

Kurdistan Chronicle

SHE WORE
THE CROWN,
AND SPOKE
FOR A PEOPLE





WHERE LUXURY MEETS PERFORMANCE



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Kurdistan A Place to Embrace All



Botan Tabseen

*is the Publisher of
Kurdistan Chronicle
Magazine.*

K*urdistan Chronicle* has been selected for the Award of Excellence by the Religion Communicators Council, an interfaith association of religion communicators working in print, digital media, advertising, and public relations. A delegation from *Kurdistan Chronicle* will attend the Wilbur Award ceremony in Salt Lake City, Utah, on April 25. The award honors *Kurdistan Chronicle*, along with other media outlets, for its dedication to promoting religious coexistence.

This recognition is yet another reminder that the Kurdistan Region has become a center of peace in an otherwise volatile region. The stories emerging from Kurdistan reflect a deeply rooted culture of religious, social, and ethnic harmony.

The diverse communities of the Kurdistan Region, whether religious or ethnic, have become so interwoven over centuries that the distinctions between them often blur. In the Shaqlawa district of Erbil, for instance, a shrine is known as Pir Wsu Rahman by Muslims, who visit it on Fridays, and

as Raban Boya to Christians, who visit it on Sundays. This shared reverence highlights the spirit of peaceful coexistence.

Elsewhere, in the village of Hawdiyan, two faith communities have lived in harmony for centuries. A Christian resident donated land for the construction of a mosque, and in a reciprocal gesture, a Muslim resident offered land for a church.

Nearby, the village of Bedyal is remembered for protecting its Christian population during the Kurdish struggle for freedom. In the 1980s, as Saddam Hussein's genocidal Anfal Campaign targeted Kurdish communities, Christian residents were urged to remove their red headwear – identical to those worn by Kurdish Muslim men of Barzan – to avoid persecution. Refusing to abandon their identity or their Kurdish brothers, they stood in solidarity, even at the cost of their own lives.

This issue of *Kurdistan Chronicle* also features the story of Abdul Karim Afandi, the former Mufti of Erbil, who

championed peaceful coexistence between different faiths. As the city's highest Muslim religious authority of his time, he visited a church and prayed there – a bold act meant to set an example of unity and challenge attempts to sow division.

Religious leaders from non-Muslim communities across the Middle East have repeatedly emphasized that the regions where Kurds live are among the few places where religious and cultural diversity is genuinely preserved and respected. In 2014, when hundreds of thousands of Christians and Yezidis fled ISIS, they found refuge in Kurdistan—yet another powerful example of the Kurdish culture of pluralism and inclusion.

These stories are just a few among many that remind us of the longstanding culture of peaceful coexistence in Kurdistan – a tradition that could serve as a model for the broader Middle East, offering hope for a future defined not by ethnic, religious, linguistic, or racial division, but mutual respect and shared humanity. ●

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Newroz

Every year on March 21st, Kurds come together around the world to celebrate the Kurdish New Year, known as Newroz. But among the countless celebrations, the one in Akre, dubbed the capital of Newroz, attracts the largest number of tourists.

This year, President Masoud Barzani, accompanied by Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, welcomed several foreign diplomats in Akre to share the joy of spring's arrival with thousands of people.

One of the rituals of the Newroz celebration in Akre is the carrying of torches by more than 2,500 men and women to the top of a mountain, which ends with a massive bonfire, Kurdish music and traditional dance.

Photo: Melman Akrayi

Kurdistan Region Edges Closer to Government Formation



Marewan Hawramy

is a writer and has master's degree in diplomacy and international relations.

Six months have passed since the last parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region, yet a new government has not been formed. The prolonged period, however, is increasingly seen as an opportunity for major political parties to find common ground and build unity in the face of external challenges.

Historically, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have dominated the political landscape of the Kurdistan Region. In the most recent elections, the KDP and PUK won 39 and 23 seats, respectively, in the 100-seat parliament. The New Generation Movement came in third with 15 seats but soon made the expected move to join the opposition.

