

# Kurdistan Chronicle

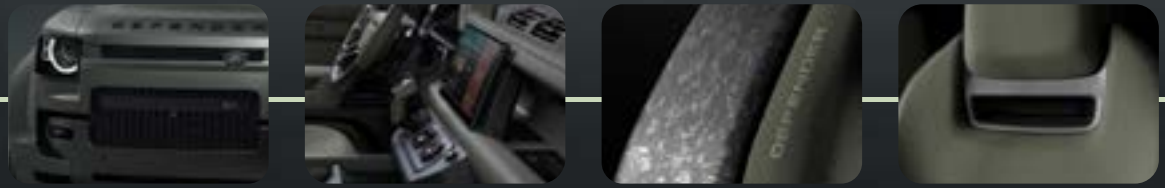
PROTECTING  
KURDISTAN'S LAST  
**LEOPARDS**





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## Celebrating Courage, Culture, and Progress



Nahro Zagros

In this issue of *Kurdistan Chronicle*, we uncover the inspiring perseverance, innovative achievements, and thoughtful perspectives that illuminate the dynamic narrative of Kurdistan's past, present, and future.

One exceptional example is the story of brothers Nabaz and Bahez Horeni together with Hana Ahmed, whose dedication to preserving wildlife exemplifies the profound bond between humans and nature. Their vital work in documenting and protecting the elusive Persian leopards of the Zagros Mountains highlights both the urgency and inspiration of their mission to safeguard this bond. The trio's commitment is not without its challenges. Climate change,

including rising temperatures and reduced rainfall, threatens the natural habitats of these leopards; but they are taking proactive, innovative measures, such as creating man-made wells, to ensure the survival of local wildlife.

We also report on the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) latest initiatives to support refugees. On July 10, 2024, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani announced new guidelines aimed at improving refugee affairs, underscoring the KRG's steadfast commitment to humanitarian aid. Despite substantial financial challenges, the region continues to provide vital support to hundreds of thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons.

In another piece, David Muller of the German non-profit ojcós foundation commends the Kurdistan Region's progressive approach to religious tolerance. His extensive experience across the Middle East lends credence to the Kurdistan Region's significant role in fostering peace and stability through respect for diverse religious practices.

We also celebrate the Her Voice project in Halabja, an initiative led by the Iraq Space Center and funded by the U.S. Consulate General. This project addresses gen-

der-based discrimination through empowerment and advocacy and recently marked the graduation of around 240 women.

Siyabulela Mandela, great-grandson of Nelson Mandela and Visiting Professor at the University of Kurdistan-Hewler, also shares his insights from working with and inspiring Kurdish leaders. Drawing parallels between the Kurdish quest for self-determination and South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, Mandela emphasizes the transformative power of education.

Meanwhile, Savan Ako's article on Bestansur, an archaeological gem near Sulaymaniyah, offers a rare look into the origins of agriculture. Dating back to 8000-7100 BC, this Neolithic settlement reveals the early shift from hunter-gatherer societies

to settled farming communities marked by mud-brick structures, artifacts, and human burials.

Finally, an interview with Aziz Elaldi, President of Amedspor in Turkey, delves into the club's recent successes on the pitch and their impact on the Kurdish community. Elaldi's leadership and Amedspor's triumph in winning the 2023-2024 TFF Second League Red Group have become symbols of pride and resilience for Kurds both in Turkey and beyond.

These articles, along with other contributions in this issue from a wide range of writers and thinkers, offer unique and deep perspectives that celebrate the vibrant energy, rich cultural heritage, and intellectual vitality that characterize the Kurdish people. ●



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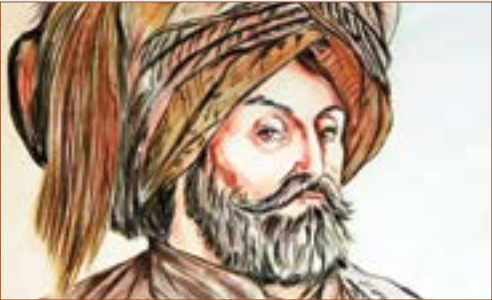
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## KRG Prime Minister Reaffirms Commitment to Yezidis

Kurdistan Chronicle

On July 2, 2024, Masrour Barzani, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), made a significant announcement during a ceremony in Erbil. The event marked the launch of a financial support program that will provide monthly allowances to 3,000 women and girls who survived the atrocities committed by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

In his speech, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the enduring struggles faced by the Yezidi community, even a decade after the horrific massacre perpetrated by ISIS. He pointed out that the situation in Sinjar District, where the population is predominantly Yezidi, remains dire, primarily due to the ongoing presence of militias and illegal armed groups. These groups have obstructed the return of displaced Yezidis to their homes, impeding reconstruction efforts and prolonging the community's suffering.

Prime Minister Barzani reiterated his unwavering support for the legitimate demands of the Yezidi people, calling for an immediate end to the state of emergency in Sinjar and emphasizing the necessity of fully implementing the Sinjar Agreement. "The militias and illegal forces in the region must be removed so that we can rebuild the region and restore power to the indigenous people of Sinjar, with support from



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

Photo: Farhad Ahmad

Photo: Sabr Dri

the Iraqi federal government and the international community,” he stated.

Prime Minister Barzani also mentioned efforts to bring ISIS terrorists to justice, noting that, with international backing, there have been initiatives to establish a special tribunal for prosecuting ISIS members for their crimes against humanity. However, he expressed concern that these efforts have not received adequate support from the Iraqi federal government, hindering the quest for justice.

**Call for international support**

The Yezidi community has endured unimaginable suffering since ISIS launched a genocidal campaign against them in August 2014. Thousands of Yezidis were killed, and many women and girls were subjected to sexual slavery and other forms of brutal violence. The destruction of homes and infrastructure in Sinjar has left the community in a state of limbo, with many still living in refugee camps across the Kurdistan Region and beyond.

The Sinjar Agreement, signed in October 2020 between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG, aimed to restore stability to the region. It included provisions for the withdrawal



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

of armed groups, the establishment of local governance, and the initiation of reconstruction projects. However, the agreement’s implementation has faced numerous obstacles, primarily due to the persistent presence of militias and the lack of concerted efforts from the federal government.

Prime Minister Barzani’s call for international support is a crucial step towards addressing the ongoing crisis in Sinjar. The involvement of global actors is essential for the effective implementation of the Sinjar Agreement and for ensuring the safe return of displaced Yezidis. International assistance can also play a vital role in the reconstruction of Sinjar, providing the necessary resources and expertise to rebuild the region’s infrastructure and restore essential services.

Moreover, the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute ISIS terrorists is imperative for delivering justice to the Yezidi community. It is a necessary step to acknowledge their suffering, hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent future atrocities. The international community’s support in this endeavor can pressure the federal government to take more decisive action and ensure that justice is served. ●



## Outgoing Dutch Consul General Highlights Kurdish Hospitality

Kurdistan Chronicle

In a farewell interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, the outgoing Dutch Consul General in Erbil Jaco Beerends said that what will stay with him most is the warmth of Kurdish hospitality.

“After almost two years in this position, I feel that I am Dutch and also a little Kurdish now. I feel privileged to have met so many people and worked on so many important aspects of our relationship,” he said during his speech at the reception for Dutch King’s Day on April 28.

“Part of Kurdistan is in my heart, a part I will take with me when I end my assignment this summer,” he added.

The Dutch representation in the Kurdistan Region works on supporting private sector development with a focus on youth and agriculture, providing support programs to internally displaced persons, and bolstering the security sector through *peshmerga* reform and training. It also serve the consular needs of the notably large Dutch-Kurdish population in the Kurdistan Region.

### Hospitality

“I had never been in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq before my posting, so for me coming here was quite new and therefore also very in-

teresting,” Consul General Beerends told *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “The first thing that came to my mind, and that has stayed with me for the full two years that I’ve been here, is the way Kurdish people greet their visitors and guests.”

On his first weekend in Akre, many people invited to him to their homes and restaurants. “They wanted us to

visit, and it was always followed by another invitation. There would be food, singing, dancing, and all kinds of hospitality.”

“When you are new to an area, it can feel very unknown, but the people here made it extremely comfortable. That feeling has stayed with me and made a lasting impression,” he added.

### Tourism

Consul General Beerends also enjoyed hiking in the Kurdistan Region in his spare time. “Not now when it’s so hot, but in the spring going outside is fantastic,” he said.

However, he mentioned that one of the pitfalls of tourism is the littering in natural areas and that this must

be managed. “You come to the most beautiful places here in the Kurdistan Region, and the amount of pollution is sometimes terrible. The plastic here is an especially big problem.”

Nevertheless, Beerends added that the potential for tourism in the Kurdistan Region is quite high, especially from other parts of Iraq and the region. He highlighted the beauty of the northern parts of Kurdistan in the border areas with Türkiye and Iran. “They have fantastically beautiful places, also places where it’s a bit cooler in summer and in winter and you have fantastic mountains to explore,” he said.

He noted the renovation of the Kurdish border town of Zakho, known for its iconic ancient bridge, as a good example. “Zakho will attract tourists from a lot of places, as will Halabja, where it’s still quite green. There are other fantastic opportunities in some areas in the summer.”

However, an important condition for the further development of tourism in these areas is stability and security.

### Diversification

The Dutch government has been working closely with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on the diversification of the economy, primarily in the agricultural and private sectors through initiatives like entrepreneurial training program Orange Corners. “It is essential to get people away from government employment and into the private sector,” he underscored.

The Ninth Cabinet of the KRG is currently working on creating a cashless society through banking reforms, digital transformation, and reducing dependence on oil revenue. “I sincerely believe that the government is genuinely working on diversifying the economy. However, many people still depend on the government for their salaries,” he added.

“We have been working with the gov-

“There would be food, singing, dancing, and all kinds of hospitality”



Dutch Consul General in Erbil Jaco Beerends (left) meeting with President Masoud Barzani (right) to bid farewell (August 4, 2024)

Photo: Adnan Barzani



ernment to develop agricultural policy, in part by enabling access to the academic knowledge and expertise that is available in the Netherlands. Part of our role is to import expertise from Dutch companies and the private sector into this region by connecting business partners. This not only facilitates trade and investment, but also kickstarts the transformation of knowledge and the creation of jobs,” Beerends argued.

Most Western consulates welcomed this new date, including Beerends, who expressed hope that it will foster Kurdish unity and restore legitimacy to government institutions like the Kurdistan Region Parliament. In May 2023, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq ruled against the Kurdistan Region Parliament’s decision to extend its term, which effectively ended the work of the parliament.



**Kurdish unity**

The Kurdistan Region will hold parliamentary elections on the newly set date of October 20, elections that have been delayed since 2022 due to disagreements between the Kurdish ruling parties.

“I hope that with the upcoming elections, a new mandate will be created, providing a fresh start for the authorities in the Kurdish Region of Iraq to regain the power they should have. It is very important to recognize that this region is unique for the Kurdish people. Unlike Kurds in Syria, Türkiye, and Iran, the Kurds in Iraq have something

quite special: their own autonomous region,” Beerends said.

He also underlined the importance of Kurdish unity. “I hope that, with the elections, new unity can be created, and a new mandate will be established to make a new start for Kurdish autonomy in this region.”

“I hope that with the upcoming elections, a new mandate will be created, providing a fresh start for the authorities in the Kurdish Region of Iraq to regain the power they should have”

Photos: Sabir Salih

**Dutch-Kurds**

Many Dutch-Kurds also live in the Kurdistan Region and the Netherlands, which has helped the Dutch

Consulate General to build relations and trust. “It’s quite helpful if you have a trusted relationship already that you can build on,” Beerends said.

In the last two years, the Dutch Consulate General has made it possible for Dutch citizens in the Kurdistan Region to renew their passports in Erbil. In the past, they had to renew their passports abroad. He noted that this was just a small step, but it is “something tangible that you can leave behind.”

**Modesty**

The Dutch people like equality. In July, images of outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who spent 14 years in office, riding off on a bicycle went viral. “I think what is very telling about that image of the prime minister on a bicycle is that it is very deeply engraved in Dutch culture that we are very much all the same. We are not about hierarchy,” Beerends shared.

As a result, people in the Kurdistan Region are sometimes surprised when the Dutch Consul General himself opens the door for visitors or brings them a cup of coffee. “They don’t expect that,” he said. “For Dutch people, it’s very normal to do things themselves, to clean up their own messes and handle tasks independently.”

In June, a new government was formed in The Hague that included the anti-immigration PVV party (Party for Freedom) of Geert Wilders, which sparked controversies. Recently, Jordan summoned the Dutch ambassador to explain Wilders’ comments that Jordan is the “real Palestine.”

However, Dutch Consul General Beerends underlined that while Wilders is entitled to his opinions as a member of parliament, his bold statements do not represent the Dutch government. “He has won the elections and is the leader of the biggest

party in the Netherlands now. Nevertheless, he is not part of the current Dutch cabinet,” Beerends noted.

“That’s actually the reason why this new government could be formed, because they agreed that it would only work if Wilders and the other heads of the parties that ran in the elections would not be part of the government themselves.”

**Gaza conflict**

Beerends will move next to the sensitive post of Ramallah in the Palestinian territories amidst the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel, which has affected not only the Middle East, but also the world.

“Our mission in Ramallah is working on programs to see how we can alleviate some of the suffering caused by the war, but that is not easy as long as this war continues,” he said.

Since the start of the war in Gaza, the Kurdistan Region and U.S. bases in Iraq have faced external assaults.

On January 15, an Iranian ballistic missile attack killed four civilians in Erbil, including businessman Peshraw Dizayee and his infant daughter, who was a Kurd from the Netherlands. Other members of the Peshraw family who also hold Dutch nationality were severely wounded. The attack was strongly condemned by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“This region has deeply felt the consequences of that war, because from the very moment it began, threats have been present through proxies. This conflict has made the entire region more vulnerable to violence. Therefore, it is crucial to resolve the issue between Israel and Palestine, not only to end the enormous suffering in the immediate area, but also for the stability of the wider region and the rest of the world,” he concluded. ●





Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani arrived in Paris on July 26, 2024, to join world leaders for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympic Games. Upon arrival, he was welcomed by his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace.

After engaging in discussions with various global dignitaries and monarchs, the President of Kurdistan Region attended the inauguration of the Olympic Games at the Chaillot Palace in the Trocadéro district of Paris.



Credit: KRP



# Safe Haven for Asylum Seekers

Kurdistan Chronicle

“

The Kurdistan Region will continue to remain a shining example of hospitality and a safe haven for all those who seek refuge from persecution, oppression, terrorism, and intimidation

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On July 10, 2024, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour attended a significant ceremony announcing new guidelines for organizing refugee affairs in the Kurdistan Region. This event marked a pivotal step in the KRG’s ongoing commitment to humanitarian aid and refugee protection and was attended by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Acting Representative in Iraq Pauline Fresneau.

The ceremony featured a speech by Ambassador Romanowski, which was followed by the formal signing of the guidelines by KRG Minister of Interior Rebar Ahmed Khalid. This signing ceremony underscored the collaborative efforts between the KRG, United States, and UNHCR to address the needs and rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the region.

Prime Minister Barzani delivered a poignant address, highlighting the Kurdistan Region’s long-standing tradition



Large crowd of civilians displaced as ISIS controlled territories in Iraq in 2014

Photo: Safin Hamid





Photo: Sabr Dri

KRG Minister of Interior Rebar Ahmed Khalid signing the protocol for the Kurdistan Region Administrative Instructions for Asylum-Seekers

of providing refuge. His remarks were as follows:

“For many years, the Kurdistan Region has hosted hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, refugees from neighboring countries, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from within Iraq, without any religious, racial, or ethnic prejudice. During the onslaught by ISIS, thousands sought safety in the Kurdistan Region. Despite the region’s financial crisis, the KRG took on the task of hosting numerous IDPs in refugee camps, fulfilling its responsibilities despite shouldering the majority of the burden.

“Today, the Kurdistan Region continues to protect and provide shelter for thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs who fled their homes due to

insecurity and conflict. Unfortunately, conditions in their home regions have not yet normalized to enable their return. The KRG supports the voluntary return of all refugees and asylum seekers through the normalization of the situations in their homes, allowing them a dignified return.

“In a bid to organize asylum affairs, the Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with the UNHCR, has been preparing and drafting administrative guidelines about the asylum-seeking process in the Kurdistan Region.

“These guidelines are integral to the KRG’s administrative and legal initiative aimed at safeguarding the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as defining their obligations. They focus on coordinating and organizing

arrival and reception procedures for asylum seekers, and on establishing their rights and obligations in the region.

“I commend the Ministry of Interior, the team that drafted the guidelines, and UNHCR for their collaborative work.

“We reiterate that the Kurdistan Region will continue to remain a shining example of hospitality and a safe haven for all those who seek refuge from persecution, oppression, terrorism, and intimidation.

“Although we face a tough financial situation, we remain committed to providing public services such as education, healthcare, security, and essential needs to IDPs, refugees, and

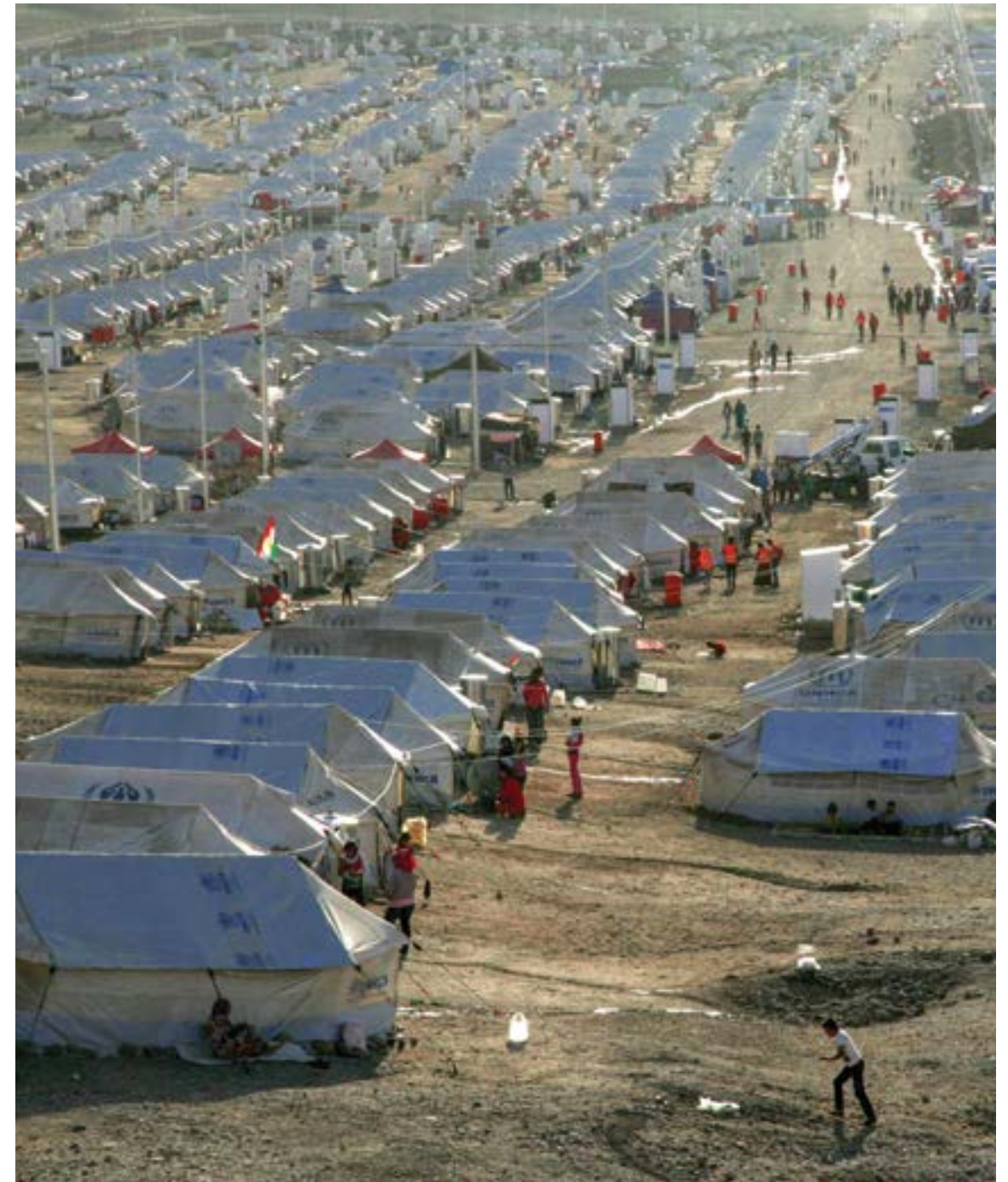


Photo: Safin Hamid

A camp for IDPs and refugees in the Kurdistan Region

asylum seekers. We hope that the federal government and the international community will also assist the Kurdistan Region in maintaining these services for the refugees and asylum seekers until conditions in their home countries allow them a dignified return.”

