of society, and family members often live together and support one another.

Perhaps most importantly, Kurdish people value food. Food is a central part of the culture, and meals are times for families to come together and socialize. Even though I am far away from my Kurdish family, I still feel close to the culture and highly value my family.

## Blessed with three cultures

ly-oriented and warm-hearted. Households in Kurdistan are characterized by the sweet smell of freshly prepared food, kids' laughter, and most importantly love.

Although my

Once again, there is no one culture that I feel a closer connection to. I am blessed to be able to be a part of three cultures that differ from each other in many ways and am grateful that my parents developed close bonds for my siblings and me with them.



visits to Kurdistan have been less frequent in recent years, I always receive the same warm welcome every time I visit. The Kurdish people have a beautiful quality of welcoming you into their culture with open arms. Their generosity and love make you feel at peace. Hospitality is

We live in a globalized world, and there will be an increasing number of people in the future who will experience growing up with multiple, different cultures. I hope this will enhance global understanding and unite different cultures from around the world. ■

# KURDISTAN TO HOST CONIFA WORLD FOOTBALL CUP 2024



Jalal Saeed

*Jalal Saeed is an experienced journalist who also serves as board member and spokesperson for Kurdistan Football Union.*

Photo: Safin Hamid



# CONIFA

The Confederation of Independent Football Associations (CONIFA) World Football Cup 2024 is set to take place in the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, bringing together stateless people and unrecognized nations. The Kurdistan Football Association made the exciting announcement, revealing that the tournament will kick off in mid-2024 and feature teams from 16 regions worldwide.

Sulaimani, Erbil, Duhok, and Zakho have been chosen as the host cities, with matches scheduled to take place in their respective stadiums. The selection of the Kurdistan Region as the host followed a visit from a CONIFA delegation led by President Per-Anders Blind in March, where they assessed the suitability of the stadiums. Impressed by the evaluation, the decision was made to