Ongoing dialogue

Since the official announcement of the election results, the KDP and PUK have been engaged in talks to agree on a formula that satisfies both sides' expectations for the next government. As of mid-April, the two political parties have held several bilateral meetings and, according to their affiliated media, have laid the groundwork for a final agreement. The next round of talks are expected to focus on the distribution of key ministerial positions.

No changes are expected in the top leadership positions. As the majority party, the KDP is likely to nominate the president and prime minister of the Kurdistan Re-

gion, while the PUK is set to take the role of parliament speaker.

As for the ministerial roles, negotiations are still ongoing, and a reshuffle is highly likely.

As it has reiterated on multiple occasions, the KDP leadership initially sought to include the broadest possible coalition of political parties in the new cabinet. But the initiative was ultimately abandoned, leaving the KDP and PUK with one viable option – finding more common ground to strengthen what is known as their “strategic partnership.”

A chance for unity

Amid rising tensions and new crises across the Middle East, the Kurdish leadership appears increasingly aware that internal unity is more vital than ever. This understanding is likely driving the KDP and PUK to focus on shared objectives rather than partisan divisions.

In a recent public statement, President Masoud Barzani, one of the most influential Kurdish leaders in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, underscored the importance of unity among Kurdish parties and encouraged broad participation in the political process.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Erbil International Book Fair on April 9, President Barzani said the Kurds collec-



President Masoud Barzani delivering a speech at the Kurdistan Women's Conference in Erbil (April 13, 2025)

PRIME MINISTER

Deputy Prime Minister



- Minister of Justice
- Minister of Interior
- Minister of Health
- Minister of Construction
- Minister of Higher Edu
- Minister of Labour
- Minister of Agriculture
- Minister of Transport
- Minister of Martyrs & Anfal Affairs
- Minister of State
- Minister of State

- Minister of Peshmerga Affairs
- Minister of Finance & Economy
- Minister of Education
- Minister of Municipalities
- Minister of Planning
- Minister of Culture
- Minister of Trade
- Minister of Electricity
- Minister of Religious Affairs
- Minister of State
- President of the Diwan



■ Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani with his cabinet ministers after being sworn in at the Kurdistan Parliament (June 2019).



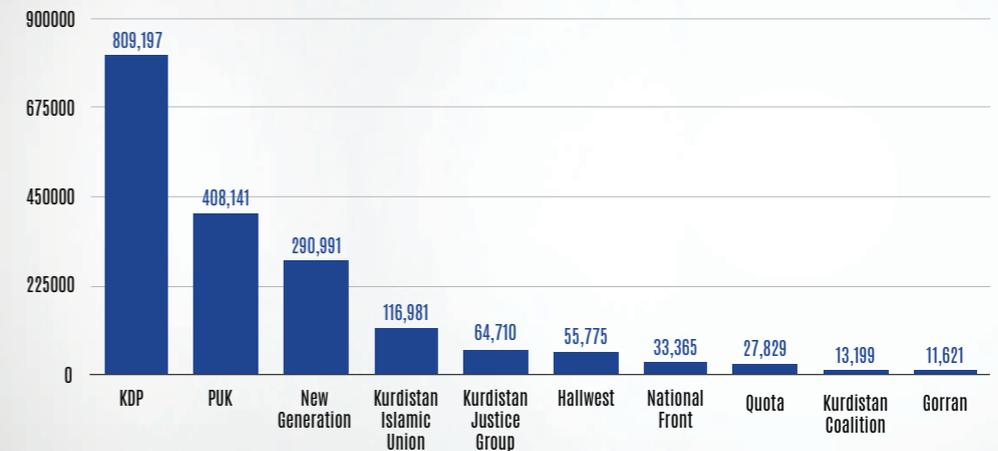


Parliamentary Seat Distribution

As per preliminary results

- KDP: 39
- PUK: 23
- New Generation: 15
- KIU: 7
- Quota: 5
- Hallwest: 4
- KJG: 3
- National Front: 2
- KR Coalition: 1
- Gorran: 1

Kurdistan Region Elections 2024 Vote Share by Political Party



tively reaffirm their commitment to maintaining a culture of unity, mutual respect, and freedom of thought, religion, and belief.