The Kurdistan Region, despite financial challenges, has a history of significant humanitarian contributions. During the fight against ISIS, the region hosted nearly two million IDPs and refugees. According to recent data, the Kurdistan Region now shelters over 900,000 IDPs and refugees, both in camps and within local communities. This continued effort underscores the KRG’s unwavering dedication to providing a safe haven and upholding the rights and dignity of those displaced by conflict and persecution. ●



## Religious Freedom Advocate Commends Coexistence in Kurdistan



**Wladimir van Wilgenburg**

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

The Kurdistan Region sincerely prizes the diversity of the peoples residing within its borders as a form of strength that underpins its vision as a political and social entity. Having experienced how religious differences can tear apart the social fabric of any country, its commitment to religious co-existence is resolute and historically grounded.

David Muller, an advocate for religious freedom in Iraq representing the German non-profit ojcocs foundation, agrees. Muller underlined that the Kurdistan Region has been relatively progressive in terms of religious freedom and coexistence, especially when compared to other parts of the Middle East.

"I have been visiting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq regularly for several years as part of our foundation's commitment to understanding and supporting the region. The resilience of the region and the warmth of its people are deeply inspiring. The rich history and cultural diversity make it a unique place that offers valuable perspectives on coexistence and regional politics," he said.

"I believe more Germans should visit to appreciate its historical significance and current geopolitical dynamics, which are often misunderstood in the wider context of Middle Eastern affairs."

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The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has generally supported legal frameworks that respect diverse religious practices

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David Muller in front of Erbil Citadel





David Muller at the famous Machko teahouse just outside the historic Erbil Citadel

Muller also spoke at the Kurdish House Davos during the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in January 2024. “The Kurdish House at the WEF in Davos was a warm and attractive business card for the region. A welcoming atmosphere with tea and Kurdish snacks allowed for an inspiring exchange between various Kurdish leaders and global actors,” Muller recounted.

“The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has generally supported legal frameworks that respect diverse religious practices. There have also been concerted efforts to rebuild communities, protect minorities, and foster an environment in which different religious groups can practice their faith openly and safely. However, challenges remain, and continued support and vigilance are needed to maintain and improve these conditions,” he underlined.

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Despite progress in some areas, many parts of Sinjar are still badly damaged and not ready for a large-scale return of the population

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“In Germany, our activities include engaging with political, religious, and civil society actors to inform and influence policy decisions. Our relationship with the German government is collaborative, as we work to create understanding between Iraq and Germany on religious and cultural complexities,” he added.

#### **New concerns, new vigilance**

In March 2024, Germany’s Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief Frank Schwabe sounded the alarm on religious freedom conditions in Iraq. “Key concerns include systemic discrimination, targeted violence, and the precarious political and security environment. The alert underlines the urgency of international attention and action to protect these vulnerable groups and support Iraq’s progress toward a more inclusive and secure society,” Muller said.

In February, Iraq’s Federal Supreme Court removed 11 quota seats for religious minorities in the Kurdistan Region Parliament. “The Federal Supreme Court’s decision to remove quota seats from the Kurdistan Region Parliament raises serious concerns about the representation and political participation of religious minorities within the region,” Muller said. “These seats have been an essential tool to ensure that different groups remain visible and influential. Their removal could weaken political



stability and increase the risk of marginalization.”

“In a multi-layered and ethnically diverse area such as Kurdistan Region, it is crucial that all groups are adequately represented in order to promote inclusive and peaceful governance.”

However, on May 21, Iraq’s Electoral Judiciary Council restored only five quota parliamentary seats to religious minorities in the Kurdistan Region. This decision led to discontent among party leaders from these minority groups, with two quota seats allocated for Erbil, two for Sulaymaniyah, and one for Duhok.

On May 10, the U.S. Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya also warned against the influence of militias preventing the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the disputed territories of Sinjar and Nineveh.

“Under Secretary Zeya’s statement about the negative influence of militia groups in Nineveh and Sinjar underscores a profound problem affecting the stability and security of the region,” Muller said.

“These militias contribute to an atmosphere of insecurity and fear that not only hinders the return of IDPs but also jeopardizes long-term peace and reconciliation. It is important that the Iraqi government and the international community work together to reduce the presence and influence of these groups.”

In October 2020, the Iraqi federal government and the KRG signed the Sinjar Agreement with support of the UN. The agreement has yet to be implemented.

“Its implementation is essential for the recovery and reconstruction of Sinjar, which is mainly inhabited by Yezidis, who have suffered immensely,” Muller said. “Effective implementation would facilitate much-needed security, reconstruction, and reconciliation efforts. However, it will require the genuine cooperation and commitment of all parties, together with international support, to address the complex socio-political challenges and



David Muller lighting a candle on the eve of the Yezidi New Year in Lalish Temple



David Muller discussing the future of Christians in Iraq with Bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Abris Youkhanna



David Muller in Rabban Hormizd Monastery in Alqosh, with a view of Nineveh Plain



Mandaeans performing a religious ritual

ensure that the rights and needs of the Yezidi community are met.”

He also added that the Iraqi government’s intention to close all IDP camps by July 30 raises significant questions about the safety and viability of Yezidis returning to Sinjar.

“Despite progress in some areas, many parts of Sinjar are still badly damaged and not ready for a large-scale return of the population. Infrastructure, access to basic services such as water and electricity, and security remain inadequate. The decision to close IDP camps should be based on a careful assessment of the current conditions and the capacity of the region to ensure that returnees can return to a safe and sustainable environment,” Muller said. ●



# CONSERVATION

## Protecting Kurdistan's Last Leopards



*Qassim Khidbir*

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

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It was the first time a leopard had been caught on camera in Bamo Mountain

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# LEOPARDS





Named “Kurdistan,” the first female leopard recorded on Bamo Mountain in 2020 by brothers Nabaz and Bahez (Photo provided by Bahez to Kurdistan Chronicle)

Brothers Nabaz Horeni and Bahez Horeni live in the village of Horen in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate of the Kurdistan Region. Located on the slopes of Bamo Mountain within the Zagros Mountain range, this area is a suitable habitat for wild mammals. Both brothers have a deep love for the nature that surrounds them and have dedicated themselves to protecting the wildlife of Bamo Mountain, particularly its leopards.

The brothers have so far recorded eight leopards using camera traps and were the first in the Kurdistan Region to photograph a leopard family. They were also the first in

Kurdistan and Iraq to record footage of a female leopard.

“It was January 6, 2020, when we saw the footage. We hugged each other,” Nabaz recalls.

They decided to name her Kurdistan. It was the first time a leopard had been caught on camera in Bamo Mountain; previously, there had only been word-of-mouth sightings of leopards or documentation of their tracks.

“Since we beginning to document her in 2022, Kurdistan has given birth twice,” Bahez recounts. In the first year, she



The female leopard “Kurdistan” with her two cubs, “Hiwa” and “Nishtiman,” exploring Bamo Mountain in the Darbandikhan District. (Photo provided by Bahez to Kurdistan Chronicle)

gave birth to and successfully raised two cubs, one male and one female, whom the brothers named Hiwa and Nishtiman, Kurdish for “hope” and “homeland,” respectively.

### Natural challenges

Bahez and Nabaz have spent their entire lives surrounded by the nature of Kurdistan. From a young age, they enjoyed hiking and taking photos and videos of their natural surroundings and its wildlife. Over time, they became aware of the suffering of the wild animals and birds. They began

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in areas inhabited by Kurdish people. In Kurdistan, the Persian leopard is simply called “leopard” (*plng* in Kurdish). However, Bahez and Nabaz are advocating for renaming it *plngi zagros*, or “Zagros leopard.”

“By adding Zagros, we want to win the hearts of the people of Kurdistan, so that they might love and protect this majestic animal. Kurdish people have a deep love for Kurdistan’s mountains,” Bahez explains.

This love of Kurdistan’s mountains also prompted Hana Ahmed Raza to



Hana Raza installing a camera trap in Qaradagh Mountain. Hana says not only are humans causing problems and threatening wildlife, but there is also a shortage of people working in conservation. Handout photo by Hana Raza to Kurdistan Chronicle.

speaking to poachers, urging them not to hunt. As summers on Bamo Mountain became hotter – and rainfall became scarce – they started cleaning wells to ensure that the animals and birds had enough water. When those wells dried up as a result of climate change, they began creating man-made wells.

“We used to have only two hot

months in the summer in our village, but now we have four months of hot weather,” Bahez says.

The leopards in Kurdistan’s mountains are internationally known as Persian leopards. Historically, Persian leopards have always lived in the Zagros Mountains, which extend through Iran, the Kurdistan Region, and southeastern Türkiye, primarily

devote her life to conserving biodiversity in Kurdistan and beyond. After earning a biology degree from Sulaymaniyah University, Hana joined Nature Iraq – a non-governmental organization in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region that is accredited by the UN Environmental Program – and began collecting data on wild mammals throughout Kurdistan. When she asked people about leopards, they





**Bahez Horeni, 33, posing on Bamo Mountain** (Handout photo by Bahez to Kurdistan Chronicle)

frequently stated that they had not been seen since the 1980s. Despite this, Hana was certain that leopards were still roaming the mountains of Kurdistan.

“I told myself, there is a strong bond between hunter and prey. Since there are wild goats in Kurdistan, I believed there must still be leopards in the mountains,” Hana recounts.

In 2011, for the first time in the history of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, Hana recorded a leopard, a male, on a camera trap in Qaradagh Mountain, also in Sulaymaniyah Governorate. This picture became the first and only hard evidence of the existence of leopards in Iraq. Previously, there were only unconfirmed written references in literature, which were not enough to prove their presence.

This 2011 discovery motivated Hana to dedicate her life further to protecting the last leopards of Kurdistan. Later, she went to Newcastle University in the UK to study ecology and wildlife.

### Poachers threaten Kurdistan’s wildlife

Hana, Nabaz, and Bahez have sounded the alarm: poachers pose the gravest threat to wildlife in the Kurdistan Re-



**Hana Ahmed Raza posing on a mountain in Kurdistan.** She has devoted her life to conserving Kurdistan’s biodiversity and environment. (Photo provided by Hana to Kurdistan Chronicle)

gion, surpassing even climate change and landmines. “Sadly, Kurdistan has a large number of poachers who are destroying our region’s beauty and wildlife,” Nabaz says. The conservationist mentioned that the negative impact of poaching involves more than just the killing of animals. Poachers disrupt the ecosystem by killing animals that leopards prey on, like wild goats and porcupines, leaving leopards hungry and forcing them to migrate. Additionally, they steal young animals, like brown bear cubs, and sell them to wealthy people, as happened in a well-publicized case in Duhok Governorate.

Meanwhile, Hana criticizes the media’s role in endangering wildlife. “Media often portray wild animals like leopards, bears, and boars as dangerous beasts by publishing fake, unverified information about attacks on villagers or livestock,” she says. “There isn’t a single confirmed case of a leopard attacking a person or domesticated animals in Kurdistan,” Hana emphasizes.

Protecting wildlife has not been easy for Nabaz, Bahez, and Hana. They have faced opposition from poachers who see them as adversaries.

“It’s not our fault,” Nabaz argues. “Poaching goes against



**Nabaz Horeni, 37, installing a camera trap on Bamo Mountain.** Nabaz and his brother Bahez have recorded eight leopards using camera traps in the mountain. (Photo provided by Bahez to

the law, religion, and basic humanity. It also harms nature.”

“Maybe it’s divine intervention,” he adds hopefully. “Perhaps these animals are finally receiving God’s mercy through our passion to protect them.”

Their efforts to curtail poachers have not been entirely fruitless. Some poachers have been convinced to abandon the practice. Bahez shares that some feel ashamed after seeing young people dedicating their lives to protecting wildlife. “They realize they can’t hide from our camera traps, even if they evade us,” Bahez says. He also mentions that 15 of their camera traps were stolen in just one year.

Regarding landmines, Nabaz offers a surprising perspective. He believes that landmines, especially those along the Iraq-Iran border, have created a haven for wildlife. Poachers are deterred by the danger, and according to their data, landmines have claimed very few animal lives since the 1990s. “We’ve observed a higher concentration of wildlife in areas with landmines,” Nabaz concludes.

### What needs to be done

Hana highlights that not only are humans causing problems and threatening wildlife, but there is also a shortage

of people working in conservation. She has called on the government and international community to support and encourage those aspiring to become conservationists. Moreover, she urges the government to employ more environmental police and station them in the mountains to protect wildlife from poachers.

“Our aim is to change the image of Kurdistan and Iraq, showing the world that it has protected national parks and beautiful nature,” Hana says.

In 2022, Hana established Leopards Beyond Borders, a non-profit organization in the Kurdistan Region. Nabaz and Bahez are members. These three conservationists are seeking enough support to develop and implement three key projects. First, they aim to designate Bamo Mountain as a community conservation area, supporting the local community in protecting their natural surroundings and wildlife. Second, they want to make Qaradagh a nature reserve. Third, they plan to protect the brown bears in Duhok Governorate.

Their goal is to protect the last leopards of Kurdistan, ensuring that they do not become extinct like some animals that once lived in the region, such as the brown bears in Bamo Mountain.



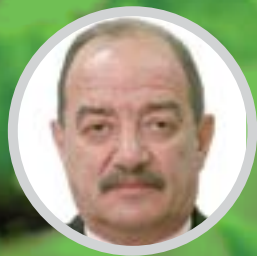
**Image of a male leopard walking on Bamo Mountain in the Kurdistan Region, recorded by a camera trap** (Photo provided by Bahez to Kurdistan Chronicle)

They also urged the Kurdistan Regional Government and the world community to put pressure on the Iraqi government and Türkiye to halt the building of fences along Iraqi, Iranian, and Turkish borders. “These fences will harm wildlife since animals will no longer be able to easily cross borders, and will eventually become extinct. I hope the Iraqi government stops building the fence along the Iranian border,” Hana stated.

The barbed wire fence was recently commissioned by the Iraqi federal government as part of the security agreement with Iran that aims to address security concerns raised by Tehran. ●



## Pioneering Hydroponics in Erbil



*Basil Al-Khatib*

*is an Iraqi journalist based in the Kurdistan Region.*

Who among us does not dream? It is part of being human, yet few achieve their dreams. Among these few is a young engineer leading a team of specialists with high-level scientific and academic qualifications to implement a pioneering agricultural project that addresses multiple challenges at the same time, including water scarcity, food security, and increased variety of agricultural production.

A group of Kurdish youth, led by information technology expert Dara Govand Sherwani, has successfully applied hydroponics technology at Cihan University - Erbil to produce a variety of high-value vegetables – from French and Dutch lettuce to Italian basil – that were previously imported as they could not be grown locally. Moreover, with

the support of local and international organizations, local demand for these vegetables can now be met.

### A three-year dream

Sherwani explained that it all began in 2021, when the UN Development Program (UNDP) commissioned Skills House, a consulting company that he manages, to prepare a study on the feasibility of implementing a hydroponics program in Nineveh Governorate. “The outcomes of the study, prepared by specialists in agriculture, business, and marketing, were very promising. We then proposed to the UNDP the idea of implementing a hydroponics project in Erbil as a precursor to similar projects in other parts of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq,” he said.

Photo: Safin Hamid





Sherwani further noted that, while the UNDP welcomed their proposal to produce plants that cannot be grown locally through traditional agriculture due to weather and climatic factors, they did not support the financing of the project. “This prompted us to seek financial support from Safe Home, which enabled us to initiate the project,” he recounted.

Additionally, the team secured a contract with Cihan University to use a suitable plot of land of 520 square meters within the university’s Erbil complex for a period of five years. There, they established a pioneering hydroponics greenhouse for training purposes, the products of which would be used to generate profit for the im

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Hydroponics constitutes an appropriate solution to the problem of water scarcity in Iraq, as it utilizes about 20% less water than traditional irrigation methods  
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plementing agencies. Sherwani mentioned that the project was also presented to the U.S. Agency for International Development, which not only welcomed it – in line with the agen

Wcy’s support for the Iraqi agricultural sector – but also gifted the team a solar energy system.

“The team includes specialists in the fields of communications, electronics, and marketing, as well as agricultural experts,” Sherwani explained. “We began implementing the project in March 2023, and actual production began at the beginning of 2024,” he said.

Sherwani stated that the greenhouse “produces 7,200 seedlings per month, at a rate of 15 seedlings per meter, which is a much higher yield than what can be obtained with traditional agriculture. The project’s clients are fast food restaurants and a group of commercial markets in Erbil. In addition, we receive many requests from other governorates, especially Baghdad, that we cannot meet because of the project’s current limitations.”

“The team is planning to expand the project to be able to meet the increasing demand for its products from various parts of Iraq,” he added. “We are also planning to develop a software system to control and manage the greenhouse remotely.”

#### Why hydroponics?

Hydroponics is a modern and sustainable method of agriculture in which plants do not grow in soil, but rather directly in water enriched with nutritious mineral components. This type of agriculture offers many benefits over traditional agricultural methods, helping to increase production, conserve water, and protect the environment.

With this technique, more seeds can be planted and grown faster in water compared to soil. Hydroponic plants also have fewer problems with fungi, insects, and diseases, making them

generally healthier than conventionally grown plants. Additionally, there

is a decrease in the amount of heavy metals or pesticides that accumulate in the tissue of the plants.

“Hydroponics constitutes an appropriate solution to the problem of water scarcity in Iraq, as it utilizes about 20% less water than traditional irrigation methods,” Sherwani emphasized. “Moreover, it provides continuous, high-quality production throughout the year, the period from planting to harvest is half of what plants need in traditional agriculture, and it does not require pesticides.”

Concerning the ambitions of the team after its success in hydroponics, Sherwani indicated that they are “currently planning to meet the increasing demand for our products and the possibility of growing other plants.”

“We are also planning to implement another project in aquaponics technology, which combines hydroponics and fish farming by taking advantage of the same hydrological cycle. Water cycles from the fish tank to the farm, and after the plants filter and purify it, the water is returned to the fish tank. This allows for the breeding of new

species that are not available in Iraqi waters, such as salmon, catfish, and others,” he noted.

