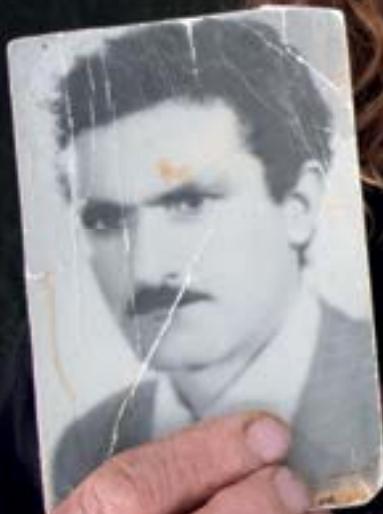


# Kurdistan Chronicle

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August 2023 Volume 1 Issue 7



THE AFTERMATH  
OF GENOCIDE



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Photo: Sabr Dri

## Chronicles of Resilience, Culture, and Hope



Nahro Zagros

In the chaos of our modern world, where news headlines broadcast incessant images of global strife and turmoil, it is heartening to discover a publication that brings to light the rich, multifaceted tapestry of a unique part of the world: the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This issue of *Kurdistan Chronicle*, our seventh, delivers another set of articles that illuminate the region's profound history, its vibrant culture, and the indomitable spirit of its people.

At the center of this edition, we are reminded of the enduring strength and determination of the region's people through the solemn commemoration of the Ninth Yezidi genocide perpetrated at the hands of ISIS. This tragic chapter reminds us of the unspeakable atrocities that can still be committed against minority communities, and *Kurdistan Chronicle's* comprehensive coverage of this commemoration seeks to honor the memory of the victims and shine a spotlight on how the Yezidi community is moving forward on their journey toward healing and justice.

Continuing in the political realm, Béatrice Dillies confronts the enduring intentionality behind genocides against the Kurdish people in the postwar Middle East, reminding the world of the suffering that the Kurds have endured and underscoring the urgency of making sure these tragic events are prevented from reoccurring. Michael Arizanti poignantly outlines the differences between the and other Kurdish armed groups, arguing that the have garnered international recognition as a steadfast ally of the United States and other Western partners for the past three decades.

On the cultural and historical front, Sardar Sattar pens a captivating narrative about the Jerwan aqueduct, bringing to life the forgotten legacy of one of humanity's earliest achievements in water management, while Shanaz Jamal shares details of how she crafted a robe for His Holiness Pope Francis during his visit to the Kurdistan Region and her plans for future fashion diplomacy. Other writers take the reader on fascinating journeys through topics ranging from landmine removal and the last known women's hammam in Sulaymaniyah to budding Kurdish enterprises and entrepreneurs working in agriculture, education, and media.

Enlightening interviews also provide readers with unique, in-depth perspectives about Kurdistan's history, culture, literature, and archaeology. The distinctive quality of *Kurdistan Chronicle* shines through in these explorations, as we gain intimate insight into the lives and creative minds of musicians and artists who have carved out unique niches in the ever-evolving realms of art, culture, and society.

We are proud and humbled that *Kurdistan Chronicle* has firmly established itself as the quintessential resource for readers across the globe seeking to discover more about the region and are thrilled by the remarkable growth in our readership. In an era overwhelmingly dominated by digital media, the soaring demand for print copies of the magazine is a testament to the publication's commitment to quality and authenticity, and an indication of the global thirst for a deeper comprehension of Kurdistan. ●

# TIMELINE

AUGUST 2023

### August 1

- PM Barzani welcomed the UK's official recognition of ISIS's genocide against the Yezidi-Kurds.

### August 2

- Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur visited Erbil.

### August 3

- Kurdistan observed the 9th anniversary of the Yezidi genocide by ISIS.
- The UN and foreign diplomatic missions renewed their call for the implementation of the 'Sinjar Agreement'.
- Jordanian First Deputy Speaker of the Lower House, Ahmed Khalaleh, met with PM Barzani in Erbil.
- PM Barzani bid farewell to the outgoing Ambassador of the European Union to Iraq, Ville Varjola.

### August 6

- Erbil and Baghdad reached an agreement to establish committees for finalizing a draft hydrocarbons bill.
- PM Masrour Barzani extended a welcome to the newly appointed Indian Consul General, Madan Gopal.

### August 7

- A roadside bomb planted by the PKK targeted a convoy, injuring one.
- PM Barzani received the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, in Erbil.
- The Iraqi Federal Court, in response to PM Barzani's petition, ruled that certain contents in two articles of Iraqi law are unconstitutional.

### August 8

- The newly appointed UK Ambassador to Iraq, Stephen Charles Hitchen, visited Erbil to meet with PM Barzani.
- David Burger, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Baghdad, visited Erbil.

### August 10

- PM Barzani bid farewell to the outgoing US Consul General, Irvin Hicks Jr.

### August 13

- Outgoing Canadian Ambassador Gregory Galligan visited Erbil to bid farewell to Kurdish officials.

### August 15

- The Kurdistan Regional Government appointed Darawan Haji Hamid as its new representative to Spain.

### August 16

- The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) celebrated its 77th anniversary.
- Jean-Christophe, Charge d'Affaires of the French Embassy in Iraq, visited Erbil to meet with PM Barzani.

### August 17

- Norwegian oil company DNO announced a partial resumption of oil production at Kurdistan's Tawke fields.

### August 18

- PM Barzani met with Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, President of the UAE, in Abu Dhabi.

### August 19

- France confirmed the deaths of two of its soldiers in a car accident outside Erbil.

### August 20

- The US announced the appointment of Mark Stroh as the new Consul General in Erbil.

### August 23

- The new US Consul General, Mark Stroh, arrived in Erbil and held meetings with top Kurdish officials.

### August 23

- The UK Minister of State for Security, Tom Tugendhat, visited Erbil and met with top Kurdish officials.

### August 24

- Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar arrived in Erbil to meet with Kurdish leaders.
- A German delegation led by MP Lamya Kaddor was received by PM Barzani in Erbil.

### August 25

- Kurdistan commemorated the victims of the 1988 Bahdinan Anfal genocide by the former Baath Regime.

### August 30

- A cross-party delegation of Canadian MPs led by Tomasz Kmiec arrived in Erbil.



Nurturing Bilateral Ties and Regional Cooperation



Klitschko's Inspiring Visit to Kurdistan



A Robe for Pope Francis



Crafting Nature Inspired Artistic Jewelry

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## Nurturing Bilateral Ties and Regional Cooperation

Kurdistan Chronicle



President Masoud Barzani receiving Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan in Erbil on August 24, 2023

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Foreign Minister Fidan underscored Erbil's enduring reputation as a secure and stable city, even during periods of unrest in Iraq

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In a remarkable diplomatic initiative aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and bolstering regional stability, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan embarked on a diplomatic mission to Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), on August 24. His visit followed his recent trip to Baghdad, where he engaged in a series of meetings with his Iraqi counterpart and other high-ranking Iraqi officials, and carries substantial implications, not only for the Türkiye -KRI relationship but also for the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

Fidan's diplomatic mission represents a positive stride in enhancing relations between Türkiye and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), fostering optimism for a more stable and prosperous Middle East where diplomacy and cooperation prevail over conflict and instability. His visit also highlighted Türkiye's revamped diplomatic strategy, reaffirming its position as a prominent regional and global actor.

Foreign Minister Fidan was received by the KRG's Interior Minister Rebar Ahmed and other distinguished officials, and his visit marked his first official journey to both Iraq and the KRI since taking on the role of foreign minister. Following this, he participated in comprehensive meetings with the KRG President Nechirvan Barzani and Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. These meetings were dedicated to in-depth discussions on bilateral relations and the exploration of avenues for enhanced cooperation. Additionally, as part of his trip, Foreign Minister Fidan also had the privilege of meeting with former President Masoud Barzani.

In offering a warm welcome to Foreign Minister Fidan, Prime Minister Barzani emphasized the robust relationship between Erbil and Ankara and voiced a strong commitment to addressing outstanding issues

between the two parties. Throughout their discussions, both Prime Minister Barzani and Foreign Minister Fidan placed notable emphasis on the significance of revitalizing the KRI's oil exports through Türkiye's Ceyhan port. Their focus was on expeditiously resolving any existing obstacles pertaining to this matter, as articulated in a statement from the Prime Minister's office. In a joint press conference alongside Foreign Minister Fidan, Prime Minister Barzani remarked, "We delved into various regional matters, encompassing bilateral Iraq - Türkiye relations and our interactions with the Kurdistan Region, including the mechanisms governing the export of the KRI's oil."

Regarding the Ankara-Erbil bilateral relationship, Foreign Minister Fidan underscored Erbil's enduring reputation as a secure and stable city, even during periods of unrest in Iraq. He underscored the significance of this stability and affirmed Türkiye's willingness to extend support to ensure its continuation.

While challenges remain, including addressing the Kurdish question in Türkiye and navigating the complex geopolitical realities of the region, the willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue marks a positive development. The visit lays the groundwork for continued negotiations and cooperation, promising far-reaching implications for the future of the Middle East.

### Why Foreign Minister Fidan's visit matters

Foreign Minister Fidan's visit to Erbil is a pivotal step in ongoing diplomatic efforts to solidify ties between Türkiye and the KRI. It bears significance for several reasons:

- **Diplomatic outreach:** The visit under-



PM Masrour Barzani engages in discussions with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan during their meeting in Erbil on August 24, 2023

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Turkish Foreign Minister’s visit highlighted Türkiye’s revamped diplomatic strategy, reaffirming its position as a prominent regional and global actor

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Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani welcoming Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan in Erbil on August 24, 2023

scores Türkiye’s commitment to diplomatic engagement with its regional neighbors. While historical tensions have strained relations between Türkiye and the KRI, this visit reflects a proactive approach to dialogue and cooperation.

• **Regional stability:** The Middle East has long been marred by instability and conflict. Foreign Minister Fidan's visit

signals the willingness of Türkiye and the KRI to discuss regional security concerns and explore avenues for collaborative efforts aimed at promoting stability.

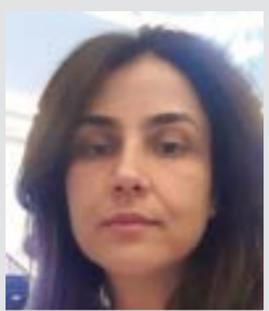
• **Economic collaboration:** Economic ties underpin diplomacy. Türkiye and the KRI possess the potential to bolster economic cooperation, encompassing trade, investment, and energy partner-

ships that can mutually benefit both parties and foster regional prosperity.

• **Counterterrorism cooperation:** Both Türkiye and the KRI have played instrumental roles in the fight against terrorism, particularly in combatting the threat posed by groups like ISIS. Strengthening their cooperation in this regard can further degrade terrorist networks operating in the region. ●

# COMMEMORATION

## Yezidi Kurds Commemorate the Genocide



Samal Erfani

**Dr. Samal Erfani** is an accomplished anthropologist and dedicated researcher, based in the Kurdistan Region. Her primary focus lies in the fields of anthropology and the strategic planning of development projects.

On August 3 of every year, the Yezidi Kurdish community commemorates a tragic chapter in its history – the genocide perpetrated against them by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The atrocities committed during this dark period include the abduction and enslavement of Yezidi women, the destruction of villages around Sinjar, and the loss of countless lives. This remembrance underscores both the resilience of the Yezidi people and the importance of preventing such heinous acts from occurring again.

### Who are the Yezidis?

The Yezidi Kurds are a religious group primarily concentrated in northern Iraq and parts of Syria and Turkey, with smaller numbers in Armenia and Georgia. Many Yezidis are also in the diaspora, mainly in Europe and Russia. The Yezidis speak Kurdish and have a distinct religious belief system that incorporates elements from various faiths, including Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Christianity, as well as ancient traditions and indigenous beliefs.

Their faith revolves around the veneration of a single deity and incorporates a reverence for angels and a figure known as *Melek Taus* (the Peacock Angel). This unique blend of beliefs has often led to misconceptions about their religion.

Historically, the Yezidis have faced persecution due to their unique religious practices and ethnic identity. They have been subjected to various forms of discrimination, including forced conversions, violence, and displacement.



Photo: Safin Hamid

Despite these challenges, the Yezidi Kurds remain a resilient and tightly-knit community, deeply committed to their cultural heritage and religious traditions. They continue to work toward preserving their identity, seeking justice for past atrocities, and creating a better future for their people.

### A genocide unfolds

In August 2014, ISIS launched a brutal assault on the Yezidi Kurdish community living in the Sinjar region of northern Iraq. The militants targeted Yezidis because of their unique faith, and, in the span of a few days, ISIS fighters overran Yezidi villages, causing chaos, death, and destruction on an unimaginable scale.

One of the most harrowing aspects of the Yezidi genocide was the systematic abduction and enslavement of Yezidi women and girls. Reports indicate that thousands of women were taken captive, forced into sexual slavery, and subjected to unimaginable physical and psychological abuse. Many were sold, traded, or passed among ISIS fighters as if they were commodities. The international community was appalled by

these acts of brutality, which highlighted the urgency to address gender-based violence in conflict zones.

As ISIS swept through Yezidi villages, their destructive rampage left communities in ruins. Homes were burned, religious sites desecrated, and livelihoods destroyed. Entire families were displaced, leaving behind a legacy of pain and trauma. The destruction of these villages not only erased physical structures but also severed the cultural and historical ties that the Yezidi people had to their land.

### Never forget, never again

Despite the unimaginable horrors they endured, Yezidi survivors have shown remarkable fortitude. Many have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the genocide, seeking justice for their community and advocating for the recognition of the crimes committed against them. Organizations and individuals around the world have supported their efforts, acknowledging the need to honor the memory of the victims and prevent such atrocities from happening again.

The international community responded with outrage to the Yezidi genocide, recognizing the urgent need to hold the perpetrators accountable. In 2016, the UN established an investigative team to collect evidence of ISIS crimes in Iraq, including those committed against the Yezidi community. Efforts are ongoing to bring the responsible individuals to justice and ensure that the victims receive the support they need to rebuild their lives. In a significant move, in 2023 the UK government officially labeled the horrific acts perpetrated against the Yezidi Kurdish community as genocide. This recognition holds the potential to facilitate international efforts toward accountability and justice.

The annual commemoration of the Yezidi genocide on August 3 served as a stark reminder that the world must remain vigilant against hatred, extremism, and the violation of human rights. Meanwhile, the Yezidi Kurdish community's determination to remember their history, seek justice, and rebuild their lives has been remarkable. As we reflect on this tragic chapter in history, let us renew our commitment to preventing such atrocities and creating a world where every individual can live free from fear and oppression. ●



Photo: Safin Hamid

A Yezidi woman walking along a mass grave of Yezidis massacred by ISIS in 2014

# Postwar Middle East Genocide



**Béatrice Dillies**

*Béatrice Dillies, a journalist at Dépêche du Midi since 1995, has dedicated the last decade to uncovering the Kurdish genocide in Iraq. She has interviewed over a hundred survivors from the 1969-1989 genocide era. Her book, "A Forgotten Genocide, the Broken Voice of the Kurdish People," provides essential insights for achieving justice for this remarkable stateless community.*

**A**t the dawn of the 20th century, the Kurds and Armenians were largely forgotten about as the right to self-determination – a principle defended in the 1910s by then U.S. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson – was granted to various peoples around the world. As a result, two genocides claimed hundreds of thousands of victims in these two communities.

A man from Sulaymaniyah had warned the countries responsible for negotiating the peace treaty after World War I of this eventuality. This man was Mohammed Chérif Pasha Babanî, the head of the delegation in charge of representing the demands of the Kurdish nation. One of his delegation's key aims was the creation of a greater Kurdistan integrating the vilayets of Bitlis and Van with access to the Mediterranean Sea at the Gulf of Alexandretta to enable "the flow of its oil and its other mineral and forest wealth."

This former general of the Ottoman army had been ostracized from Turkish diplomacy for denouncing the Armenian genocide in 1915, as well as because this Francophile trained at Saint-Cyr – the largest military school in France – had disapproved of the alliance with Germany. From the point of view of the victors of the First World War, this should have been enough to give credit to the former ambassador of the Sublime Porte in Sweden. Instead, those who would decide the fate of the Middle East ignored his warnings.

In retrospect, it is clear that Chérif Pasha was right to be worried. On March 1, 1920, in a memorandum addressed to the President of the Supreme Council of the

Peace Conference, he explained why "the distribution of the wealth of the soil in the Kurdish countries cannot in any way serve as a pretext for the separation of Kurdistan into several zones of influence, nor to its division."

Considering the forces present, with "war-like populations jealous of their national independence," he anticipated the consequences of a division of Kurdistan in these terms: "Disorder will reign in an endemic state, unless the Allies want to maintain there in perpetuity a strong army which will itself be exposed to all the attacks of a guerilla war." The United States was able to verify this at its own expense, decades later. On the ground, however, it is the Kurds who have paid the highest price.

## Legalizing discrimination

Indeed, what could be easier for the region's states than to attack a people whose existence was denied by the signatories of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923? Less than eight months later, the Kurds of Turkey were the first to see the ax fall, despite promises from Mustafa Kemal of Turkish-Kurdish friendship. On March 3, 1924, the very day the Caliphate was abolished, Mustafa Kemal signed a decree banning all Kurdish schools and associations, as well as any publications in the Kurdish language. From the outset, non-Turkish-speaking citizens were seen as potential enemies of the nation, justifying all discrimination against them.

That same year, a law outlining Iraqi nationality also had a detrimental effect on the fate of the Kurds on the other side of

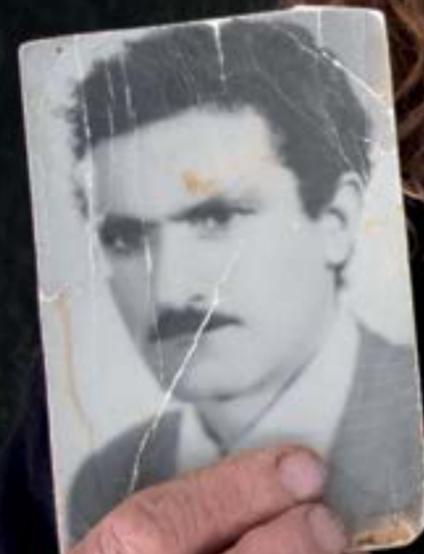
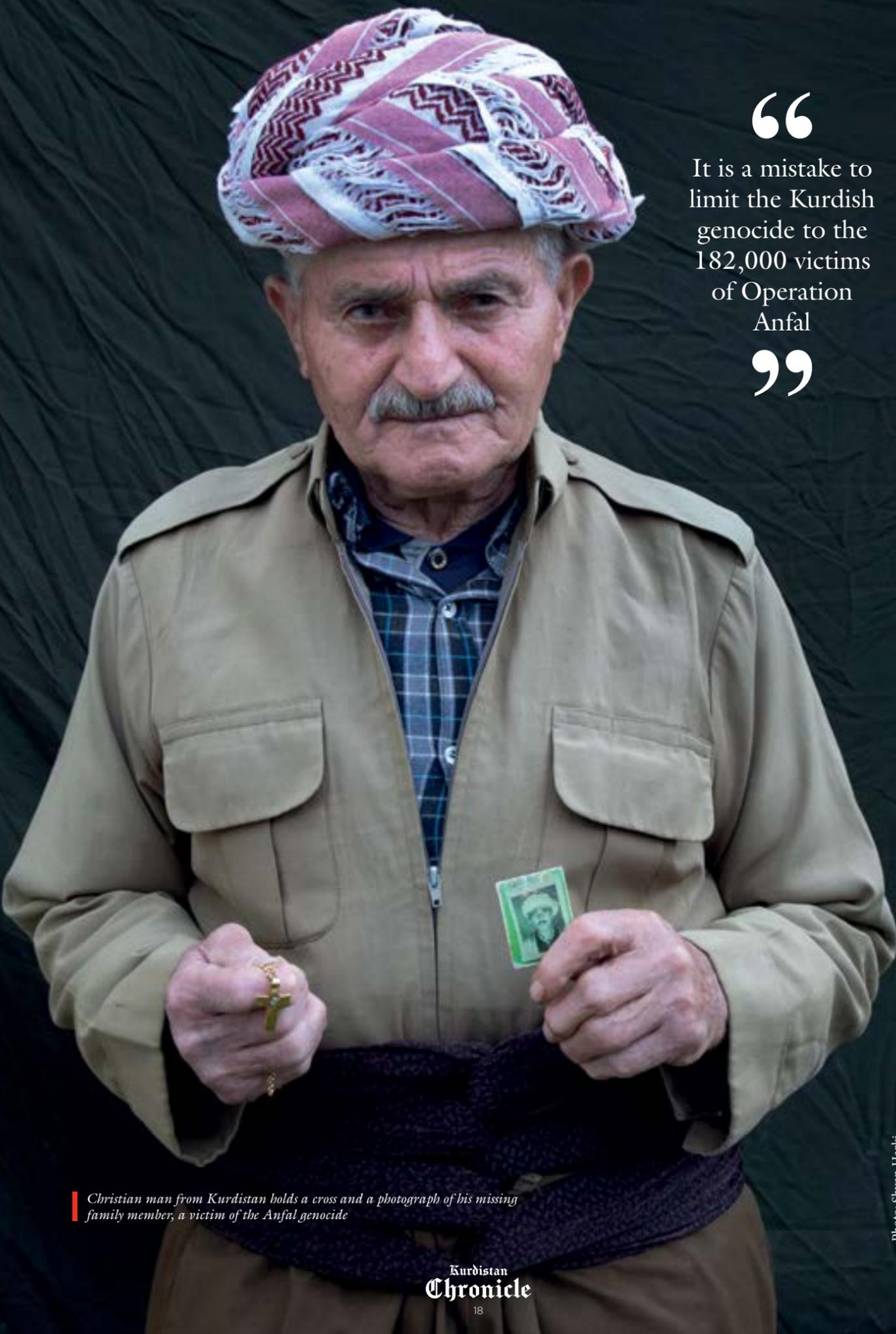


Photo: Shvan Harki

*A Kurdish woman exhibits photographs of her family members who disappeared during the Anfal genocide perpetrated by the former Iraqi Baath Regime*



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It is a mistake to limit the Kurdish genocide to the 182,000 victims of Operation Anfal

”

Christian man from Kurdistan holds a cross and a photograph of his missing family member, a victim of the Anfal genocide

Photo: Shvan Harki



Béatrice Dillies participates in a book signing ceremony

the border. The Failis, a Shiite minority within the mainly Sunni Kurdish community, were the first target.

This law introduced discrimination between the descendants of citizens of the Ottoman Empire and citizens designated as being of Persian origin – in other words, between Sunnis and Shiites.

While the former were considered “authentic” Iraqis and benefited from Iraqi citizenship, the latter had to formalize their request to benefit from citizenship. In this context, the Failis quickly became subject to discrimination, especially along the border with Iran and in Baghdad, where they controlled whole sections of the local economy.