“These are the foundations that should never be compromised,” President Barzani emphasized.

“We are happy with those who gained seats, and we will create a government, a cabinet, based on the collective will of everyone. Kurdistan belongs to all of us, and we are all brothers. No one should be treated differently,” the Kurdish leader stated. “Around us, in the Middle East and the wider world, there are great crises, and it is possible that even greater crises will arise. Therefore, the only chance for the success of the Kurds is unity.”

The Tenth Cabinet: formation and ambitions

While technical committees handle direct negotiations, the leadership of the KDP and PUK also continue to meet regularly. On March 16, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani met with the PUK’s leader Bafel Talabani to discuss the formation of the Tenth Cabinet of the KRG.

In a brief statement to the media following the meeting, both Prime Minister Barzani and Talabani described the talks as “productive” and highlighted their shared goal of forming a government that prioritizes public services and improved the quality of life for citizens.

“This is the second time we have had a constructive meeting aimed at bringing us closer together and discussing issues that are important to the people of Kurdistan and our region in general. There has been significant progress and understanding on these issues, and I hope that the delegations can reach a comprehensive agreement on the formation of the government in the near future,” Prime Minister Barzani said.

Talabani echoed Prime Minister Barzani’s sentiment, saying that they had agreed on “several strategic matters” that will benefit the people.

One Kurdistan, one government

What is clear for now is that the next cabinet will be led by the KDP’s Masrour Barzani as prime minister. The PUK’s Qubad Talabani is also expected to stay in his current role as deputy prime minister. However, both sides are working toward a more harmonious and collaborative government that reflects their partnership in policy execution and political vision, both domestically and internationally.

Yet forming a government is just one part of the broader vision. President Masoud Barzani has consistently stated that the October elections should mark the beginning of a new era for the Kurdistan Region that is characterized by “one government, one parliament, and one military.”

This, political observers agree, is the direction to watch in the months ahead. ●

General Barzani to President Kennedy

“We Only Need Our Rights”