#### About Skills House

Dara Govand Sherwani holds a Bachelor of Science in Software Engineering from Salahaddin University in 2008, a Master of Business Administration from the Lebanese French University in 2010, a second Master of Science in E-Business from the University of Huddersfield in 2011, and a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from City University of London in 2016. He has worked as a project lead and user research consultant on various projects involving the development and evaluation of software systems, such as hospital information management, supply chain management, eLearning systems, and online communities for residential clients. He currently holds the position of Chair of the Computer Science and Information Technology department at the American University of Dohuk.

The project team is composed of agricultural expert Dr. Deidar Khoshnaw, communications engineer Muhammad Khaled, and financial and banking expert Abdul Aziz Tahseen. ●



## KRG's Strategy for Clean Energy



**Mohammad Dargalayi**  
is a journalist and photographer with 14 years of experience. He is a member of IFJ Global.

Like many parts of the world, the Kurdistan Region is grappling with the impact of climate change. In response, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has developed a comprehensive strategy that adheres to guidelines presented at international conferences on climate change mitigation. A key principle of the KRG is that the environment is its greatest asset, a principle wholly embraced by the Ninth Cabinet since its inception. This commitment has placed the Kurdistan Region on the global map of efforts to combat climate change, with sustainability and clean energy production set to become key areas of growth in coming years.

Clean energy production and investment KRG Minister of Electricity Kamal Mohammad Salih Khalil highlighted the significant strides in renewable energy production that have been taken in the Kurdistan Region. "According to data provided by the KRG Ministry of Electricity, renewable energy production has increased by 6.75% in the five years since the inauguration of the Ninth Cabinet, rising from 25.6% to 27.4%."

However, the majority of electricity in the region is still generated by fossil fuel power plants. To address this, the KRG has devised a comprehensive plan to modernize its power-generation facilities with sustainable technologies. The ministry's statistics indicate that the region is on track to achieve over 31% renewable energy in its public grid by the end of 2026.

KRG Board of Investment Chairman Mohammed Shukri stressed the growing focus on clean or renewable energy in the Kurdistan Region. He mentioned that the KRG is collaborating with relevant parties to boost investment in solar power, hydropower, and waste-to-energy to leverage the region's potential in these areas. To date, two solar projects have been approved by the Board of Investment, with two more under consideration. Additionally, several project proposals have been submitted to the Board of Investment and the Ministry of Electricity, reflecting the significant

interest in solar power from both the private and public sectors.

According to Shukri, a joint committee comprising the Board of Investment, the Ministry of Electricity, the Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism, and the Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement (BEPI) was also formed to facilitate the suc-

cessful implementation of clean energy projects. This committee has made several key recommendations and established principles and rules for solar energy projects, especially regarding land use requirements.

Furthermore, the Board of Investment and the KRG, in partnership with the International Finance Corporation, plan to implement several major clean energy projects in the coming years, with a particular focus on attracting foreign investment.

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The Kurdistan Region is well-positioned to achieve its strategic goals in clean energy and environmental sustainability

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Rooftop solar panels being installed on a building in Erbil



Photo: Gailan Haji





Photo: Gailan Haji



Photo Credit: KRG

The village of Enemsidi with rooftop solar panels that supply electricity to households

### Leadership and international engagement

KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani underscored the region's commitment to clean energy and environmental sustainability at the 2024 Davos World Economic Forum in January. During the forum, he engaged in panels and discussions with officials, political leaders, and entrepreneurs, outlining the key objectives of diversifying the economy, enhancing banking services, finding new markets for agricultural products, investing in minerals, oil, gas, and clean energy, and combating the negative impacts of climate change and drought.

Then, in his speech at the 2024 World Government Summit in Dubai in February, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the collective desire to address environmental change through a new and different approach. He stressed the need for bold decisions to diversify energy sources and invest in renewable energy and emphasized that the long-term benefits of these decisions would far outweigh the short-term economic costs, protecting future generations and ensuring a sustainable future.

### Role of government

KRG Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement (BEPI) Chairman Abdulrahman Sadiq outlined the board's effective role in promoting clean energy. He stated that although BEPI is not an executive authority, it serves as an monitoring and coordination body, assessing the environmental impact of all projects and coordinating with the relevant ministries and implementing agencies. BEPI also collaborates with the Board of Investment to facilitate investment in environmentally friendly projects, with project owners required to use clean energy sources to meet a portion of their electricity needs. Moreover, BEPI works with the Ministry of Reconstruction and Housing on the concept of green buildings, emphasizing energy efficiency, natural lighting, good air quality, and the use of renewable energy.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy focuses on green investment projects and promoting a sustainable green economy, while the Ministry of Planning incorporates the recommendations of the Paris Agreement into its annual plans. The Ministry of Natural Resources invests in clean fuels and renewable energy and imports the latest green



Photo Credit: KRG

Traffic lights at an intersection in Erbil that are powered by solar energy

technology in oil production. Lastly, the Ministry of Electricity aims to increase electricity production from clean energy sources and install treatment units for power plants.

Finally, BEPI plays a key role in raising public awareness about the importance of clean energy, including how the use of solar energy systems can reduce costs and emissions. It also provides tips for maintaining solar panels and reducing electricity consumption by using high-quality panels, installing LED lights, and ensuring proper insulation.

### Collaborative efforts

The Ninth Cabinet of the KRG has made significant strides in putting the Kurdistan Region on the global map of efforts to combat climate change. By opening a climate change office within BEPI and participating in in-

ternational meetings on renewable energy, the KRG is preparing for a future that will change energy production and conservation.

KRG Minister of Education Alan Hama Saeed noted that, since the inauguration of the Ninth Cabinet, 60 schools have been equipped with solar electricity, with 33 of these funded by UNICEF. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education plans to convert 72 more schools to solar power using the KRG budget. In 2024, an additional 35 schools will be powered by solar energy through UNICEF funding.

Similarly, the village of Enemsidi in Erbil Governorate, located in Mergasur District, has been completely converted to a solar-powered electricity system. Abdullah Ahmad, a resident of the village, expressed his gratitude for the project's implementation by

the government, which has provided the village with reliable electricity day and night.

Additionally, the private sector is helping advance clean energy use. Director of Canadian company Sunlid Solar Shaun Ismail highlighted that the company has installed solar-powered street lights in Erbil and provided electricity to refugee camps. The company plans to expand its operations, with the KRG offering significant support and facilities.

The KRG's strategy for clean energy production is comprehensive and multi-faceted, involving significant investment, international collaboration, and public awareness. With continued efforts and collaboration among all stakeholders, the Kurdistan Region is well-positioned to achieve its strategic goals in clean energy and environmental sustainability. ●



## Youth Provide a Brighter Future



**Dr. Asmaa Alfadala**

*is Assistant Professor at the College of Public Policy at HBKU. She holds a Ph.D. in Education Policy, and currently is a consultant in educational development and has contributed to education research in Qatar and beyond.*

Sometimes, a journey begins in the pages of a book. It was through immersing myself in the writings of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Sinan Antoon – and their predecessors Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Nazik al-Malaika – that I discovered the profound depth of Iraq’s history and the richness of its cultural diversity, long before I ever visited the country. Their literary works, imbued with nostalgia, pain, and hope, illuminated the lives and experiences of Iraqis and ultimately motivated me to visit the country.

Jabra’s vivid autobiographical depictions of Baghdad, with its bustling Mutanabi Street, vibrant cafes, and extensive bookstores, along with his portrayal of Al-Ameerat Street, painted a lively picture of the city. Antoon’s harrowing narratives of Iraq during and after the war, including the tragic events of Halabja in the 1980s, further deepened my understanding of the successive wars and crises that have shaped modern Iraq.

I have harbored a deep desire to visit Iraq since high school. This yearning intensified over the years, fueled by the literary images that these authors so masterfully crafted. In late May 2024, I was thrilled to receive an invitation to give a speech to young graduates in Kurdistan, who had just completed a training program organized by the KRG’s Office of Initiatives and Communication. I accepted the invitation immediately – not only did it fulfill my long-held wish to visit Iraq, but it also aligned with my passion for youth devel-

opment. It is my firm belief that young people can play a key role in building a promising future for a nation that has endured numerous hardships.

I decided to visit the Kurdistan Region, particularly the capital Erbil, to gain a deeper understanding of the region’s youth and to dispel the misconceptions perpetuated by media narratives of insecurity and instability.

### Cultivating leaders and goal setters

My family and I arrived at Erbil Airport after a two-and-a-half-hour flight from Qatar’s Hamad International Airport. Early the next morning, I prepared to give my speech to the graduates. As part of my routine, I visited the hotel gym, then enjoyed a breakfast featuring Iraqi qaymar with date molasses, local yogurt, and Iraqi tea. During breakfast, I overheard a man in his sixties speaking in the Iraqi dialect of Arabic on the phone at a nearby table. While I had heard this dialect countless times before, experiencing it firsthand in Iraq was particularly impactful.

The conference hall, elegantly arranged, left me in awe. The sight of young men and women dressed up to celebrate their graduation from the training program was heartening. This program, which enrolled 4,200 students from across the Kurdistan Region, began in January 2024. Its aim was not only to prepare students for employment, but also to equip them with es-



Dr. Asmaa Alfadala delivering a speech at an event in Erbil



Photo: Mohamad Shwani

Photo: Mohamad Shwani





Government officials and representatives from the Qatar Foundation participating in the First Youth Training Graduation Ceremony (July 13, 2024)

Photo: Mohammad Shwami

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Having visited 48 countries, I found the people of Kurdistan uniquely hospitable and welcoming

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sential life skills such as time management, prioritization, effective communication, problem-solving through critical and creative thinking, teamwork, and cooperation. Additionally, the training emphasized personal and professional responsibility, leadership development, positive thinking, and the setting and achieving of personal and professional goals. These skills are crucial for young people to successfully navigate life's challenges.

My role in this event was to deliver an encouraging speech to the graduates. I shared my personal and professional journey over the past 28 years as a working mother of five children. I recounted stories of success and failure, emphasizing the lessons learned from these experiences in my current role as a professor at the College of Public Policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar. I stressed the importance of continuous learning for students and researchers to grow and develop in their fields, as well as to overcome life's difficulties.

Balancing study, work, and family responsibilities taught me the importance of setting clear goals and managing time effectively, both of which are key to achieving continuous progress. Persistence and dedication in one's efforts are essential for yielding fruitful results. I encouraged the students to engage in continuous reading to expand their knowledge and to stay abreast of recent developments in their fields. Additionally, I emphasized that maintaining mental and physical health is crucial for effectively facing challenges.

### The promise of young women

During lunch, I had the pleasure of discussing the role of women in building society with the Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Interior Rebar Ahmed Khalid and the Secretary General of the Family and Development Council. This trip clarified many questions for me and instilled hope that what I had read and seen about Kurdistan

and Iraq would evolve positively through the efforts and determination of its youth and the pivotal role of decision-makers in creating suitable conditions for graduates to apply their knowledge.

Throughout the event, several graduates shared their success stories. Susan conveyed her challenges and achievements through sign language, Rebin from Halabja recounted her journey to obtain a scholarship to study in Boston, and Maryam shared her story of finding job opportunities and overcoming life's obstacles.

After a busy day, I asked to visit a village for a more intimate experience of Kurdish culture. One student, Asya,

armly welcomed us to her beautiful farm, where I was delighted by the high level of education and upbringing of her daughters, particularly Nour, who aspires to become an ambassador to the UN. I was also pleased to see the enthusiastic support she received from her family, especially her grandfather – an encouraging sign for the future of the region and its youth.

We also explored Shaqlawa, a mountainous town about 40 minutes from Erbil, known for its cooler air in the hot summer. We stopped at a bakery, where the baker generously refused payment for our bread, reminding me of the bakery in the neighborhood where I lived in the 1980s in Al Ruwais, Qatar. The hospitality, generos-

ity, and warmth of the Kurdish people were remarkable. Having visited 48 countries, I found the people of Kurdistan uniquely hospitable and welcoming.

This trip provided me with a new perspective on an evolving country, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges and aspirations of its young men and women. I realized that hard work and dedication can transform reality and create a better future, regardless of the difficult circumstances. This visit reaffirmed my belief in the resilience and potential of Iraq's youth and the importance of continuous support and encouragement from their families and communities. ●



## Kurdish Man Thwarts Knife Attack in Finland

In a remarkable act of bravery, Paiwand Zahid, a young Kurdish man, thwarted a knife-wielding attacker in Turku, Finland, in August 2023, earning him widespread acclaim and a personal thank you from former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö. This heroic deed, which saved lives and prevented further harm, resonated across the country and Europe.

Born in 1995 in the village of Mawilian in the city of Rawandiz in the Kurdistan Region, Zahid moved to Finland with his family in 2000. Growing up in a new country, he embraced his new home, excelling in both academics and sports. After completing secondary school, he pursued medical studies and developed a passion for Brazilian jiu-jitsu, which he has practiced for over a decade.

The evening of the incident in Turku started like any other. Zahid was returning from the library when he noticed people running towards a café and saw a man bleeding. Concerned, he inquired about the situation and was told that a man was attacking people with a knife.

Driven by an innate sense of duty and courage, Zahid moved toward the chaos. He



**Riband Saadallah**

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



**Former President of Finland Sauli Niinistö thanking Paiwand Zahid, 2023**

saw the attacker assaulting an elderly man and immediately intervened. Without hesitation, Zahid confronted the attacker, striking him in the face and subduing him until the police arrived.

**“I watched Spider-Man and Batman”**

His brave actions did not go unnoticed. Finnish and European media quickly hailed him as a hero, and he was invited to the Finnish presidential palace, where then-President Niinistö personally thanked him for his courageous actions. The president’s acknowledgment was not just for Zahid, but also a tribute to the Kurdish community in Finland.

During an interview with the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Zahid

**“Zahid’s story is a testament to the power of individual courage and the impact that one person can have on their community”**

reflected on his actions with humility. When asked about his bravery, he smiled and said, “as a child, I watched Spider-Man and Batman.” More earnestly, he revealed that he acted for the sake of his father’s memory, believing that his father would have been proud of him.

In addition to his studies and work as

a medical assistant in a hospital, Zahid serves as a security guard onboard the ships of Finnish shipping company Viking Line. His heroic actions in Turku led Viking Line to offer him this position, recognizing his capability to ensure the safety and security of others. He is dedicated to roles that allow him to help others, particularly in emergency situations.

Zahid’s story is a testament to the power of individual courage and the impact that one person can have on their community. His bravery continues to inspire those around him, and his ongoing contributions reflect his commitment to making the world a safer place. As he looks to the future, Zahid remains focused on helping others and upholding the values of bravery and compassion that define his legacy. ●



## Empowering Women in Halabja The Her Voice Project



**Ausama AlKurd**  
is an independent journalist and the Project Manager of Her Voice Project. He also serves as the Head of the Halabja Office for the Iraq Space Center Organization (IQSC).

The Iraq Space Center (IQSC) recently celebrated the graduation of approximately 240 women from the Her Voice project in Halabja Governorate. The project serves as a guiding light in tackling problem of gender-based discrimination in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, with a specific emphasis on Halabja. Funded by the U.S. Consulate General in the Kurdistan Region and organized by the IQSC, this initiative aims to empower women by addressing obstacles such as restricted job access, workplace gender biases, and societal norms that hinder women's involvement in different areas of life.

Expanding on the achievements of Her Voice, the project team presented several important suggestions to guarantee ongoing advancement. It is essential to provide participants with a wide range of perspectives and expertise in order to enhance their opportunities in the labor market. It is also crucial to support advocacy work that aims to enforce laws and policies, ensure the protection of women's rights, and hold those respon-

sible for gender-based violence accountable.

Advocating for systemic change and accountability will help establish a safer and fairer environment for women in Halabja and the Kurdistan Region. Ongoing endeavors to increase awareness, enhance skills, and advocate for societal transformation will contribute to the establishment of a community that firmly opposes gender-based violence and treats every individual with the utmost respect and dignity.

After a journey of six months of exercises and hard work, the Her Voice project reached its pinnacle with a momentous graduation ceremony. Women participants enthusiastically shared their experiences and aspirations with a diverse audience, which included local officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a representative from the U.S. Consulate General in the Kurdistan Region. This event offered a wealth of valuable insights into the experiences of the community, shedding light on important issues like



gender equality, empowerment, and opportunities for advancement.

"I was delighted to witness the remarkable progress and transformation of these women, alongside local officials and representatives from NGOs," commented a project organizer.

### Dedication to gender equality

The stories of these individuals conquering obstacles and reaching their aspirations are undeniably motivating. The presence of local officials and NGOs highlighted the collective effort to uplift and empower women in the region, while the involvement of a representative from the U.S. Consulate General emphasized the significance of global support for these initiatives. The local authorities were pleased with the initiative and encouraged its continuation in the near future. They also expressed their appreciation for the support of the U.S. Consulate General, acknowledging its crucial contribution to the project's achievements.

The graduation ceremony was more than a simple celebration. It provided a space for women to openly discuss their experiences, dreams, and obstacles, encouraging conversation and teamwork among individuals dedicated to advancing gender equality and empowering other women.

The story of Her Voice in Halabja exemplifies the impact of community-driven initiatives on fostering social transformation. Through the empowerment of women and the questioning of discriminatory norms, the project has brought about positive changes in the lives of individuals and has also contributed to the creation of a society that is more inclusive and fair.

Her Voice is actively working toward creating a society that rejects gender-based violence and promotes respect and dignity for everyone. By raising awareness, fostering skill development, and advocating for

change, the project's participants and organizers are making a significant impact. The ongoing journey involves individuals, groups, and supporters collaborating to foster a well-informed and proficient community committed to eradicating gender-based discrimination and violence.

"The visit to Halabja and the success of the Her Voice project serve as significant affirmations of our dedication to promoting gender equality and empowering women," expressed a spokesperson from the U.S. Consulate General. "This initiative establishes a model for future endeavors in the area and beyond."



This incredible tale of transformation and empowerment in Halabja Governorate is a shining example of the power of dedicated advocacy and community engagement in creating long-lasting social change. Her Voice highlights the collaborative endeavor and unwavering commitment to establish a just, secure, and all-encompassing society for women in Halabja and beyond. ●



## Resilience and Talent of Kurdish Women



Sharif Bajo

is a talent management expert, innovation professional, and certified executive coach operating from both Australia and the UAE. He has pioneered the development of an artificial intelligence-enabled talent-identification system that is gaining significant traction in the Middle East.

This article was inspired by the story about Firmsk Wirya Qanch, the Kurdish woman chess champion, published in March 2024 in Issue 14 of *Kurdistan Chronicle*. This shining example of talent reminds us of the tremendous human potential of the Kurdish people.

Kurdistan is a culturally and historically rich region with a significant and widespread population, despite not having official recognition as an independent state. The Kurdish people are divided among several countries, including Türkiye, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and smaller parts of Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as millions living in the diaspora. This geographic fragmentation has presented numerous challenges but has also fostered a unique resilience and adaptability among the Kurdish people.



Renowned Kurdish chess champion Firmsk Wirya Qanch

### Historical and geographical context

Kurdistan spans a distinctive region that has historically been a crossroads of various empires and cultures. This area includes:

- **Türkiye:** Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye), known as Bakur, is rich in culture and history. Major cities like Diyarbakir and Van are cultural hubs, despite political challenges.
- **Iran:** Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran) includes much of the provinces of Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan.
- **Iraq:** Southern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Region of Iraq, KRI) includes cities like Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.