Stigmatized for decades, the Failis became pariahs after the Ba’ath Party came to power in 1968. Like the Jews in Nazi Germany, the Failis were portrayed as an enemy within who were infiltrating the economy for their own benefit.

There was little international reaction,



Activists commemorate the anniversary of the Yazidi genocide by ISIS

Photo: Safin Hamid

for instance, when 70,000 Faili Kurds were deported to Iran in the late 1960s. Further north, Bashur's Kurds – mostly Sunnis – yearned for more autonomy. They did not realize the hidden intentions of Saddam Hussein, then vice-president of Iraq, who was in charge of negotiations with those he then called “the Kurdish brothers of Kurdistan.”

Yet Saddam was already in the first stage of a genocidal policy that steadily escalated in the 1970s and 1980s. In March 1987 he appointed his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid as secretary general of the north of Iraq to implement the ‘final solution’, which caused 182,000 deaths between February 23 and September 6, 1988.

### Divide to exterminate

It is a mistake to limit the death toll of the 182,000 victims of Operation Anfal. Certainly, for the survivors, it is important to have dates to honor the memory of the victims. However, the proliferation of commemorations in Iraqi Kurdistan is not likely to increase the official recognition of the Kurdish genocide by the international community. Why not? Because it limits the crime to a specific time frame and does not allow the analysis of an overall plan that

constituted “the intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.”

The overall plan was not clear at first, as only the Failis were targeted. Divide in order to better exterminate had been the leitmotif of the Ba’ath Party from the start, when it proclaimed “the Arab identity of the Kurdish land” in the early 1970s.

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To date, only six countries have partially recognized the Kurdish genocide  
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After the Failis, the Sunni Kurds from the Barzan region, Mergasur district, were the next group to experience why genocide includes “the intentional subjection of the group to conditions of existence calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” Between 200,000 and 300,000 people were deported to camps in southern Iraq in three successive waves in 1975, 1978 and 1982.

But the plan included further “serious bodily or mental harm” that constitutes genocide. For the Faili Kurds, everything accelerated after the adoption of a new decree on May 26, 1980, which made it possible to strip an additional 450,000 Failis of their nationality. Sami al-Fayli estimates that nearly 23,000 Shiite Kurds went missing in the years that followed.

Then the Ba’ath regime once again focused on the people of Barzan. Far from their mountains, the survivors who languished in tents in the Iraqi desert were repatriated to concentration camps closer to Erbil. For the government, this move aimed to facilitate the arrest of men and boys aged nine and over in the summer of 1983. No one in the international community has ever heard of the Barzan 8,000. And yet, the parallel is glaring with the recognition of the 8,000 Bosnian men and teenagers who perished in Srebrenica following the ethnic cleansing operation perpetrated from 1992 to 1995 in areas controlled by the Army of the Serb Republic of Bosnia.

But the Kurdish genocide did not stop there. Laws, decrees and regulations issued by the Iraqi authorities continued to legitimize the Arabization of the Kurdistan region throughout

the 1980s. The climax of this policy was the adoption of decree 4008, on June 20, 1987. Seventeen days before, on June 3, General al-Majid had signed a directive delimiting eight ‘prohibited zones’. In his note n° 28/3650, he specified that “the armed forces must kill any human being or animal present in these zones.”

For the Kurds, these eight “Anfal” have since been commemorated as a geno-

cide. However, this was just one step in the overall plan, starting in the late 1960s, to divide the Kurds into several sub-groups to eliminate them more easily.

To date, only six countries have partially recognized the Kurdish genocide. The Iraqi Parliament was the first to rule on Anfal on June 24, 2010, followed by Norway and Sweden in 2012, then England and South Korea in 2013. In addition, in 2010, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq recognized that the Halabja massacre also constituted a genocide. The Iraqi Parliament spoke out on the Faili genocide in 2011. Most recently, in March 2023, the Austrian Parliament recognized the Kurdish genocide committed in Halabja in March 1988.



This form of recognition makes it seem as if each of the horrors committed under the aegis of the Ba’ath Party constituted a genocide in its own right, whereas they were simply stages of a single long-term plan. The Kurdistan Regional Government should promote this understanding of the events on the international stage if it wants the Kurdish genocide to be officially recognized one day. Otherwise, events such as the 2014 killings of Yezidi Kurds at the hands of former Ba’athists who joined ISIS will happen again, whether the victims are Yezidis, Failis, or Sunni Kurds. ●

# POLITICS

## Why I Joined the Kurdistan Regional Government



Hemin Lihony

Hemin Lihony is Head of Initiatives and Communications Office

After over a decade of working in the media I recently joined the Kurdistan Regional Government. This career move was driven by a desire to be part of a vision that aims to bring positive change to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

During my first meeting with Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, he took the time to explain his goals and the challenges lying ahead and underscored his sincerity and determination for change.

One key focus of Prime Minister Barzani is implementing reforms and addressing the shortcomings of the existing political

system. In his first term he embarked on reforming a 30-year-old bureaucracy that lacked a well-established framework. In order to achieve meaningful reform, he deemed it necessary to build new modes of executing policies and to invest more in human resources.

The reform process faced numerous challenges. Basic services such as water and electricity continued to be a major concern for people. The current cabinet was criticized for such issues, which had accumulated over the last three decades under previous cabinets.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Barzani did

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not shy away from taking responsibility and actively set about addressing these concerns. Unfortunately, in a coalition government, only a handful of individuals were willing to take responsibility for the situation.

Over the past few months working with Prime Minister Barzani, I can attest to his commitment to reform and his unrelenting emphasis on establishing a strong and institutionalized system.

A leader who charts a new course often encounters challenges, sometimes from those closest to him. Those with

interests of their own may resist such attempts at change and reform, preferring to maintain the current system. Prime Minister Barzani experienced this type of resistance from individuals and parties who were driven by personal interests rather than a commitment to improve our people's future.

My team and I have undertaken the task of writing Kurdistan 2028, a document that lays out the principles and strategies for achieving Prime Minister Barzani's vision for the next four years. In this task, we are focusing on five pillars: human capital development, quality education, sustainable growth,

environmental sustainability, and economic diversification. The heart of this vision is robust infrastructure that offers people the best services, in addition to strengthening public institutions and combating corruption at its root.

I am deeply encouraged by Prime Minister Barzani's unwavering support for agriculture, human resources, climate change, future generations, and digital transformation. Whenever I am asked about my work or my personal impression, my immediate response is the same: he has a vision. ●



Photo: Sabr Dri

PM Barzani inaugurates the Dalal Corniche project in Zakho on August 14, 2023

# The Commitment to Institutional Reform

# #Stronger\_Kurdistan

## 9th | KRG CABINET ANNIVERSARY



**Mahmood Mahmood**

*Dr. Mahmood Mahmood is an Economist and holds a PhD from the University of Erlangen, Germany. He has worked as researcher at the center for Iraq Studies in Erlangen – Germany.*

The Ninth Cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has undertaken significant efforts to enhance the enforcement of laws and directives. This commitment is particularly evident in the management of public finances, which has undergone noteworthy advancements across all tiers of government. In the short term, the government has adopted various mechanisms and techniques that aim to streamline how it operates. In the medium and long term, these reforms are anticipated to result in a significant upgrade in the KRG's governance in alignment with contemporary international benchmarks.

A pivotal aspect of this endeavor is the introduction of the "one-stop shop" concept across several government institutions. Beyond simplifying administrative processes and diminishing bureaucratic hurdles, this

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A pivotal aspect of this endeavor is the introduction of the "one-stop shop" concept across several government institutions  
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approach is expected to reduce corruption as well. These reforms and innovations have materialized through the collaboration between the private and public sectors in the administration of public entities.

### Decentralization and digitization

The government oversees key sectors of the economy – including housing and electricity production – that are partly managed by the private sector. It is worth underscoring that private sector management of these activities removes a large burden from the government, freeing up resources to deploy where they are most needed.

To foster this objective, the government provides land and a variety of financial incentives to both domestic and international investors. Alongside addressing housing, electricity, and other critical sectors, these initiatives generate employment prospects and promote the growth of small and medium-sized businesses in interconnected fields. In numerous ways, these endeavors contribute to advancing economic development in the Kurdistan Region.

Decentralization has also been a key focus of the Ninth Cabinet's efforts. This has entailed the devolution of greater financial and managerial authority to towns and communities. By doing so, the government aims to foster more localized decision-making and resource allocation, ultimately leading to improved governance at grass-roots levels.

While governments are not profit-driven entities, the KRG has placed a significant



*PM Barzani engages with citizens during a Townhall Meeting session in Erbil on July 5, 2023*



Photo: Sabr Dri

PM Barzani casually interacts with citizens during a visit to the local Bazaar in Erbil on April 18, 2023

emphasis on the management of public finances to fulfill its commitment to transparency and efficient resource allocation. The collective impact of these measures is expected to propel the government forward and has already led to a more sustainable and positive trend in the KRG's fiscal deficit.

In a recent development, the KRG launched a digital payment initiative known as "Hajmari Min," with the aim being to digitize the payroll processes for over a million public employees and retirees in the Kurdistan Region. Additionally, this program will transform the role and functionality of banks from simply disbursing government payrolls to offering a range of modern and conventional services.

### Enhancing governance, combating corruption

Recognizing the intricate nature of institutional reform, the KRG has pursued a multifaceted strategy that encompasses various developmental

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Decentralization has also been a key focus of the Ninth Cabinet's efforts  
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phases. The implementation of these reforms is geared towards fortifying administrative functions and includes strategic planning, institutional restructuring, and resource coordination. The primary goal is to enhance governance while combating corruption.

For decades, there has been significant pressure to overhaul the legal framework. The Kurdistan Parliament and KRG have both introduced numerous contemporary laws and directives. Regardless of the potential efficacy of these legal instruments, the crucial aspect lies in enhancing their enforce-

ment and ensuring that the changes carry lasting effects.

Institutional reform is not a straightforward journey with predefined objectives. It extends beyond the mere creation of a reform strategy. A distinctive and efficient approach might entail embracing multiple iterative models inspired by the experiences of nations engaged in analogous reforms. To achieve this, studies should employ comprehensive comparative case analyses, which illuminate a spectrum of successful, unsuccessful, and mixed outcomes for various reforms.

It is crucial to acknowledge that sorting priorities is a complex undertaking and that the process of implementing reforms may span years, if not decades. Drawing from recent insights, the foundation of successful institutional reform involves a more profound undertaking: the establishment of a resilient framework that bolsters the private sector, aligning it with strategic economic development objectives.



Photo: Sabr Dri

Of particular significance are those efforts that embrace digitalization within contemporary governance frameworks. The primary aim is to streamline and structure governmental institutions towards fostering a service-oriented administration, while cultivating an environment that nurtures both social and economic advancement.

Should the ongoing reforms persist over the upcoming four-year period, culminating with the establishment of the 10th Cabinet following the general elections scheduled for Feb-

ruary 2024, it is unequivocal that the KRG will unearth a robust pathway towards an enhanced and more prosperous Kurdistan Region.

As the reform trajectory extends into the next quadrennial phase, there stands a resolute conviction that the KRG will unveil a substantial foundation for reform that is conducive to advancing the Kurdistan Region into greater affluence and progress. ●

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In a recent development, the KRG launched a digital payment initiative

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Photo: Safin Hamid

A worker by the blast furnace at Erbil Steel Factory |

## International Ties to Support the Humanitarian Mission



**Awat Mustafa**

*Awat Mustafa is a board member of the Barzani Charity Foundation and is the researcher and author of *The Soul of the Mountains: The Principles and Values of Mustafa Barzani*. He holds a master's degree in International Development from Newcastle/ Northumbria University in the United Kingdom.*

Over the last decade, the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) and the Latter-day Saint Charities (LDSC) have been collaborating with each other to supply humanitarian assistance in Iraq and Syria. The partnership between the two organizations has saved many lives and given hope to millions of refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) who have sought protection in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

To strengthen and elevate the relationship between both organizations and establish further collaboration between the BCF and other organizations, such as the Stirling Foundation (SF), the BCF was invited to visit the state of Utah; Dallas, Texas; and Washington, D.C. The purpose of our visit was to gain a deeper understanding of LDSC and the Stirling Foundation, which is a newly established humanitarian foundation aiming to serve humanity beyond U.S. borders and support vulnerable people, including refugees and IDPs.

Recognized globally for their humanitarian initiatives, LDSC has been actively involved

in offering aid and long-term development assistance. We were eager to explore how they navigated this challenging period when many organizations had retrenched, but yet both Utah-based LDSC and SF are determined to stay in our region to address current challenges and provide hope for the future.

### Visiting Utah

At a time when the majority of international non-government organizations (NGOs) have withdrawn their funding for refugees and IDPs in the KRI, our visit to the United States was prompt and significant. Funding cuts by UN agencies and international humanitarian agencies have left many vulnerable peoples without essential resources and support. Amid this challenging landscape, we discovered a glimmer of hope during our visit to Utah, where we

had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including Elder David Bednar, Elder Anthony S. Perkins, Patrik Kearon, sister Sharon Eubank, and Boyce



Our visit culminated in a meeting with officials from the U.S. State Department, where we discussed the urgent need for alternative sources of funding and explored potential collaborations to address this pressing issue. Despite the difficult circumstances, our meeting with LDSC, SF, and State Department officials who are active in the KRI and

### A beacon of hope

The first leg of our visit was in Salt Lake City, where we were blessed to have the opportunity to engage with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and witness their significant role in supporting these vulnerable populations in the United States and worldwide. The co-



A delegation from the BCF pays a visit to the Kurdistan Region Representation Office in Washington D.C. on August 15, 2023

President Nicole Stirling, Director of The Middle East and Europe Brittany Stirling, President and Board Director Miles Hansen, and Sally Johnson. Also headquartered in Utah, SF plays a significant role in humanitarian initiatives in our region.

northeast Syria shed light on potential avenues for assistance that could alleviate the hardships faced by refugees and IDPs in the KRI.

ordination between the Church, people, and humanitarian organizations is truly miraculous. The Church's leadership, from the perspective of both faith and charitable activities, is a great example of how humanity should be served.

The Latter-day Saints community in Utah has emerged as a beacon of hope, offering vital assistance and resources to refugees and IDPs in our region. Their unwavering commitment toward providing shelter, education, healthcare, and food has profoundly improved the lives of those affected by displacement in the last decade.

Before our departure from Salt Lake City we had the privilege to meet with other organizations such as Brigham Young University to discuss how to help underprivileged people in the KRI earn educational certificates and be better prepared for employment opportunities. We also met with the former Governor of Utah Gary Herbert to discuss future KRI-Utah commercial relationships and how to better connect both regions.

Additionally, we found some time to connect with the Kurdish and Iranian diaspora in Utah to discuss the current hu-

manitarian situation in our region and how to better serve each other in the future. We learned about the common values and historical ties between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the KRI, two communities that have faced persecution and hardship to become dedicated to serving humanity.

that impact refugees and IDPs in our region. One of the aims of our meeting was to provide factual information about the current situation of refugees and IDPs at the camps. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has been a vital agency over the past decade, providing leadership and funding for camp management. However, the funding for camp management and services has been cut by approximately 30%. Another example that we highlighted at our meeting with the State Department was the complete withdrawal of services provided by UNICEF.

The World Health Organization currently provides a very small amount of medicine to the camps, and above all the Iraqi Government and Ministry of Migration of Iraq play an even less significant role. For example, this year the Government of Iraq has provided just four food baskets to IDPs and no aid whatsoever to refugees.



BCF delegation visiting LDS Welfare Centre in Salt Lake (August 2023)

The meeting allowed us to evaluate the State Department's response to this challenging situation, as its role in addressing humanitarian crises is crucial, particularly when local NGOs are unable to provide necessary support.

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### Building support

The BCF's visit to the United States was a very significant step toward connecting with the international community, particularly U.S. donors, who have been open-handed in contributing to humanitarian aid in Iraq and Syria. During our visit to Washington, D.C., we were honored to meet with our partner organization Peace Wind of America (PWA) at their headquarters to evaluate past and current projects that serve refugees and IDPs in camps in the KRI. We aimed to expand our collaboration and go further to narrow the gap between people.

### Meeting with the U.S. State Department

During our visit to the United States, our meeting with the U.S. State Department, including the head of the Iraq desk; the KRI desk; the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; the United States Agency for International Development; and the northeastern Syria desk was crucial. It was a key opportunity to discuss humanitarian and other issues



BCF delegation meeting with the Stirling Foundation leadership in Utah State (August 2023)

This visit was also a prime opportunity to reconnect with the Kurdish community in Dallas, Texas, where we had a successful meeting with Kurdish diaspora leadership and encouraged them to continue to play a vital role in humanitarian efforts in the KRI.

We had a similar community meeting with the Kurdish diaspora in Washington, D.C. and showed our gratitude for their efforts to help refugees and IDPs. Lastly, we met with the new Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Representative Treefa Aziz and her small but very effective staff, who represent Kurdish values and interests in the United States.

The KRI were part of an international alliance, struggling against the extremist group ISIS, and the sacrifice that



BCF delegation meeting with charitable organizations in Washington D.C. (August 2023)

Kurds have made is a significant step toward global peace and security. The KRG has been a cornerstone for humanitarian efforts since 2013, having

made its services – such as health, education, energy, and water – accessible to all refugees and IDPs under the KRG's protection. The KRG has implemented a zero-discrimination policy toward anyone and everyone who lives in the KRI, as coexistence and diversity is a key part of the KRG's Ninth Cabinet's strategic policy. The safety and security of everyone, including religious minorities, is a top priority of the government.

The BCF will continue its work with national and international humanitarian and development agencies to improve the life of refugees and IDPs in our region and work with all stakeholders to find a safe way for people to return to their homes. Until then, the BCF appeals to the international community not to leave these vulnerable communities behind. ●

## Potato Revolution

Kurdistan Chronicle

Land that has borne witness to millennia of farming, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is experiencing a renaissance in its agricultural sector, and at the forefront of this resurgence stands the KH Company. Established in 2009, the company has not only reshaped Kurdistan's agribusiness landscape, but also acted as a bridge between Dutch expertise and regional resources, resulting in a transformation that has captivated both local and global audiences.

As a symbol of unity and collaboration, KH Company draws its name from the fusion of "Kurdistan" and "Holland." This union wasn't just symbolic; it was an embodiment of a mission to infuse the region's farming practices with

Dutch ingenuity. The journey started after the company invited Hang Maye and Hugo Mol, two prominent Dutch farmers, to the KRI. The combination of their extensive experience and Kurdistan's fertile soil is igniting a revolution in the region's agricultural sector.

The cornerstone of this endeavor is the potato, a seemingly humble crop that holds the key to a multitude of positive changes. In partnership with the Dutch company HZPC, KH Company imported 200 tons of potato seeds. With the support of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Ministry of Agriculture, this venture catalyzed a staggering increase in potato production – from a meager 2,000 tons to an

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The annual income from potato production for the KRI's populace is estimated at a substantial \$500 million  
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Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

■ *Bashar Mushir Goran, CEO of KH Company, during an interview with Kurdistan Chronicle*

astonishing 650,000 tons. This numerical leap, while important in increasing production, also represented a substantial stride toward food security, self-sufficiency, and economic growth.

The impact reverberated far beyond the fields. In a region where agriculture and livelihoods are intimately connected, the surge in potato production has translated into tangible improvements in the lives of the local population. Employment opportunities have burgeoned, curbing unemployment rates

and providing a sense of purpose to thousands.

As Bashar Mushir Goran, the CEO of KH Company, elucidated, “The expansion of potato cultivation also created job opportunities for over 40,000 unemployed individuals.” The result? A marked decline in crime rates, transforming the social fabric of various communities in the region.

Data tells a compelling tale: the annual income from potato production for

the KRI’s populace is estimated at a substantial \$500 million, directly impacting the lives of all those engaged in the industry. KH Company, initially comprising 100 permanent employees and 35 agricultural engineers, expands exponentially during the potato harvest season, welcoming up to 25,000 seasonal workers. In the CEO’s factory alone, 500 workers labor daily during this crucial period, highlighting the magnitude of the endeavor.

A pivotal contributor to KH Compa-



Photo: Halmat Omar

■ *Workers harvest potatoes from farms in Erbil and Duhok provinces*

ny’s success has been the steady support of the KRG. Against the backdrop of geopolitical challenges, the government’s dedication to agricultural development has been pivotal. Its strategic vision, spanning agriculture, industry, and tourism, has steered the region toward a future of prosperity and self-reliance. The partnership between the KRG, KH Company, and the Dutch Consulate has exemplified the importance of harmonious collaboration.

### New markets

The company’s transformation extends beyond potato cultivation. The upcoming French fries factory, meat-production factories, and onion-slicing factory embody the company’s

commitment to elevating the region’s agricultural prowess. These endeavors, along with the construction of state-of-the-art cold storage warehouses, aim to bolster production and ensure the availability of quality products throughout the year, even during periods of scarcity.

However, KH Company’s accomplishments are not confined to local markets. The journey of Kurdistan’s potatoes from local fields to foreign lands is one of determination and resilience. Overcoming obstacles such as closed borders and logistical challenges, the KRG’s collaboration with the Iraqi central government has facilitated the export of potatoes to markets beyond Iraq’s borders. The removal of barriers has paved the way for the KRI’s finest produce to grace the tables



■ *An aerial view captures a farm on the outskirts of Erbil*

Photo: Halmat Omar



■ *Workers harvest potatoes from farms in Erbil and Duhok provinces*

Photo: Halmat Omar

of countries like the UAE. “Compared to other countries’ potato products, Kurdistan potatoes are the best potatoes in the Middle East in terms of quality,” Goran explains, pointing to the demand for locally grown yellow potatoes.

The impact does not end with potatoes. In line with Groan’s vision, KH

Company’s agricultural success story is a template for the cultivation of other crops, such as onions, grapes, apples, pomegranates, and corn. This vision echoes a historical reality, with the KRI having supplied 70% of Iraq’s agricultural needs until geopolitical challenges disrupted the equation. Now, fueled by governmental support and innovative partnerships, the region’s agriculture

sector is poised to flourish anew.

As climate change exerts its influence on global agriculture, KH Company has embraced innovation to adapt and thrive. With water consumption a critical concern, the company has introduced advanced irrigation methods such as the drip system, pivot system, and steamer, technologies that optimize

water usage and elevate the efficiency of crop cultivation, setting a precedent for sustainable practices in the region.

The company’s efforts are underpinned by a resounding commitment to elevate the KRI’s agriculture to meet international standards. With Dutch assistance, extending from training programs to skill enhancement, the company has not only achieved parity with interna-

tional quality but also greatly increased production efficiency. As more farmers gain expertise and knowledge, the cycle of progress becomes self-sustaining, demonstrating that shared knowledge has the power to revolutionize entire industries.