Sardar Sattar

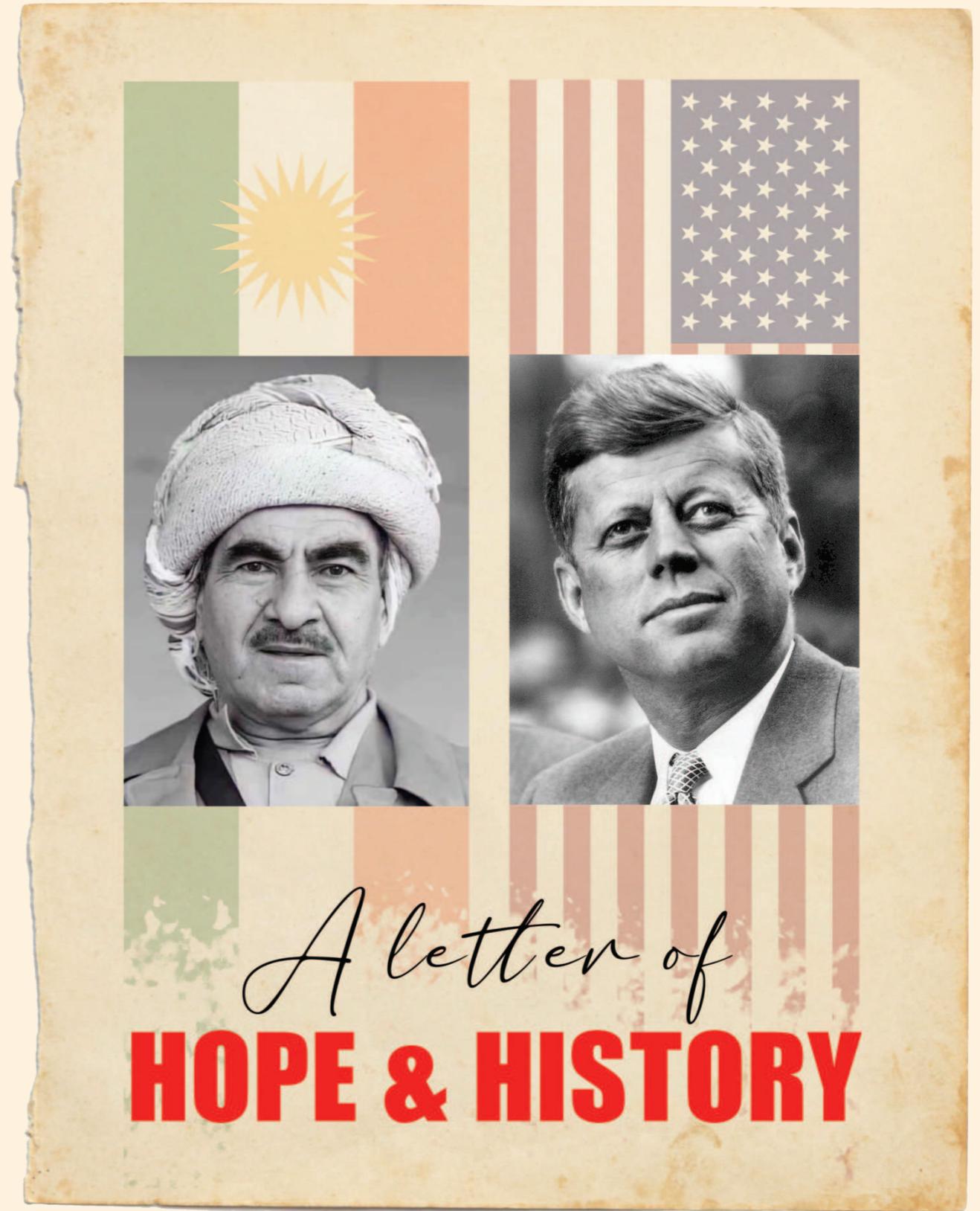
is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.

The Kurdish struggle for freedom has experienced many ups and downs over the past century. Following the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958, the Kurds were hopeful that the establishment of a republic would address the Kurdish question. The hope was strengthened by the promises made by Abdul Karim Qasim, the Prime Minister of the newly formed Iraq. His assurances paved the way for the return of General Mustafa Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish freedom movement at the time, from the Soviet Union to Iraq.

Although Qasim had promised Kurdish autonomy to gain General Barzani's support for his policies, he later failed to honor that promise once he felt his government's position was secure. This left the Kurds with one option: returning to the mountains to fight another revolution for their basic rights.

This revolution, lasting from 1961 until 1970, is known as the First Iraqi-Kurdish War, or the Eylul (September) Revolution in Kurdish. While leading thousands of fighters in the mountains during those years, General Barzani also introduced the Kurdish cause to the international community, including the United States.

Recently, Kurdistan Chronicle gained access to a handwritten letter from General Mustafa Barzani to then-U.S. President John F. Kennedy. The letter was sent to the White House through the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. What makes the letter from 1963 relevant in 2025 is that the demands of the Kurds are the same after more than six decades. Below is the letter, translated from Persian into English.