### Proportional talent

Despite challenges, Kurdish talent is proportionally high. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon:

- **Resilience and adaptability:** The Kurdish people have developed a remarkable ability to adapt and thrive in diverse and often adverse conditions. This resilience is reflected in their educational achievements, entrepreneurial activities, and cultural contributions.
- **Diaspora and global presence:** The Kurdish diaspora is spread across the world, particularly in Europe and North America. This global presence has allowed Kurds to gain access to diverse educational and professional opportunities, fostering a talented and well-educated community.



- **Syria:** Western Kurdistan (northern Syria) is known as Rojava.
- **Azerbaijan and Armenia:** These countries boast small Kurdish communities

### Lack of independence

Kurdistan is often referred to as the largest nation in the world without an independent state. This lack of political sovereignty has been a significant impediment for Kurds, impacting their ability to unify and assert their collective identity on the global stage. However, this has also contributed to a strong sense of nationalism and community solidarity among Kurds worldwide.

- **Cultural emphasis on education:** There is a strong cultural emphasis on education within Kurdish communities. Families often prioritize academic achievement and encourage their children to pursue higher education, leading to a highly educated population.

- **Political and social engagement:** Kurds are often deeply engaged in political and social activism, both within their home countries and in the diaspora. This engagement fosters leadership skills and a strong sense of civic responsibility.

- **Economic contributions:** Kurdish regions, particularly in Iraq, have become economic hubs due to oil reserves and other natural resources. This economic activity has created opportunities for business development and professional growth.



• **Cultural richness:** The Kurdish cultural heritage, including music, literature, and art, is rich and vibrant. This cultural richness fosters creativity and innovation among Kurdish individuals.

Role of women in Kurdish society

Women play a vital role in Kurdish society and contribute significantly to the proportional talent and achievements of the Kurdish people. Kurdish women have made remarkable strides in various fields, showcasing resilience, leadership, and innovation despite facing societal and geopolitical challenges. Here are some key aspects highlighting the contributions and roles of Kurdish women:

- education have helped elevate the overall intellectual capital of the Kurdish community.
- **Military and defense:** Kurdish women have gained international recognition for their contributions in military and defense. The female Kurdish fighters in Syria and Türkiye, along with the female *peshmerga* fighters in Iraq and Iran, have become symbols of courage and resistance, playing crucial roles in the fight against extremist groups and in defending Kurdistan.
  - **Entrepreneurship and business:** Kurdish women entrepreneurs are making significant contributions to the economy. They have established successful businesses in



- **Leadership and activism:** Kurdish women are prominent in political and social activism. They have been at the forefront of movements advocating for Kurdish rights, gender equality, and social justice. Notable figures include female leaders in the Kurdish political landscape and activists in the diaspora who work tirelessly for the Kurdish cause.
- **Education and academia:** There is a strong emphasis on education for Kurdish women. Their achievements in

- various sectors, from agriculture and handicrafts to technology and services. Their entrepreneurial spirit drives economic growth and innovation in Kurdistan and the diaspora.
- **Cultural preservation and promotion:** Women are key custodians of Kurdish culture, preserving and promoting Kurdish language, traditions, and arts. They are involved in cultural initiatives, producing literature, music, and art that reflect and celebrate Kurdish heritage.



Rez Gardi, a Kurdish-New Zealander international lawyer and human rights activist, celebrating his graduation from Harvard University

- **Social and community work:** Kurdish women are actively engaged in social and community work, addressing issues such as healthcare, education, and human rights. Their efforts in numerous international and local organizations including non-governmental organizations have led to significant improvements in the quality of life for many Kurdish people.
- **Breaking traditional barriers:** Many Kurdish women are challenging traditional gender roles and barriers, paving the way for future generations. By pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering, medicine, and law, they are setting new standards and inspiring other women to follow suit.

Call to action: Formation of the Kurdistan Talent Club

The remarkable potential and achievements of the Kurdish people, especially its women, highlight the need for

a dedicated platform to harness and cultivate this talent. Therefore, it is time to call for the formation of the Kurdistan Talent Club, which will be a space where Kurdish talent can brainstorm, imagine, create, and innovate at all levels. It will serve as a collaborative hub for individuals from various fields to come together, share ideas, and work on solutions that can propel the Kurdish community and cause forward.

Objectives of the Kurdistan Talent Club

- **Encourage innovation and creativity:** Foster a culture of innovation, providing resources, mentorship, and support for creative projects and initiatives to explore new ideas.
- **Promote collaboration and networking:** Facilitate networking and collaboration among Kurdish talent across various regions and fields, building a strong, skillful, and knowledgeable community.
- **Support education and professional development:** Offer programs, workshops, and trainings to enhance skills in technology, entrepreneurship, leadership, and more, promoting continuous learning.
- **Advocate for Kurdish rights and cultural preservation:** Promote awareness and advocacy for Kurdish rights and heritage, supporting initiatives to preserve Kurdish traditions, language, and arts.
- **Address socioeconomic challenges:** Develop strategies to tackle socioeconomic issues, create economic opportunities, improve education and healthcare access, and foster social cohesion.

Vision for the future

The vision for the Kurdistan Talent Club is one where 1 + 1 is no longer just 2 but grows exponentially into 11, 111, even 1111. By bringing together diverse talents and encouraging collaborative innovation, the club aims to amplify the impact of individual efforts and create a powerful, united force for progress.

Conclusion

The unseen potential of the Kurdish people, exemplified by figures like Firmesk Wirya Qaneh, showcases their remarkable resilience and talent, as well as the pivotal role of women in their society. Despite the challenges of geopolitical fragmentation, Kurds have demonstrated extraordinary achievements. The formation of the Kurdistan Talent Club will harness this potential, fostering innovation and collaboration to drive forward the Kurdish cause and community. ●



# INTERVIEW

## Discovering *Amedi*



**Goran Shakhawan**

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

In a captivating interview, we had the pleasure of speaking in Denmark with Kristian Alex Larsen, the author of a book recently published in Istanbul called *Amedi*. Larsen's unique background and deep appreciation for different cultures stem from growing up in a bicultural family. With a Danish father and Greek mother, he was immersed in diverse traditions from an early age.

Larsen holds a master's degree in political science and Near-Eastern Archaeology, and worked as an academic consultant in various municipalities in Copenhagen before retiring. Although retired, he plans to continue publishing academic articles on archaeology, sharing his expertise and insights with the world.

Larsen's interest in the Kurds dates to the early 1980s, when media coverage of the Kurd-

ish resistance and the arrival of Kurdish refugees in Denmark left a lasting impression on him. The atrocities committed during the Anfal campaign, particularly in Halabja, deeply shook him, and the images of families struggling to survive under horrendous conditions in the mountains at the border with Türkiye remain etched in his memory.

Larsen's connection to Kurdish culture deepened when he married Galavis, a Kurdish woman, in 2000. Since then, their travels have taken them to the Kurdistan Region numerous times, with his wife's hometown of Amedi holding a special place in their hearts.

### **Amedi**

Perched on an imposing mesa in the Duhok Governorate of the Kurdistan Region, the town of Amedi has fascinated scholars for centuries. Even 250 years ago, Carsten Niebuhr, a scientist in the service of the Danish king, wrote about Amedi during his oriental expedition. Although Niebuhr did not have the opportunity to visit Amedi himself, he described it as an impregnable town renowned



**Kristian Alex Larsen,**  
author of the book '*Amedi*'



**A** scenic view of Amedi in Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region





■ *Crown Imperial, a famous flower found in the mountains of Kurdistan*

for its fortifications and its exportation of oak apples used for making ink.

Inspired by his visits to Amedi and the captivating conversations he had with the locals, Larsen was driven to delve deeper into the wonders of the town and share its beauty with the world through a book.

The aim of Amedi is to illuminate the marvels of Amedi and Kurdistan, as seen through Larsen's eyes. The book serves as a celebration of the town's captivating beauty, cultural heritage, and enduring spirit. Situated harmoniously in nature, Amedi's ancient monuments and rich history captured Larsen's attention, inspiring him to bring its wonders to life through his photographs and narratives.

While war and grief have undoubtedly shaped Kurdish history, Larsen wants to showcase the region's multifaceted nature. Amedi, in particular, embodies the values of tolerance and friendly coexistence that are so central to life in the Kurdistan Region.

### **Kurdistan and the Kurdish language**

During his journeys to Kurdistan, Larsen observed both differences and similarities between Kurdish and Danish cultures. One notable difference that he discovered was the Kurds' inclination towards dancing when they come together, a stark contrast to the reserved nature of dancing in Denmark. However, he also found that social relations and showing respect to-



■ *Remains of the Qubahan Madrasa*



■ *Tombs of the Emirs*



■ *The Dragon Gate that once stood at the emirate palace*

wards others hold great importance in Kurdish culture, something shared with Danish culture. This also resonated with him deeply, as he believes that such values are fundamental to fostering harmonious communities. As an archaeologist, Larsen recognizes that while cultures are unique, they also share surprising similarities that may be rooted in ancient times.

Despite the challenges of learning a new language at his age, Larsen is determined to learn the Sorani dialect of the Kurdish language. He finds it fascinating that there are many cognates between Kurdish and Danish, as both languages belong to the Indo-European family, indicating common linguistic roots.

### **Hope for the future**

As our interview drew to a close, Larsen expressed his hopes for the Kurdish people, envisioning a future where they can exercise their right to independence and determine their own destiny. Additionally, he hopes that the accomplishments and beliefs of the Kurdish people will receive the recognition they deserve.

Larsen eagerly shared that the esteemed journal, *Adoranten*, will soon publish an article that he has written that focuses on a significant rock painting from the area of Hakkari. Through his experiences and insights, Larsen invites readers to embark on a journey of discovery, celebrating the marvels of Amedi and Kurdistan. ●



## The Free Yezidi Foundation's Impact on Youth Education



Olivia Wells

is the Programs Director at the Free Yezidi Foundation, where she champions human rights. She holds a master's degree in human rights law from the University of Cape Town, bringing extensive expertise to her advocacy role.



Cecilia Pedersen

is a Programs and Development Officer at the Free Yezidi Foundation, specializing in sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as forced displacement. Her expertise contributes significantly to the foundation's initiatives.

In Shekhan District in the Nineveh Governorate of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a beacon of hope and progress has emerged for the Yezidi community and other local youth with the launch of the Free Yezidi Foundation, a women-led non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment and support of Yezidis and other Iraqi ethnic and religious minorities.

Funded by the U.S. Consulate General Erbil, this innovative educational initiative includes the English Microscholarship Access Program (Access), a two-year course that involves more than just learning English. Access is a holistic educational experience designed to foster critical thinking, social cohesion, tolerance, and mental well-being among students who have faced the harsh realities of conflict and displacement.

### A holistic approach to education

Access stands out for its commitment to the comprehensive development of its students. Rather than focusing solely on the acquisition of language skills, the program emphasizes the importance of nurturing critical thinking and analytical abilities. This approach encourages students to question, engage with, and understand the world around them, fostering a generation of informed and thoughtful individuals.

Through a curriculum that integrates language learning with discussions on social

issues, cultural awareness, and personal development, students are encouraged to think beyond traditional educational boundaries. This method not only enhances their English proficiency, but also prepares them to navigate complex societal issues and contribute positively to their communities.

“By prioritizing mental health, the program thus ensures that students are not only academically equipped, but also emotionally resilient and capable of overcoming challenges

”  
**Fostering social cohesion and tolerance**

In a region where ethnic and religious diversity is both a strength and a source of tension, the program's focus on social cohesion and tolerance is particularly vital. The student body of 144 Iraqi youth includes individuals from various backgrounds, many of whom have been

directly affected by conflict and displacement. By bringing together students from different communities, the program creates a space for dialogue, mutual understanding, and the break-

values that enrich the students' educational journey and support broader goals of peace and reconciliation in the region.

Workshops on stress management, yoga for trauma recovery, self-care, and emotional intelligence are integrated into the learning process. Additionally, the program provides



Children participating in the FYF's English Microscholarship Program

ing down of prejudices.

The curriculum integrates activities and projects aimed at fostering teamwork, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives. Through interactive games, group projects, field trips, and innovative language learning and communication methods, students can apply classroom strategies to real-world scenarios. These experiences promote cultural understanding, unity, tolerance, and social cohesion,

### Prioritizing mental well-being

Recognizing the profound impact of trauma on learning and development, Access places a strong emphasis on mental well-being. Many students in the program have experienced significant psychological stress due to their past experiences. To address this, the program incorporates elements of psychological support and resilience-building into its curriculum.

access to counseling services and creates a supportive environment where students feel safe to express their thoughts and emotions. By prioritizing mental health, the program thus ensures that students are not only academically equipped, but also emotionally resilient and capable of overcoming challenges.

### A summer of learning

This summer, students are immersed



in a unique and enriching experience designed to enhance their English language skills and cultural understanding. Over the course of two weeks, they engage in intensive English lessons for six hours each day that are aimed at improving grammar, vocabulary, and conversational skills. To complement classroom learning, students visit local cultural sites, gaining a deeper appreciation for Kurdistan and Iraq’s history and diverse cultural landscape.

During a visit to the University of Duhok’s American Corner, Access students interact with university students and faculty, inspiring them to pursue higher education. Additionally, organized picnics and outdoor games provide a fun, social environment where students can practice English and build friendships. This full immersion approach ensures constant language practice, leading to noticeable

advancements in proficiency and motivation to learn. Salma, a 14-year-old beneficiary of the Access program, reflected on the impact of the program thus far: “This course has been very beneficial. It has greatly improved my English reading and comprehension skills. I now understand the importance of English and believe it will help me a lot in college, providing many opportunities.”

**Planting seeds for a brighter future**

For the 144 Iraqi youth participating in the program, the benefits are profound. However, the effects of the program extend beyond the individual students. Supported by their teachers and communities, students will design, develop,



Children participating in the FYF’s English Microscholarship Program



Children participating in the FYF’s English Microscholarship Program

and implement a collaborative project each year to benefit community development in Shekhan District.

As these young people grow and take on roles in their communities, they will carry with them the values and skills that they acquire through the program. Their ability to think critically, work collaboratively, and approach problems with empathy will contribute to the development of a more just, peaceful, and inclusive society.

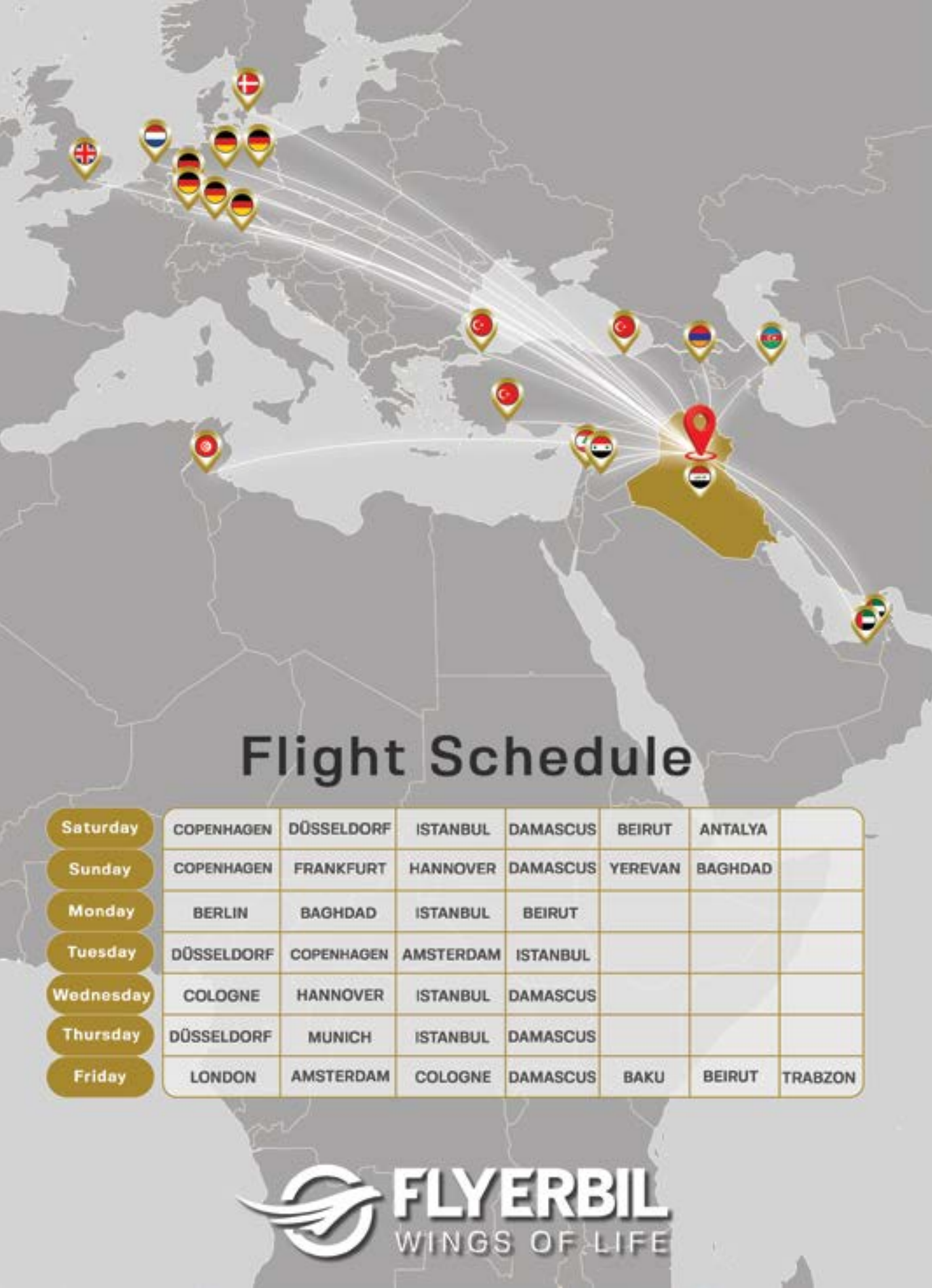
The ultimate goal of Access is to plant the seeds for a brighter future for the participating youth. By equipping them with critical thinking skills, fostering social cohesion, and supporting their mental well-being, the program prepares students to become active, engaged, and compassionate members of society. In doing so, Access represents

the transformative power of education when it prioritizes the holistic well-being and development of its students.

**About the Free Yezidi Foundation**

The Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF) is a non-partisan, Yezidi women-led non-profit organization established in response to the 2014 Yezidi Genocide. FYF is dedicated to the empowerment and support of the Yezidi and other ethnic and religious minority communities through the provision of comprehensive advocacy, justice, mental healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood services. With a special focus on women, girls, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, FYF’s initiatives aim to enable those most vulnerable to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience. ●





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## A Silenced Kurdish Voice



**Firat Jeweri**

*is a Kurdish writer, translator and journalist from Mardin, Türkiye.*

*He has written more than ten books in Kurdish and translated literary works of John Steinbeck, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Astrid Lindgren, Yaşar Kemal and Henning Mankell into Kurdish.*

The life of an intellectual is a long and arduous one. Every century a few pivotal figures become the articulators of their community's aspirations and concerns. Their guidance propels humanity toward a brighter future. Driven by a desire to enlighten those around them, they prioritize justice and transparency over gaining favor with the government or business elites. In developed countries with civil and democratic systems, such intellectuals are celebrated as national treasures. However, in undemocratic regimes, their reward is often arrest, imprisonment, or even death, as rulers perceive them as threats to their power and thus seek to silence their voices.