The work of KH Company captures the potential of a region that, despite challenges, is determined to carve its path

to prosperity. With steadfast collaboration and an unshakable commitment to high quality, Kurdistan’s agriculture is on the cusp of a golden era, symbolized not simply by the hue of its potatoes but by the transformation of a land that has rediscovered its roots, embracing modernity while staying true to its heritage. ●



# Understanding the Kurdish *Peshmerga*



**Michael Arizanti**

*Michael Arizanti is a Dutch-born social justice activist and prolific writer with a keen interest in Kurdish affairs and human rights. With his expertise in the Middle East, Michael is a passionate advocate for social justice and has dedicated his life to positively impacting the world.*

As one of the world's largest ethnic groups without a state of their own, the Kurdish people have been fighting for independence and self-determination for decades. Their resilience, determination, and bravery in adversity have captured the world's attention. Their struggle for independence has not been smooth sailing, however, with different Kurdish armed groups at times at the center of considerable controversy.

## Differences matter

Western governments and media tend to lump all Kurdish armed groups together, making it difficult to understand the nuances of Kurd-

ish politics. This, in turn, has hindered peaceful and positive development for the Kurdish nation, as different armed groups pursue their own objectives through different tactics. This article will explore the differences between the various Kurdish armed forces, focusing on the People's Defense Units (YPG), the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), and the different forces.

The YPG is a Kurdish militia operating primarily in Syria. It was formed in 2011 to defend Kurdish areas of northern Syria from the Syrian regime. The YPG is affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian wing of the PKK. The YPG has been one of the most effective fighting forces against ISIS, working alongside the U.S.-led coalition to capture key territories from the terrorist organization.

The PKK is a Kurdish militant organization that originated in Turkey. It was founded in 1978 to establish self-administration in Turkey's Kurdish areas. The PKK has been designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union after carrying out numerous attacks against

Turkish security forces and civilians, resulting in a decades-long conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish in Iraq have been in operation since the 1930s. The term means “those who face death,” and

fight against ISIS.

The differences between these groups are palpable, a fact that is vital to understand to appreciate their contributions to the overall Kurdish struggle. While the YPG primarily focuses on protecting the Kurdish population in Syria, the PKK



Peshmerga forces demonstrate their physical prowess during a military graduation ceremony

the group has a storied history of fighting against Iraqi government forces. The are not a unified force; they are divided between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). For over three decades, the forces have been a vital ally of the United States in the

seeks to establish autonomy in Turkey. In contrast, the are concentrated in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). These differences in objectives and tactics must be considered when attempting to develop strategies to promote peace and stability in the area.

To appreciate the contributions of various armed groups, understanding the differences between them is essential. The YPG, PKK, and all have unique objectives and tactics, and any strategy to promote peace and stability in the region must consider them. It is important to note that the lack of awareness surrounding these differences has been detrimental to the overall prospects for peace in the region. When Western governments and media lump all Kurdish armed groups together, they associate them with the violence perpetrated by the PKK, which hinders peaceful development and can lead Western governments to support the wrong groups or fail to support the right ones.

One of the most prominent, widely recognized, and vastly endorsed Kurdish political parties is the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which was founded in 1946 by the Kurdish nationalist leader Mustafa Barzani with the goal of securing greater political and cultural rights for the Kurdish people in Iraq, as well as independence, after facing discrimination and marginalization under successive governments in Baghdad.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the KDP launched an armed insurgency against the Iraqi government, seeking greater autonomy for the Kurdish regions. While initially successful, with Kurdish forces gaining control of much

northern Iraq. The KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) played a prominent role in forming the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), established in 1992 to manage affairs in the Kurdish-ruled areas.

Since then, the KDP has been one of the dominant political parties in the KRI, along with other smaller parties. The KDP has been led by Masoud Barzani, son of its founder, since the mid-1970s, and has engaged in negotiations with the Iraqi government over its future status while remaining committed to securing greater autonomy and self-determination for the Kurdish people in Iraq.



Female Peshmerga forces march proudly at their military graduation ceremony

### Political parties or armed groups?

We should also note that there are other Kurdish political parties and armed groups that cannot be ignored. Understanding the differences between the various political parties and armed groups is essential in developing a meaningful strategy to promote regional peace and stability.

northern Iraq, the Iraqi government launched a crackdown in the late 1970s using chemical weapons and other brutal tactics to defeat the Kurdish resistance.

Despite the setbacks, the KDP continued to operate underground and carried out sporadic attacks against Iraqi forces. In the aftermath of the 1990-1991 Gulf War, Kurdish forces, supported by US-led coalition forces, were able to secure a degree of autonomy in

The second major political party in the KRI, the PUK, was founded in 1975 by Jalal Talabani, a prominent Kurdish nationalist leader, along with other activists in the Kurdish political movement in Iraq. The primary goal of the PUK was to achieve greater political and cultural rights for the Kurdish people in Iraq.

## Who are the *peshmerga*?

The Kurds have proven to be a vital ally in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and their contributions have been noticed by the United States and other Western countries.

The Kurdish people have long been a natural ally to the United States and the West, demonstrating their commitment to democracy and human rights. Since the First Gulf War in 1990-1991, Iraqi Kurdish political parties have been a robust ally to the United States, and their relationship has only grown stronger over the years.

During the 2003 Iraq War, they worked closely with the U.S. military, providing valuable intelligence and assistance in dislodging Saddam Hussein's regime. They were also instrumental in establishing a stable and democratic government in the Kurdish region of Iraq, which has become one of the most peaceful and prosperous regions in the country.

In the fight against ISIS, they were on the front lines, fighting fiercely to defend their homeland. They successfully prevented ISIS from taking over the KRI and even pushed the group out of some of its strongholds, such as the cities of Sinjar and Kirkuk. Finally, they played a key role in providing humanitarian aid to civilians affected by the conflict. They set up refugee camps and provided food, water, and medicine to those displaced by the fighting.

The United States and the West must continue to support their Kurdish allies. The success of the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria has depended upon them, while Kurdish political parties have proven to be reliable allies.

## Unifying the *peshmerga*

It is important to note that the Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs) are under the command of the Ministry of Affairs and thus elected civilian governance, which is free from external political influence. However, on October 16, 2017, eight out of 14 RGBs split along KDP and PUK lines and have since remained separated.

Attempts to unify them under government control have failed since the 1990s, but progress has been made in recent years.



The KRG is committed to reviewing the current mechanisms for reorganizing and unifying them as well as internal security forces, with the help of local and international experts. They aim to strengthen the KRI's defense capabilities, counter risks, enhance security, and elevate the professional and military capability of their forces.

As someone who has been involved in the Kurdish issue for over 15 years, I have come to greatly respect the Kurdish parties' efforts to learn from their historical mistakes, particularly when it comes to preventing destructive forces from pitting Kurds against each other.

I witnessed the painful civil war of the 1990s and the events in Kirkuk in 2017, and I am relatively knowledgeable about modern Kurdish history. I understand why attempts to establish a Kurdish state failed in Red Kurdistan, the Republic of Ararat, the Republic of Mahabad, and elsewhere.

While the Iraqi army ran from ISIS, they bravely fought with

old, worn-out AK-47s. The West's reluctance to arm them directly, routing aid through Baghdad instead, made it difficult for the KRI to secure weapons during the early years of the war against ISIS.

However, their heroic efforts did not go unnoticed, and eventually, the coalition realized that investing in them was better than in the Iraqi army. They received the needed resources to decisively defeat ISIS.

## Looking forward

Their greatest strengths lie in their fighting spirit, popular support, reli-

ability, number of fighters, and unique intelligence network.

For the West, reform of them aims to establish an accountable, capable, and affordable regional force operating effectively as an element of the Iraqi Security Forces, promoting a more secure and stable KRI. However, for the KRG, the objective in reforming them should be seen as a stepping stone toward building an independent Kurdish state.

Security, safety, and stability are essential factors for a sovereign nation-state, as seen in Israel's development. Despite the differences between the KRI's and Israel's history, Kurdistan's situation to-

day is somewhat analogous to Israel's in the late 1940s.

Kurdistan has a tribal society and, historically, they have been loyal to different tribes, local communities, or political parties. However, they are becoming a unified national army, in line with democratic development in the KRI, which ultimately presents both challenges and opportunities for a future independent Kurdish state.

Regardless of what the future holds, one thing is certain: the increasing importance of Kurds and Kurdistan in the future of the Middle East highlights the KRG's place in international politics. ●

## The Last Days of a Legend

In early May this year, before the heat wave struck Erbil, my journalist friend, Dilbixwin Dara, and I were on our way to the Royal City neighborhood. Our destination was the home of the venerable Kurdish politician, Muhsin Dizayee, who, despite being over 90 years old, still exudes elegance and gentleness. I had met him briefly a few

days before at a funeral but had not had the chance to ask him the time he spent in Washington, D.C., with the historic Kurdish liberation leader, Mustafa Barzani. On Thursday, May 4, we planned to pay him a visit at his home in Erbil.

Barzani's brief stay in the hospital in Washington was very

Jan Dost



*Kurdish legendary leader Mustafa Barzani and veteran politician Muhsin Dizayee*



From left: President Masoud Barzani, Muhsin Dizayee, and Idris Barzani

important to me because I needed documented information about those days for a prologue to my next novel. According to my colleagues at Kurdistan Chronicle, Muhsin Dizayee was one of the people who remained at Barzani's side during

his final days. I felt compelled to pay him a personal visit and hear his account of that time.

Dizayee is a veteran Kurdish politician who was a key member



Kurdish poet, novelist, and journalist Jan Dost meets Muhsin Dizayee in Erbil in 2023



Kurdish legendary leader Mustafa Barzani and Muhsin Dizayee in the US during 1970s

of the Kurdish negotiating committees that engaged with the Iraqi government from 1965 to 1966, during the tenure of Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz.

Following the July 1968 revolution, Dizayee served as the Minister of Northern Reconstruction in the federal government led by Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayef. From August 1973 to November 1974, he was also the Minister of Public Works and Housing, demonstrating his commitment to the development and infrastructure of the Kurdish Region of Iraq and Iraq as a whole.

However, as political circumstances evolved, he made the transition to the armed Kurdish movement, signifying his commitment to the cause.

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We arrived on time for our visit and were greeted warmly by Dizayee's son Sherwan, who led us into the reception room. Muhsin Dizayee himself entered

and greeted us warmly moments later, with a dignified bearing and impeccable attire.

I was aware that our interview time was limited. As a result, I was careful to limit my inquiries to the time he spent with the late Barzani in Washington in 1979, during the latter's battle with lung cancer.

"Could you share your recollections of your last days with Barzani? Was he in pain?" I asked.

Dizayee raised his head slightly, closed his eyes for a few seconds as if to take a trip down memory lane, and then said:

"Barzani's spirits were high, and he didn't care about his illness. He refused to talk about his illness or complain about it in any way. When we were alone one day, I asked him, 'Sir, are you not in pain?' 'Of course, I am!' he exclaimed, laughing. 'I experience two types of pain. A pain because I

don't know what my people are going through right now, because I don't know what their circumstances are or what difficulties they are facing. Second, there is the agony of my own illness. In terms of my illness, I've learned since childhood not to show pain.'"

Dizayee paused briefly before continuing the conversation, as if he wanted to demonstrate that Barzani's concern for his people outweighed his own suffering:

"Throughout these days, he was constantly communicating with senators, journalists, politicians, and ambassadors to talk about his people."

As we savored the delicious coffee served to us, Dizayee took a sip from his cup, and then, with graceful patience, resumed speaking. He went on to recount an event from December 10, 1976, when Barzani was invited to the Human Rights Watch headquarters in New York City. The audience

consisted of journalists, ambassadors, ordinary citizens, and some senators. Barzani was asked to address the gathering, and he walked to a window overlooking the United Nations headquarters, leaving the audience bewildered. He returned to clarify, "Do you know why I stood by the window? I just saw flags from every nation in the world, except the flag of



■ *Muhsin Dizayee and Mustafa Barzani, during the visit to the US for medical treatment*

Kurdistan. There are cities in Kurdistan with populations exceeding some UN member states, yet Kurds are denied even the right to self-govern."

Dizayee wanted to show us that the late leader was concerned about his people's welfare and did not neglect it, even while struggling with illness. He described how Barzani delivered a comprehensive speech about the Kurdish revolution and the injustices inflicted upon the Kurds, with Muhammad Amin Dosky translating into English.

I was eager to learn the details of Barzani's final days in order to use them in my next novel, so I asked him:

"When did Mela Mustafa's illness take a severe turn?"

"His condition worsened ten days before his passing," Dizayee responded. I was astonished by the clarity of his recollections, as he recounted events from 44 years ago as if they had occurred yesterday.

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"Did Barzani go into a coma?" I asked.

"No, he was always conscious. He spent the last four of those ten days, when he was gravely ill, in George Washington University Hospital. He had previously taken his medication



■ *From left: Idris Barzani, Mustafa Barzani, Muhsin Dizayee*

at home. He was concerned that his condition was deteriorating but did not request that we take him to the hospital. We proposed it, and he agreed. His son Idris and I were there and went with him to the hospital."

"He wasn't afraid of death, was he?" I inquired. When it comes to a man who spent his entire life facing death in mountains and caves and who had fought hundreds of battles with a brave heart and an iron will, I knew it was probably a stupid question.

"No," Dizayee answered right away. "He used to say that death was a natural occurrence! It is a stage that comes after life. He was telling us not to be sad."

"He used to smoke a pipe in the morning, but quit smoking a long time before his death. On the last day of his life, March 1, 1979, when the sun had not yet risen, Idris and I were with him in the hospital, taking turns caring for him. He awoke during my shift, opened his eyes, and said, 'Why don't you sleep?'"

"I said I could not sleep. 'Don't be too busy with me,' he said. 'I only have a few hours left in this world.'"

"After that brief conversation, one of the doctors arrived, performed the

the Kurdish people. The delegate then left, and Muhammad Said Dosky and Farhad Luqman, Mustafa's grandson, arrived to look after him while Idris and I went out to reserve tickets."



■ *Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani and Muhsin Dizayee among a group of Peshmerga*

tests, and surprised us by telling us that his condition was stable and that we could leave. When the food was served, he ate with enjoyment, and our faces lit up. 'I know you rejoice when I eat,' he said. 'I can finish it all!'"

"Idris and I were pleased and agreed to get plane tickets to leave the next day. We informed the U.S. State Department of this before leaving the hospital. An ambassador had asked me to contact him if I needed advice or if anything significant happened. I called him, explained the situation, and told him we were leaving. We waited for a representative from the Department to arrive before saying our final goodbyes." "Barzani sat up in bed for an hour and spoke to the State Department representative about America's betrayal of

That evening, as they planned to return to the hospital, they received a call from Farhad, Luqman's son, urgently summoning them back. Tragically, upon their return, they discovered that Barzani had passed away.

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When Dizayee reached this point in the conversation, we were overcome with sadness. So the legend, Barzani, was gone? That was his final fight in life. He fought and won many wars. He won the support of the entire world for the Kurdish cause. However, there must be a final day in the life of every human. For him, it was the first Thursday in March of 1979.

Dizayee stated that Barzani's will was for his body to be transferred to Bar-

zan, and if that was not possible, to Iranian Kurdistan.

At this point, I had no questions left to ask. The interview was over. We stood up and said our goodbyes to the man

who had been with Barzani in his final moments. I looked him in the eyes while shaking his hand. I imagined all the sad, anxious, and hopeful moments he had experienced in the last week of caring for Barzani.

I imagined Barzani saying his final farewell to the world, far from his homeland, for which he and his people had fought for more than a half-century. I imagined the pain in Barzani's heart and the dreams he had back then. I filled my mind with everything I needed to write the prologue to my new novel. When I returned from this visit, I felt as if I had visited Barzani himself, looking out at the distant mountains with his sharp eyes, full of hope, in his stronghold in Barzan. ●

## From the Soviet Union to Kurdistan Odyssey of Love and Resilience



Safar Jajoki

Safar Jajoki has been a journalist with *Khabt Daily Newspaper* since 2007. He is based in Erbil, within the Kurdistan Region, and is also affiliated with the *Kurdish Writers Union*.

In a world where the struggle for freedom echoes through history, the extraordinary odyssey of Svita Alexander emerges as a testament to the unwavering love, indomitable courage, and enduring spirit of the *peshmerga*. Born in 1937 in Samarkand, in what is now Uzbekistan, Svita would soon become involved with the brave and resolute fighters of Kurdistan, forming a tapestry woven from sacrifice, resilience, and an unbreakable bond with a land yearning for liberation.

In 1957, amidst the winds of change and tumultuous currents of revolution, Svita's fate intersected with that of Haji Ali Avaduri, a steadfast *peshmerga* in the ranks of the revered Mustafa Barzani. Their union was more than a marriage; it was a convergence of hearts and ideals, kindled by the fires of a shared commitment to a cause that would define their existence.

The *peshmerga*, legendary for their dedication to the Kurdish people's aspirations, became Svita's extended family. During the Second Barzan Revolution and the valiant defense of the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad, she bore witness to history's chapters unfurling before her eyes. Her husband's active participation in the Great September Revolution – and his sacrifices etched into the annals of courage – painted a vivid tableau of resilience and patriotism.

Yet shadows lurked within this mosaic of valor. The year 1983 cast a haunting veil over Svita's life as the brutal and devastating Anfal genocide decimated the ranks of the *peshmerga*. In a heart-wrenching twist of fate, she lost her beloved husband and son, their lives extinguished amidst a cam-



Svita Alexander

“The *peshmerga*, legendary for their dedication to the Kurdish people's aspirations, became Svita's extended family”

paigned of unimaginable cruelty. Through her grief, Svita's spirit endured, fortified by the same resolve that animated her husband and his comrades.

However, adversity took a different form as Svita found herself ensnared within the clutches of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime. Imprisoned in Baghdad for two anguishing years, her spirit remained unyielding, an unquenchable flame of determination that even the darkest dungeon could not extinguish. Emerging from her captivity, Svita's resolve burned brighter than ever, a testament to the power of love and the unbreakable bond between a mother and her homeland.

“I loved my husband, my children, and the comrades of Mustafa Barzani,” Svita's voice quivered with emotion as she recounted her arduous journey. The love that tethered her heart to Kurdistan transcended borders and barriers, propelling her triumphant return in 1988, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the magnetic pull of one's true home.

In her reflections on the quaint Awaduri village, Svita unveiled a portrait of dedication and courage. Her husband, a revolutionary teacher, nurtured young minds within the sheltering embrace of caves and mountains. His legacy, a testament to the *peshmerga*'s commitment to enlightenment, bore fruit in Svita's mastery of the Kurdish language, a poignant symbol of her devotion.

Svita embraced the language of Kurdistan, a tribute to her unrelenting commitment to the cause. “I served the *peshmerga* alongside other Kurdish mothers,” she declared with a resolute smile, casting a spotlight on the often unsung heroines of the struggle for liberation. Her personal narrative attests to the unity and shared strength that helped people

survive those tumultuous times.

Amidst the shadows of heartache, glimmers of hope and justice beckon. The return of the remains of Anfal victims and the trial of Saddam Hussein provide accountability and are milestones

by unwavering love, profound sacrifice, and unyielding loyalty, resonates as an anthem of hope and triumph. Her unbreakable spirit mirrors the steadfast commitment of the *peshmerga*, the vanguard of a nation's dreams.



Svita Alexander and Ali Avaduri in the early years of their marriage

on a journey of healing and reconciliation. Svita's heart brims with gratitude for the visionary leaders of Kurdistan, including Masoud Barzani, whose

Through her remarkable voyage, the world glimpses the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring love that binds a people to their sacred home-



The modest wedding ceremony of Svita and Ali celebrated among relatives and friends

steadfast dedication has birthed a new era for the land she now calls home. Svita Alexander's epic journey, marked

land. As Svita's story unfolds, the tapestry of history is forever enriched, weaving her legacy into the vibrant fabric of Kurdistan's narrative. ●

# HISTORY

## Jerwan Aqueduct Resurrecting a Lost Legacy

two million stones were painstakingly extracted from the surrounding mountains and meticulously arranged in a geometrical manner to ensure stability. The aqueduct stretches an impressive 280 meters in length and 22 meters in width and stands at height of 9 meters. While still in operation, the aqueduct's engineering ingenuity allowed it to collect water until it overflowed or was released through the thirteen floodgates, making it a reliable water source for the

ib. According to the translated cuneiform texts inscribed on the stones, King Sanharib intended to bring water from Khanis to the aqueduct's location to appease the Assyrian god Assur. The aqueduct's construction took 15 months of non-stop work, making it one of King Sanharib's most significant legacies.

pose. Subsequent visits by other foreign archeologists also yielded no definitive answers due to the dense forests that covered the area, hindering further investigations.

Later on in 1904, renowned English archeologist Leonard William King also visited the site. Despite dedicated efforts, he was also unable to fully unravel the aqueduct's story. It was not until 1913 that Professor Walter Bakhman of



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

An aerial view captures the remnants of the ancient Jerwan Aqueduct



Sardar Sattar

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

**D**eep in the heart of Kurdistan lies an extraordinary engineering marvel that has stood the test of time for over three millennia: the Jerwan Aqueduct. Considered one of the oldest aqueducts in the world, the Jerwan Aqueduct, located near Shekhan district in Duhok province, boasts a creative and ingenious architectural design that continues to intrigue historians and archeologists to this day. Built by the Assyrian King Sanharib over 3,000 years ago,

this ancient structure served not only as a vital water source but also as a testament to the power and grandeur of the Assyrian Empire.

### Unveiling the architectural wonder

The Jerwan Aqueduct's architectural design is nothing short of fascinating. In an era devoid of modern technology, approximately

capital city of the Assyrian Empire, Ninawa (also spelled as Nineveh), and the surrounding regions.

### King Sanharib's ambitious project

The historical significance of the Jerwan Aqueduct is deeply rooted in the ambition of its builder, King Sanhar-

### Lost and found: The rediscovery of Jerwan

The story of Jerwan remained shrouded in mystery for many years until foreign archeologists began to unveil its secrets. In 1845, the first recorded discovery of Jerwan occurred when British archeologist Austen Henry Layard encountered the site but could not ascertain its pur-

Germany, in collaboration with other foreign archeologists, began to conduct thorough investigations that ultimately revealed the architectural design and purpose of the Jerwan Aqueduct.

### The revelation of the inscribed stones

The inscribed stones at Jerwan serve as

valuable artifacts, revealing crucial information about the aqueduct's history and significance. The texts are classified into four groups — Text A, which contains remarks about King Sanharib's power and rule; Text B, which describes the construction of the aqueduct; and Texts C and D, which both praise King Sanharib for building the aqueduct and how Asur god assisted him in realizing this ambitious project.