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۹۱۲/۷۱۳ توسط سفارت کبری ایالات متحده آمریکا در تهران

حضرت محترم جناب آقای پروردگندگی

هنگامات دیپلماتی دولت علیه ایالات متحده آمریکا بسبب ما کردی عراق و با خبر می باشد که ما چنان حکومتی را می خواهیم
مطالبی را خواسته باشیم حقوق انسان و دستور دائم سازمان ملل متحد که توافق دارد و ما بجز خدا قیل حقوق ملی
و عادلانه خود که عبارت از آتوموس در داخل چهار جوب جمهوری عراق است چیزی نخواسته و آر و روزیم . ولی بعد از سال
هنگام و خونی بی بارولت عیالیم تا سیم که سنجید انقلاب هشتم فوریه سال ۱۹۶۳ شده . و چنانکه بر سر چه بنیان
روشن است که ما کردی برای جلوگیری از خونریزی و برادر کشی جناب را متوقف و با انتظار رسیدن بحقوق حتم خود
از راه مسالمت آمیز با دولت جدید وارد مذاکره شد که شاید راه حل عادلانه پیدا و از هیچ گونه خشونت و تساهلی
راجع به این مسئله حیوی خود دارست نکرده . و باز هر چه جراتیان گراهند که دولت تازه عراق بهر بیان و
سوگندی که در این باره اعلام کرده بود لیست بازده و از تاریخ و هم نوشته که اکنون بنگاه وادی از آن میگذرد
به حکمت طه و حشیانه و دانسته دار و کوسی علی کرد ما که یک چهارم جمعیت عراق تشکیل میدهند و
و با سلب ناشیتمای هیستری سیاست سرزمینهای سوخته را شعار خود قرار داده و قضایای را
مرتکب شده اند که واقعا براس بشریت قرن بیستم ننگ بزرگی بشمار میرود .

اینک ملت مظلوم کرد که مدت دو سال از مبارزه خونین او در راه احقاق حق مشروغش میشدند و
هیچگاه هیچ دولتی از دولت کوچک گرفته تا بزرگ با کمک و ساعده نکرده ، امروز با چشم پر از امید از جناب
عالی دولت شما قلمند آزادی دوست آمریکا دعوت میکنید که بخاطر روح دگرگونی و بشر دوستی که ملت
کجیب آمریکا بنیان گذار آن بوده برای رسیدن کرد های عراق بحقوق عادلانه خود که عبارت از خود مختاری
در داخل جمهوری عراق است ، و کفصل جلوگیری از خونریزی و رفع کابوس ظلمی که بر گردنای عراق وارد گشته است
با جدیت هر چه تمامتر و با روح نوع پوری طرفداران فرایند . و نفوذ شخصی و ملی آمریکا را در این
باره هر چه زودتر کنار ببرید . که شاید در این باره هم مانند همیشه بزبانچ پر اقتدار دیوالت خلوصی ملت
کجیب آمریکا سخن افزوده بشود .

با کمال بی صبری منتظر اقدامات آن جناب و هم چنین حکم برده که معلوم مثبت و اطمینان بخشی را
توسط حامل و رفته از طرف آن حضرت دریافت نمایم .

امیازه نغزانی که سلام و احترامات و مرمت کرد را بحضور آن جناب و دولت اشروست
آمریک تقدیم نمایم .

مصطفی بارزانی

تقدیم

Through the Embassy of the United States of America in Tehran

July 12, 1963

Your Excellency Mr. President Kennedy

We are confident that the diplomatic officials of the United States of America are well aware of the case of our Kurdish nation in Iraq. We have repeatedly asked the former and current governments [of Iraq] for rights that align with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations. We seek and wish for nothing more than our just and national right, which is autonomy within the government of Iraq. However, after two years of war and bloodshed with Abdul Karim Qassim's government, which led to the revolution on February 8, 1963, and as it is clear to the world that we, the Kurds, have halted the violence to prevent bloodshed and civil war and have entered into peaceful dialogue with the new government of Iraq expecting that our legitimate rights will be secured. In this aim, we have spared no efforts to show our good will and facilitate the process.

Again, the world witnessed that the new government of Iraq has violated each and every promise it has made and has launched a large-scale, continuous, and brutal attack against the Kurds, who make up a quarter of the Iraqi population. [The Iraqi Government], similar to Hitler's fascist regime, follows a scorched-earth policy that creates an environment that is a disgrace to mankind in the 20th century.