A number of such figures emerged in Kurdish society during the 20th century. As a young man, however, I particularly admired two individuals dedicated to education and wisdom: Edip Karahan and Musa Anter. Both hailed from Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye) and grew to be revered as legendary figures who sought to shine the light of truth on an uninformed society, but were ultimately pursued and cut down by powerful governments. As a teenager, I immersed myself in books and forbidden poetry and aspired to emulate these intellectual giants. I yearned for their company, advice, and insights. By the time I reached adulthood, Karahan had passed away, but Anter lived on.

### Without trace of resentment

Born in the village of Eskimagara in Mardin Province, as a young man Anter moved to Istanbul to study law. Anter was criticized by nationalist Turkish writers and journalists for his 1959 poem "Qimil," and was arrested and even threatened with execution. Still, he emerged unbowed from his time in prison, connecting with Kurdish intel-

lectuals in Istanbul, and eventually returned to his roots with a wealth of knowledge.

Seeking solace and truth, Anter left Istanbul and returned to his homeland, settling in a village near the city of Nusaybin in Mardin Province in Türkiye rather than the city itself. I was residing in Nusaybin at the time. Having grown weary of writing slogans, and after engaging in materialistic philosophy debates, I found the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat increasingly unappealing. The senseless pursuit of one-party rule and the political restrictions on writing

“ Seeking solace and truth, Anter left Istanbul and returned to his homeland, settling in a village near the city of Nusaybin in Mardin

”

in Kurdish had left me disillusioned. Perhaps taking the risk of writing in Kurdish would awaken me to my true identity. In 1978, I visited Anter in Stilil with two friends.

Despite the persecution Anter had endured, when we visited him on that summer day, he greeted us warmly without a trace of resentment. Though only a few years older than us, he possessed a worldly wisdom and experience beyond his age.

During our visit, Anter cooked for us in his garden, which was adorned with trees, flowers, and a tranquil



*Flowers placed at Musa Anter's portrait on the anniversary of his assassination*





**F**irat Jeweri (left) and Musa Anter (right) meeting in Nusaybin, Türkiye (1989)

water pond. Our conversation delved deeply into various philosophical and scholarly realms. Upon learning of my decision to write in Kurdish, he expressed both happiness and concern, aware of the potential consequences. However, when I mentioned my plans to leave the country, his demeanor brightened. He recommended Sweden – where his family had settled – as a place to improve my language skills and freely pursue writing.

Before the 1980 coup, I made my way to Sweden via Syria, Germany, and Norway. A decade later, I returned to a turbulent Türkiye. Anter remained in Stîlîl. Concerned for my safety, my brother advised against visiting him. Instead, we brought him to our home. Our reunion was filled with joy and happiness. I interviewed him for a Kurdistan Press article titled “Interview with a 75-Year-Old Man.” Afterward, fearing repercussions, I quickly published the interview and distanced myself.

### Undertaking a fraught path

After marrying a year later, Anter moved back to Istanbul. During our weeklong visit, I proudly shared my work and discussed plans for a new magazine, Nudem. Musa Anter enthusiastically agreed to contribute. His article for the first issue focused on Nusaybin, but tragically, he did not live to see the second. I published the devastating news of his murder in the third issue.

At the printing house, sharing the news with my friend

“  
The loss of Anter was a profound shock to the Kurdish intellectual and cultural world  
”

Emin Bozarslan was heart-wrenching. His reaction was profound. At first, he was frozen in place, and, fearing he might collapse, I placed myself under his arm so that he wouldn’t fall to the ground and faint.

The loss of Anter was a profound shock to the Kurdish intellectual and cultural world. His absence left an irreplaceable void. His murder was not merely a personal tragedy, but a symbol of the relentless persecution faced by Kurdish intellectuals.

In the aftermath of his death, I became increasingly aware of the dangers I faced. The state’s hostility towards Kurdish intellectuals was evident, and I knew I had to be cautious. Yet, Anter’s memory and unwavering commitment to truth inspired me to continue our shared struggle. I dedicated myself to preserving Anter’s legacy and carrying forward his intellectual pursuits. I worked tirelessly to document his life and work, to ensure that his ideas and contributions would not be forgotten. It was a challenging and often perilous task, but I felt a deep responsibility to honor his memory.

The path ahead was fraught with obstacles, but I was determined to overcome them. I knew that I stood on the shoulders of giants, and that the struggle for Kurdish rights and cultural expression would continue. Musa Anter’s spirit lived on within me, a constant source of inspiration and strength. ●



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**Delovan Barwari**

Host

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



**Suzan Safar**

Guest

Ms. Suzan Safar, the Founder and President of the DAK Organization for Yazidi Women Development.

Ms. Suzan Safar discusses the current situation of the Yezidi community, the unstable security and infrastructure in Sinjar, and the urgent need for justice and accountability.



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## The Emirate of Botan



*Bukhary Wshyar*

*is a Kurdish poet and researcher from Erbil. He has published five books and won the first place in poetry category of Rwanga Foundation's 2019 Competition.*

**T**his article explores the historical evolution of the Botan region, tracing its origins back to Herodotus's mention in the Achaemenid Empire. The principality of Botan existed until 1847 as an Ottoman vassal. The article delves into various conflicting accounts of the emirate's establishment, focusing on the narratives by Sharafkhan Bidlisi and Mohammad Amin Zaki. It details the lineage and rule of the Azizan family, particularly under Bedr Khan, who modernized and expanded the emirate before its downfall in 1847 due to an Ottoman-British alliance. Post-Bedr Khan, the family continued to influence Kurdish nationalism and cultural movements, contributing to the Kurdish liberation movement and cultural advancements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Portrait of Sharafkhan Bidlisi, the Kurdish Emir of Bitlis who was also renowned as a historian, writer, and poet*



The oldest historical source mentioning the region of Botan is the Greek historian Herodotus (484-426 BC), who says that the “Bukht and ikh” was one of the many subordinated territories of the Achaemenid Empire. Over two millennia later, the word underwent significant phonetic change to become Bokhti, Buhtan, and finally Botan. The principality lasted from the early fourteenth century and to 1847 as a sovereign state but vassal of the Ottoman Empire.

There are several different and conflicting interpretations concerning how the emirate was established. Sharafkhan Bidlisi, the Emir of Bidlisi (1543-1604), mentions in his *Sharafnama* (*Book of Honor*) – regarded as the oldest important source of Kurdish history – that the founder of the Botan principality was someone named Sulaiman, son of Khalid, who was from the families of Botan and ruled during the Umayyad Caliphate. Sharafkhan noted that Sulaiman was of Arab origin and was the son of Khalid Ibn Walid, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad of Islam.

However, the 20th century Kurdish historian Mohammad Amin Zaki disputes this account in his book *Tarikh al-Dawl*: “In *Sharafnama*, the author indicates that this emirate was established during the Umayyad Caliphate and originated from the family of Khalid Ibn Walid, but this information is unverifiable because there is no evidence of Khalid and his son Sulaiman being in Kurdistan. Moreover, this family did not exist in the early days of Islam; it is therefore a shame to consider this narrative true.”

Building on this, we know that Khalid Ibn Walid had no sons or heirs. After his death, Abdullah Ibn Salma took over his property in Medina. As Hazhari Mukriani wrote

in the margin of his translation of *Sharafnama*: “I do think that the tribe, which has made up this story for themselves, must be the remnants of the Khaldi (Haldi or Chaldean) ancestors of the Kurdish coast. This shows that they adhered to the Yezidi religion until recently.”

What is known from historical sources is that the Jiziri Emirate (Botan) first emerged during the Umayyads. After the death of Sulaiman, the first ruler of the Kurds of Botan was Mir Abdulaziz. Mir Saifuddin succeeded his father and his brother Amir Majdaddin succeeded him. His son Amir Isa succeeded him. After the death of Amir Isa, his son Bedraddin succeeded him. After the passing of Badraddin, his son Mir Abdal took the heir and succeeded him, and after his death his son Mir Ezaddin succeeded him.

This ruling family was known as Azizan. During its reign, in 1393-94 to be precise, the Turco-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane arrived in Mardin, and Ezaddin submitted to his rule to avoid war. Nevertheless, a battle broke out with Tamerlane’s forces, which resulted in the principality being occupied as part of the Timurid Empire.

After the Timurid Empire left, the descendants of Ezaddin revived their rule of the Botan Emirate. The order of the emirate of Botan is as follows: (Mir Sharaf Khan I, Mir Mohammad Khan, Mir Sharaf Khan II, Mansoor Khan, Ismail Khan, Mustafa Khan, Abdullah Khan, Amir Khan)

## Bedr Khan

The name of the Bedr Khan family comes from the name of Bedr Khan, son of Abdullah Khan, son of Mustafa Khan.



It is written on the tomb of Bedr Khan in the cemetery of Maulana Khalid Naqshbandi in Salhiya neighborhood in Syria that he was born in 1802.

Bedr Khan was born in 1802 and at the age of 18, he took over the rule of Botan in 1820, after his elder brother Emir Salih resigned. According to sources, Bedr Khan immediately began to reorganize the affairs of the emirate. Ordering the construction of many palaces and houses, he provided financial assistance to low-income families and gave land to farmers cheaper than the Ottomans did.

Bedr Khan appointed Maal Abdul Qudus as Sheikh of Islam, Tahir Agha as commander-in-chief of the army, Hamid Agha as commander of the cavalry and Effendi Agha in charge of the treasury and private affairs. He

also established an advisory council for the empire to issue an enema, decrees and laws. The council consisted of elders headed by Abdul Qudus.

Bedr Khan's greatest aim was to maintain peace and order in the empire and, during his rule, the Botan Emirate became the most advanced Kurdish state to have existed. Its borders were extended to Sablagh, Rawanduz, and Mosul, and it was defined by progress and development.

## The fall of the Botan Emirate

The strength of the Botan Emirate under Bedr Khan worried the Ottomans, who organized a major attack with the help of the British. Initially, Bedr Khan’s forces forced the Ottomans to withdraw to Mosul, but later the Ottoman army succeeded in capturing the city of Cizre. Bedr Khan

was forced to leave the island and went to the citadel of “Arukh”, which was later surrounded by the Ottomans. After several months of siege and his escape route blocked, Bedr Khan was forced to surrender on July 20, 1847.

Bedr Khan was arrested and transferred to Ottoman army headquarters. A few days later, he, his older brother Salih, his younger brother Asad, and all the officials of the emirate were sent to Istanbul, arriving on September 29.

He was later exiled to Heraklion on the island of Crete, where he remained for 18 years before he and his family returned to Istanbul in 1866. In 1868, he and his family moved to Syria, settling in Damascus, where he remained in Damascus until his death in 1869.

## Descendants of Bedr Khan

Bedr Khan left behind 49 children: 28 sons and 21 daughters. He raised them with a sense of national and revolutionary patriotism. Haji Qadir Koyi taught his children as a teacher. Therefore, after Bedr Khan’s death, the Bedr Khans launched several revolutions and uprisings, including that of Yazdan Sher in 1854, Osman Bedr Khan in 1879, and Hassan and Hussein Bedr Khan in 1910. Therefore, this family became a prominent family of the Kurdish people’s liberation movement.

After the uprising and revolution of the Bedr Khans, the sons of this family did not stop with the armed revolution and established several associations and movements that worked to fight for Kurdish rights and to spread its culture, such as (*Ta’ali u taraqi Kurdistan*), (Khoyibun), (Hevi) and many others. They also became leaders in advancing science, information, literature, and art helps to develop a national Kurdish consciousness, and began publishing the newspapers in Kurdistan, Hawar, Ronahi and Roza-nu. ●





## I Consider Myself a Kurd

Kurdistan Chronicle

Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, also known by his Them-bu clan name Madiba, the great-grandson of South Africa's historical and world leader Nelson Mandela, is currently a Visiting Professor at University of Kurdistan Hewler (UKH)'s Department of Politics and International Relations.

He will spend another five months in Erbil, hoping to teach a new generation of Kurdish leaders. "Educa-



Nelson Mandela

tion is one of the greatest tools that we can use to change the world," Dr. Mandela said.

But coming to Kurdistan was about more than teaching. "The mere fact that I am here and chose to come to Kurdistan means that I support the Kurdish cause. I may not have been born a Kurd, but I consider myself a Kurd," he told *Kurdistan Chronicle* in an exclusive interview.



Siyabulela Mandela holding the flag of Kurdistan on the summit of Mount Halgord in Kurdistan





**Siyabulela Mandela**

### A shared history of resistance

During Dr. Mandela's first visit to the Kurdistan Region in March 2023, he saw the Halabja Monument and Peace Museum, which reminded him of the oppression of black people in South Africa by the apartheid regime. "You have to be really tough not to cry when you leave that museum. I'm thankful the Mayor of Halabja Nuxsha Nasih showed me around."

"If you read the history of South Africa, we were close to being exterminated. There were already studies on biological warfare that the apartheid regime was going to launch against the black masses." However, he said that the release of great grandfather averted those killings.

He said that the shared history of resistance between the Kurds and the black people of South Africa was among the reasons he decided to return to the Kurdistan Region this year to contribute to the development of the Kurdistan Region through education and give back to a people who stood with the South African people.

"I felt that sense that I was among the people whose history is similar to mine so far as the fight for their own independence, freedom, or self-determination. So, I was very much impressed with the people," he noted.

Moreover, he explained how people in Africa do not know much about the Kurdish people. "They speak of the Arabic people, but they don't speak about the culture or the language of the Kurdish people."

Dr. Mandela said that in the past many people also did not know about the oppression of black people in South Africa until Mandela was released on February 11, 1990, after spending 27 years in prison. "If he had not been released from prison, very few people would refer to him as a role model today."

"The Kurdish people and the people

of Palestine in the Middle East stood with us when we were fighting for our own freedom and right to self-determination," he said, adding that both groups had called for his great-grandfather's release.

"They understood our pain, as they were going through the very same injustice as we were in South Africa at that time," he said. "So, for me, now that we are free in South Africa, we should continue to support other groups that have not yet attained their own independence."

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Nelson Mandela for  
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”

Now, Dr. Mandela aspires to educate the future leaders of the Kurdistan Region. "To invest in the education of the younger generation, the future leaders of tomorrow, is one of the greatest things you can do."

He aims to instill in young Kurds the significance of seeking alternative approaches to conflict resolution, emphasizing the value of compromise, reconciliation, and reconstruction.

### Independence referendum

Dr. Mandela is a notable supporter of Kurdish self-determination and freedom. On September 25, 2017, under the leadership of then-president

Masoud Barzani, Iraqi Kurds held an independence referendum, securing a 93% majority despite opposition from the majority of the international community, regional countries, and Baghdad itself.

"It's no surprise that the international community did not support the Kurdish people in their fight for independence," he said.

"If you remember, even Nelson Mandela and his generation faced rejection from the international community for a long time, with their liberation movement supported primarily by countries undergoing similar struggles, such as the Kurdish people and the people of Palestine."

Moreover, he said that "Nelson Mandela for the longest time was considered a terrorist. But today the very same individual who was perceived as a terrorist is celebrated as one of the greatest leaders that has walked the earth."

He also explained how in the past many people thought that black people in South Africa would always be marginalized and denied their rights to self-determination. "But after waging a relentless struggle we were able to attain our freedom. If your own vision is to one day live in a country that is free, let's say an independent Kurdistan, then it is possible," Dr. Mandela said.

### Why Kurdistan?

One of Dr. Mandela's students at UKH was shocked that he chose to teach and live for a few months in the Kurdistan Region. "Why Kurdistan? Why not the United States or the UK?" one of his students asked him.

"I had to put things into perspective for him to understand that there is a reason why people go to certain areas," he said.

"It's not a question of just coming to teach. It's a country that shares histo-





*Siyabulela Mandela during his visit to Halabja, Kurdistan Region*



ry with my own country, the common experience that we have shared. The vision has always been freedom and one's right to self-determination. We achieved our own in South Africa, and we hope that the Kurdish people will one day attain their own freedom and right to self-determination."

"Until then, those of us who are free must continue to support those who are not, until they are also free as well. For example, my great-grandfather, Nelson Mandela, refused to accept the International Atatürk Peace Prize given by Türkiye in 1992," he noted.

Nelson Mandela said at the time, "if you want to get to know the Turkish government, become a Kurd for one hour. My great grandfather understood the acceptance of

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When I say the Kurdish  
people are my people,  
I don't say this just as a  
political statement

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treatment of the Kurdish people.” Moreover, Dr. Mandela really likes the Kurdish mountains and plans to visit them during weekends. “There's an expression in Kurdistan: no friends but the mountains. I enjoyed the mountains, and I love hiking there as well.”

“When I say the Kurdish people are my people, I don't say this just as a political statement. Even how they express their generosity and hospitality shows. In Erbil I am hosted by the Ozel family, who has shown an abundance of hospitality and kindness, I feel that I am at a home away from home,” he added. “Especially because I have read a bit about the Kurdish people and the history of the Kurdish resistance, for me it was like, in a way, coming home. I did not feel that I was in a new environment.”



*Siyabulela Mandela during his visit to Kurdistan Chronicle's office in Erbil*

that award would mean that, in a way, he supports and endorses Türkiye's position towards the Kurdish people,” Dr. Mandela explained.

“As a revolutionary leader and liberation figure he had to be able to stand his ground and say I am not going to Türkiye to accept the award as a way to protest Türkiye's

“Even the students at UKH make me feel at home,” he emphasized. “I don't feel like a visiting professor, I feel like a part and parcel of the community. It's just been an amazing experience so far, and I'm looking forward to the next five months and the impact that hopefully I will have on the students,” he concluded. ●



## *The Merx Tree* A Symbol for Khorasan's Kurds

Kurdistan Chronicle

The Kurds of Khorasan reside in Iran's northeastern provinces of North Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan, bordering Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Researcher Shores Reshi identifies 22 major Kurdish tribes and clans scattered across these regions.

Due to the lack of official recognition in the Iranian census, the exact Kurdish population in Khorasan remains unknown. Researchers like Afrasiab Shekoffte and Khorasani artist and historian Kelimullah Tevahodi estimate it to be nearly two million.

Major Kurdish cities in Khorasan include Quchan, Deregez, Shirvan, Esfarayan, Ashkhaneh, Bajgiran, Bojnurd, Chenaran, Fariman, Kelat, Layin, Mane, and Similqan.

### Tracing Kurdish roots in Khorasan

There are two main perspectives on the Kurdish presence in Khorasan: that of internal Kurdish historians and that of foreign writers and travelers.

Tevahodi, author of the six-volume *The Historical Movement of Kurds in Khorasan*, offers detailed insights. Following the 1514 Battle of Chaldiran between the Ottomans and Safavids, the strengthened



Kurdish presence near the cities of Urmia, Salmas, Khoy, and Maku concerned the Safavid state.

Tevahodi suggests that Shah Abbas the Great thus strategically relocated dozens of Kurds from Urmia to Khorasan to weaken Kurdish influence in the west and establish a buffer against Uzbek, Mughal, and Turkmen attacks in the east.

Reshi agrees with Tevahodi, adding that migrations occurred not only from Urmia, Maku, and Salmas, but also from Samsur, Mardin, Diyarbakir, Afrin, and Dilok.

Conversely, American historian Beatrice Forbes Manz, in an academic article entitled "Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy," mentions that Timur encountered Kurds in Quchan during his 14th-century Khorasan expedition. Similarly, the fifteenth century Spanish writer Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo documents their presence in his travelogue, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand AD 1403-1406*.