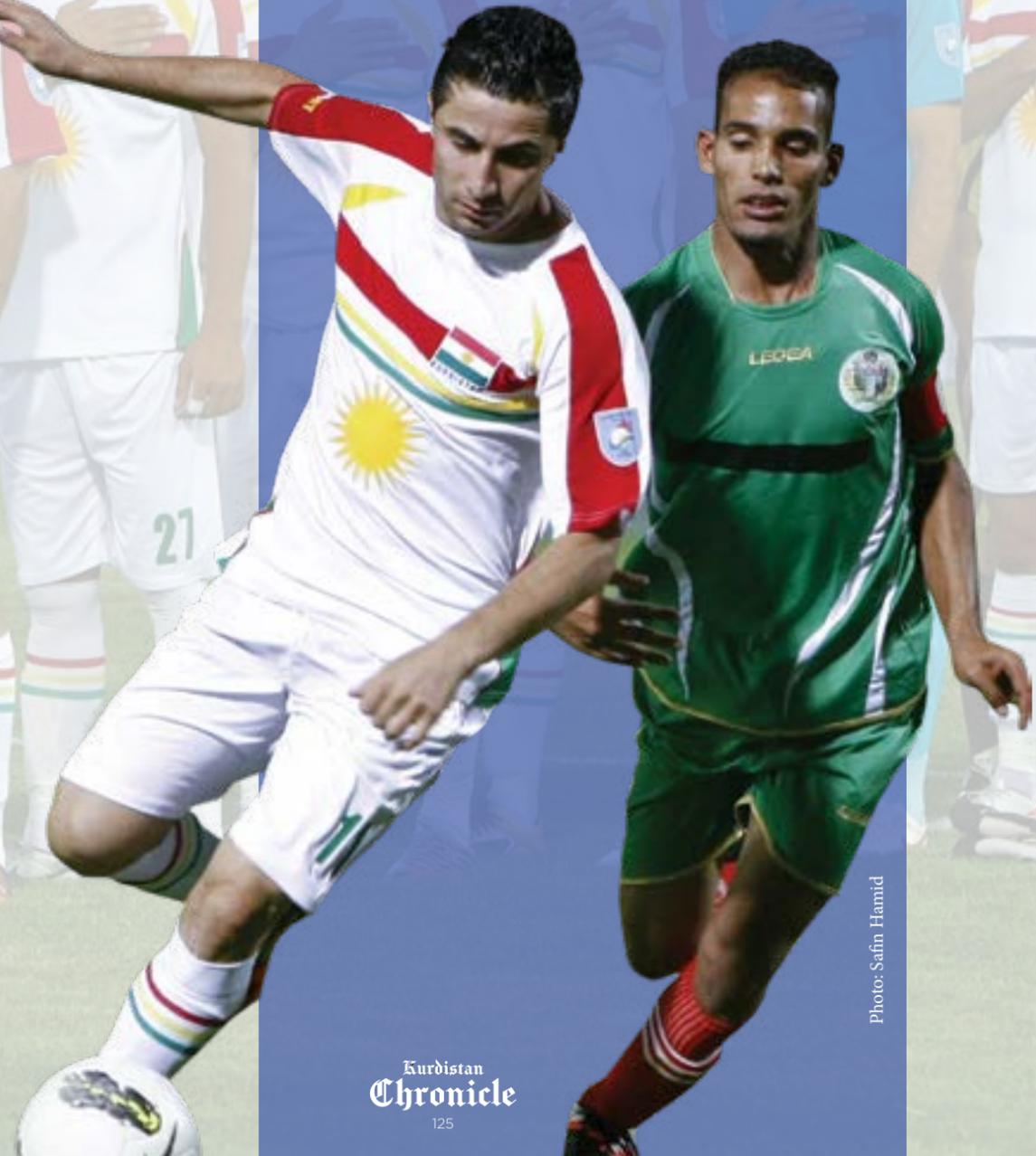


Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid

The Kurdistan Region football team celebrating their CONIFA victory in 2013.

grant the hosting rights to the Kurdistan Region, a tremendous honor considering the competition from eight other regions that had applied.

The Kurdistan Olympics Committee has wasted no time in commencing the necessary preparations to ensure the success of the event. This prestigious international tournament, the CONIFA World Football Cup, serves as a platform for states, minorities, stateless peoples, and regions unaffiliated with FIFA to showcase their football prowess. Since its inception in 2014, the tournament has grown in stature and popularity, and it is now held every two years. The first edition took place in Sweden, featuring 12 teams, and in 2024, an even grander showcase of football talent and unity awaits.

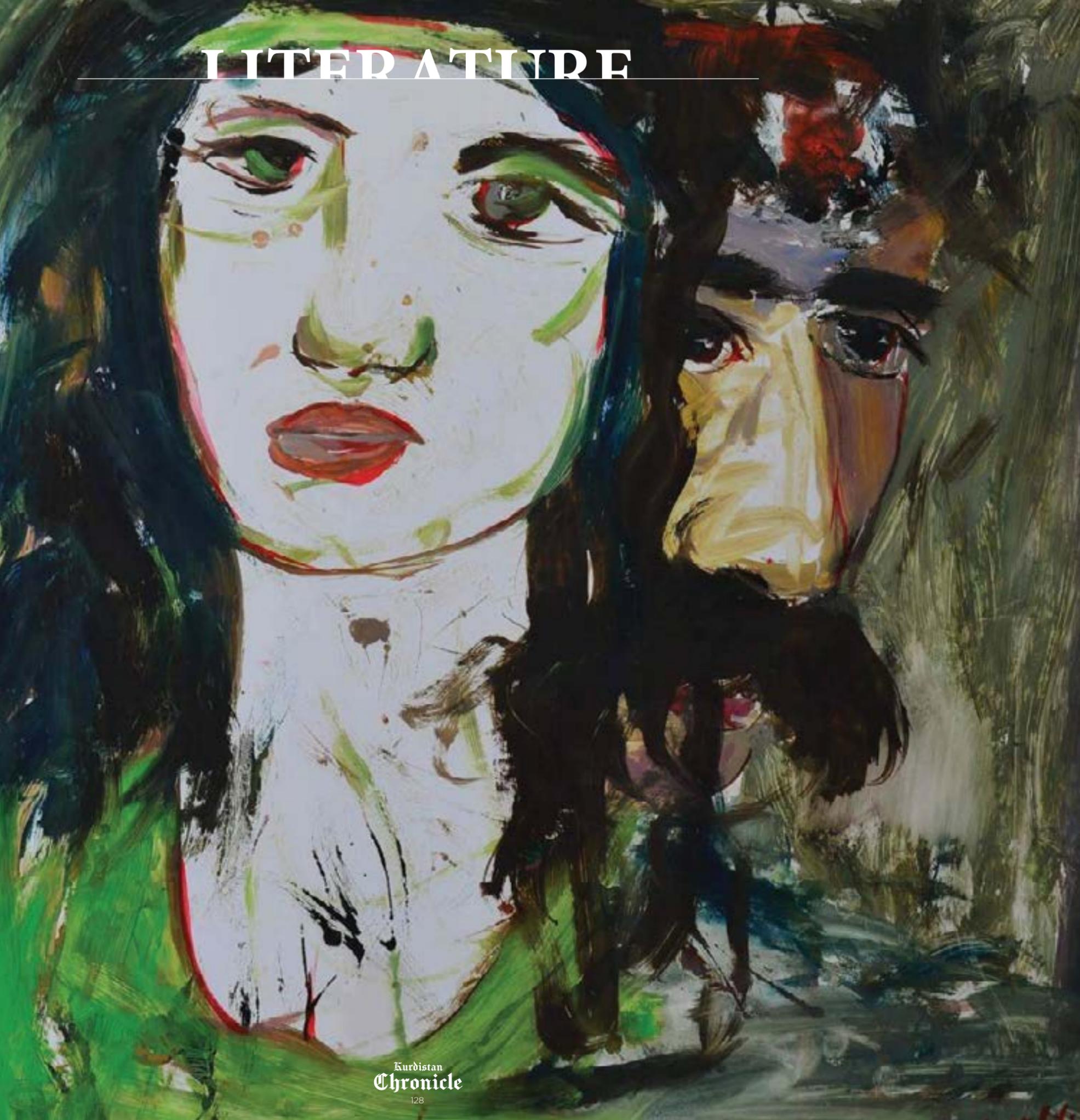
The Kurdistan football team, currently ranked fifth in the CONIFA world rankings, is determined to claim the top spot in the upcoming tournament. Their exceptional skills