Now, the persecuted Kurdish nation, which has been fighting for the past two years for its legitimate rights and has never received help from any states big or small, is hoping that your excellency and the noble people of America can offer their crucial assistance so the Kurds can finally gain their right to autonomy within Iraq. This will help prevent bloodshed and put an end to oppression against the Kurds in Iraq. We hope that you will use your personal and national influence to end this situation as soon as possible, so that another chapter will be added to the glorious history of America's pioneering role in supporting democracy.

We impatiently look forward to seeing your action, as well as a positive and reassuring response from your excellency through the person who delivers this letter.

Please allow me to also give my regards on behalf of the Kurdish nation to your excellency and the peace-loving nation of the United States of America.

Mustafa Barzani

Please allow me to also give my regards on behalf of the Kurdish nation to your excellency and the peace-loving nation of the United States of America.

Mustafa Barzani

Chinese Companies Exploring Opportunities in Kurdistan

Kurdistan Chronicle

At a press conference held at China's Consulate General in Erbil on Sunday, March 16, Liu Jun, China's Consul General, outlined China's policy priorities and reaffirmed the country's commitment to fostering closer ties with the Kurdistan Region and supporting regional stability.

The press conference began with a review of China's annual "Two Sessions," the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. These meetings, held in March, set the stage for China's policy and economic goals. Highlighting

its steady growth trajectory, Consul General Jun proudly emphasized that China achieved a 5% economic growth rate last year and is aiming for a similar target this year.

"China, as the second-biggest economy in the world, has an important role to play in promoting global stability and growth," he remarked.

Commercial opportunities

While global economic trends were addressed, the core of the discussion focused on China's relationship with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Jun pointed to the remarkable expansion of these ties since the establishment

of China's Consulate in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, in 2014. Currently, around 3,000 Chinese nationals reside in the Kurdistan Region, working with a diverse array of companies.

"Since 2014, relations between China and the Kurdistan Region have been on a very fast track, a very fast trajectory," Consul General Jun stated, underscoring the region's strategic location along the Belt and Road Initiative, China's ambitious global infrastructure project.

The economic data presented was compelling. Trade between China and Iraq reached an impressive \$54.2

■ *The Great Wall of China*



Photo: Sabr Salih

■ Liu Jun, China's Consul General in Erbil, during a press conference on March 16, 2025

billion last year, a 9% increase. While specific numbers for the Kurdistan Region were unavailable, Jun estimated that they comprised over \$5 billion of that total, illustrating the region's important contribution.

Consul General Jun also emphasized that many Chinese companies are increasingly interested in exploring the various opportunities present in the Kurdistan Region. "We are seeing more and more Chinese companies coming to explore the business opportunities in the Kurdistan Region, which we consider a virgin land for Chinese investment," he asserted. "There is big potential for business collaboration."

He particularly noted the investments by companies like POWERCHINA, which is currently building massive cement and power plants in the region with significant Chinese funding, and the establishment of cell phone manufacturing plants.

Cultural and educational ties

Jun announced that, for the first time, in 2025 the consulate would begin issuing tourist visas to those wishing to visit China. This initiative, he said, would "continue to open our doors to tourists, no matter where you are from."

A key aspect of China's commitment to the Kurdistan Region is its emphasis on human resource development. Last year, around 600 people from Kurdistan traveled to China for various training programs. Jun expressed his hope that this number would increase in the years to come.