### Kurdish tribes and dialects in Khorasan

Writer Mehmet Bayrak, in his book *Khorasan in the History of Kurds and Alev-*



Cover and content pages of Merx magazine



is, lists Kurdish tribes in the region, including Rashwani, Ramanlu, Muradkhani, Jalali, Tupi, Amarlu, Zeferanlu, Tupkanlu, Melekshahi, Zengene, Quchan, Redkanlu, Titkanlu, and Erdelani Milani.

Interestingly, these tribes appear in both Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran) and Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye), particularly near the Euphrates River.

Meanwhile, Jafarquliyeh Zengeli's contributions and poems point to the predominance of the Kurmanji Kurdish dialect in Khorasan. Author Mehrdad Izady's *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* explores the Lak and Lur Kurds and their dialects.

Despite the geographical distance from Kurdistan, the Kurds of Khorasan maintain a strong connection to their language, culture, and art, as evidenced by the enduring presence of Kurdish elements in their lives.

### Introducing Merx magazine

Merx is the first literary, artistic, and musical magazine dedicated to Khorasan's Kurds. Many prominent Kurdish intellectuals – including Husen Firouze, Sherko Pehlewani, Ali Riza Layin, Yehya Ellawifard, Melihe Erki, Salih Ismaili,

Raziye Sadaqeti, and Mihemed Khurshidpour – have contributed to the Merx project.

Firouze, Merx's editor-in-chief, explains that there was a pressing need for a formal publication to represent the art and culture of Khorasan's Kurds, citing the lack of dedicated Kurdish media, the chaos of social media, and the dominance of unprofessional content online. Merx, with its skilled team, aims to fill this gap.

The magazine's name refers to an evergreen tree native to the mountains of Khorasan. Just like the tree's deep roots and enduring presence, Merx aspires to represent the unwavering spirit and cultural identity of the Kurds of Khorasan.

"We considered names like Hawar, Bakure Khorasan, Duman, Kurmanc, and Merx," Firouze says in describing the naming process. "Ultimately, Merx resonated most with the group. One member pointed out the resemblance between the Kurds of Khorasan and the Merx tree – both adaptable, enduring, and ever-present."

The inaugural issue of Merx boasts 120 pages in Farsi and Kurdish, with a focus on Kurdish content. Articles delve into Kurdish history, language, and music, accompanied by captivating photographs showcasing the region's Kurdish culture.

This issue pays homage to the aforementioned Kelimulah Tevahodi, featuring an interview with him alongside excerpts from his works. Additionally, poems by renowned Kurdish poets Haji Qadir Koyi, Cigerxwin, and Jana Seyda grace its pages.

The first issue saw a print run of 2,000 copies and received positive feedback. With continued success, the publication aims to increase circulation to 3,000.

Distribution primarily targets Khorasan's northern cities – including Mashhad, Chenaran, Dargaz, Kallat, Quchan, Shirvan, Ashkhaneh, Esfarayen, Sabzevar, and Nishapur – as well as bookstores in Tehran and Kermanshah that cater to Kurds residing in those cities.

### Preserving and reviving the Kurdish language

Firouze emphasizes that the core mission of Merx is the protection, revival, and promotion of the Kurdish language, a unifying objective for the magazine's team.

He highlights the immense contribution of Tevahodi in his interview, acknowledging Tevahodi's pivotal role in bringing recognition to the Kurdish population of northern Khorasan, both within Iran and internationally. Before Tevahodi's research, the existence of this Kurdish community was largely unknown and disregarded.

Through Firouze's leadership and the content produced by Merx's writers, the magazine strives to emulate the enduring spirit of the merx tree, ensuring the Kurdish language continues to thrive among the Kurds of Khorasan. ●



## Bestansur The Dawn of Agriculture



**Savan Abdulrahman**

is the editor-in-chief at DidiMn, a Kurdish cultural website. Concurrently, she is engaged in a research project on the origins of masculinity in her role as a research assistant at the American University in Iraq, Sulaymaniyah, and also collaborating on this project with the London School of Economics (LSE).

Imagine stepping back in time to the dawn of agriculture, when the first seeds of farming were sown. This is the story of Bestansur, a unique archaeological gem nestled in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains in Kurdistan on the edge of the Shahrizor Plain.

Roughly 30 kilometers southeast of the city of Sulaymaniyah, Bestansur is a Neolithic settlement and the first and only archaeological site to present the earliest stages of village life in the region. The site is of global cultural, historical, and archaeological significance as it provides the first evidence of human civilization in Kurdistan for the period 8000-7100 BC.

The site consists of a series of mud brick buildings that were erected during a great transition period spanning nearly one thousand years. Thousands of stone, clay, and bone artifacts have been unearthed within the buildings, as have human burials under the plaster floors of one of the buildings, and traces of red-painted plaster on the walls.

### A decade of digging

A joint Iraqi-UK team started excavating at Bestansur in 2012, and the project operates under a memorandum of understanding with the Sulaymaniyah and Erbil Directorates of Antiquities and Heritage and with agreement from the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in Baghdad. The project is undertaken in full collaboration with the Director of the

Sulaymaniyah Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage Kamal Rasheed Raheem.

The site was first identified by Iraqi archaeologists in the 1950s and later surveyed by a German-Iraqi team in 2008-2009. Since 2011, Wendy Matthews, the co-director of the Central Zagros Archaeological Project, and Roger Matthews, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading in the UK, have spent many hours leading work and research on the site.

Speaking to *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Roger Matthews outlined the significance of the site. “We’re researching the transition from hunter and gatherer communities to more settled farming and agricultural communities with the herding of animals and growing of crops. This region, the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, is one of the first areas where that transition takes place. People make that change; they domesticate animals like goats, sheep, and cows, as well as crops like wheat and barley, mainly in the highlands zone to the east here. And then they settle and start to build sophisticated mud brick buildings,” he said.

According to UNESCO, Bestansur bears unique testimony to a cultural tradition and civilization from the distant past of humanity. No other archaeological site in the Kurdistan Region provides such early evidence for this critically important episode in the transition from mobile hunting-gathering to sedentary farming life.



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The site is of global cultural, historical, and archaeological significance as it provides the first evidence of human civilization in Kurdistan for the period 8000-7100 BC

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Under the floors of Bestansur’s buildings rest many human burials, most notably in the middle building, where nearly 80 individual human corpses were found. “It’s a very special building where people brought their dead for final burial. This is during the so-called pre-pottery Neolithic period, so it’s before the invention of pottery,” Roger Matthews explained.

As research on the site continues, the team struggles to find a balance between protecting the site and analyzing it for research before further archaeological decay sets in. “Mud brick architecture has straw inside it to make it strong. But this straw, after 10,000 years, is not there anymore, so the mud brick is not very strong,” Wendy Matthews said. “Unfortunately, each season we must cover the

buildings back up,” she added.

This problem is not unique to Bestansur. Across the world, very old mud brick buildings cannot be displayed because they are too weak. “At the moment, we’re making some noticeboards and panels to help visitors better understand Bestansur,” Wendy Matthews noted.

Surveying and analyzing

Published in 2020, *The Early Neolithic of the Eastern Fertile Crescent: Excavations at Bestansur and Shimshara, Iraqi Kurdistan* is a 720-page research volume on the excavations, surveys, and analyses undertaken by the Central Zagros Archaeological Project between autumn 2011 and

The archaeological settlement mound of Bestansur



summer 2017. Edited by Roger Matthews, Wendy Matthews, Kamal Rasheed Raheem, and Amy Richardson, it was published in the UK by Oxbow Books.

Wendy and Roger Matthews shared their sentiments about working on the Bestansur site. “Kurdistan is a very important region. We’re delighted to be working here. Bestansur has a long history of occupation because of the very important spring here, and there is biodiversity with the marshlands and the mountains.”

The archaeologists’ bond with the community has also made a huge difference to the project’s advancement. “We work very closely with the workmen in the village and the ladies; they help us with the sorting of the small finds. It’s

very much a team effort,” Wendy Matthews underscored. “It’s very important to stress that we feel very much part of the village family when we’re here,” Roger Matthews added.

Bestansur stands out for its unparalleled significance, as there are no comparable sites on the UNESCO World Heritage or Tentative Lists, either within Iraq or among its neighbors. Achieving UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List status would aid in protecting the site and its surrounding environment, including the second-largest spring on the fertile Shahrizor Plain and picturesque views of the Zagros Mountains. Bestansur reveals the roots of human civilization and is a testament to the legacy of our ancestors and their journey from survival to settlement. ●



# HISTORY



*Chiman Salih*

*a Kurdish legal  
consultant, writer  
and journalist.*

## A Reflection on History and Division in Kurdistan



*An artist's rendition of Elmede Xani, created by Saadat Barzani*



Often dubbed “the Kurdish Shakespeare,” the Kurdish poet and philosopher Ehmede Xani (1651-1707)

said at the beginning of his famous epic poem *Mem u Zin* that the work “is a way to express the inner sadness that fills me.” One interpretation of this line is that Xani meant Mem and Zin, two lovers doomed to be disunited, to be symbols of Kurdistan and its Kurdish people.

As those familiar with Kurdish literature know, Xani’s innovative tale is one of the foundational works of Kurdish art, influencing other artists working in a range of media. *Mem u Zin* is considered the most famous artistic and literary portrayal of Kurdistan’s division as well as the callous history of how others have treated the Kurds.

A combination of history, romance, and cultural anthropology, *Mem u Zin* was published in 1692 and is now considered the Kurdish *Romeo and Juliet*. It used the theme of national struggle as a backdrop for the story of the two lovers. In addition, Xani brought attention to Kurdish culture when he intentionally chose Newroz, the most significant holiday for the Kurds, as the first date for the two lovers.

To understand Kurdish people, their art, and their literature, it is essential to understand the land they inhabit and their turbulent and devastating history, as both land and history have shaped and divided the Kurds for millennia. A Sumerian clay tablet that dates to the third millennium BC identifies the area that is now Kurdistan as

“the land of Karda,” while a people called “Su” were said to live in the regions south of Lake Van. Other Sumerian tablets referred to the people who lived in the land of Karda as Qardu-chi and Qurti. Karda/Quardu is etymologically related to the Assyrian term Urartu and the Hebrew term Ararat.

Professor Alessa Lightbourne wrote her latest novel *The Kurdish Bike* about Kurdish life and culture. She begins with her narrative by underlining the importance of the land of Kurdistan to the life and history of human beings. “A grandiose vibe to the place. You cannot exactly put it into words,” she writes. “Fellows like Gilgamesh, the mythic Akkadian hero king came from here. Patriarchs like Abraham. This is where Alexander triumphed over Darius. A who is who of ancients chiseled themselves into the gritty embrace of history on this very plain.”

Furthermore, Lightbourne says, “in the Shanidar Cave in Kurdistan, which holds the trace of proto humans who first migrated from 65,000 BCE, the earliest forms of domesticated wheat have been found. The first evidence of writing comes from a little to the south. This part of the Fertile Crescent was the breadbasket for ancient Assyria staring around 2,500 BC, and has been home to Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Akkadian, Arabs, Ottomans, and more. There is something special about this place, which made people think up agriculture, religion, and writing as we know it.” Indeed, the land nourished these great inventions and breakthroughs.



Front cover of Ehmede Xani’s *Mem U Zin*, published in Istanbul in 1921

“*Mem u Zin* is considered the most famous artistic and literary portrayal of Kurdistan’s division

”



Opening pages of *Mem U Zin* by Ehmede Xani, copied in 1806-7 (The British Library)

## Land and division

Despite the richness of the region, the Kurdish emirates have never enjoyed a well-established solidarity because of the rugged landscape and because it is landlocked. An orientalist commentator once noted, “if geography helps to define the Kurds, it also helps to divide them. The ranks of jagged peaks, with their walled-in valleys and forbidding chasms, seal the Kurds off from one another as much as from the outside world.”

Empires in the Middle East also contributed to that division. Kurdistan was divided for the first time in 1541, after the Ottomans and the Safavids fought each other in the battle of Chaldiran. As a result of the battle, the Ottomans acquired lands from the Safavids and divided them and the Kurdish people. There were several reasons for this division, but the main one was the invaders’ authoritarian desires, which prompted expansionist

“*A Sumerian clay tablet that dates to the third millennium BC identifies the area that is now Kurdistan as The Land of Karda*

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policies, greed, and the confiscation of the region’s rich resources.

The two empires also benefitted when Kurdish fighters, famous for their bravery, joined the ranks of the Ottoman and Safavid armies. The bravery of the Kurds was recorded in Greek military leader and philosopher Xenophon’s book, *Anabasis*. The Kurds, then known as the Carduchi (Kurds), inhabited well-provisioned villages in

the mountains north of the Tigris in 401 BC. The Carduchi were enemies of the Persian king as well as Xenophon’s Greek mercenary forces, who entered Kurdish territory and were surprised as battle-hardened hoplites to be met with such hostility. The Carduchi used longbows and slings with deadly accuracy. For the Greeks, the “seven days spent in traversing the country of the Carduchi was one long continuous battle, which cost them more suffering than the whole of their troubles at the hands of the king [of Persia] and Tissaphernes put together.”

Kurdish fighters were appropriated after the battle of Chaldiran and fought in the frequent wars between the Ottomans and Safavids, and against the rising Western powers. Currently, the world’s global powers are treating the Kurds in a similar manner, and so Ehmede Xani’s masterpiece still mirrors reality more than three centuries later. ●



## Preserving Kurdish Culture in Türkiye



Mevlüt Oğuz

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

Founded in Istanbul in March 1992, Nubihar Publications has been a cornerstone of Kurdish literature and culture for over three decades. Just months after its inception, the first issue of Nubihar magazine – published entirely in Kurdish – hit the shelves in October 1992. Since then, Nubihar has consistently published and distributed books and magazines across 14 diverse categories, including history, classic and modern literature, Kurdology, folklore, and translation. As a testament to its enduring legacy, the 166th issue of Nubihar was published in March 2024, featuring an insightful dossier on social media usage.

Editor-in-chief Suleyman Cevik describes Nubihar Publications as a vital response to the challenges faced by the Kurdish language, culture, and history in Türkiye, where public discrimination, ignorance, and assimilation all pose major threats. In our conversation with Cevik for *Kurdistan Chronicle*, we delve into the intricacies and history of Kurdish book and magazine publishing.

Cevik recounts the origins of their publishing house and the inception of the magazine: “We began our publishing journey in March 1992 with book releases. By October of that same year, we launched our monthly magazine, Nubihar. At its inception, Sabah Kara served as editor-in-chief alongside me. Our goal was to integrate both the book and magazine sectors. Over time, Ali Karadeniz, Selman Dilovan, and several other colleagues joined us. There were periods

# Nubihar

## Who is Suleyman Cevik?

Suleyman Cevik, born in 1965 in a village within the Cermik district of Diyarbakir, has made significant contributions to Kurdish publishing. He completed his primary, secondary, and high school education in Mardin, where he excelled as a licensed long-distance runner and participated in track and field events. In 1984, he moved to Istanbul and enrolled at Marmara University Press School – now known as the Faculty of Communications – graduating in 1989. Since joining Nubihar Publications, Cevik has been a pivotal figure in Kurdish literature. Notably, he became the first – and remains the only – recipient of a turquoise press card (formerly yellow) from the Turkish Presidency for a Kurdish publication, achieving this milestone 18 years after his initial application.

Suleyman Cevik, Editor-in-Chief of Nubihar

Photo: Mevlüt Oğuz



when the magazine staff consisted of just one person or a small team of two or three.”

“After three years, Kara relocated to Germany, but we persevered in producing the magazine without interruption. One of our dedicated team members handles layouts, while Berken Berch oversees the poetry section. Due to economic reasons, we could never have the full professional staff that we should have had when publishing a magazine. The publishing house and the magazine required several people to work, and I received technical support, but there were also times when I was alone. But our team never exceeded three people,” Cevik says.

Promoting Kurdish literature

Since its inception in 1992, Nubihar magazine has proudly published content exclusively in Kurdish (Kurmanji and Zazaki), refusing to include texts in any other languages. Initially released monthly for eight years until 2000, the magazine only briefly halted publication in 2002 due to financial challenges. Its format has evolved, and now boasts an expanded page count of 96, up from the original 32. According to Cevik, Nubihar has played a pivotal role in promoting literacy among its readership, with many individuals who began as readers eventually stepping into the role of writers. “When our magazine first launched, most letters we received were in Turkish, with only a handful written in Kurdish. Over time, however, the tide shifted; now, nearly all correspondence comes to us in Kurdish. The only exceptions are letters from prisons.”

“Today, as we sift through our emails, we find that they too are exclusively in Kurdish. Thanks to our publishing house and other Kurdish publishers, many Kurds have gained the ability to read and write in their own language. It’s important to clarify that I’m not referring to all Kurds, but specifically those who engage with the Kurdish

language and have developed their literacy skills in Kurdish,” he says.

“In the past, our magazine operated on a monthly schedule, allowing us to publish timely articles. However, with the shift to a quarterly format, we pivoted away from current events and instead focused on more theoretical pieces that resonate across time. This change has fostered a vibrant community where many of our readers have evolved into contributors, with several of their works being published

facets of life, and advancing its use in scientific discourse. We strive to prepare texts and materials that support these goals. Additionally, our magazine serves as a proactive response to the challenges and prohibitions faced by the Kurds in Türkiye, combating neglect and assimilation to preserve Kurdish language, culture, and history.”

Alongside Nubihar, the printing house publishes and distributes Nubihar *Akademi*, Türkiye’s first peer-re-



Some publications of Nubihar put on display in a library

by Nubihar. Additionally, we have embraced linguistic diversity by featuring articles in the Sorani dialect,” Cevik notes.

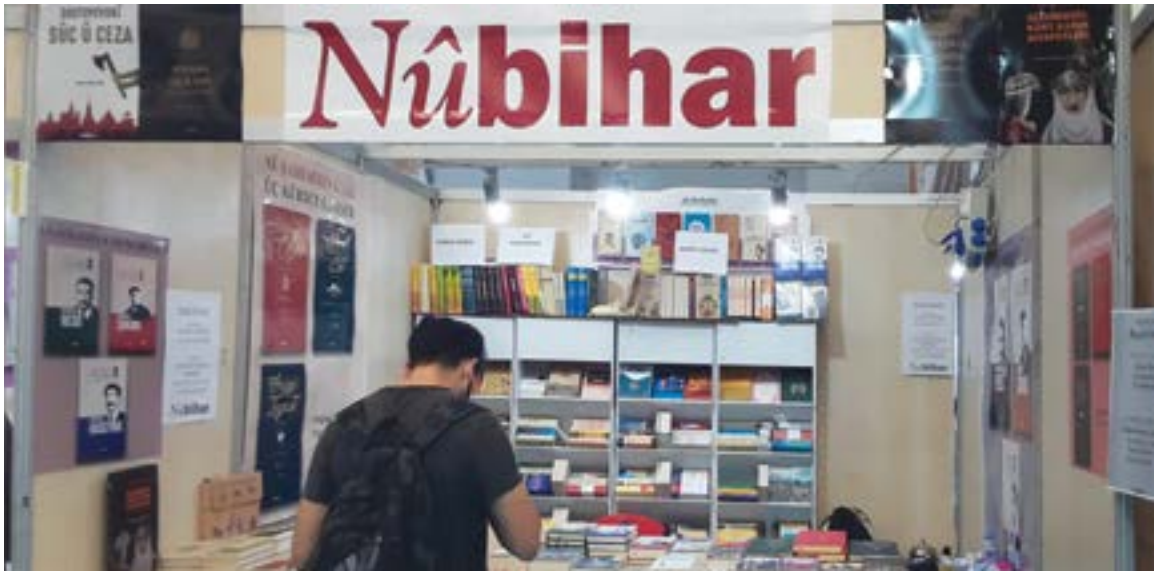
“At our publishing house and magazine, we are dedicated to fostering and popularizing the Kurdish language,” he continues. “Our mission encompasses publishing new literature, integrating Kurdish into all

viewed publication in Kurdish, which is issued twice a year and has released 20 issues to date. Each article undergoes a rigorous review process by expert referees before being published in both Kurdish and English. The editorial team comprises academics from Mardin Artuklu University, which further ensures its high-quality content. The go-to publishing house for Kurdish literary classics

Nubihar stands out as a pioneering and enduring publishing house dedicated to Kurdish literature in Türkiye. With a remarkable catalog of over 400 titles predominantly in Kurdish, Nubihar focuses on the rich tapestry of Kurdish language, history, literature, and folklore. In the past year alone, they have released more than 40 new books, with only four or five published in Turkish and the remaining in Kurdish.