### Jerwan's legacy and decline

Jerwan Aqueduct's historical importance extends beyond its role as a water source for the Assyrian capital. The aqueduct served numerous areas and villages, providing them with life-sustaining water. Today, Jerwan's rich

history lies almost forgotten, and its once-prosperous surroundings have transformed into a deserted and dry wasteland. Unfortunately, many stones from the aqueduct were taken by locals to build houses and fences, further eroding its historical legacy.



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

■ Cuneiform inscription on Jerwan Aqueduct Stones

### Preserving ancient heritage

As we are amazed by the architectural wonder of the Jerwan Aqueduct, it serves as a reminder of the need to protect and preserve our ancient heritage. Urgent action is required to prevent further degradation of this remarkable site and raise awareness about its historical significance. The responsibility lies with both the government and local communities to safeguard this precious piece of history.

The Jerwan Aqueduct stands as a testament to the ingenuity and engineering prowess of ancient civilizations. With its rich history dating back thousands of years, this architectural marvel holds a wealth of knowledge waiting to be explored. As we uncover the secrets of our past, we should also strive to protect and cherish these invaluable sites of our heritage, ensuring that future generations can marvel at the wonders of our ancient ancestors and learn from the lessons of history. ●

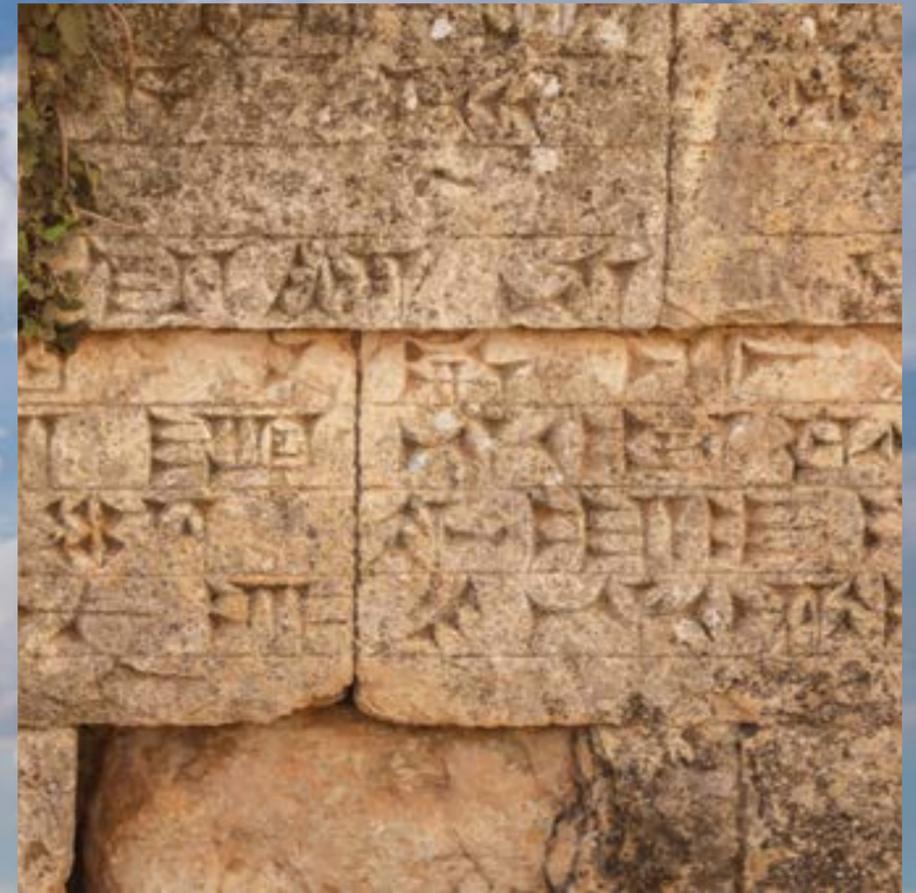


Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

■ Cuneiform inscription on Jerwan Aqueduct Stones



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

## The Role of Kurdistan in Shaping the Silk Road

*The Silk Road was a historic trade network connecting civilizations from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Its origin in China around 3,000 BC was marked by the prized commodity of silk, which initiated early trade dealings. The route played a crucial role in economic, social, and cultural development in the regions it traversed.*

*The World Customs Organization holds annual international congresses in countries situated along the Silk Road, with the Kurdistan Region actively participating. The region's strategic location as a trade hub has facilitated customs practices, supporting both land and air trade. The article emphasizes the importance of preserving the Silk Road's legacy in Kurdistan, as it continues to shape the region's economic, social, and cultural landscape.*



**Abdulqadir Abdulla**

*Abdulqadir Abdulla is currently Deputy Head of Customs, bringing with him 25 years of expertise in the realms of international taxation and customs operations.*

### The Significance of Customs in Shaping the Silk Road

The art of silk production began in China, and its popularity quickly spread westward to eastern Europe. The Silk Road earned its name in 1877 from the renowned German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, owing to silk's dominance in the trade between China and other regions. Despite attempts to rename it, the allure and splendor of silk prevailed, firmly establishing the Silk Road's identity.

The Silk Road had a profound economic impact on the regions it traversed. It brought prosperity to the areas along its path, leading to the construction of dwellings, the provision of services, and the establishment of a thriving trading system.

Beyond economics, the Silk Road played a crucial role in societal integration. It served as a meeting point for people and merchants from diverse countries, fostering social bonds and facilitating bargaining and interactions.

Cultural exchange along the Silk Road was also significant. Artworks, crafts, paintings, music, and knowledge of various cultures

were shared, creating a rich tapestry of cultural heritage that transcended borders.

Religious dissemination was another consequence of the Silk Road's existence. It facilitated the spread of religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism to new territories, contributing to the religious diversity and syncretism along its path.

Moreover, the Silk Road promoted industrial advancement. Local products from different countries were exchanged, leading to the transfer of knowledge on production methods and contributing to industrial progress.

Tourism also experienced growth due to the Silk Road. People from participating countries had the opportunity to explore the beauty and cultures of other nations, making tourism an integral part of the Silk Road's legacy.

Agricultural expansion was facilitated by the exchange of agricultural techniques and seeds, which promoted agricultural development and introduced new products to different regions along the route.

# SILK ROAD



## Routes of the Silk Road

The Silk Road encompassed two primary routes:

- The Land Road: Divided into a northern road used in the summer and a southern road employed in winter, these routes were the most trafficked and formed the basis for the Silk Road's profound historical legacy.

- The Sea Road: Established during the Han Dynasty (140-87 BC) of China, this route revolutionized trade between China and Rome, linking India, southern Asia, northern Africa, and the Red Sea.

## Customs and the Silk Road

The World Customs Organization (WCO) holds annual international congresses in countries situated along the Silk Road. Kurdistan, an essential part of the Silk Road, has actively participated in these congresses. Despite efforts to divert the route from the region, the Kurdistan land has maintained dynamic customs practices, facilitating both land and air trade.

## Enhancing the Silk Road's potential in the Kurdistan Region

The Silk Road held immense significance for Kurdistan, playing a vital role as a trade route and cultural bridge that greatly influenced the region's economic, social, and cultural development. Let's explore the key aspects that highlight the importance of the Silk Road in Kurdistan.

**Economic prosperity:** Being part of the Silk Road exposed Kurdistan to flourishing trade activities between the East and West. This led to the growth of commercial centers and markets, creating economic opportunities and prosperity for the region's inhabitants.

**Trade hub:** Kurdistan's strategic location along the Silk Road positioned it as a crucial trade hub, facilitating the exchange of goods, commodities, and ideas between different civilizations.

The region's position as a crossroads of trade routes allowed it to benefit from the flow of goods and diverse cultures passing through its territory.

**Cultural exchange:** The Silk Road served as a platform for extensive cultural interactions. Kurdistan became a melting pot of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions as merchants, travelers, and scholars from various regions traversed the route. This cultural exchange left behind a rich tapestry of heritage that continues to shape Kurdistan's identity.

**Spread of knowledge:** The Silk Road acted as a conduit for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and innovations. Through interactions with foreign traders and travelers, people in Kurdistan gained insights into advancements in fields such as art, science, and technology.

**Urban development:** The flourishing trade along the Silk Road spurred the development of towns and cities in Kurdistan. These urban centers became important stopovers for traders, further enhancing economic activities and cultural interactions.

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The Silk Road held immense significance for Kurdistan, playing a vital role as a trade route and cultural bridge that greatly influenced the region's economic, social, and cultural development  
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**Diplomatic relations:** Trade and travel on the Silk Road fostered diplomatic relations between different regions and empires. Kurdistan played a role in facilitating peaceful interactions and alli-



ances between neighboring nations.

**Art and architecture:** The Silk Road brought together artists, architects, and craftsmen from diverse cultures. This artistic fusion influenced Kurdistan's architectural styles, art forms, and craftsmanship, leaving a lasting impact on its cultural heritage.

**Technological transfer:** The Silk Road facilitated the transfer of technologies and innovations between regions. Kurdistan, as part of this vast network, gained access to advancements in agriculture, manufacturing, and other industries, leading to improvements in local production.

**Social and educational exchange:** The diverse influx of people along the Silk Road encouraged social and educational exchanges. Educational institutions and centers of learning in Kurdistan benefited from exposure to various ideas and knowledge systems.

**Legacy and identity:** The historical significance of the Silk Road in Kurdistan contributes to the region's sense of identity and pride. Memories of the Silk Road's vibrant past continue to res-



onate in local traditions, folklore, and cultural practices.

In summary, the Silk Road played a pivotal role in shaping Kurdistan's economic, social, and cultural landscape. It fostered exchange, cooperation, and

growth between civilizations, leaving an indelible mark on Kurdistan's history and identity.

The Silk Road's legacy is undeniable – it promoted economic ties, cultural exchange, and social interaction and

facilitated the development of nations. Erbil in particular emerged as a prominent station along this historic route. By preserving and enhancing the Silk Road's legacy, regions can continue to benefit from its historical significance and foster international cooperation. ●

## Klitschko's Inspiring Visit to Kurdistan

Kurdistan Chronicle

Long before he indulged his passion for human rights advocacy, Wladimir Klitschko was already a global boxing sensation. In 2011, he made a memorable visit to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) that, despite the many years since then, it still worth revisiting in light of his current role in peace advocacy in Ukraine.

### From boxing ring to the frontline

Born in 1976, Wladimir Klitschko is a prominent former professional boxer from Ukraine who competed from 1996 to 2017, leaving an indelible mark on the sport's international



Wladimir Klitschko presents a signed boxing glove as a gesture of goodwill to President Masoud Barzani.



From left: Saadi Barwari, Wladimir Klitschko, Aleksandr Onyshenko, Salib Sarwar Pedawi, Sarwar Pedawi



■ Sarwar Pedawi and Vitali Klitschko meeting at the World Economic Forum, Davos.

arenas. He held the world heavyweight championship twice and collected a number of titles, including the unified WBA (Super), IBF, WBO, IBO, and Ring magazine titles. Klitschko's boxing prowess was unparalleled.

Known for his exceptional knockout power, he wielded a formidable arsenal, featuring a strong jab, straight right hand, and left hook. His quick hand speed, combined with remarkable footwork and mobility, defied the norm for heavyweight boxers.

While he faced setbacks in his early years, he transformed under the supervision of legendary trainer Emanuel Steward, transitioning from an aggressive puncher to a defensively adept boxer. Alongside his brother Vitali Klitschko, he dominated the heavyweight division during the "Klitschko Era" from 2004 to 2015.

His fights commanded a massive global TV audience and his legacy includes records for the longest cumulative heavyweight title reign and the most fighters beaten for the world heavyweight championship. Inducted into the Internation-

al Boxing Hall of Fame in 2021, Klitschko's impact on the sport remains legendary.

Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, Wladimir Klitschko joined the Kyiv Territorial Defense Brigade, a military reserve component of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Both he and his brother, who has been Mayor of Kyiv since 2014, pledged to fight to protect the capital of Ukraine. Meanwhile, they took advantage of their fame and influence to raise funds for the defense lines and advocate international military support for their country.

### The visit to Kurdistan

On October 20, 2011, Wladimir Klitschko arrived in Erbil on a private jet. His visit was organized by prominent Kurdish figure Sarwar Pedawi. During the visit, Klitschko met with President Masoud Barzani and Masrour Barzani, the incumbent prime minister of the KRI who then served as the chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council.



■ Wladimir Klitschko meeting with PM Masrour Barzani, then serving as Chancellor of Kurdistan Region Security Council.

The official Facebook page of the Klitschko brothers confirmed Wladimir's visit to Kurdistan in a statement featuring his photograph next to President Masoud Barzani: "In the capital Erbil, Klitschko met president Masoud Barzani. Different topics regarding economy, politics and sports were discussed. During the visit hostilities with the Turkish army were discussed. He expressed his regret and hope that the conflict would be solved diplomatically in the future," the online statement read.

Saadi Barwari told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the Ukrainian champion's first impression of the Kurdistan Region was uplifting as he did not expect his destination to be a safe region with a fairly developed society.

Klitschko sympathized with the Kurds for the difficulties they have experienced throughout history. Despite his wild spirit in the boxing ring, he has

been involved in international charity campaigns since 2002, when he was named UNESCO Champion for Sport. He is among only 15 living athletes that have received this title.



During his meeting with President Barzani, as recalled by Sarwar Pedawi, the Kurdish leader touched upon the historic relations between Kurds and

Ukrainians in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In the days following the fall of the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad, hundreds of fighters joined Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani in relocating to the former Soviet Union. Some Kurdish fighters settled in today's Ukraine and studied, worked, and even married there. This long history, and the fact that there are people in the Kurdistan Region who carry Kurdish-Ukrainian blood in their veins surprised Klitschko. He praised the resilient Kurdish spirit, something that he channels today in his military life.

In Wladimir Klitschko we find a remarkable blend of strength and compassion. His visit to the Kurdistan Region both revealed his appreciation for the region's resilience and foreshadowed his unwavering commitment to humanitarian efforts on a global scale. ●

## Kurdistan's Storks in 'Peril'



**Sevda Kaplan**

*Sevda Kaplan is a Dicle University Physical Education graduate who has been a journalist since 1993. With a background in presenting and TV reporting, she notably held a six-year term as vice president of the Journalists Association. Alongside her ongoing journalism career, she has authored two novels in the Kurdish language.*

Every year, the remarkable journey of storks from Africa to Diyarbakir in Turkey captivates onlookers. These majestic birds, symbols of fertility and new beginnings, migrate thousands of miles to the Tigris Valley, seeking respite from the African heat. However, these awe-inspiring animals are under threat as a result of an increasingly harsh environment brought on by drought and extreme heat.

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Dicle University in Diyarbakir has sounded the alarm, with Associate Professor Alaettin Kaya revealing the perilous situation these avian travelers face. "The water available to the birds has decreased due to the use of water resources for agricultural irrigation. Thirst and heat have adversely affected them," Dr. Kaya explained.

### Environmental challenges

The consequences of these environmental changes are profound, impacting not only the adult storks but also the vulnerable chicks.

Diyarbakir, a pivotal stop on the storks' migratory path, has witnessed the dramatic effects of climate change on these magnificent creatures. The storks, which usually spend the winter months in Africa before making

their way to the Tigris Valley in spring, have encountered a new reality this year. The region's extreme heat – with temperatures exceeding 40°C – coupled with dwindling water resources, has intensified the challenges faced by these migratory birds.

Dr. Kaya, who is leading the charge to protect these birds, emphasizes that the lack of water resources and scorching temperatures have created an arduous environment for the storks. He further highlights that this distressing situation is particularly detrimental to the growth and well-being of stork chicks. This year alone, nine out of every 20 storks have required treatment and rehabilitation before being released back into their natural habitats. The dwindling water resources and decreased rainfall not only hinder their ability to find sustenance but also impede their preparations for migration.

Stork chicks, who rely on abundant food sources to build strength for their upcoming journey, now face hardships that previously did not exist. The stressors of drought and heat compromise their health, rendering them weak and susceptible to illness.

### Ongoing efforts to help

The Dicle Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center plays a pivotal role in nursing sick storks and other wildlife back to health.

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Diyarbakir, a pivotal stop on the storks' migratory path

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Photo: Sabr Dri

This center has become a sanctuary for various wild bird species that require medical attention.

Unfortunately, the storks' struggles are exacerbated by human activities. The use of water reservoirs for agricultural irrigation has unintentionally reduced the availability of water resources critical to their survival. As the storks rest in the Tigris Valley during their migration, the increasing scarcity of water there also jeopardizes their well-being. The situation is dire, and the call for action echoes loudly. The conservationists and experts at the Dicle Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center are working tirelessly to provide essential care, including vital vitamin support, injury treatment, and rehabilitation. Their mission is clear: nurse these magnificent birds back to health and release them into a world that should ideally be

more conducive to their survival.

Dr. Kaya has a plea for the local community and beyond: "we ask our citizens to be a little more sensitive in this aspect. A collective effort is needed to mitigate the impact of climate change on these incredible creatures. The survival of the storks is intertwined with the health of our ecosystems, and it is

within our power to make a difference."

These storks have come to symbolize resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. As communities come together to raise awareness, support conservation efforts, and address climate change, there is hope that these remarkable migratory birds will continue to grace the skies of Diyarbakir and inspire future generations. ●



*The building of Dicle Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center in Diyarbakir*

## ZeroWaste Kurdistan



Saya Badrkhan

Saya Badrkhan is a researcher and volunteer at ZeroWaste. She has dedicated the past few years to both actively working on and advocating for global warming issues.



Avin's passion for the environment began in her early childhood with her admiration for the region's spectacular natural heritage and its stunning mountainous landscapes, especially in her ancestral village in the Barzan area. Her concerns about the environment came to a head when she established the ZeroWaste Kurdistan project in 2021.

### Creating a sustainable future

ZeroWaste Kurdistan aims to encourage, prompt, and create a caring community appreciative of KRI's nature. Avin's dream is to create a sustainable future for the KRI, so that the region's inhabitants can enjoy its breathtaking nature for generations to come. As a young Kurdish woman, she believes that the best way to serve her community and inspire positive change is through environmental advocacy.

Along with her fellow activists at Ze-

“ZeroWaste Kurdistan aims to encourage, prompt, and create a caring community appreciative of KRI's nature

”

“My main aim is to inspire Generation Z to take the environment seriously!”

Avin Sherwani, at only 23 years old, is a dedicated environmental and climate justice activist. Currently enrolled in a master's program at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH), she is also an alumna of the Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program. Most importantly, she stands out as the founder of the ZeroWaste Kurdistan project, an organization devoted to raising awareness and inspiring action among the youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) on the current global environmental crisis and climate change. Meanwhile, her academic background as a petroleum engineer has landed her a job as sales and marketing coordinator at KurdNeft, a retail fuel company in the KRI.

“Recycling can eventually become the norm, with a little guidance

”

roWaste Kurdistan, Avin has already embarked on several remarkable group activities such as planting trees, organizing cleanups, and creating educational campaigns. The group has also placed several themed bins in public places to encourage the practice of recycling, which has yet to become a habit in Kurdistan. “Recycling can eventually become the norm, with a little guidance,” Avin said.



Head of ZeroWaste Kurdistan project (Avin Sherwani) thanking former US Consul General Robert J. Palladino after a hard day's work helping clean-up and dispose of rubbish in the areas surrounding the Erbil's Martyrs Monument.

“

In order to build a society that cares, it is absolutely essential we focus on the youth, especially primary school pupils

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To this end, Avin and her co-activists have conducted a number of seminars at academic institutions in the KRI, namely UKH and Tishk International University in Erbil. One of the highlights of her activism was a joint project with the U.S. Consulate and American Corner in Erbil last year. U.S. Consul General Robert J. Palladino and many other U.S. diplomats stationed in Erbil participated in a cleanup effort together with volunteers from ZeroWaste Kurdistan. The project received nationwide recognition. “This support gave a massive boost to our fledgling organization, raising its profile and highlight-



Former U.S. Consul General Robert J. Palladino and Avin Sherwani hard at work on the clean-up operation.



ZeroWaste Kurdistan team members and US diplomats showing off their hard work after the clean-up campaign.

ing the noble cause behind it,” Avin stressed.

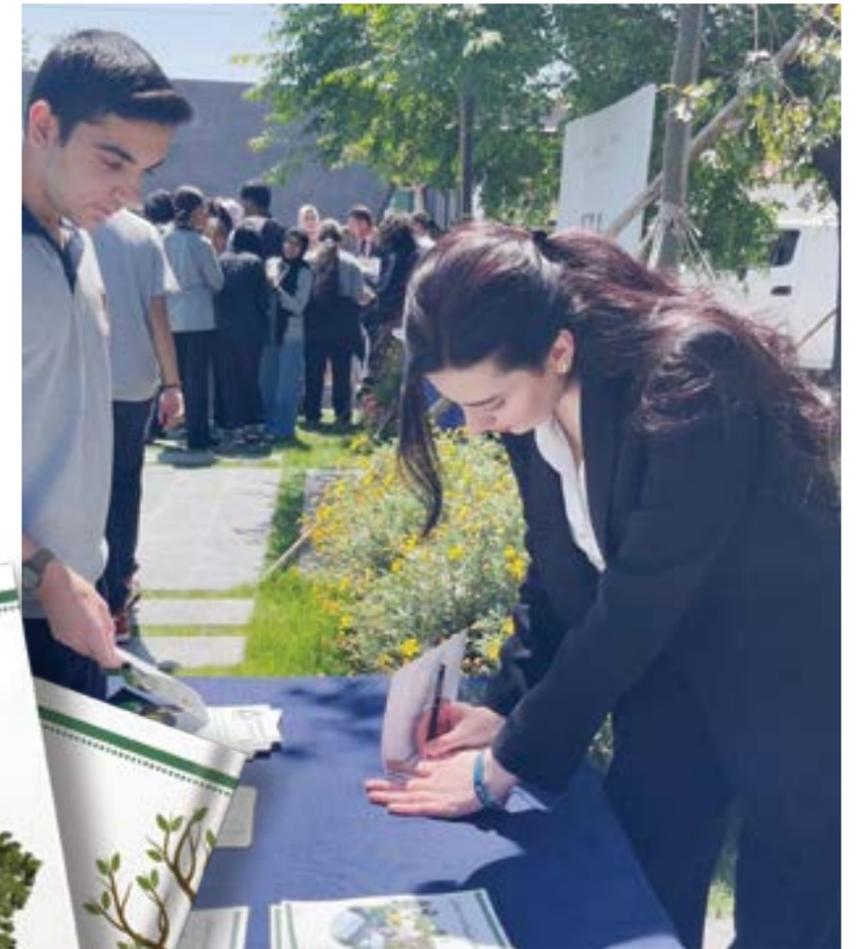
### Forging community

These kinds of initiatives serve to motivate Generation Z to appreciate and protect the nature that surrounds them. Avin is overwhelmingly optimistic about the way her organization is advancing and maintains that “so far, everyone who has heard of ZeroWaste wants to be part of it.”