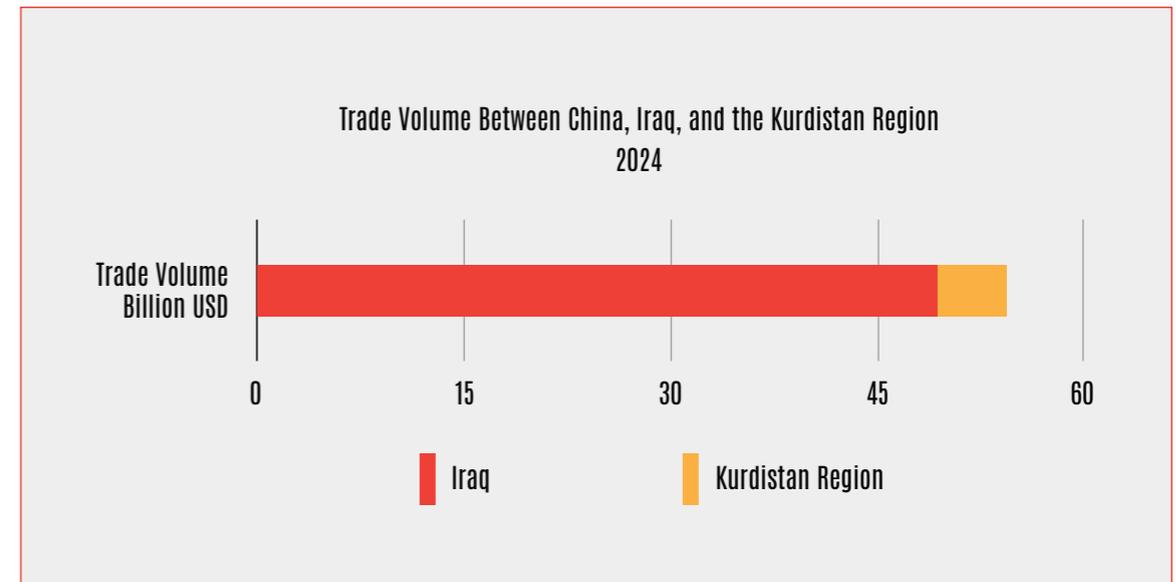
“China is working to open a Chinese Language Department at Sulaymaniyah University in order to encourage cultural understanding between the two peoples, after establishing the same department at Salahaddin University in Erbil in 2019”

“When China has already advanced and realized significant economic growth and social development, we believe it's important to share our experience with you,” Jun explained. Quoting Chinese President Xi Jinping, he added: “In a garden, if you only have one flower blooming, it's not spring. But when you have all the flowers blooming, then we have real spring.”

Moreover, Counsel General Jun said China is working to open a Chinese Language Department at Sulaymaniyah University in order to encourage cultural understanding



“Chinese policy is that we don't interfere in other country's internal affairs, but if we are asked for help, we are ready”



between the two peoples, after establishing the same department at Salahaddin University in Erbil in 2019.

To further enhance bilateral relations, Jun shared his goal of establishing sister-city relationships between Chinese cities and those in the Kurdistan Region, particularly with Sulaymaniyah. He also expressed a keen interest in creating such a sister-city relationship between Nanjing and Halabja in recognition of their respective tragic histories.

Regional peace and stability

Consul General Jun addressed the challenges facing the Middle East and reiterated China's commitment to pro-

moting peace and stability.

“We hope that peace and stability can be achieved through dialogue and negotiation,” he said, highlighting China's role in mediating talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

He also stated China's readiness to help with the negotiations and support building healthy relationships between Baghdad and Erbil if both parties were to ask for help.

“Chinese policy is that we don't interfere in other country's internal affairs, but if we are asked for help, we are ready,” he affirmed. ●

International Conference on Climate Change Action



Humer Abdulla Khayyat

is an assistant professor at the Department of Geography, Salahaddin University-Erbil.

Salahaddin University-Erbil (SUE) proudly hosted the upcoming International Conference on Climate Change Action: Challenges and Solutions (ICCCSUE 2025) on April 8-9, 2025, which served as a critical platform for addressing the pressing climate challenges facing not only the Kurdistan Region and Iraq but also the global community. Considering the remarkable leadership demonstrated by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in addressing environmental concerns and promoting sustainable development, this conference was pivotal in advancing climate action and fostering sustainable development.