When discussing Nubihar, one cannot overlook its commitment to preserving and promoting the classics of Kurdish literature, with the house having published roughly 20 signifi-

“Nubihar has played a pivotal role in promoting literacy among its readership, with many individuals who began as readers eventually stepping into the role of writers”



Nubihar showcasing publications at a book fair

cant works from renowned authors such as Melaye Ciziri, Ehmede Xani, Feqiye Teyran, Mela Huseyne Bateyi, and Sex Semsedine Exlati. Many of these works have been Latinized and annotated, with the modernized version printed alongside the original text. Additionally, some editions feature both Arabic and Latin scripts or include commentaries. Notably, a few classics are available in bilingual Kurdish-Turkish formats, further enriching their accessibility.

In an insightful discussion, Cevik

details the meticulous process behind preparing these classic texts for publication: “As a publishing house, we draw on a wealth of knowledge and experience rooted in our history. Our team comprises experts skilled in reading and interpreting the manuscripts we acquire, ensuring they are primed for publication.”

“Our guiding principle is encapsulated in our slogan: ‘The bridge between yesterday and today,’” he says. “The *madrasah* tradition among Kurds spans over a millennium, persisting even through the establish-

ment of the Republic. Although *madrasahs* faced prohibition under the Republic, Kurdish culture and knowledge continued to thrive within their walls. Today, several Kurdish books remain integral to the curriculum in these institutions, including titles like Nubihar, *Mewlud*, and *Nechul* Enam. Furthermore, divans have also been part of the educational offerings in *madrasahs*. In our role as a ‘conservative’ publishing house, we take pride in our connections with scholars of classical literature who are adept at crafting works in the Arabic script. Esteemed authors such as Xani, Mela, Bateyi, and Exlati have contributed to this rich tradition.”





Suleyman Cevik, Editor-in-Chief of Nubihar

Photo: Mevlüt Oğuz

Zirav, a work that stands as a classic. Additionally, we have released Eli Heriri's divan, complete with insightful commentary," Cevik explains. "Looking ahead, we are excited to announce plans to publish Mele Seide Meczub's works. Around 10 poems by Eli Heriri will also be included in our classics series. Furthermore, we have published 33 poems by Ehmede Xani – in addition to his renowned *Mem u Zin* – accompanied by thoughtful commentary, and we intend to incorporate these into our classics collection as well," he notes.

In addition to its classic repertoire, Nubihar Publications has recently unveiled four comprehensive anthologies of *dengbej* (Performer of epic songs and reciter of epic stories): Sakiro, Reso, Huseyno, and Mehmude Hese. A fifth anthology is currently in preparation. This pioneering initiative aims to publish the complete works of approximately 20 *dengbej* artists, garnering significant attention and prompting a reprint due to popular demand.

Researchers Omer Gunes and Ibrahim Sahin are passionately dedicated to this endeavor. Rather than working from a desk, they immerse themselves in the field, visiting the homes of *dengbej* artists and speaking with their families, all to access invaluable recordings. They have established a home studio that allows them to transfer these tapes onto CDs. For instance, while Dengbej Sakiro boasts 140 songs on YouTube, the anthology published by Nubihar features around 270 songs.

### Preserving Kurdish history

Nubihar Publications also plays a crucial role in bridging the gaps in Kurdish historical literature by publishing significant source works. Among these, researcher and author Nihat Karademir's studies on the late Ottoman Empire stand out for their depth and insight.

While Muhammad Amin Zaki's *History of the Kurds and Kurdistan* is well-known, Ibn al-Azraq al-Fariqi's Tarihu Meyyafarikin, authored by

a Kurd who passed away 840 years ago, was Nubihar's first publication. This groundbreaking work was meticulously published in Arabic after Nubihar acquired two copies from London. The decision to release it in Arabic first aimed to ensure its entry into Arab literary circles. In 2023, the book was translated into Kurdish by Emin Narozi, making it the earliest history book written by a Kurd that can be read in Kurdish.

In significant cultural endeavor, Nubihar also brought the *Hasankeyf Chronicle* from the Royal Library in Vienna and published it in Arabic for the first time. This work joins the ranks of Tarihu Meyyafarikin, which also had not been previously available in Arabic – both works were only published in Syriac previously. Plans are underway to translate it into Kurdish as well. Another noteworthy addition to their collection is *Serefname*, authored by Serefhan Bitlisi in 1597, originally written in Farsi. Both volumes of *Serefname* have been translated into Turkish and published by Nubihar.

Together, these three texts form a vital chain of historical documentation, offering profound insights into Kurdish history spanning four centuries.

### Current situation in Türkiye and impact on Kurdish publishing

Publishing inherently presents its own set of issues, but publishing in Kurdish in Türkiye involves overcoming a number of unique obstacles: "There's a Turkish saying that can be roughly translated as: 'Publishing neither revives nor kills.' It serves both practical and prestige purposes," Cevik says. "The individuals surrounding the publisher are typically knowledgeable, cultured, and level-headed. However, due to Kurdish not being recognized as a language of education in Türkiye, submissions often come with substantial editorial challenges. This complicates the process of ensuring that articles are comprehensible and publication-ready."

Reflecting on past experiences, Ce-

vik notes a marked improvement in the quality of writing among those who have been engaged in Kurdish publishing for an extended period but highlights several pressing issues: "The economic difficulties are significant, but the challenges extend beyond that. State institutions often stifle rather than support progress. The prevailing structure in Türkiye harbors a negative perception of Kurdish culture, leading to serious obstacles in distribution and sales. This extends to public displays and even the procurement of Kurdish literature by libraries," he describes.

In the early days of the magazine, Cevik took it upon himself to distribute copies personally. Despite facing periods of poor sales, he remained undeterred, stating, "This is the situation anyway, and we are working to change it."

His dedication and passion for the project have been unwavering throughout the years. He emphasizes that their commitment will per-

sist, even amid challenging economic conditions: "The primary motivation behind our work is love and determination. We strive to persevere against all odds. Publishing in Türkiye today is fraught with difficulties; rising paper and printing costs pose significant challenges," he explains.

"Historically, Kurdish publishing has faced economic hardships. In previous years, we have navigated these obstacles through debt and sacrifice. Creating written works for our language and nation brings both joy and fulfillment, as does addressing topics that have long been overlooked. There is a unique satisfaction in crafting literature in our own language, shedding light on topics that have yet to be explored in print. Despite the challenges of publishing, it is heartening to hear from readers who say, 'I learned to read Kurdish from your magazine; I was once just a reader, and now I'm contributing as a writer.' Witnessing this transformation is one of the greatest rewards of our work," Cevik shares. ●



## Award-Winning Documentary on Kurdish Porters



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

**K**ahi Titab is a young documentary filmmaker from Kurdistan best known for directing films *Childhood Outside the War* and *When Hope Dies*, which have garnered nearly a dozen international awards.

Titab's latest work, *Under the Load of Life*, won the award for Best Picture at the Duemila30 international short film festival held in Milan, Italy in June, in collaboration with the UN. This year's festival featured 150 films by directors from 80 different countries with the focus being on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Titab was the only Kurdish director to participate and win an award.

### Synopsis of film

In the film, head of documentaries at *Kurdistan24* Sarwar Mohiuddin narrates the story of peasants living along the border regions of Iran, Iraq, and Türkiye, where over 20,000 people are forced into smuggling, a practice known as *kolbar*. This dangerous work

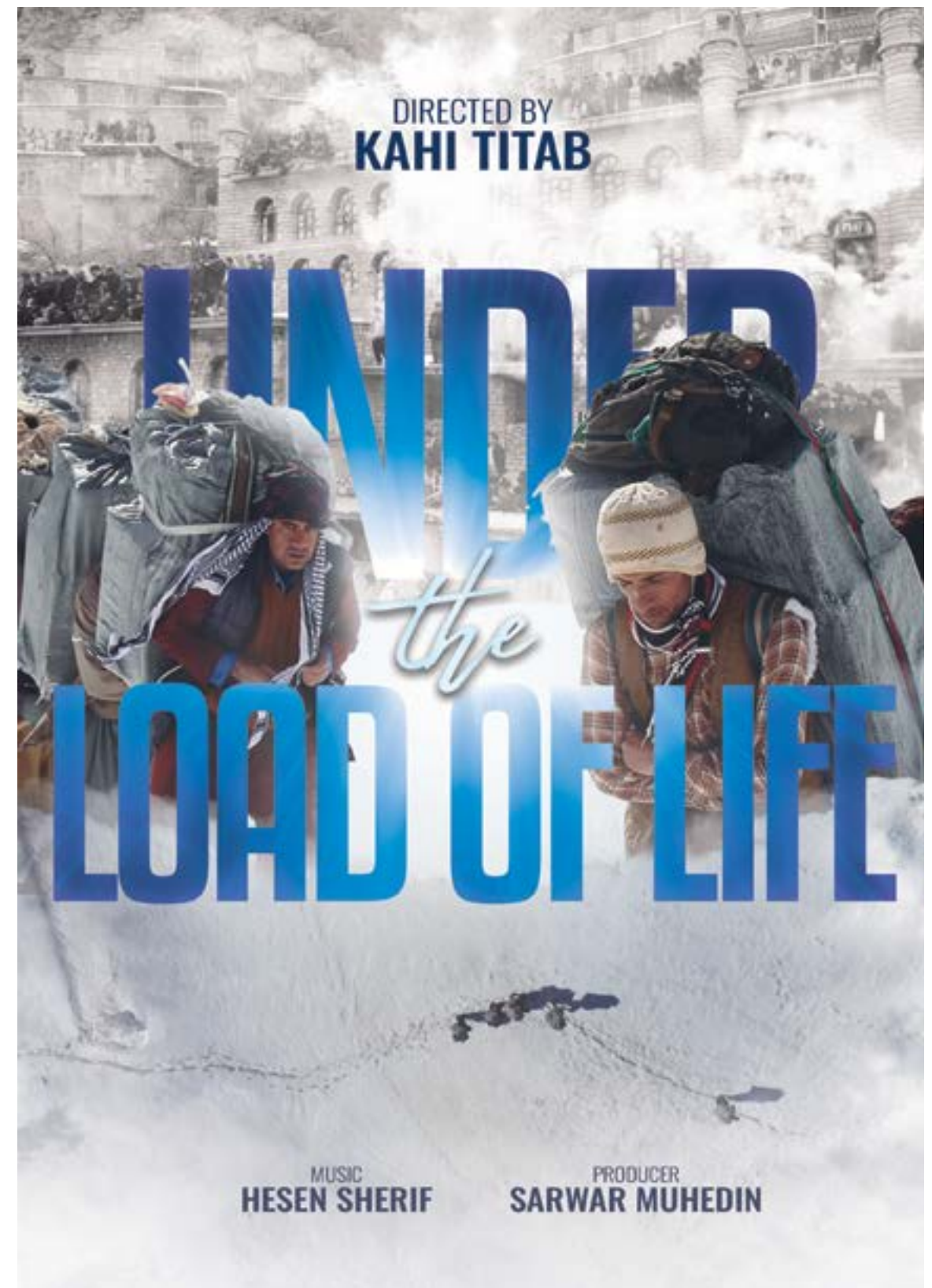
involves men, women, and children, who are pushed by limited job opportunities in the areas that border Iran to undertake perilous journeys to earn a living, sometimes carrying loads of cargo that exceed 30 kilograms for distances over 30 kilometers all for a profit of \$1. Meanwhile, they face threats from Iranian security forces, who frequently open fire on these porters. In 2022 alone, 45 porters were killed and 172 injured.

### Statement from the director

“This is a story that  
needs to be told,  
and I am proud to  
be the one telling it

“For as long as I can remember, I have been captivated by the stories of the *kolbars*, the Kurdish porters who traverse treacherous mountain ranges to move goods across borders. Their lives are marked by tradition, hardship, and perseverance. This documentary aims to capture their essence and share their hidden stories with the world.

“Through the camera lens, we meet the porters – elderly men, young men, and



The official poster of Kahi Titab's film *Under the Load of Life*





Director Kabi Titab



Some still shots from *Under the Load of Life* that capture Kurdish porters carrying goods across the border



teenagers – who risk their lives daily to provide for their families and witness the unforgiving landscapes they navigate, the burdens they bear, and the dangers they encounter. Yet, we also see their strength, determination, and deep love for their country. This film is not just about porters; it’s about the human spirit, the will to survive against all odds and the enduring power of tradition.

“I believe their story will resonate with audiences worldwide and am dedicated to creating films that are both informative and emotionally engaging. Using stunning cinematography, we showcase the beauty and intensity of the Kurdistan mountains, blending interviews with *kolbars* and local experts with historical footage to create a richly textured portrait of their lives. Ultimately, I hope this documentary raises awareness about the plight of these porters and the challenges they face. I also hope it inspires viewers to learn more about Kurdish culture and history. This is a story that needs to be told, and I am proud to be the one telling it.” ●



# Evolving Perspectives in Kurdish Contemporary Art



*Shamal Saadullah*

*is a prolific Kurdish artist. He currently works as Art Director at Erbil Plain Directorate of Education.*



*Photos: Sabir Salih*

*Kurdish artist Balla Ahmed in her studio*

**B**alla Ahmed Ibrahim, born in 1987 in the Ranya District of the Kurdistan Region, has emerged as a distinguished and visionary painter, leaving an indelible mark on Erbil's art community. Her journey from a young art enthusiast to one of the most active professional female artists in Kurdistan is both inspiring and impactful.

From a young age, Balla displayed a keen interest in the arts. She completed her primary and secondary education in Erbil before graduating from the Institute of Fine Arts in 2006, where she studied art. Her dedication to her craft quickly became evident as she opened three solo exhibitions and participated in 11 joint exhibitions, solidifying her reputation in the art world.





Balla’s artistic journey is deeply intertwined with her personal life. She is married to a fellow painter, Shemal Abdul- lah, and has been a significant influence on her husband’s success, showcasing the power of mutual support and col- laboration.

Forms and themes

The colorful and vibrant spaces in Balla Ahmed’s paint-

ings reflect the world she aspires to create, representing her worldview and dreams rather than the reality around her.

Balla is one of the most active and prominent contempo- rary Kurdish artists, having evolved through various stages in her career. Initially, her work was more figurative and ac- ademic, closely aligned with expressionism. She conveyed her ideas through the faces and postures of her subjects, arranging them as if they were posing for a photograph.



Photos: Sabir Salih

As her work has evolved, Balla em- braced a wider range of materials and a greater degree of creative freedom, leading to significant technical ad- vancements. This openness allowed her to express her perspectives more fully. During this phase, she skillfully incorporated her academic training and figurative techniques to master- fully manipulate space in her paint- ings.

Drawing inspiration from other artists is crucial for any artist’s development, and Balla is no exception. She contin- ually seeks new experiences and meth- ods. At certain points, she has been notably influenced by the expansive work of Spanish artist Miquel Barcelo, using diverse materials to enhance the artistic principles in her work.

Balla’s high treatment of form arises from contemplating everyday materi- als and reimagining them in a differ- ent space with artistic intent. This has resulted in a series of paintings where she methodically explores various forms and themes. Her work often features hanging clothes, the white shirts of Yezidi women, horns sym- bolizing conflict and domination, and recently, rosaries. These objects serve as the primary means through which Balla expresses her worldview within the space of her paintings.



Empowering the next generation

Although originally from Ranya, Bal- la has made Erbil her home for many years, forging strong connections with local organizations, schools, and institutes. Her collaborations have resulted in numerous exhibitions and projects, each reflecting her commit- ment to fostering a vibrant art scene. Balla’s ability to bring people togeth- er through art is one of her defining qualities.

Currently, Balla continues to advance her artistic career, with aspirations to further develop her work and serve society. She is committed to empow- ering the next generation of artists and fostering a community where creativity and innovation thrive.

Beyond her exhibitions, Balla is ded- icated to mentoring young artists, providing guidance and support to those passionate about the arts. Her paintings, rich in meaning and beau- ty, explore themes of freedom, peace, coexistence, women’s rights, and the beauty of her homeland. Each piece is a testament to her artistic vision, blending modernity with profound emotional and cultural expression.

Key Exhibitions and Projects

2007: Opens exhibition for three tal- ented children at Media Gallery in

- Erbil.
- 2008: Showcases her skills in a por- trait exhibition at Media Gallery.
- 2010: Holds first solo exhibition at Media Gallery.
- 2011: Participates in the annual Erbil Festival.
- 2012: Studies at the Duhok Art Gal- lery, opens a women’s exhibition at Merg Gallery, and takes part in a joint exhibition at the French Institute in Erbil.
- 2014: A special exhibition at Par Me- dia in Erbil showcases her evolving artistic style.
- 2018: Holds joint exhibition with two other female artists at the French Institute in Erbil.
- 2020: Participates in a joint exhibition in the “War” project series in Erbil.
- 2021: Featured in the Art Frosh exhi- bition at VIM Foundation Gallery in Sulaymaniyah and collaborates with the German Goethe Institute for an exhibition at Framing School Gallery.
- 2022: Selected to attend the docu- mentary festival in Kassel, Germany, and participates in the “Be Chwarche- wa” project in Duhok and Sulaymani- yah, and at the Erbil Festival.
- 2024: Participates in an art sympo- sium at the German Goethe Insti- tute. ●





## Berivan Jalal

### Sports Icon and Futsal Champion



**Peshraw Mahdi**

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

For Berivan Jalal, born in 1995 in the city of Halabja in the Kurdistan Region, sports have been everything. A holder of a master's degree in sports physiology, Jalal is best known as a champion futsal player for the Iraqi national team. Futsal is a modified version of football that is played indoors on a hardcourt and features five players on each side. Having dedicated herself to a range of sports over 15 years, including football, handball, and track and field, sports have become a driving force in her life.

Jalal's journey began in primary school, where she participated in various sports activities. These early experiences ignited a lifelong passion for athletics, leading her to pursue a career in physical education. Witnessing the impact of sports firsthand as a teacher solidified her desire to excel in the field.

For five years, Jalal dominated at a sports institute, honing her skills and ranking first consistently. This dedication propelled her to play for numerous clubs in Kurdistan and Iraq, including Sirwan, Sharazoor, Sarchnar, Sirwani Nwe, Aphrodite, Erbil Women's Club, Biladi Baghdad, Halabja Shaheed, Choman, Zawra'a, and North Oil.

Throughout her impressive career, Jalal has received numerous accolades. At the youth level in 2012, she secured first- and second-place finishes in the 100-meter and 200-meter races, respectively, with Sirwani Nwe Club. In 2015, she achieved

second place nationally for handball while playing for the Aphrodite club. The same year, she helped secure second place in futsal with the same club.