The organization has an active volunteer base of 30 members – a number that is rising. Avin stressed that the volunteers enjoy the visible changes that they make to their homeland, as well as the



collaborative nature of their work and the resulting spirit of comradery. “They also get many perks from this work,” she added. In addition to making new lifelong friends with a group of like-minded individuals, they were all awarded certificates of recognition by the U.S. Consulate in Erbil.



### Reaching Generation Z

One of ZeroWaste Kurdistan’s major achievements was the publication and distribution of a Kurdish-language children’s storybook titled *Forest Adventures*, which aims to help enlighten Kurdistan’s future generations about the environment. This interactive story follows two friends who are concerned about their local forest being destroyed by a major industrial plant. Beautifully written and inspirational, *Forest Adventures* encourages children to think about ways to protect their local environment.

Avin’s main focus in her climate activism is to change the mentality of Generation Z because they are the future of the KRI. She wants them to be confident in a bright future for their home-

land. “There does not have to be a particular reason to plant a tree anywhere in Kurdistan,” she said. “The very fact that they live here should make them want to do so anyway.”

“In order to build a society that cares, it is absolutely essential we focus on the youth, especially primary school pupils, because they are impressionable and easily influenced when a positive effort is made,” she said. “If we are able to make them embrace a climate-conscious mindset – which I am confident we can – then we will be able to build a very beautiful future for Kurdistan.”

Avin underscored that ZeroWaste Kurdistan aims to make environmentalism fun and pleasant for everyone by giving vibrant and lively seminars to raise awareness, as well as organizing therapeutic activities like planting trees and painting murals in public places. ●

## Overcoming the Legacy of Landmines



**Mohammad Dargalayi**

*Mohammad Dargalayi is a journalist and photographer with 13 years of experience. He is a member of IFJ Global.*



“ Kurdistan, a picturesque expanse of land straddling Iran and Iraq, witnessed extensive military activity during the war ”

As the world reflects on the history of conflict and its toll on societies, it is imperative to acknowledge the sacrifices made by the Kurdish population in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. Thirty-five years since the ceasefire between the two nations, the Kurdish people are still grappling with the devastating consequences of a war that wreaked havoc on their lands and lives.

The eight-year war, spanning from September 22, 1980, to August 16, 1988, stands as one of the 20th century's longest, bloodiest, and most economically damaging conflicts. With a staggering

death toll of around 1.1 million, the war left an indelible mark on both nations. While much attention has been devoted to the widespread destruction caused by this conflict, what often goes unnoticed is the immense toll it exacted on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

Kurdistan, a picturesque expanse of land straddling Iran and Iraq, witnessed extensive military activity during the war, leading to the displacement, death, and disappearance of countless Kurds and leaving a scar that continues to haunt the region today. Iraq's strategic use of mines further deepened the misery of the Kurdish population, with

minefields becoming grim reminders of the region's turbulent past.

### The Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency

In a candid interview with Ali Miran, the Director General of the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA), startling facts emerged regarding the ongoing challenges faced by the Kurds. Miran outlined the agency's history, explaining that it was formed in 2004 by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to address the aftermath of the war. The IKMAA contains various de-

partments responsible for mine clearance, war waste destruction, awareness campaigns, quality assurance, and mechanical projects.

The extent of landmine contamination in the KRI is nothing short of alarming. Miran explained that landmine placement occurred across four distinct stages: first, the Iraqi regime's military activities against Kurdish liberation efforts in the 1960s; second, the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s; third, the Gulf Wars in 1990-1991 and 2003; and finally, the fight against ISIS in 2014. Shockingly, a staggering 776 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) of the KRI remain riddled with mines and explosive remnants.

The Landmine Impact Survey conducted from 2004 to 2006 by Landmine Impact survey (ILIS) by UNMAS and VVAF revealed the bleak reality of the region's landmine contamination. Out of the estimated 776 km<sup>2</sup>, a mere 258 km<sup>2</sup> have been cleared since the inception of mine removal in 1992. While international organizations initially played a pivotal role in mine clearance, their efforts have waned due to the KRI's financial crisis and other global conflicts.

## International collaboration

Two organizations, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and the Fondation Suisse de Déminage (FSD), continue to work in Duhok, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Mosul, albeit with reduced activity. To alleviate the burden on the KRG, in 2022 the IKMAA signed a memorandum of understanding with the ITF

Enhancing Human Security (ITF), a Slovenian organization, boosting its operational capacity and promising accelerated clearance.

The slow progress has had ramifications beyond delayed rehabilitation. The Ottawa Convention, effective since February 2008, initially mandated the clearance of Iraq and the KRI within a decade. Yet, due to financial constraints, the timeline was extended to 2028, underscoring the complexities of mine clearance in a region grappling with multifaceted challenges.

Among these challenges, Miran highlighted the absence of minefield maps left by the former Iraqi regime after 2003, and the geographical impediments posed by the predominantly mountainous terrain. The region's cold climate

mate further restricts clearance efforts, while the lifespan of mines remains alarmingly uncertain, often extending beyond 50 years. The mines themselves include the perilous Valmara, VS50, PMN, and POMZ, each holding the potential to claim innocent lives.

Areas heavily affected by mines include the border zones with Iran,



encompassing Penjwen, Sharbazher, Choman, Sidakan, and Haji Omeran. Over the years, more than 100,000 mines have been successfully cleared, a feat that has saved countless lives. Approximately 60% of the KRI's territory, amounting to 518 km<sup>2</sup>, has been liberated from the grip of mines.

## Raising awareness

The haunting statistics of mine victims further underscore the urgency of comprehensive clearance efforts. With over 13,580 victims claimed by landmines – and a heart-wrenching 31 lives lost in the past year alone – the urgency of this endeavor becomes palpable. These victims, largely civilians, bear witness to the ongoing toll of a war that ended decades ago.

Raising awareness is paramount in mitigating further tragedies. Alongside manual mine-clearance teams, awareness units actively educate communities about the dangers of mines. Their efforts span from distributing educational materials in schools to delivering public awareness campaigns via social media. A hotline empowers citizens to report mine-related concerns, ensuring rapid response from dedicated teams.

In light of these challenges, the IKMAA is forging ahead with renewed determination. Plans include enhanced collaboration with international organizations, leveraging modern technologies such as drones and innovative tools like the Dragon anti-landmine system. This promising advancement utilizes heat to neutralize mines, sidestepping the need for detonation.

The KRI's resilience shines through in the face of adversity. As this region continues to rise above the remnants of war, it holds a steadfast hope for a future free from the shadow of mines – a future where its picturesque landscapes are once again a haven of safety and prosperity. ●



## Different Model of Education in Erbil



Robin Howe

*Dr. Robin Howe is an international Montessori consultant with the Montessori Foundation, a nonprofit corporation based in Florida, United States. Dr. Howe works with Montessori school leaders worldwide and holds Montessori credentials at the primary, elementary, and secondary levels*

Having spent the last four decades predominantly in the United States, like many Westerners I understood little about the Middle East. My education and travels spanned Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe, but for a long time this region remained an enigma.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was in the summer of 2018, when I was asked to observe the International Montessori School of Erbil as a consultant for the Montessori Foundation. I arrived with a limited understanding and a mild apprehension fed by tales of regional challenges. But I was met by a people brimming with warmth and



Dr. Robin Howe alongside teachers and staff of the International Montessori School in Erbil

As the digital age blossomed, giving me instant access to videos and photos from every corner of the globe, my ideas about the region changed – but I now recognize how these ideas diverged from the reality I would later experience.

My first encounter with Erbil and the

pride in their culture and city who were eager to share their heritage with me.

Visiting Erbil, the capital of the KRI, fundamentally reshaped my understanding of this part of the world. I discovered that Erbil and the KRI boast one of humanity's richest cultures. Anchoring this ancient city is

the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Erbil Citadel – one of the oldest continuously occupied spaces in the history of humankind. Yet Erbil is more than a repository of historical riches; it is a city of warmth, compassion, and comfort, pulsating with a vibrant economy and boundless opportunities.

The Montessori Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in the United States that was founded in 1992 to support Montessori schools and their leaders worldwide. Its mission is to help Montessori educators and schools serve students throughout the world using the Montessori Method.

The Montessori Method is a non-traditional model of education inspired by Dr. Maria Montessori and is one of the world's most significant independent models of education. While entire books have been written about Montessori, here are a few distinguishing characteristics. Montessori is a child-centered approach designed around the idea that children are naturally intelligent, regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic position, and that the role of education is to provide an opportunity for children to realize their potential. A Montessori education addresses the whole child, including their academic and socio-emotional needs, and empowers them to be confident leaders, even as young children.

The International Montessori School of Erbil asked the Montessori Foundation to help bring this methodology to the KRI. Over the course of the last four years, the Montessori Foundation has worked with the proprietors, investors, students, faculty, and parents to help this school develop into a replicable model that can help transform how education is perceived, not only in Erbil or the KRI, but in the entire region. Once in Erbil I was surprised by the interest and openness of the faculty and administrators to try something that had never really been attempted. Since 1992 we have worked together to support the school in implementing more characteristics of the Montessori Method. As I grew accustomed to the culture and the city, I became more enamored and impressed by what the KRI has to offer.



Dr. Robin Howe in front of a recently revitalized building inside the historic Citadel of Erbil

Over the years I have amassed a bouquet of experiences that form my profound appreciation for all that makes Erbil special. The restaurant scene ranges from high-end eateries to rustic spots in the bazaar, where I have savored tea and freshly butchered lamb cooked right in front of me. I have relished home-cooked meals with local families, sitting on the floor on lazy Saturday afternoons, surrounded by platters of meat, rice, fruit, and cups of the inevitable tea.

These experiences share a common thread: the genuine warmth of the people and the comfort of shared meals. Although this may seem minor to some, it is a profound hallmark of the region's culture, an element of hospitality that is exceptionally heartwarming, even when compared to my experiences worldwide, including in my home country.

As an educator, I have always been fascinated by the dichotomy between nomadic and sedentary cultures. With its rich and ancient history, the KRI offers unique insights into this dichotomy. Aside from being the center of Erbil and the reference point for all roads, the Citadel is a city layered upon cities, offering a snapshot of human history. I have been lucky to visit this site with local friends, their narratives enhancing its historical grandeur.

My journeys to Erbil, including during the Covid-19 pandemic, have allowed me to venture into more remote areas of the KRI. I had the chance to travel to the resort town of Soran and the holy site of Lalish, sacred to the Yezidi people.

Each return to Erbil brings fresh astonishment as I witness the city's rapid evolution. The ubiquitous construction cranes and tantalizing 'coming soon' signs testify to a city in the midst of growth, attracting others who recognize its potential.

Erbil holds a special place in my heart. Even without mastery of Kurdish or Arabic, I relish strolling its streets and visiting small shops, luxurious hotels, movie theaters, and parks.

Between my experiences as a visitor and having the opportunity to be part of such an important project of bringing a non-traditional and progressive educational system to this part of the world, Erbil has completely transformed my perceptions of the Middle East. As a visitor, I deeply respect this city, its welcoming people, and its unique experiences. It is a place I look forward to exploring for many years to come. ●



Dr. Robin Howe among his students at the International Montessori School in Erbil



Dr. Robin Howe next to a Yezidi leader at the holy temple of Lalish, Duhok, Kurdistan Region

## Send Money Worldwide, Instantly! Powered Visa Direct Via FIB

### The Global Money Transfer Solution

Visa Direct is a global real-time money transfer network for individuals between accounts, and between friends and family domestically and globally it's used to transfer money globally. Visa Direct serves as an expansive real-time money transfer network, filling the money transfer gap between individuals, friends, and families across both domestic and international places. Functioning as a rapid and secure means of global fund transfer, it revolutionizes the traditional approach by allowing bank accounts to seamlessly push money from one institution to another. This push-based system expedites transactions by synchronizing payment instructions and monetary transfer in one streamlined process. Visa Direct is a global network of country-to-country money transfers with the fastest and safest way to send money within your accounts and instead of pulling money from an account to be deposited into another, Visa Direct enables bank accounts to push money from one bank to another. These push payments can be facilitated more quickly as the sender sends both payment instructions and money at the same time. In addition to its efficiency, Visa Direct brings a touch of innovation by discarding outdated money transfer norms. This creative approach not only simplifies the process but also saves valuable time for users. Furthermore, Visa Direct ensures the safety of funds, instilling users with unwavering confidence through robust security measures. Visa Direct allows consumers and merchants to instantly send money directly through Visa Direct.

- Its global : it reduces access to points around the world and brings all the countries closer together to facilitate the remittance process
- its fast : it's a one-stop shop for connecting to global networks in the easiest and simplest way.
- It's creative: by removing the old ways of sending money and offering you an easier, faster and more innovative way and saving more time for our users.
- its safe : it gives our users complete assurance and confidence in the safety of their money

With lower costs and without any Visa Direct security risks. Sending money All the work is done through the FIB application. Lowering costs and mitigating Visa Direct security risks, this service operates seamlessly through the FIB application. The user-friendly interface enables hassle-free international money transfer, often completed within

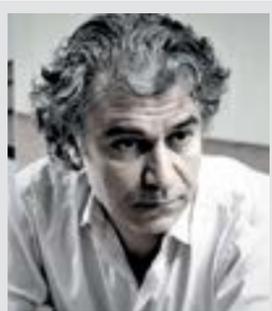


24 hour, This includes most of the countries in the world, especially that this service is used with and only in a few countries this service is not available, including: -Iraq -Syria -Russia -Iran -Afghanistan -South Africa -The United States -Qatar -Canada -Brazil -Argentina -Bangladesh -Egypt -Chile - Colombia - Mexico

In summary, Visa Direct delves into the intricacies of this global financial solution, emphasizing its role in revolutionizing money transfers and fostering greater financial connectivity worldwide.



## Tolerance in the Poetry of Ahmad Khani



Jan Dost

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

Ahmad Khani (1650-1709), a prominent seventeenth-century Kurdish classic poet, intellectual, scholar, and mystic, was born and passed away in Dogubeyazit near the current border of Iran and Turkey.

Khani played an enlightening role and is considered the founder of Kurdish nationalism, as his poetry called for unity, freedom, independence, and the need for a leader around whom the Kurds could rally to save themselves from the oppression of the Safavid and Ottoman Empires.

One of Khani's most important works, *Mem and Zin*, is considered the national epic of Kurds and includes more than 2,600 verses of Arabic poetic meters and prosody modified by non-Arab poets. It not only tells the timeless love story between the young Mem, an employee of the Kurdish Emirate of Bohtan, and the Kurdish Princess Zin, sister of the ruler of the emirate, but also presents a range of knowledge in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, and mysticism. In addition to penning a crucial epic in the history of Kurdish literature and one considered the gospel of Kurdish nationalism, Khani compiled a small dictionary to teach Kurdish children the Arabic language. He also developed educational curricula to teach poetry and the principles of the Islamic faith and a beautiful collection of poetry that covers topics varying from philosophy and mysticism to *ghazal*, which is a form of amatory poem or ode.

Perhaps the call to write in the national language is one of the most important objectives that made Khani distinctive in the history of Kurdish literature and made him the spiritual father of writing in the mother

tongue, especially through his wonderful introduction to *Mem and Zin*. Although Khani regards the languages of neighboring peoples as precious metals, like the gold and silver that people use and trade with, he also confirms that the Kurdish language can, at least, be copper and be valuable if used by a prince or ruler.

“In addition to penning a crucial epic in the history of Kurdish literature and one considered the gospel of Kurdish nationalism, Khani compiled a small dictionary to teach Kurdish children the Arabic language

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### Sufi literature

Another pivotal topic that caught my attention in Khani's poetry, which I have devoted myself to studying, and translating for many years, are the subjects of human tolerance, religion, and love as a supreme value.

Sufi literature is generally about tolerance, with Sufi discourse based on values and principles that promote tolerance and harmony among mankind without discrimination. Sufis, according to Ibn Arabi, accept the coexistence of all the religions, and even consider them multiple forms of a single existence. The church is the house of God, like the mosque, synagogue, and even the houses of pagan idols and Zoroastrian fire; according to the poets of Sufism, these are all houses of God. Based on this golden Sufi rule, which considers all religions to be divine and equal, Khani called for ending the torture of human beings including infidels with fire, as it is far from divine justice, and says:

*Even if we were disbelievers and disobedient, we would all hope for your mercy and forgiveness, O Lord.*

*And there is no one among the disbelievers and disobedient who is not one of the manifestations of your attributes and qualities.*

*We have become disbelievers because Subduer is one of your names, and because you are forgiving, we have become disobedient and commit sins.*

This idea (i.e., the fact that man's actions are manifestations of the eternal names of Allah) is what the Sufis, including Khani, started to reach – a state of acceptance of the other, regardless of their religion, sect, creed, or belief. Therefore, Allah cannot punish His servants for their actions as His mercy, compassion and forgiveness, always precede his punishment, and thus, human beings should not fight each other because of religious differences.

### A stream of tolerance

It is worth underscoring here that tolerance already exists among Kurdish societies and that Kurds do not accept religious extremism in any form or terrorism in the name of religion. Orientalists have referred to the tolerance in Kurdish society through the ways in which Kurdish women freely treat with foreigners without the burqa and women shake hands with a foreign man and sit in men's meetings and gatherings and provide them with food in the absence of a man to do so. This was pointed out by the Kurdish writer and translator Mullah Mahmud Bayazidi in his nineteenth-century book *Kurdish Customs and Traditions*, which he wrote it at the request of the Russian consul in Erzurum August Zappa 1801-

1894: “The Kurds never mistrust women and do not think to accuse their women of adultery and misdeeds, even if the women work, sit, talk, play and laugh with foreign men, or, if necessary, stay at the homes of strangers over the night.”

Therefore, with tolerance an inherent value of Kurdish society, we have seen it reflected in the works of Kurdish poets, foremost among them Ahmad Khani and his predecessor



An artist's rendition of Ahmad Khani, created by Kurdish artist Saadat Barzani

Malay Jaziri (1570-1640), who repeated the idea in many of his poems that love can be an alternative religion and that the Lalish Temple can represent the monastery, church, and other houses of worship.

The stream of tolerance brings together many poets in the



East like the great Persian poets Jalal al-Din Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and Ibn al-Farid to our classical Kurdish poets who praised tolerance, the unity of the human element, and the need to spread divine love instead of doctrines that can fight and cause bloodshed due to fanaticism and extremism, which are often promulgated by clerics and religious leaders.

Sufism came as a peaceful alternative to the violent laws of *sharia*, and Sufis took up this human stream and gathered around it, seeing no alternative.

### Tolerance for love

We have pointed out that the religious toler-



ance in Kurdish society led to the recognition of women's humanity and the acceptance of falling in love; hence, there have been many love stories and songs that honor and glorify love between a young man and a girl. There were widely known cases of two lovers fleeing from the strictures of family and resorting to a ruler, lord, or a senior cleric to protect love; these stories are still common in some Kurdish societies. In some cases, unfortunately, they ended with the killing of the girl to wash out the shame.

Khani talks about the love between a man and woman and sees it as a noble emotion that must be respected. We also note that he praises relationships

“  
 Khani talks about the love between a man and woman and sees it as a noble emotion that must be respected  
 ”



A statue of Ahmad Khani in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region

before marriage and allowing lovers to practice kissing away from the curious.

In *Mem and Zin*, the lovers do not have legitimate ties except the bond of love; they are neither engaged nor a couple, but Khani allows them to have sexual practices such as kissing, lip-sucking, whispering, touching, and joining each other as they did in one of the orchards of Princess Zin's brother palace and then at another stage in one of the lobbies of the Royal Palace.

We see that Khani tolerates it to certain limits, which he called the limits of foreplay, and has defined a red line for which the area of the range cannot be crossed. This means that he would not have allowed the two lovers to have intercourse, despite the marriage project they had hoped to achieve. He only allows the upper half of the body in the case of love and does not accept to descend below that, which is to protect love from impurity (in his expression of course).

One may wonder here how seriously Khani legalizes these erotic practices among lovers, and whether what he wrote was out of a purely literary motive or was this his doctrine of love, which must be made manifest by some physical contact and pleasure?

I think Khani, who tolerated many matters, was so bold that he absolved Iblis for the crime of not prostrating to Adam, and prayed, as we have read, that God would not torture any human beings, even disbelievers, so long as they believe in what he wrote in this domain as well. In this light, there is no objection to the matter if love and the consent of both parties are the basis of a sexual practice. ●

# MEDIA

## Kurdistan 24 Forging a Responsible Media Discourse

Photo: Mohammad Shwani



**Ahmed Al-Zawity**

*Ahmed Al-Zawity is a distinguished journalist and author from Kurdistan. He presently holds the position of Director General at Kurdistan 24 news channel and has previously dedicated two decades to serving as the head of the Al Jazeera office in Erbil.*

A little over a year ago, I took on the role of Director General at the Kurdistan 24 Media Foundation. I brought 24 years of experience in international media to this project and corporation, which I consider to be one of vital interest to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

Upon joining this project, I prioritized several things in my role, the most important of which was breaking the tradition that has afflicted the general Kurdish media discourse. I aim to make Kurdistan 24 different from the other Kurdish news channels, which have almost drowned in the negativity surrounding local affairs. Such discourse has produced a generation that almost does not believe in its national affiliation and has hindered the ongoing Kurdish struggle. Our foremost task is to restore a sense of national belonging to this generation, which is a daunting task. We face the obstacles of chaos and populism brought by the discourse of other Kurdish media channels, both on television and through social media.

As a news channel, we have reformulated our concept of the academic definition of the news, and focus on what benefits our audience and keeps them from developing a negative view towards what is happening. We set our vision and sights through what we cover and broadcast to convince our audience of the reality of where we are: surrounded by those who do not want the best for us but instead nurse grudges.

In so doing, we face two essential challenges. First, a large number of our competitors in the Kurdish media, including television and social media, are supported by local

and regional forces who yearn to harm this region, and sow chaos in it. Second, it is easy to instill in the public a negative view that is critical of reality, regardless of the dangers that such a view poses!

However, the virtues of what we seek should strengthen us, giving us the power to be patient and persistent until we achieve what we want.

We also disagree with our competitors that we, as a media corporation, want to change what exists and do not change according to what others want us to be. Rather, we will commit ourselves to what we are convinced is good for the Kurdish cause.

### Positive, realistic, and outward-focused

We also aim to support a responsible media discourse. Currently, media freedom is not the problem in the KRI. Rather, a sense of responsibility towards the media discourse is the problem! Most of the Kurdish media outlets advance a discourse that lacks a sense of responsibility.

We at Kurdistan 24 must show our viewers the reality of the situation that surrounds us and convince them that this reality is better than those of our neighbors. The problems facing us are present in other regions, but what differs is that we are not in a recognized state entity while our neighbors are. Thus, the consequences of negative news coverage do not affect them as much as they affect us.