A delegation from CONIFA at Faranso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.

and unwavering determination make them a formidable force on the field. As they represent their region, the journey of the Kurdistan team is poised to captivate fans and inspire aspiring footballers globally.

Football enthusiasts from around the world will have the opportunity to witness the excitement unfold in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2024 as it proudly hosts the CONIFA World Football Cup. This tournament, known for its inclusivity, perfectly aligns with the cherished values of the Kurdistan Region. Expect thrilling matches, dazzling displays of talent, and a vibrant atmosphere as teams from stateless nations and unrecognized regions come together in pursuit of football glory. It will undoubtedly be an unforgettable event that celebrates the true spirit of the beautiful game. ■



# Selfie

## Qubady Jelizade

Translated by Nahro Zagros

### Selfie

1  
In a fleeting moment, transform into a butterfly,  
In a mere breath, become an artist,  
And in a passing second, channel the spirit of a musician.

For a brief interlude, embrace the life of a raindrop,  
In a fleeting instant, become the shadow of a tree,  
And in a passing moment, transform into a honeycomb.

To glimpse the divine,  
At dawn, become a dewdrop on flowers,  
At dusk, take flight like a nimble sparrow,  
And in the depths of night, feel the soul of a poet.

2  
Should I encounter the divine presence,  
I shall present the names of all those who pilfer,  
Offer the portraits of those who betrayed our land,  
Reveal the abodes of those who trample gardens and pollute water.

3  
If I chance upon the divine visage,  
I shall humbly beseech for a moment captured,  
A selfie to immortalize our encounter.



### Sabr Dri



**K**urdistan boasts a diverse range of wildlife, including mountain-dwelling creatures as well as aquatic species. Among these, the captivating flamingo deserves special mention. While being a migratory bird, the favorable conditions, climate, and abundance of lakes and rivers in Kurdistan entice these majestic creatures to stay for extended periods.

The particular type of flamingo found in Kurdistan is the greater flamingo (also known as *Phoenicopterus roseus*), which holds the distinction of being the most widespread species within the flamingo family. This impressive bird is encountered in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and southern Europe.

Standing at an average height of 110-150 cm (43-59 in) and weighing 2-4 kg, the greater flamingo is the largest among its flamingo counterparts. In exceptional cases, the largest male flamingos have reached staggering heights of up to 187 cm and weighed approximately 4.5 kg.





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Photo: Harem Sewaisi