Her achievements extend to the international stage. In 2013, Jalal represented the Iraqi national handball team at the UAE Handball Super Cup in Abu Dhabi, clinching fifth place in the Arab countries' championship. More recently, in 2022, she made history as part of the Iraqi national team that triumphantly won the West Asian Cup, a defining moment in her career.

“  
Jalal acknowledges the societal challenges she has faced, particularly the perception of football as a male-dominated sport

”

Jalal's success transcends individual achievements. In 2017, she played a pivotal role in securing Erbil Women's Club a championship title in the Kurdistan Region's Women Futsal League. This victory, along with Sirwani Nwe Club's 2018



**Berivan Jalal**

*Photos: Peshraw Mahdi*







■ Berivan Jalal



Photos: Peshraw Mahdi

■ Berivan Jalal

“

Jalal acknowledges the societal challenges she has faced, particularly the perception of football as a male-dominated sport

”

league title and Choman’s 2020 second-place finish – both with Jalal on the team – highlighted her consistent excellence. Most recently, she secured the 2022 Kurdistan Premier League title with Erbil Women’s Club.

While acknowledging the significance of all her accomplishments, Jalal emphasizes that the West Asian Cup victory was the most momentous. “Of course, all sports have a special place in my life,” she says, “but football holds a unique place. It allowed me to truly utilize my skills.”

Jalal acknowledges the societal challenges she has faced, particularly the perception of football as a male-dominated sport. However, the West Asian Cup win served as a turning point, shattering these stereotypes. “That’s why sports are so important and special to me,” Jalal concludes, “they have the power to break barriers and inspire change.”

Family support has been instrumental to Jalal’s success. “Family plays a vital role,” she says with gratitude. “I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support, especially my husband, who has been a constant source of strength and a wonderful life partner.” ●



## A Journey Through Triumph and Struggle



*Ruken Hatun Turballi  
is a Kurdish journalist  
based in Erbil, the  
Kurdistan Region.*

Anyone familiar with football knows that it is far more than just a sport. As author Simon Kuper unpacks in his award-winning book *Soccer Against the Enemy*, football affects politics, economics, and culture in such profound ways that the results on the pitch mirror and even shape people's emotions and identities. Such developments are central to the story of Amed Sportif Faaliyetler Kulubu, commonly known as Amedspor, a Turkish Football Federation (TFF) team based in Diyarbakir.

Last year, Amedspor became the champion of the 2023-2024 TFF Second League Red Group, vaulting it to the TFF First League for the upcoming season. The team's successes on the field resonated beyond the stadiums, creating a synergy between the team and its fans across borders, as digital and social media broadcast their story around the Kurdish world.

*Kurdistan Chronicle* had the opportunity to chat with Amedspor President Aziz Elaldi about the team's success story, its preparation process for the upcoming season in the TFF First League, and other plans.

**Kurdistan Chronicle (KC):** First, we congratulate Amedspor on becoming champion of the 2023-2024 TFF Second League Red Group under your leadership and wish you continued success. Why do you think Amed-

spor's success created such great joy for Kurds inside and outside of Türkiye?

**Aziz Elaldi (AE):** Even though Amedspor is the team of Amed – a Kurdish city known in Turkish as Diyarbakir – it is a club that has gained the appreciation, admiration, love, and respect of all Kurds simply because of its struggle for existence within its own means. The many injustices we have been subjected to, such as the sad treatment we have received for years at away matches and the away bans that are applied without justification, have only increased the sense of belonging among our many conscientious football fans, both Kurdish and non-Kurdish.

**KC:** What kind of reactions did Amedspor receive from the international, Turkish, and Kurdish public after its championship? Did the club receive any sponsorship offers afterwards?

**AE:** Many clubs competing in our national leagues – as well as many international clubs – have congratulated us. Based on these congratulations and the invitations that we received, I have traveled nationally and internationally. The shows of love, respect, and enthusiasm we see in every city in Europe and Türkiye have been incredibly uplifting.

Regarding your other question, yes, we have received sponsorship and adver-



*Fans waving an Amedspor flag during a football match in Diyarbakir*



*Amedspor managers and players celebrating while receiving the championship cup for the 2023-2024 Turkish Football Federation Second League Red Group at a festival held at Diyarbakir Stadium*



tising offers from many local and international companies. Our executives are working in line with the club’s best interests. The results of the sponsorship efforts will soon be shared with the public and our dear fans.

**KC:** When you took over as club president in 2023, during a challenging period for the club, you boldly declared, “This is the year,” referring to your championship aspi-

red any scenario other than the championship. Since the first day we took office, together with all my fellow board members, we did not hesitate to boldly express our aspiration to win the championship, and the entire management team has worked very hard to achieve it. In the end, thank God, we did not embarrass the Amedspor community and were able to fulfill our promise.

fought to maintain its existence, relying solely on its own resources and the unwavering support of its dedicated fans since leaving the old Silbe Stadium.

**KC:** As is well known, the name Amed was officially used during the

**AE:** Yes, the name Amed is the oldest known name of this city. Even before we used the name Amed, which is from our native Kurdish language, Diyarbakir clubs were subjected to treatment at away matches that no one wants to see in sports competitions. However, after we took the

lated to the increasing economic difficulties, hooliganism and racist attacks have been on the rise. However, we recognize that the acts of ignorant or young fans are not representative of the wider population of a city and that many people, regardless of their race, hold Amedspor in high regard. We



**A**medspor players celebrating their championship

rations. Remarkably, you achieved it. What contributed to this success, and what are your future goals?

**AE:** There is a philosophy that has greatly contributed to my business life: “Believing is half the battle.” I trust in myself first. Once I believe in myself, it becomes easier to convince those around me. Yes, I believed that we would become champions from day one and I never even consid-

**KC:** Can you briefly tell the story of Amedspor for those who are not familiar with the club?

**AE:** Amedspor is a club with a rich yet challenging history. Founded in 1972 as Melikahmet Turanspor, the team has undergone five name changes, settling on Amed Sportif Faaliyetler Kulubu in 2014 with the approval of the TFF and other authorities. For nearly a decade, Amedspor has

Ottoman Empire. Notably, Evliya Celebi, one of the most prominent explorer-writers of the 17th century, documented the city of Amed in his renowned travelogs. Given this rich history, what specific difficulties has Amedspor encountered because of its Kurdish name?

name Amed, the ideological, sociological, physical, psychological attacks grew in intensity. We find these immoral and wrong. The reason for such attacks is the lack of education in our country.

Recently, for many reasons that are re-

have felt this love firsthand and have been warmly welcomed on numerous occasions. It is our hope that the courteous and exemplary hospitality that we have experienced will become more prevalent in the sports community moving forward. We urge the incoming TFF management to address





■ Aziz Elaldi, President of Amedspor

the troubling incidents we have faced over the years and to work toward solutions.

**KC:** Amedspor has faced significant challenges in Türkiye, receiving the most penalties in away games and playing matches without spectators. Additionally, the club has been subjected to racist treatment in many away matches. What are your thoughts on this issue?

**AE:** I don't know if there is another example of this in Türkiye or even in the world, but yes, for about 10 years, our fans have not been allowed into stadiums at away games, regardless of the city or host club. Our attempts

to change this have been insufficient. Unfortunately, this issue does not find much coverage in the local press either. This shame belongs to all of us, and this problem must be resolved urgently by the relevant authorities and provincial security boards before the upcoming season.

**KC:** Amedspor is one of Türkiye's most popular football teams, often described as more than just a sports club. Many fans liken it to Barcelona, and you've expressed a vision to elevate Amedspor to similar heights. What specific goals do you have in mind to achieve this ambition?

**AE:** Although we are a club whose matches were not

broadcast until this season and who competed in lower leagues, media and stadium figures show that we have one of the largest fan bases in Türkiye. This is beyond rhetoric; it is an undeniable, rational fact. We cannot say that it is wrong to describe a club that has so many fans and supporters even in the lower leagues as "the people's team." As we have seen and experienced, we can say this very clearly: "Amedspor exists today with the support of its people and fans." Amedspor is really the people's team.

Regarding your question about Barcelona, the comparison arises because the Catalan people have faced treatment in Spain that mirrors the marginalization experienced by the Kurds over the years. Barcelona is a club that enjoys global support and respect, despite the grievances endured by its people. We recently met with senior management at Barcelona and are committed to fostering warm relations moving forward.

**KC:** You recently went on a European tour where you had numerous meetings. You encountered many strong Kurdish football players who are well known in Europe. Some of them expressed their support for Amedspor. Are you considering transferring any of these players for next season? Furthermore, are you focusing on developing Amedspor's youth setup to create a primary resource that trains its own athletes?

**(AE):** First, let me underline that, in Amedspor's development up to today, football players and managers from different races, religions, and sects belonging to the peoples of the Republic of Türkiye have contributed and served. We have never discriminated against any race among our athletes, and we will not allow it. Of course, our Kurdish athletes are loved more and feel a sense of belonging to the team and our fans. This sense of belonging felt toward regional athletes is also quite normal.

We receive a lot of support from Kurdish athletes, both from abroad and from within Türkiye, some of which is reflected in the media but also in other ways. Their presence, prayers, and good wishes are the greatest sources of morale and motivation for us. Our own youth setup will now be much more active and effective. Our managers are working intensively to institute a new structure and build new facilities. We will have youth setup selections again soon. Our people should follow them on official accounts and entrust their children to us with peace of mind. For a long-term existence, we need the next generation of players from our youth setup, as well as our own financial resources. We are aware of this and are working toward this purpose.

**KC:** Which clubs did you visit during your European tour, and what types of meetings did you have? Amedspor has previously sought to establish sister team relationships with prominent clubs like Borussia Dortmund and Werder Bremen. Are there plans for similar collaborations in the coming years?

**AE:** I recently completed my long European trip, which began on June 15. During this journey, I had the privilege of meeting influential business leaders in cities such as Paris, Barcelona, Bremen, Hannover, Hamburg, and Stuttgart to seek their support. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors and dear Amedspor fans for their invaluable contributions.

Throughout my travels, I established warm connections with FC Girondins de Bordeaux, SV Werder Bremen, and FC St Pauli. We have also scheduled meetings with FC Barcelona, Olympique Marseille, RC Lens, and Lille OSC; however, their managers are currently occupied with the 2024 European Championships. I am planning another trip to Europe soon. Amedspor will always maintain friendly

and brotherly relations with Turkish clubs, as well as clubs and individuals worldwide

**KC:** Amedspor has entered an exciting partnership with Ersun Yanal, a coach renowned for his principled approach within the Turkish football community. Yanal has expressed his ambition to transform Amedspor into a team that meets European standards. Can you elaborate on how you plan to collaborate with Yanal – from new player acquisitions to developing a cohesive working system – to achieve this goal?

**AE:** Ersun Yanal is one of the few local national team coaches who has also won the Super League championship and received national and international appreciation and respect. We are in a coordinated and harmonious collaboration with him. We are making plans not only for this year's championship, but also for institutional and permanent success that will be sustained over the long term. Instant successes are temporary; permanent successes take time. We are working intensively with him, patiently, selflessly and devotedly. Our fans, please trust us and be patient.

**KC:** Have there been any invitations from the Kurdistan Region for Amedspor to play friendly matches? If not, what would your approach be if such invitations occur? Do you have a message you would like to convey to the sports clubs, business circles, and people of the Kurdistan Region?

**(AE):** We are thrilled to receive congratulations and invitations from the Kurdistan Region, as well as from various countries. This recognition brings us immense joy. We look forward to visiting Amedspor fans, engaging with business leaders, and connecting with Kurdish sports clubs and athletes in the Kurdistan Region as soon as possible to establish warm and close ties. ●



# SUMAC



*Yassin Ahmed Rashid*

*is a University Professor  
and Expert in Botany*

The word “sumac” comes from the medieval English term *sumach*, which originates from the Arabic *summaq* (سماق), in turn derived from the Syriac *summaqa*, meaning “red,” in the 13th century. The Greek term *ῥοῦς* (*rhous*) is where the genus name *Rhus* originates.

## Description

Sumac plants are trees and dioecious shrubs in the Anacardiaceae family that grow to a height of one to 10 meters. While some species have trifoliate or simple leaves, most species have pinnately compound leaves. The blooms are tiny, greenish, creamy white, or crimson, with five petals, and they are arranged in dense panicles or spikes that are between five and 30 centimeters long. When fully grown, the crimson, thin-fleshed drupes are covered in varied degrees of hair and grow into thick clusters at the ends of

branches, which are frequently referred to as sumac bobs. Sumacs propagate by rhizomes and seeds, which are dispersed by birds and other animals through their droppings to produce massive clonal colonies.

## Taxonomy

The taxonomy of the *Rhus* genus dates to 1825, when Swiss botanist Augustin Pyramus de Candolle proposed a five-sectioned subgeneric classification. With more than 150 species, *Rhus* was the largest genus in the Anacardiaceae family, when it reached its maximum circumscription.

## Cultivation and uses

Wild white sumac (*Rhus coriaria*) is present in the mountains of the Kurdistan Region, and red sumac (*Rhus typhina*) is cultivated in central and southern Iraq for culinary



usage. Many species are bred for ornamental purposes, such as smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), small leaf sumac (*Rhus microphylla*), and fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*).

**In food**

The dried fruit of some species of sumac is pulverized to create a cr world and has a sour flavor. In addition, the fruit can be used to make a classic “pink lemonade” by steeping it in water, straining to get rid of any hairs that could irritate the mouth or throat, and occasionally adding sugar or honey as a sweetener. High concentrations of malic acid give sumac its acidic flavor.

*Rhus coriaria* fruit, or drupes, are pounded into a red-dish-purple powder that is used as a spice in Middle Eastern cooking to give meats and salads a tangy, lemony flavor. It is frequently added to falafel and used as a garnish on meze dishes like hummus and tashi. The spice is one of the main ingredients of *kubah sumakieh*, a dish made in Aleppo, Syria. It is added to salads in the Levant, and is one of the main ingredients in the Palestinian dish *mu-sakhan*. In Afghan, Armenian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Mizrahi Jewish cuisines, sumac is added to rice or kebab.

In the Middle Ages, particularly between the 13th and 15th centuries, wealthy Western Europeans regularly used sumac in their cooking. Specifically, a stew made from sumac called *sumaqiyya* was often translated as “macchia” by Europeans.

**Dye and tanning agent**

Many cultures throughout the world have used the high tannin content of the leaves and bark of the majority of sumac species to make leather. Both the Latin name for *Rhus coriaria* and the Hebrew term *og ha-bursaka'im* translate to “tanner’s sumac.” Some sumacs produce tannins – mostly of the pyrogallol variety – from their leaves. The wood and roots of *Rhus pentaphylla* and *Rhus chinensis*, or Chinese Gall, and the leaves of *Rhus coriaria* are other notable sources.

Sumac-tanned leather is light-colored, pliable, and lightweight. Morocco leather is one kind of leather that contains sumac tannins. When shipping sumac as a fine floury product in sacks alongside heavier cargoes like marble, its coloring property has to be taken into account. Sumac is particularly hazardous to marble, since if it settles on the surface and combines with water, its deep red color can

penetrate the marble to a considerable depth.

Algerian scholar Abdel-Hamid ibn Badis describes a formula for making red ink out of leeches sumac mixed with gum. Sumac dye was used only for the outerwear of the Emperor of Japan, thus making it a forbidden color in imperial Japan.

**Traditional medicinal use**

In medieval medicine, sumac was used to treat a variety of illnesses, mostly in Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, where it was more easily obtained than in Europe. When archaeologists excavated an 11th-century shipwreck off the coast of the Greek island of Rhodes in the 1970s, they discovered commercial amounts of sumac drupes. These might have been meant as a spice in food preparation, a medication, or a coloring agent. According to a recent clinical trial, dietary sumac can be used as an adjunct therapy to lower blood pressure in hypertensive patients.

**Other uses**

Dried sumac bobs are a common fuel source for beekeepers’ smokers. Sumac stems are also especially valuable in

traditional Native American pipe-making because of the spongy pith in the core that can be easily removed. In the northern United States, they were frequently used as pipe stems. When exposed to long-wave UV light, dried sumac wood fluoresces.

**Toxicity and control**

Sumac can also be dangerous. Poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), poison sumac (*Rhus vernix*), and other species that were once identified as belonging to the genus *Rhus* can generate the allergen urushiol, which can result in severe allergic reactions. The white drupes of poison sumac differ significantly from the red drupes of the genuine *Rhus* species.

Goats are a traditional and effective form of control for sumac, since they consume the plants’ bark and inhibit the growth of new branches. Mowing, however, is less effective, given the elasticity of sumac wood. Sumac can quickly regrow following cutting, and spreads via rhizomes, creating clonal colonies from a central mature tree. Root trimming is one way to control the plant’s growth without completely eradicating it. ●



Photo: Peshraw Mahdi



## Dilshad Abdullah



Dilshad Abdullah was born in Erbil in 1956, he studied agriculture in Baghdad and began writing poetry in the 1970s. He has published eight books featuring his poems and literary works. Some of his poems have been translated into Farsi, Arabic, and Swedish.

## Contrast

Each day, something within me fades,  
Clearing the way  
For something new to be born.

I don't blame anyone; it's my fate.  
Each in their own skin  
Tends to a beast called adulthood.

Every day, something new emerges,  
Taking the place of what must die.  
We yearn for the realm of childhood,  
Where death takes its place.

## کۆنتراست

هەر پڕۆژه و شتیکم تیدا دهمری  
بۆ ئهوهی پڕی خوش بکا،  
شتیکی نوێ له دایک بێ.

گلهیی له کهس ناکهم، چاره نووس وه هایه  
ههریه که و له پستی خۆیدا  
درندهیهك به خێو دهکا ناوی گه وره بوونه!

هەر پڕۆژه و شتیکی نوێ له دایک ده بێ  
له و جیهی شتیکی تر ده مرێ  
حهیف! بۆ منداڵیی  
ئهوهی شوینی ده گرێته وه مردنه.

Translated by Nahro Zagros



# Dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*)

The Kurdistan Region provides ideal conditions for snakes, because it has many unspoiled natural areas and a warm climate. While many snakes in Kurdistan are venomous, this dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*) – which we photographed while chasing a fish – is a nonvenomous water snake.

The dice snake is a common Eurasian nonvenomous snake belonging to the

family Colubridae, subfamily Natricinae.

Females are larger than males. Their typical size is 1-1.3 meters. Their color can vary from gray-green to brownish or almost black, with dark spots on the back. The belly is sometimes brightly colored, either yellow or orange, with black spots that greatly resemble dice, hence the name. The dice snake lives near rivers, streams,

and lakes and often eats fish. Sometimes it also eats amphibians such as frogs, toads, and tadpoles. During the mating season, which occurs between March and May, dice snakes gather in large groups. Egg-laying usually occurs in July, with 10-30 eggs laid in one clutch. The young snakes then hatch in early September.

Dice snakes hibernate from October to April in dry burrows near water.

## Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota  
Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Reptilia  
Order: Squamata  
Suborder: Serpentes  
Family: Colubridae  
Genus: *Natrix*  
Species: *N. tessellata*





## Mohammed Ghafoor Majeed

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

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

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

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



# Das Food Industries

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

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

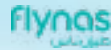
This ambitious project is absolutely vital for the agri-industry's growth in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, and hence the farmers benefit immensely, it also provides employment for the younger generation. The company's main goal is to restore the most substantial local capital that was sent abroad up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







# Success in Diversity



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