Our other goal is to attract audiences to our television reports and the various so-



A view of the bustling newsroom at Kurdistan 24's headquarters in Erbil

cial media applications affiliated with our corporation and to earn positive reviews compared to other media organizations through polling and surveys.

We have a longer-term goal to address non-Kurds as well, thus breaking the Kurdish-centered discourse that per-

vades other Kurdish media companies. We need to know and learn about others, just as we need others to know who we are: our rights, our history, and the grievances of our cause.

Our media policy will be following the rule that, instead of cursing the dark-

ness, one should light a candle. We want to be a source of light amid the darkness that enshrouds the irresponsible media discourse that dominates the landscape in the KRI. If the journey begins with a single step, we want to start this journey down the thousand-mile path. ●



Behind the scenes of a news bulletin production at Kurdistan 24

Photo: Mohammad Shwani

Photo: Mohammad Shwani

## Voices of Kurdistan in Australia



**Shahin Bekir Sorekli**

*Shahin Bekir Sorekli, a Kurdish writer and journalist born in Kobani, Syria, now resides in Australia. Between 1982 and 1983, he hosted a weekly Kurdish-English program on 2SER FM Radio in Sydney. In 1984, he founded SBS Kurdish, starting with Radio 2EA, and served as Editing Producer/broadcaster until his retirement in 2015.*



In 1979, I had the privilege of meeting several Kurds, who were primarily from Turkey. Together we established Australia's inaugural Kurdish association, of which I served as the president and secretary for approximately six years.

My journey as a broadcaster commenced in 1982, when I contributed written pieces to a program broadcast in English on Sydney's 2 SER FM. This program was operated by Australians, including some with an Arabic background who were supportive of the Palestinian cause. Contributors included Caroline Graham, Therese Taylor, and Abdullah Moughrabi. Subsequently, I initiated a weekly community radio program that blended Kurdish and English, with invaluable support from both Australian and Kurdish friends. This program ran for around 18 months.

Our next goal was securing a slot on Radio 2 EA. Given the limited number of Kurdish speakers in the country and the opposition that some held toward Kurdish politics, we faced challenges. Nonetheless, we managed to secure a trial broadcasting period. Following Radio 2 EA's relocation to Bondi Junction in Sydney in 1988, the Kurdish Program's airtime expanded to 45 minutes per week. As Radio 2 EA evolved into the

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My journey as  
a broadcaster  
commenced in 1982

Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), establishing its radio and TV operations in Artarmon, North Sydney, the Kurdish program further extended to one hour per week and reached listeners in Melbourne and Wollongong.

### Growing SBS

My official title at SBS was Head of the Kurdish Language Program, and I acted as the coordinator, journalist, and broadcaster for the program during this phase. From May 2013 onward, the Kurdish Language Program expanded to a two-hour weekly slot, now reaching towns across Australia.

SBS has now established itself as a highly



A view of the control room at SBS Radio

regarded broadcasting entity within Australia, boasting a diverse range of radio and television programs. Its financial backing stems from federal government allocations and advertising revenue. With SBS broadcasting in more than 70 languages, the allotment of airtime is generally tied to the number of speakers of each language, as indicated by official census data conducted every five years. The 2011 Census recorded 4,985 Kurdish speakers in Australia, a number that increased to 6,185 in 2016 and nearly 10,000 in 2021.

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Despite its limited  
airtime, SBS Kurdish  
has managed to  
conduct over 1,000  
interviews over the past  
three decades

From 1984 until mid-2014, Chahin Baker led SBS Kurdish, with his involvement extending an additional two years following his retirement. Chahin juggled this role part-time alongside

his permanent position within the NSW Department of Education and Training. He received invaluable support from numerous individuals, including Kurdish correspondents across Europe, Turkey, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as members of Australia's Kurdish community.

Despite its limited airtime, SBS Kurdish has managed to conduct over 1,000 interviews over the past three decades, including conversations with prominent figures like Masoud Barzani, Jalal Talabani, Nechirvan Barzani, Abdulla Hesenzade, Abdullah Ocalan, Ibrahim Ahmad, Kemal Burkay, Hemreş Reşo, Hemid Derwish, Fuad Aliko, and many others. Interviews also extended to various politicians and intellectuals from major Kurdish parties and individuals from all corners of Kurdistan.

Notably, the program has featured non-Kurdish speakers as well, encompassing Australian representatives, Syrian and Iraqi ambassadors, and activists from non-governmental organizations engaged in Kurdish-related activities. Contributors and correspondents who have enriched the Kurdish Program include Hatice Kamer, Shehên Heme Nûrî, Ahmet Cantekin, Dilbixwîn Dara, Kameran Omer, Nûreddin Zengene, Siûd Kiliç, Canî Dilan, Rêbwar Fettah, Mihemed Sanrî, Ibrahim Seydo Aydogan, Hévidar Zana, and many more.

Following Chahin's retirement, Roza Germian and Mayada Kordy Khalil took over the program's helm. Presently, Mayada heads SBS Kurdish, delivering two broadcasts each week on Fridays and Sundays.

### Connecting Australia to the global Kurdish community

SBS Kurdish is a pioneer among Kurdish-language programs, operating independently of any specific political party affiliation. Its content caters to Kurdish speakers globally, encompassing matters pertinent to Australia and beyond. The program, presented in both Kurmanji and Sorani, encompasses news, current affairs, interviews, immigration-related discussions in Australia, as well as culture and language. This content is sourced from SBS's newsroom, international agencies, and Kurdish resources, maintaining a strict adherence to objectivity and journalistic professionalism.

Effectively acting as a bridge between Australia and the global Kurdish community, SBS Kurdish is accessible via live radio broadcasts and online streaming worldwide, with social media frequently leveraged to inform Kurdish speakers about the program's schedule and content. ●

# ART

## A Robe for Pope Francis



**Qassim Khidhir**

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



Photos: Safim Hamid

In the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) resides a remarkable artist whose creativity transcends borders. Shanaz Jamal, an artist, fashion designer, and advocate for recycling, has emerged as a local sensation and gained international recognition. Her journey has been defined by her dedication to preserving Kurdish heritage, promoting religious tolerance, and conveying powerful messages through her art and fashion.

Her artwork can be found in homes, cafes, and government buildings, including the White House. When top foreign officials and dignitaries visit the KRI, Kurdish officials gift them with Shanaz's artwork.

*Kurdistan Chronicle* recently met Shanaz in Sulaymaniyah to discuss her upcoming projects and her meeting with Pope Francis.

One pivotal moment that propelled Shanaz into the international spotlight came in 2019 when she met Pope Francis at the Vatican. The catalyst for this recognition was the making of a robe adorned with symbols representing the eight reli-

gions in the KRI: Islam, Christianity, Yezidism, Mandaeism, Yarsanism, Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í Faith, and Judaism.

intention of uniting their representatives within a mosque or a church and gifting them these artistic embodiments of unity. A friend's suggestion, however, reshaped this vision to combine the eight works and incorporate other Kurdish symbols into a single robe destined for Pope Francis.

It took Shanaz 19 months to finish the robe. Its back was embellished with 5,000 beads and precious stones, each representing a life lost in the tragic chemical attack in Halabja. On the front, 182,000 beads and stones represented the victims of the Saddam Hussein regime's genocidal atrocities against the Iraqi Kurdish population from 1983 to 1988.

In addition, the robe was elegantly embroidered with religious symbols such as the cross, the crescent, Zoroastrianism's winged emblem, the Star of David, and the sun and temples revered by the Yezidis. These collectively captured the Kurdish people's enduring spirit and unwavering faith despite relentless persecution.

Meeting Pope Francis was a dream for Shanaz. "I could not believe it when I received the invitation. I met his holiness and



Shanaz Jamal gifting her handmade robe to Pope Francis in Vatican (October 2019)

gions in the KRI: Islam, Christianity, Yezidism, Mandaeism, Yarsanism, Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í Faith, and Judaism.

Shanaz explained that her original plan was to create eight pieces of art representing all the faiths in the KRI, with the

put the robe around his shoulders; he was impressed by its beauty and all the symbols on the robe," she recalled.

Shanaz's artistic journey is deeply intertwined with her love for Kurdish culture. She draws inspiration from traditional

Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid

rugs, carpets, and clothing, aiming to transform them into artistic expressions that echo the rich heritage of her homeland. Her childhood memories of her mother sewing Kurdish women's attire and her grandmother crafting handmade *klash* – a kind of traditional footwear – from cotton and cowhide have left an indelible mark on her creative path.

“One pivotal moment that propelled Shanaz into the international spotlight came in 2019 when she met Pope Francis at the Vatican”

“Through my art and fashion pieces, I want to show the world that Kurdish

culture, its beautiful designs, the ability of Kurdish women, and the importance of religious coexistence in the Kurdistan Region,” she explained.

Shanaz believes she must act as a cultural ambassador of the KRI, stitching together stories of peace and diversity.

She also stated that she is currently working on a project to create art for several world leaders.

“There are some messages I'd like to convey to some world leaders, but I'd like to convey them through art,” she said, declining to specify what kind of art she intends to make or to which world leaders she will give them.

The project is in motion, and Shanaz hopes to travel soon to Europe to meet the first of the world leaders.

Meanwhile, she hopes one day to be able to open her permanent gallery in Kurdistan to the public.

“I want to establish an international Kurdish brand for clothing, women's accessories, and recycled arts made

from rugs and carpets embellished with precious stones and beads,” she said.

She also encourages the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to establish cultural centers within KRG representatives to familiarize the world with Kurdish cultures and arts and provide an opportunity for Kurdish designers to introduce their work to the world.

The KRG has 14 international offices – most notably in the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Iran – and none of them has a cultural center.

Besides working as artist, Shanaz spends her free time volunteering at prisons in the KRI to support inmates.

Shanaz donates some of the money that she earns to organize music concerts and film screenings inside prisons, as well as workshops teaching inmates how to make women's bags.

“I just want the inmates to see some of the good things that are going on outside the prison walls,” Shanaz said. ●

## Japanese *Kaizen* with Kurdish Resilience



**Shamal Abdulla**

*Shamal Abdulla is a journalist with 18 years of experience in the field. He has held a number of prestigious positions, including news director at Kurdistan 24 and the editor-in-chief of BasNews.*



As we entered the meeting room, two well-dressed gentlemen warmly welcomed us and offered us seats at a neat table. We were at the Erbil office of Toyota Iraq Company, the exclusive distributor of Japanese brands (Toyota, Lexus and Hino). In the very first moments, I noticed a *kakemono* hanging on the wall that read: "Benefit for self and others, private and public interests are one and the same." The hosts then offered us *matcha in chawan* – powdered green tea in porcelain bowls – a powerful symbol of Japanese hospitality. I was there to interview Yutaka Ezaki, CEO of Toyota Iraq, and President of Toyota Iraq Sardar Al Beban.

Toyota Iraq is the official distributor of Toyota, Lexus, and Hino in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The company is a partnership between Sumitomo Corporation, one of the largest Japanese general trading and investment companies in the world and Sardar Group, the experts in the automotive industry in Iraq and KRI. This combination of Japanese quality and Kurdish spirit has paved the way for the company to stand out in the automotive market in Iraq. Sumitomo Corporation, in fact, has been present in the country since the 1960s, but it suspended operations after the Gulf War in 1991, only to return in 2016 and became one of the first international companies after 2003's Iraq War to form a joint venture with a local Kurdish partner.

Despite the company's past challenges, and the turbulent history of the region, Mr. Ezaki was confident and optimistic when speaking about Toyota's future in Kurdistan. His enthusiasm could be seen as he admired the virtues of safety and security in the KRI. He noted that the continued prioritization of security shared by citizens, expatriates, and entrepreneurs alike is evidence of the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) unwavering determination to the region and vision for growth. This strong commitment, as he elaborated,

not only improves lives but also creates an environment that enables economic growth.

At the core of Toyota Iraq's vision lies a commitment to building a sustainable society, fostering a thriving environment and contributing to a robust economy that benefits all. In other words, the target group for the company is not only its customers, but all the local society. This vision, as Mr. Ezaki explained, is pursued through an integrated approach that includes corporate activities, public awareness campaigns, and



capacity-building programs for local employees.

As the largest automotive company in Iraq, Toyota Iraq is also at the forefront when it comes to creating job opportunities. Currently, there are more than 1,100 employees working within the Toyota network throughout Iraq.

### Capacity building and cultural practices

Operating at global standards and adhering to international requirements are top priorities for Toyota Iraq. The company routinely trains its staff in professionalism and efficient practices. But that is not all, the company has also embraced some unique Japanese cultural practices, including *Kaizen* and *Omotenashi*, to enhance skills, capabili-

ties, and output of its teams' members. Commenting on these cultural practices, Mr. Sardar Al Beban explained that *Kaizen* is a philosophy of continuous improvement that emphasizes incremental, systematic progress and involves all members of an organization in the pursuit of efficiency and quality enhancement. As for *Omotenashi*, he pointed out that it is a cultural concept characterized by exceptional hospitality, where hosts anticipate and fulfill guests' needs and desires with sincerity and attentiveness. Mr. Sardar Al Beban also further elaborated that *Omotenashi* shares

commonalities with Kurdish hospitality, especially when it comes to serving guests and people in need without expecting anything in return.

In line with these objectives, Toyota Iraq conducts regular training for its staff in the KRI and other parts of Iraq. Meanwhile, special programs are devised to train staff in Japan, where they learn about work efficiency and professional practices while acquainting themselves with Japanese culture and the social values of this fascinating nation and later on sharing the learned

skills and practices with their colleagues back in KRI and Iraq

### Commitment to sustainable development

Toyota Iraq's commitment to sustainability is unwavering. Mr. Ezaki explained during the interview that the company has aligned itself with UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically targeting

ing for young graduates and internally displaced People (IDPs), with 108 individuals emerging as proud graduates. The initiative is believed to have been effective, especially in a region where over 2 million refugees and IDPs arrived after the advent of ISIS.

Additionally, the company has forged partnerships with academic institutions like Erbil Polytechnic University, offering summer training for students, technical training for automotive instructors, and essential workshop materials and tools for their automotive department. These initiatives align with the local government's plan to create more job opportunities

generally and the Middle East especially, Toyota Iraq has taken its corporate responsibilities quite seriously, launching extensive tree-planting initiatives across the KRI, including the introduction of Japanese *Sakura* trees as a symbol of peace and cultural exchange. Furthermore, the company pioneered the introduction of "Reversed Vending Machines" in the region, enabling customers to recycle plastic and aluminum cans while earning loyalty program points for their Toyota and Lexus vehicles.

Additionally, education and awareness are pivotal elements of Toyota Iraq's sustainability drive. The company conducts orientation sessions for governmental and academic entities, shedding light on the significance of sustainability and hybrid technologies and thereby contributing to environmental protection and collective sustainability mindset spreading.

Concluding the interview, Mr. Ezaki and Mr. Sardar Al Beban noted that Toyota Iraq will continue to contribute to the economic growth of the KRI and remain steadfast in its commitment to cultivating a sustainable and educated society. Drawing upon the rich experience of Japan in strategic development, Toyota Iraq is



"Quality Education" Goal and "Climate Action" Goal. This alignment has led to the implementation of projects that contribute and serve both

Toyota Iraq, in cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), has successfully provided vocational train-

ing opportunities and gradually diversify its economy to reduce its dependence on oil.

As global warming presents an imminent threat to the future of the globe

dedicated to fulfilling its vision through initiatives that aim to enhance living standards for everyone in Kurdistan. In Toyota Iraq, the Kurdistan Region finds not only an economic partner but also a source of inspiration for a brighter and more sustainable future for everyone. ●

## Discovering the Serene Shaqlawa Mountain Resort



**Wladimir van Wilgenburg**

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

Shaqlawa is a thriving mountain resort with around 30,000 residents, located 30 minutes northeast of Erbil. It attracts numerous tourists annually, particularly during the summer months.

“Its natural endowments encompass lush forests, a temperate and arid climate, considerable agricultural prospects, and a strategic proximity to Erbil,” Acting Governor of Shaqlawa, Karwan Karimkhan, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“The majority of tourists arrive during the summer season. While Shaqlawa possesses the potential to be a year-round destination, insufficient attention has been paid to attracting visitors during other seasons,” he added.

During the weekends, the streets are often full of visitors, who stroll through the market, buy local products, or enjoy one of the town's many restaurants.

“

The bulk of Shaqlawa's population are Kurds and Chaldean Christians, and the city has a long history of religious coexistence

”

### Summer tourism

Shwana Jawher Abdullah, a waiter, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that the main visitors to Shaqlawa during the summer are primarily Arab tourists.

“The market is more active in summer, but in winter there is either less activity or nothing, so people save their money from summer and spend it in winter.”

According to Karimkhan, the tourists in Shaqlawa can be divided into two main categories: temporary visitors who spend just a few hours, often coming from nearby cities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and more extended-stay tourists from other parts of Iraq, particularly Arab cities.

“It's noteworthy that the latter group tends to be from the middle to lower-middle economic classes, which aligns with Shaqlawa's economic profile,” he added.

Kareem Hussein, a tourist from Basra, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that he came to Shaqlawa with his family. “We always come to Shaqlawa and explore. We came here because the weather is mild.”

Moreover, he wanted to visit relatives in Shaqlawa.

Mohammed Hazim Fakhri Abbas, a tourist from Anbar, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that he often comes to Shaqlawa. “We will stay here for five days and then go to Bekhal and Erbil. Shaqlawa is a nice place for tourists, that's why I keep coming here.”

Mohammed Wrya Sleman, who works in a shop selling traditional products, as well as figs and nuts, said tourists also come from Arab Gulf countries.

“Shaqlawa is known for its mild weather, and we are famous for our local products, such as dried apricots and figs.”

He said that “people still come due to the mild climate,” despite difficult economic conditions.

### Refuge for the displaced

Shaqlawa also saw an influx of thousands of displaced Sunni Arabs who fled ISIS in 2014. At one point the town was nicknamed Shaqluja, due to the high number of displaced persons coming from Fallujah.

“During the harrowing period of the war against ISIS, the city was subjected to demographic upheaval,” Karimkhan said. “The magnitude of the crisis was such that the number of displaced peoples rivaled the city's resident population.”

Photo: Mohamed Dargalayi

A picturesque view of Shaqlawa nestled at the foot of Safin Mountain



Photo: Safin Hamid

A man selling vegetables at a local market in Shaqlawa

However, he said that a significant portion of them have since returned to their homes.

“What’s more, the appeal of Shaqlawa continues to draw interest from Iraqis seeking to establish residence in its serene environs,” he added.

He said the government needs to devise a strategy to safeguard the city’s demographic heritage.

### Religious coexistence

The bulk of Shaqlawa’s population are Kurds and Chaldean Christians, and the city has a long history of religious coexistence.

“The rich tapestry of religious coexistence in Shaqlawa is visible throughout history, characterized by a traditional and spontaneous harmony among diverse faiths,” Karimkhan said.

He said that childhood friendships that span religious boundaries are a prime example of this tolerance.

He added that the culture of coexistence within Shaqlawa extended even to matters of death. “Notably, during a tragic incident where 23 Kurds, including young Christians, lost their lives post-uprising, the Christians adhered to Islamic rituals and interred their dead in Muslim cemeteries.”



The view of a store in Shaqlawa selling local products



Karwan Karimkhan, the Acting Governor of Shaqlawa

Another example of this coexistence is the Saint Boya shrine, known as Sheikh Wso Rahman among Muslims, in Mount Safeen. Dating to the 17th century, this shrine is a place of pilgrimage for both Christians and Muslims. Governor Karimkhan underlined that it is the responsibility of the Kurdistan Regional Government to safeguard this cultural heritage of coexistence of Shaqlawa.

“By fostering an atmosphere of mutual benefit for Kurds and Chaldeans alike, the social legacy of coexistence can not only generate harmony but also contribute to the city’s economic vitality,” he said.

### High-class tourism

Moreover, Karimkhan says the local authorities hope to elevate Shaqlawa’s status to a hub of “high-class residential tourism,” thereby strengthening the local middle-class economy. “This shift could be pivotal in transforming the city’s economic landscape.”

“One strategy involves enriching the factors that attract discerning tourists, such as fostering scientific tourism by creating facilities like an astronomical observatory on Mount Safeen or promoting geotourism,” he said.

“Simultaneously, an environment conducive to slow driving and adequate

parking can be cultivated. Implementing sustainable and clean transportation systems, including pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, would not only alter the city’s noisy ambiance but also usher in a more tranquil way of life.” Karimkhan said Shaqlawa could bolster its tourism sector by diversifying its visitor base and transform into a year-round destination, “contributing to the city’s long-term growth and vibrancy.”

### Mount Safeen

But Shaqlawa has one more advantage: its proximity to Mount Safeen and its captivating landscape, adorned with abundant trees, valleys, and ravines. This natural richness has attracted mountaineers who visit the mountains, mostly in the cooler seasons.

In March 2023, a Guinness World Record was set on Mount Safeen for the world’s largest hike, with over 800 hikers and 100 volunteers participating. Every year in March, mountaineers also light a Newroz fire on the mountain.

“With its proximity to various cities in the KRI, particularly Erbil, Mount Safeen’s allure extends across all four seasons, making it an ideal destination for climbing and other sports activities, including swimming,” Karimkhan said.

“In light of this, we propose the establishment of a Sports Tourism Founda-

tion as a national initiative, strategically anchored in Shaqlawa. Broadly, our vision involves cultivating a culture of mountaineering, elevating patriotic sentiments through a harmonious relationship with nature,” Karimkhan said.

Capitalizing on this opportunity, the company Safari Kurdistan has orchestrated bike rides along the expanse of the Safeen mountains.

Furthermore, nestled within the mountains is the captivating Music Valley, a favorite destination among hikers. It earned its name from the harmonious symphony of birds that grace the area with their melodic songs.

Karimkhan also explained how local authorities have engaged local climbers to engage in tree planting initiatives. “We undertook tree planting efforts on Mount Safeen this spring, exemplifying our commitment to preserving and enriching the environment.” Moreover, Shaqlawa’s authorities are working to address waste disposal on Mount Safeen and foster a culture of cleanliness among climbers, as many people leave waste after hikes or picnics.

“Additionally, the establishment of volunteer firefighting units and promoting the compassionate treatment of animals stand as important objectives on our agenda,” the governor said.

“As we strive to enhance its prominence, we aim to foster a harmonious coexistence between people, nature, and sports, thereby elevating both Shaqlawa and its beloved mountain to new heights of prominence and conservation,” Karimkhan underlined.

Adam Mirani, a Kurdish-Canadian photographer living in Erbil, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that “Safeen Mountain is not just a backdrop to Erbil; it’s an untapped resource for sustainable tourism.”

“With its wealth of outdoor activities – from hiking and rock climbing to camping – Safeen offers a model for how tourism can be both enriching and responsible. What it needs now is a long-term vision to ensure that its natural beauty is preserved for the generations that follow.” ●

# The Last Women’s Hammam in Slemani

Kurdistan Chronicle

In Sabunkaran, the oldest neighborhood of Sulaymaniyah – pronounced “Slemani” by locals – in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, lies a cultural relic that has withstood the test of time: Mufti Hammam, a traditional public steam bath for women that has retained its original design for over two centuries.

Upon stepping into the Mufti Hammam, an enveloping wave of nostalgia washes over visitors. Its thick walls, adorned with intricate yet timeless architectural designs, culminate in a dome that crowns the structure. The journey begins with a reception area that leads to a circular chamber painted in green, red, and blue. This chamber serves as the antechamber, where women disrobe before entering the steamy bath hall.

Adjacent to the hammam lies the *saray*, an integral part of the establishment, whose original grandeur and purpose have evolved over time. Originally, it was used as a shelter for the horses of arriving travelers, who could then indulge in the hammam’s offerings and engage in local commerce.

## Amina’s guardianship

Since 1989, the guardian of this cultural landmark has been Amina Mohammad Ahmed, renowned for her kindness and warmth. The Mufti Hammam is Sulaymaniyah’s only public steam bath for women, with three other hammams catering solely to men.

“ Since 1989, the guardian of this cultural landmark has been Amina Mohammad Ahmed, renowned for her kindness and warmth ”

Amina’s journey began when her husband rented the hammam in 1978. Initially it was open to both genders, with men bathing in the morning and women in the afternoon. However, in 1989, the city’s mayor declared that the Mufti Hammam would serve women exclusively. Amina took over operation in the aftermath of this change.

The hammam has a storied lineage, passing through 29 successive families before finding its current caretaker. Amina reflects on her job, describing it as a profoundly gratifying endeavor.

*“Working in a hammam is the most joyful job a person can have,” Amina told Kurdistan Chronicle.*

She went on to say that hammams are more than just places for bathing; they

are also a social space where women gather to converse and take a break from the hardships and troubles of daily life.

According to Amina, fewer women are visiting the hammam now than in the past. In the summer, no more than five women come each day, and on some days no one comes. In the winter, around 15-20 women come each day.

Despite having fewer customers during the summer, with temperatures outside reaching 40°C, Amina does not get bored. Instead, she keeps herself busy by knitting loofahs and body scrubbers,

which she sells inside the hammam as well as to nearby shops.

## Traditions and uncertainty

Reflecting on the past, Amina recalls the 1990s, when the hammam operated around the clock due to the scarcity of electricity and heating fuel during the UN embargo on Iraq.

She laments the fading of certain traditions linked to the hammam. Once, brides-to-be were ceremoniously bathed the day before their wedding,

accompanied by festivities and sweet treats. Similarly, new mothers and their infants were brought to the hammam a week after delivery, accompanied by sweets to share.

The hammam was not only a place for bathing, but also for matchmaking. Amina recalls how mothers would frequent the hammam in search of prospective partners for their sons. She laughs as she tells stories of women thanking her hammam for introducing them to their husbands.

On the hammam’s front gate it is written: “Men are not allowed to stand in



Amina Mohammad kindling fire at the women’s Hammam of Slemani

Photo: Safin Hamid



front of the hammam.”

Amina recalled an amusing story from a few months after the hammam became exclusively for women in 1989. She was busy inside the steam room and heard the sound of coins and a man singing in the changing hall. When she went to the hall, she saw a man in just his shorts preparing to go into the steam room. When the man saw Amina, he was taken aback and asked if this was a women’s hammam. When Amina replied, he rushed to put on his clothes and bolted out the door.

Amina grapples with uncertainty regarding the hammam’s future. Her daughters, now married, hold no aspirations to oversee it. Her youngest son is interested, but he wants to convert it into a men-only hammam, which Amina strongly opposes.

“It’s the only women’s hammam in Sulaymaniyah, and it should stay that way,” she said.

As the sun sets on Amina’s tenure, she envisions a future where the hammam thrives. Amina hopes that the Kurdistan Regional Government will breathe new life into this piece of cultural heritage, restoring it to its former splendor. Amidst the city’s changing landscape, Amina stands resolute, determined that this bastion of tradition remains unshaken by the passage of time.

“Many old landmarks have been destroyed in this city; I hope this hammam does not become one of them,” Amina concluded. ●

## Crafting Nature-Inspired Artistic Jewelry

*Naskeh Omar, a 26-year-old artist who lives in Erbil, mixes different elements of nature, including plants, stones, and even some species of animals to create artistic masterpieces of the utmost accuracy and splendor. For manufacturing traditional jewelry and accessories like bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and rings, Naskeh relies on stone, terebinth grains, wild plants and exquisite inscriptions from the mythology of Kurdistan, Mesopotamia. To dive deeper and try to understand her work and the source of her creativity, we visited her workshop, saw her latest designs, and spoke at length.*

Kurdistan Chronicle

### Starting with stones

Naskeh graduated from the Department of Business Administration and Political Science at the American University of Sulaymaniyah. After graduating, her parents expected that her to become an employee in a government department or in one of the many companies in Kurdistan, like many university graduates.

However, Naskeh had other ideas, turning to a profession that is far from her academic studies but close to her spirit. "Art has been in my blood ever since I was a child," Naskeh says smiling. "Since my childhood, I felt that the stones, trees, planets, and stars, that surround me have spirits like human beings and that we can communicate with them. Stone has a language that we must master," Naskeh went on to say as she showed us a beautiful transparent stone with red veins like blood. She puts the stone on top of her iPhone's flashlight, and it sparkles like a galaxy. I see a childish joy on her face. "This is a vibrant stone. It has a soul. These veins expand with time, just like crystal."

She sees the amazement on my face and on that of my col-



league, the skilled photographer Muhammad Dargalayi, but smiles confidently and, without worrying about our reactions, adds, "I was six years old when my father traveled. Like any father, he asked me what gift I would like him to bring home for me. I said without hesitation: I want stones, Dad."

Naskeh started her artistic career by engraving and drawing on stones.

She showed me a beautiful collection she had collected in a basket. "At twenty, I had my first art show on International Women's Day, in cooperation with the French Consulate in Erbil. That was 2017. I started working on accessories and engraving them with enamel two years later when I was twenty-two years old."

### Nourishing creativity

Naskeh talks about her attempts to engage clients in creating their own designs. She opens several drawers that contain colored beads, raw rings, and colored stones, and indicates that she sometimes gives customers the freedom to choose the design they are thinking of, and says with confidence, "In this way, I want to make room for people to invest and develop their imagination. All human beings are artists in



one way or another. They just need encouragement!”

Meanwhile, my colleague Muhammad is busy taking photos from the best angles of several of the delicate works that are displayed in beautiful order in the small workshop. The shots include beautifully designed bracelets on Naskeh’s wrists, earrings hanging from her ears, a necklace over her chest, and a handkerchief for the necklaces on her shoulders, whose patterns were inspired by a stone.

“People think this inscription is simply a cross, but it is actually of a traditional inscription that adorns the Kurdish scarf, which is known as *bibri-hawri*. I like to create a mix between Kurdish art and Red Sea coral,” she says, as she juxtaposes the necklace stone with the beautiful red inscription on the edge of the scarf, which is called a Mosul scarf by some. Indeed, they are identical. How beautiful!

### Philosophical underpinnings

With philosophical words scattered with love for Mother Nature, Naskeh sums up the nature of her work on natural elements. After she brings us water, she says, “Everything speaks in the nature that surrounds us. We can only understand its language if our soul is ready to listen. I would like to involve everything that bespeaks the nature of Kurdistan in my work. A grain of terbenth alongside a piece of stone with mythology and folk stories. The whole universe speaks. Even the heavenly bodies have voices.”

I tell her about the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who claimed that the movement of celestial bodies in their spheres has special music, and that he could hear it. She nods her head with a smile.

I then turn back to her work. A beautiful bracelet inlaid with inscriptions

from folk memory catches my eye. The colors and patterns are wonderful. I ask her about their meanings, and she replies, “This is a pre-Islamic Kurdish inscription. A inscription of Jewish origin is still used in the manufacture of rugs, carpets, and pillows. I read about it in a book that I received from the Kurdish artist Rustam Aghala.”

“In the past, when a girl fell in love with a young man, she would give him a lock of her hair. The young man would take it to the rug makers, who mixed it with sheep’s wool or goat hair and make this pattern on the rug. When the couple married, they hung the small rug on the wall in the house as a symbol of their love. I thought this is important because many girls have been killed and are being killed because of love. These rugs with wonderful patterns became an inspiration for me. I have taken the inscriptions as they are and put them on the bracelets.”

She goes on, “People are interested in yellow gold. This is, in my opinion, wrong. Pure gold is beautiful in appearance, but it lacks color. The demand for Ottoman liras (*rashadiyat*) for adornment is not a tradition inherent in Kurdistan society or culture. Nature is colors. If color elements are not incorporated into gold, its beauty will not appear. My work relies on golden stainless steel and especially enamel, which adds extra beauty and warmth to cold metals.”

### Marketing jewelry

Time passes quickly. I try to collect as much information about her work as possible. I ask her extemporaneous questions necessitated by the situation and by seeing more of her delicate and charming artefacts.

She uses her talent to create her own brand of jewelry and feels a responsibility when she sees Kurdish people do not have pieces that represent Kurdish culture and instead wear other culture’s designs such as Lira. “In our culture, Lira is so common that most women have it, but the design is originally from Turkey,” she says.

“As a jewelry designer and an artist, I want to create an artistic piece of jewel-



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

ry that tells a story about my culture. My aim is to design jewelry that represents our culture and spreads education among the new generation and other nations by telling them the story behind the designs. Beside culture design, I’m working on transferring my nature-inspired imagination to a unique piece of jewelry.”

I ask her about marketing and whether her products are in vogue, to which she replies, “At first, I found it difficult to market them, but then people grew more interested in them. Now my works are displayed in four outlets in Babel, Baghdad, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah, and I can also sell globally.”

How familiar are you with the world of international jewelry and accessories? I asked before the time we have dedicated for the interview expires. My colleague Mohamed continues taking pictures, while Naskeh continues to answer with love and patience. “I follow the world’s famous designs. The majority are without spirit because they do not originate from a true artistic imagination. The designs look similar, as if the designers are imitating one another,” she said.

### Nature as a source of inspiration

“I’m inspired by creatures under the ocean, the art of nature, the shapes of plants, and of course Kurdish culture. I want to give the local folklore the value it deserves. I hope to work on the Kurdish legend of Shahmaran and be inspired by patterns and designs from Kurdish love stories. I feel a responsibility towards my country and my people. Therefore, I can say that these designs are close to my heart and soul. I am also thinking of drawing inspiration from some verses of poetry by the great Kurdish poets and Kurdistan nature-inspired designs with its stones, plants, and insects. I even look at the veins of my hands sometimes and see in them exquisite designs and beautiful art. In the depths of the oceans there are beautiful sea creatures that are suitable for inspiring engravings on bracelets or rings. Some plants, with their leaves and flowers, become rich ideas for the design of earrings.”

In Naskeh’s eyes, I see the passion of a professional artist and the delight of those fascinated by their work. Here, I remember Michelangelo, who is said to have shouted at the statue of the Prophet Moses, “Speak, O stone!”

Naskeh too says that she listens to the stones and believes they have language, as do silent creatures such as plants and trees.

On the way back to the magazine’s office in the English Village, I look out the window of the car, which the photographer Muhammed is still driving. As I look at the beautiful residential houses on both sides of the road, and it hits me that these were built of stones. I did not talk. Rather, I start listening to the stones speaking. ●

## Funnkawari Blending Old and New Music



Ayar Rasool

*Ayar Rasool is an acclaimed producer of short films and documentaries, who has been in collaboration with media agencies such as AppleTV, Netflix, and HBO. His projects have garnered critical acclaim, marked by numerous Emmy and BAFTA nominations, as well as a local distinctions.*

Globalization has undeniably brought considerable benefits to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including economic progress, job opportunities, and cultural diversity. However, it has also ushered in the dominance of Western popular culture and media within the Kurdish community, resulting in a growing divide between the younger generation and their Kurdish heritage. This is particularly true of music, where globalization has homogenized music styles and tastes, endangering the preservation of our rich musical heritage.

Yet what Generation Z perceives as “uncool” today could well become the new “cool,” if we give our traditions another chance. With the aim of revitalizing cultural values and traditional melodies, Kurdish musician Sivan Payadar has devised a unique fusion of Kurdish music and funk, which he aptly named “Funnkawari.” This name derives from the combination of “funk” and “awari,” a term rooted in the distinctive Kurdish word “Kurdawari,” encompassing all aspects of Kurdish culture and tradition. Funnkawari lives up to its name by offering a fresh and captivating musical experience.

Born on June 13, 1990, in Erbil, the capital of the KRI, Sivan Payadar is a Kurdish saxophonist, music producer, and television host. His musical journey when he picked up the flute, supported by his father, the former flutist Payadar Barznji. Eventually,

Sivan delved deeper into the world of jazz music, becoming a skilled saxophonist. At the age of six, he hosted a television program on the Gullan TV channel from 1996 to 2001, and later, another children’s television program on Kurdistan TV from 2001 to 2003. He went on to establish a musical ensemble, known as Bshadow, a group of talented Kurdish musicians, including saxophonists, pianists, guitarists, drummers, vocalists, and bass guitarists, who perform live across Kurdistan.

Under Sivan’s leadership, Bshadow debuted the genre of Funnkawari at Siduri Pub in Erbil, a renowned establishment in Ankawa. The band’s first event achieved resounding success, drawing music enthusiasts, diplomats, and prominent figures in Erbil. At the show, Bshadow introduced a unique twist to Kurdish classics, such as Ibrahim Qadri’s “Darzhe,” Aynadin’s “Narma Narma,” and Tahsin Taha’s “Min tu Navi,” infusing them with a funk style. Notably, they presented a funk version of Omar Suleyman’s iconic track “Warni Warni,” possibly for the first time.

Perhaps the genre of Funnkawari can inspire a new generation of musicians and music lovers to rekindle the flame of Kurdish music. At its heart, the genre certainly recognizes that history serves as a foundation for understanding our identity, fostering meaningful connections with our heritage, and nurturing a prosperous society.





## Hani Mojtabedy

### A Voice of Hope in Exile

In the heart of the ever-resilient Kurdish community, a courageous and pioneering figure has emerged whose voice resonates with the echoes of conflict and the call for unity. Hani Mojtabedy, a name that has become synonymous with bravery, has not only captured the attention of her fellow Kurds but also enraptured audiences worldwide with her profound story and captivating melodies.

Born in Sanandaj, a city nestled in eastern Kurdistan (Rojhilat) within northwestern Iran, Hani's journey as a singer began in 2000. Her path was far from conventional, shaped by haunting memories of religious figures and Sufi chants. She was raised in the sanctuary of her grandfather's home, where spiritual gatherings echoed with the dhikir, a kind of ritual prayer, and the timeless melodies of the Sufis. This ethereal atmosphere infused young Hani with a sense of purpose, laying the foundation for her remarkable musical odyssey.

#### A harmonious heritage

Hani's artistic lineage can be traced back to her mother, whose poignant and impassioned voice instilled within Hani a burning desire to sing freely. The constraints of tradition and circumstance had shackled her mother's voice, a fate Hani was determined to transcend. Her mother's untold longing to express herself through song became a catalyst for Hani's pursuit of a voice unburdened by limitations.

Reflecting on her youth, Hani fondly recalls the influence of her uncle, an ardent admirer of the late Kurdish vocalist Ali Merdan. This familial connection further fueled

her musical aspirations, intertwining her destiny with the threads of Kurdish musical heritage.

#### War, resilience, and unyielding identity

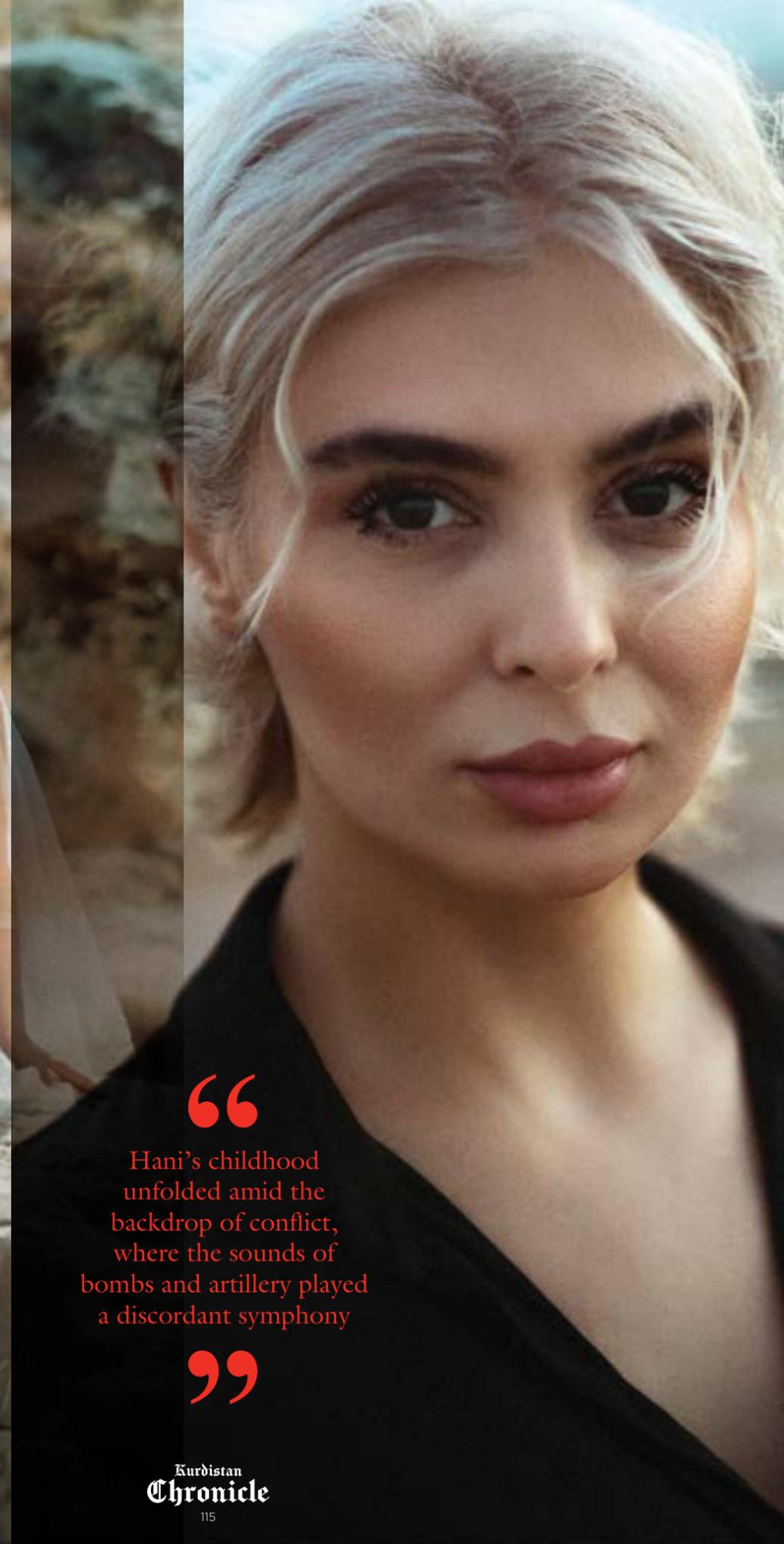
Hani's childhood unfolded amid the backdrop of conflict, where the sounds of bombs and artillery played a discordant symphony. Her earliest memories are marked by the sight of her mother's bloodied hands, treating wounds amid the chaos of war. These formative experiences forged an indomitable strength within her, propelling her toward a life of purpose.

Her mother's enduring lessons during those tumultuous times left an indelible mark on Hani's consciousness. The mantra that "Kurds do not live for themselves when they are born" became her guiding philosophy. This unwavering commitment to collective well-being and unity became the cornerstone of her identity, even as she carved her path as a singer and artist.

#### A musical ambassador in exile

In 2004, Hani embarked on a new chapter, leaving behind her homeland for Germany. Her exile was a conscious choice driven by the yearning to amplify the voice of her divided nation on the global stage. Through her music, Hani sought to showcase the creative prowess and innate talent of Kurdish women, shattering preconceived notions and crossing cultural boundaries.

Hani's musical spectrum expanded as she



“Hani's childhood unfolded amid the backdrop of conflict, where the sounds of bombs and artillery played a discordant symphony

”



Hiwa Selah

Hiwa Selah is both a journalist and a musician, having also served as the head of the Music Department at the Fine Arts Institute in Rwanda.



collaborated with German and other Western musicians, melding Kurdish melodies with diverse styles. Her partnership with these musicians was not merely transactional; it was fueled by their genuine appreciation for her sound and the message she conveyed. This collaboration is at the heart of the electronic album *Hazhirok*, a mosaic of her childhood memories set to an evocative canvas of sound.

### The call of Kurdistan

Hani's devotion to her homeland is unwavering, evident in her performances, where the national songs and the name Kurdistan are constant companions. She remains resolute in the face of criticism, seeing her music as a steadfast beacon against oppression. Hani's melodies are not just songs; they are anthems of resistance, testaments to the enduring spirit of a people yearning for self-determination.

In recent years, Hani extended her artistic reach into the world of cinema, acting in Turaj Aslani's film *Be Nish-timan*. This cinematic endeavor connected her with fellow Kurdish artists from all four corners of Kurdistan, amplifying her commitment to sharing the narratives of her people with a global audience.

### Looking ahead

When speaking with Hani, one cannot help but be swept up by her hopes and dreams for the future. Her heart swells with aspirations for the Kurdish youth, encouraging them to embrace self-confidence, pursue education, and reach for the stars. Her vision for Kurdistan is one where progress in music, art, and science becomes a hallmark of a vibrant and thriving society.

Hani Mojtahedy's story is one of resilience, inspiration, and unwavering commitment to her identity and her people. Her melodies bridge continents, cultures, and hearts, weaving a tapestry that honors her heritage and kindles a flame of hope for a brighter future. In an ever-changing world, Hani's music remains a steadfast reminder of the power of the human spirit and the unbreakable bonds of community. ●



“  
 Hani Mojtahedy's story is one of resilience, inspiration, and unwavering commitment to her identity and her people  
 ”

# Luna Erşahin



Mevlüt Oğuz

*Mevlüt Oğuz was born in 1987 in Batman's Hasankeyf. Mevlüt Oğuz is a journalist, poet, and activist working in the fields of civil society, culture, and the arts, who resides in Istanbul. 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).*

**D**anish-born musical artists Tobias Rahim and Luna Erşahin, whose fathers are Kurdish, have been on tour in recent months. At concerts at the Royal Arena in Copenhagen on April 1 and in Roskilde on July 1, they sang Kurdish songs and danced the Kurdish *halay* in front of thousands, performances widely covered on social media as well as in print and visual media. *Kurdistan Chronicle* was able to interview Luna, but unfortunately Tobias declined our request for an interview.

Expressing that her roots have always been important to her, Luna states that she started learning Kurdish and singing in the language to connect with her family background.

When asked about bans on concerts, Luna said: “No activity based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or gender should ever be banned.”

***Kurdistan Chronicle (KC):*** As far as I know, both you and Tobias have Kurdish fathers and Danish mothers. Can you tell us a bit more about Tobias and yourself?

***Luna Erşahin (LE):*** Tobias and I share the same ancestry. Our mothers are Danish, and our fathers are Kurdish. Tobias' father comes from Kelhasan, and my father comes from Çorum. We were both born in Denmark.

My roots have always been very important to me. Growing up around different languages, I was always very confused about who I was. Was I Danish? Turkish? Kurdish? I discovered that I could dive into my roots through music and started playing bağla-

ma, a kind of long-necked lute played in and around Turkey. I started to learn folk music and to sing in Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, Spanish, Swedish, and many other languages. This brought me closer to the world and the richness of languages. My Kurdish heritage became very important for me, but unfortunately I never learned Kurdish. I have been very happy to have my friend and journalist Mevlüt Oğuz translate lyrics that I wrote in Turkish into Kurdish,

which he has done for all my Kurdish songs. I have started to learn Kurmanji and hope to be able to speak fluently in the future!

I am trying to better understand my cultural background and show the whole world that I am proud of my heritage. Because of all of this, the song “Kurder I København” means a lot to me, and to Tobias too!

***KC:*** Thousands at the Royal Arena sang along to the Kurdish song performed by you and Tobias and danced the Kurdish *halay* under the shade of the flag of Kurdistan. How did the idea to sing a Kurdish song and dance *halay* come about?

***LE:*** I wrote to Tobias a few years back, asking him how he approaches his heritage in his art, since I'm very interested in this topic. After some time, he invit-

ed me to come to the studio to sing a Kurdish song for his album. The song, “Kurder I København,” started in his mind, and then he reached out to other Kurdish artists like me, including Zaman Kılıç and the bağlama player Alper Şahin, to co-create the rest. Kılıç sings the chorus and is a relative of Tobias. Şahin is an amazing wedding musician and plays the bağlama solo in “Kurder I København.”

We wanted to create a feeling of community and show the beauty of Kurdish culture and music. Tobias and his team decided to do the Kurdish halay and to bring the flag onstage and so on! At the concert on the Orange Stage in Roskilde, Tobias said that he dedicated the song to his grandfather and all the other immigrants who have made Denmark their new home. It was a humbling, meaningful, and beautiful experience.

**KC:** Your performance at Royal Arena was widely covered on social media, as well as in print and visual media. What were your feelings about this response?

**LE:** I’m overwhelmed and see the power of the Kurdish community in these kinds of situations. In 2019, a video in which I sang “Ez Kevok Im” in Chile also went viral, and it’s simply amazing how so many people reach out to tell you that they are proud of you. It can also be hard because many people have different opinions on what you should do and how you should do it. I try to connect with myself and stay centered.

**KC:** While thousands who do not even speak Kurdish sing along to your songs, concerts of Kurdish artists are sometimes avoided or outright banned in Kurdish provinces in Turkey. What do you think about these bans?

**LE:** No activity based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or gender should ever be banned.

**KC:** Who are the Kurdish and foreign artists who have influenced you and shaped your art?

**LE:** I absolutely love Aynur Doğan and Kardeş Türküler; they have been huge inspirations for me.

**KC:** Do you think you might plan a tour in Kurdistan with Tobias?

# Luna Erşahin



**LE:** I don’t know about Tobias, but I will definitely come one day!

**KC:** Are there any artists with whom you would like to collaborate?

**LE:** Aynur Doğan and Kardeş Türküler!

**KC:** What have you been doing lately and what are your plans in terms of Kurdish music?

On August 25 of this year, my band AySay will release a version of “Ez Kevok Im,” for which I have written new lyrics in Danish mixed with Kurdish. It will be a first, and I’m very excited about it. I’m nervous about how Kurdish people will take it, and I hope they will like it. In October we will also release our second album KÖY, which has songs in Danish, Kurdish, and Turkish. For now, my plan is to play many concerts in the coming few years.

## Biography

Born in 1995, Luna Erşahin is both Kurdish and Danish. Erşahin recently finished her bachelor’s degree at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen. She plays with her band AySay and has a duo with Kurdish musician Rezwan Taha. She won three Danish music awards for Album of the Year 2022 (Su Akar). ●

## A Chat with Alan Dalziel



Mey Dost

Mey Dost is currently pursuing in a Master's degree in Digital Media Communication at RWTH University in Germany. She showcases a passion for languages and frequently translates texts across various genres into English, German, and Kurdish.

Many Kurds have fled to foreign countries as a result of oppression in their homelands. Especially in countries that do not accept the existence of the Kurds, they cannot progress, preserve their own language, or freely embrace their culture without fear, unlike other nations.

In the Kurdish diaspora, from Australia to Canada, there are stories of success that depict the courage and spirit of young Kurds. Time and again, Kurds have proven that they can make a unique contribution to the beauty of this world, if given the opportunity, adding a special color to the rainbow of cultures. In this article, we will focus on the achievements of a young Kurd from Australia whose family left their homeland 37 years ago and settled in that distant country: the actor Alan Dalziel.

Alan Dalziel is an up-and-coming ac-

tor who most recently starred in the new Paramount Plus series *One Night*. Growing up in a dysfunctional household, Alan developed an early fascination with film and cinema, as it served as an escape for him, presenting the possibilities of what life



could be like. Having also starred in the SBS series *Latecomers*, his current aspirations point to conquering the United States and the international market. Trained and mentored under the close tutelage of Les Chantery (Juilliard, NIDA), authenticity and freedom are the catalysts for Alan's work. While he has cited Ryan Gosling and Shia LaBeouf as his two greatest artistic inspirations, he also hopes to work with Sam Levinson, Derek Cianfrance, and Darius Marder soon. His coming-of-age short film *Twenty Three*, starring Charlotte Best, will be released to the film festival circuit in 2024.

In January 1986, Alan's father, Sayed Mesto, having completed his degree in Economics and Commerce at Aleppo University, migrated to Australia to begin a new chapter. It was a significant decision, shared Alan's father, one that marked a pivotal moment in his life – to relocate to a foreign land where he could pursue advanced studies and utilize his political ambitions in support of his oppressed compatriots overseas.

"My dreams have been realized," he told *Kurdistan Chronicle*, "as I've been able to live in a society that champions freedom and democracy. I've had the privilege to raise my children in a superior environment, offering them quality education and a promising future."

His son Alan was born in February 1999

# Alan Dalziel

in Sydney. According to his father he was

an independent and intelligent boy. He loved playing football and ardently supported the English Premier League team Manchester United. In addition, Alan completed his black belt in Han Mu Do (Korean martial arts) in July 2015.

Throughout his childhood-

His favorite childhood film was *Home Alone*.

In 2020, Alan completed a year of tertiary study at Sydney University and engaged in a variety of online courses through the American Academy.

When not watching films, Alan is likely either at the gym or hiking. Thanks to his strong affinity for sports and a

twenty three

competitive spirit, the gym serves as an outlet for Alan's energy. He is also remarkably sociable. He loves meeting new people and enjoys dancing, often seek-

hood years, his enthusiasm for watching movies and shows was palpable.

out social gatherings.

When asked about the movies Alan enjoyed as a child, his father said that *Matilda* undoubtedly held a special place for him. He resonated deeply with the character and found solace in the film's message of a better life, encapsulating the power of cinema to instill hope in its audience's hearts.

Alan underwent training under the guidance of Les Chantery and Miranda Harcourt, both of whom imparted invaluable knowledge to him.

We reached out to Alan via email as he was traveling in the United States and United Kingdom:

**Kurdistan Chronicle (KC):** How did you get into acting?

**Alan Dalziel (AD):** I've wanted to act for as long as I can remember. I knew drama school wasn't right for me because of the theatrical focus, so I sought out Les Chantery, who is my mentor and has been the most instrumental person in my career. Really what it came down to is I would record "self-tapes" three times a week, every week for two and half years. That's really how I got comfortable in front of the camera and learned what was working and what wasn't. You could say I am self-taught, with mentoring from Les.

**KC:** Your role in the series *One Night* was pivotal. Would you talk with us about this role and the series?

**AD:** *One Night* is a limited series drama on women's generational trauma surrounding the events of one night. I'm a reoccurring guest on the show as "young Mark" in flashback scenes, the husband of Hat, one of the main characters. The shoot was an incredible experience, and I cannot speak highly enough of the cast and crew involved. I think the viewers are in for a treat.

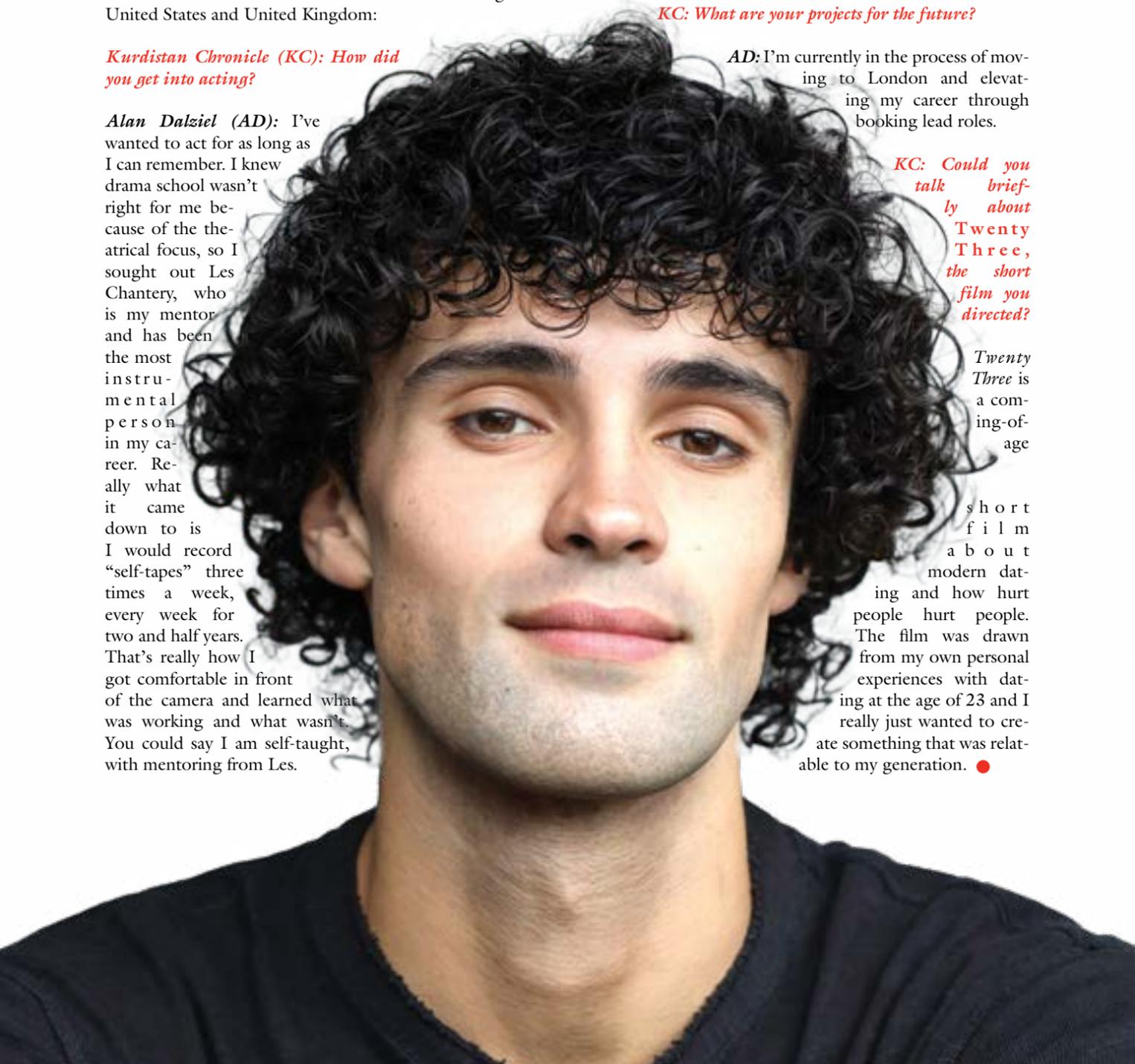
**KC:** What are your projects for the future?

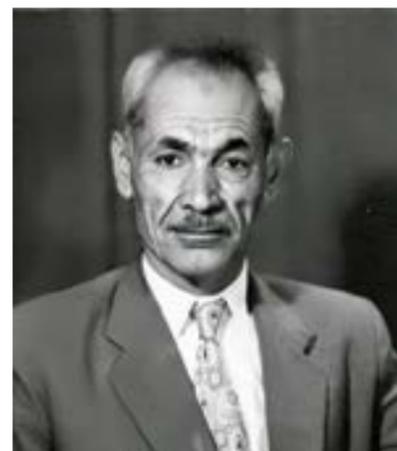
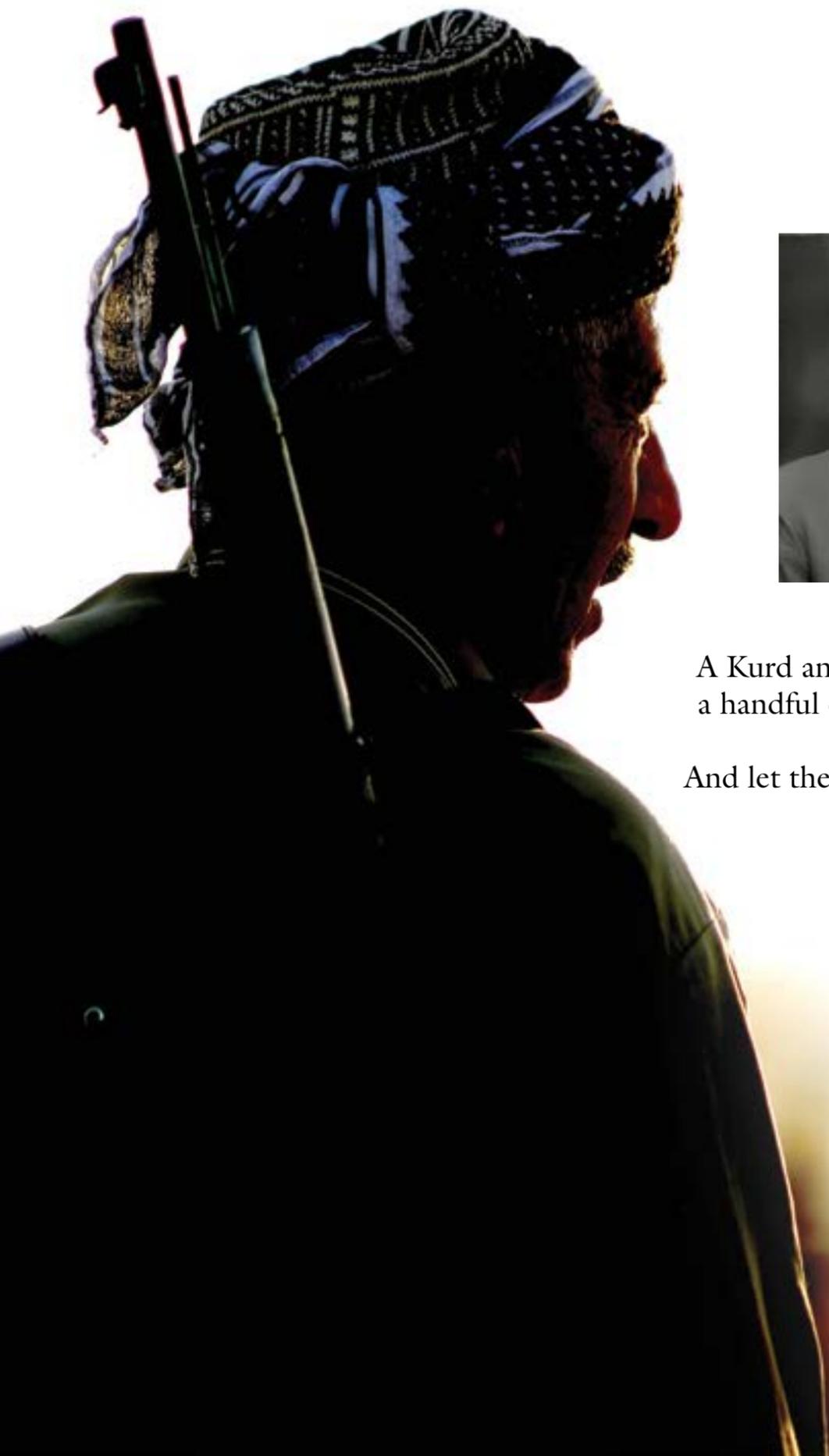
**AD:** I'm currently in the process of moving to London and elevating my career through booking lead roles.

**KC:** Could you talk briefly about *Twenty Three*, the short film you directed?

*Twenty Three* is a coming-of-age

short film about modern dating and how hurt people hurt people. The film was drawn from my own personal experiences with dating at the age of 23 and I really just wanted to create something that was relatable to my generation. ●





A Kurd and a bag of tobacco,  
a handful of raisins and a gun  
Then a rock  
And let the whole world come

Abdullah Goran



Nuri Bekhali

Translated by Nahro Zagros

## The Wind's Melody

Throughout life, man remains solitary, till his last breath's tone,  
No one, no soul,  
Can ever fill the void of another's unknown.  
The dilemma persists:  
Wherever he wanders, his image refracts,  
For every man's twin is but himself, in fact.

## (با) گۆرانى دهلیت!

مرۆڤ بۆ ههمیشه و تا دهمریت، تهنیا به.  
كەس، هیچ كەسیك،  
بۆشایی كەسیكی دیکه ی بۆ پر ناکریتهوه.  
گرفتى مرۆڤ ئەوهیه:  
چەندەى بشگەریت، چمكى خۆی بۆ  
نادۆزیتهوه،  
چمكى هەر كەسیك، خودى خۆیهتى!



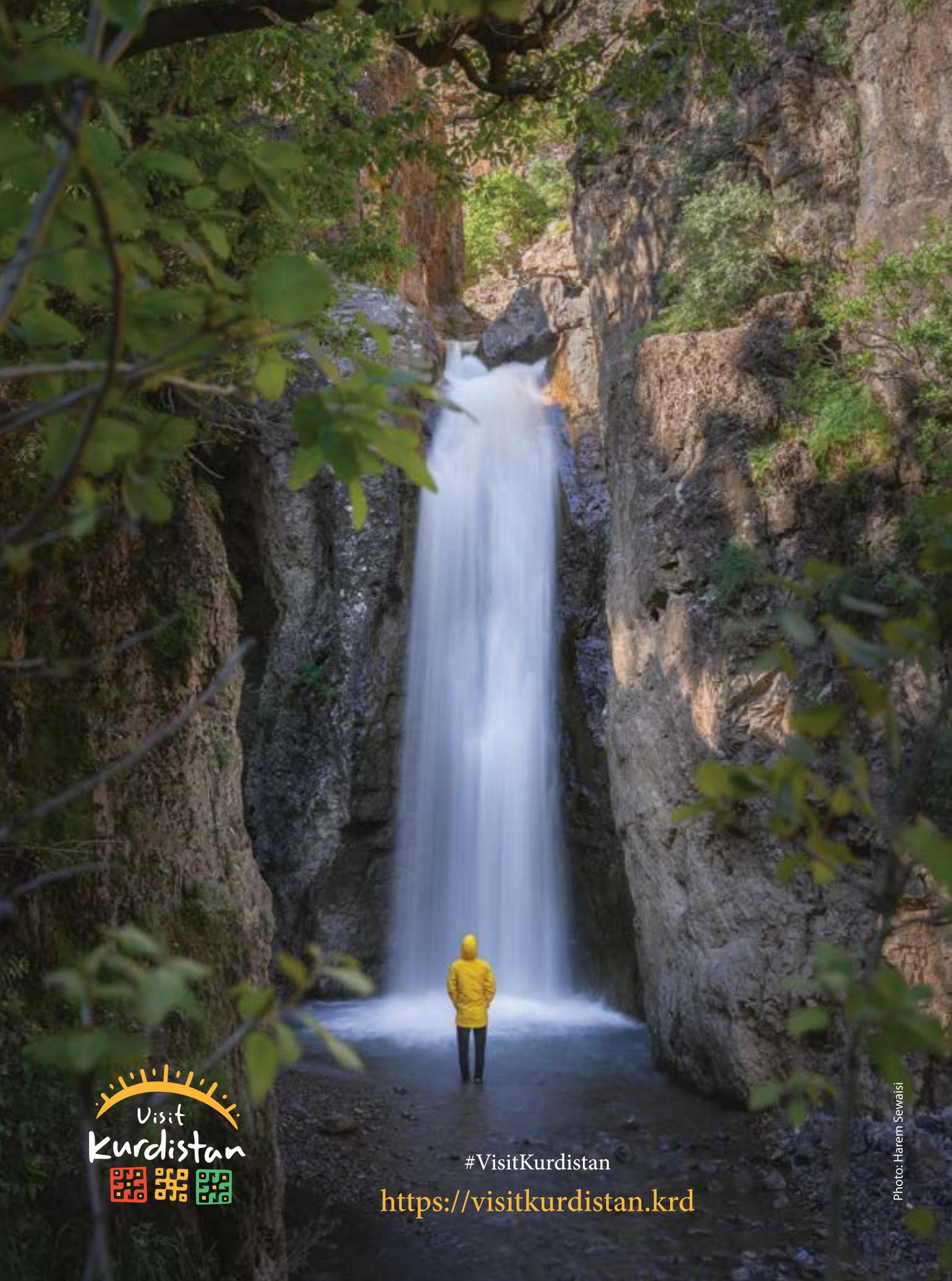
Sabr Dri



Kurdistan, characterized by its expansive mountains, slopes, and forests, provides an ideal habitat for wildlife. Among the species that thrive in this environment are golden jackals. The golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), also known as the Eurasian golden jackal, is a canid found in parts of Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia and enjoys a wide range of habitat. It lives in monogamous pairs, which sometimes have “helper” jackals that help care for their young. Golden jackals are classified as a “least-concern” species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, meaning they are not a focus of conservation as they do not face the threat of extinction. These social animals are also adaptable eaters, consuming everything from fruit and insects to small ungulates.



Photo: Mohammed Murat Aiko



#VisitKurdistan

<https://visitkurdistan.krd>

Photo: Harem Sewaisi