A global call to action

Climate change is one of Iraq's most urgent and complex challenges, with significant and far-reaching consequences for the environment, public health, economic stability, and social structures. ICCCSUE 2025 brought together experts, policy-makers, and thought leaders to propose actionable, science-based solutions to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change on the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. At the heart of the conference, there were five key objectives, each addressing a critical aspect of climate change:

1. Climate change health risk assessment: Understanding the implications of climate change on public health and developing strategies to safeguard vulnerable populations.

“

ICCCSUE 2025 will also feature contributions from over 55 research papers presented by scholars from universities in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, the UK, Greece, Jordan, Iran, Türkiye, Italy, Bangladesh, Tunis, and the UAE

”

2. Mobilization of resources for adaptation and mitigation: Formulating sustainable and adaptive strategies to address climate change and secure funding for impactful climate action.

3. Artificial intelligence-driven climate solutions: Leveraging AI and interdisciplinary collaboration to drive innovative solutions in climate research.

4. Socioeconomic implications and migration: Analyzing the socioeconomic consequences of climate change, particularly concerning migration patterns and regional stability.



Salahaddin University's 1st International Conference on Climate Change Action

Kurdistan
Chronicle

ICCCSUE

Challenges and Solutions ICCCSUE-2025



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Photo: Sabr Satib

5. Advancing renewable energy solutions: Promoting sustainable energy practices and green technologies as a means of reducing the carbon footprint.

Comprehensive, interdisciplinary dialogue

ICCCSUE 2025 featured a variety of sub-themes and goals that raised awareness of the current and future climate risks in Iraq and the broader region. Participants engaged in discussions that highlight the interconnectedness of climate change's effects on natural and human systems. Key areas of focus included:

- Assessing the health impacts of climate change and developing public health strategies.
- Fostering a holistic understanding of its effects on water resources, biodiversity, food security, and economic development.
- Securing funding for climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

- Integrating AI and technology into climate monitoring solutions.
- Highlighting successful case studies to inspire actionable climate policies and strategies.

In addition to these discussions, the conference emphasized the role of advanced technologies such as AI in monitoring and combating climate change. With a particular focus on renewable energy, green initiatives, and eco-friendly practices, attendees explored how best to integrate these innovations into existing systems and frameworks.

Distinguished speakers and thought leaders

The conference featured a prestigious lineup of attendees, including policy-makers, academics, and experts from the KRG, the Iraqi Federal Government, and international institutions. Among the distinguished speakers are:

- **Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman**, Se-

nior Advisor to the Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs and Climate Change, KRG

- **Begard Dilshad Talabani**, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG
- **Amanj Harki**, Head, Renewable Energy Subcommittee, Electricity and Energy Committee, Iraq
- **Srwa Rasul**, General Director of Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCC), Ministry of Interior, KRG
- **Karwan Sabah Hawrami**, Director-General of Water Resources, KRG
- **Majed Abu Zreig**, President, Irbid National University, Jordan; Professor of Water Resources and Water Diplomacy
- **Ali Rashid Ahmed**, President, Erbil Provincial Council.
- **Abdul Rahman Siddiq**, Former Minister of Environment, Iraq; former Head of the Board of Environ-



Photo: Sabr Satib

mental Protection and Improvement, KRG

- **Rawiya Muzal Mahmoud**, Deputy Director-General of Agricultural Guidance and Training, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq; International Expert and Negotiator on Climate Change Action
- **Maziyar Rajabi**, Climate and Carbon Economy Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister, Iraq

Scholarship launched

ICCCSUE 2025 also received 73 research paper submissions. Of these, 54 papers (73.97%) were accepted and presented by scholars from universities across the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, the UK, Greece, Jordan, Iran, Türkiye, Italy, Bangladesh, Tunisia, UAE, Egypt, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The remaining 19 papers (26.03%) were rejected following a rigorous peer-review process.

The accepted papers showcased a broad range of perspectives, includ-

ing 26 from the Kurdistan Region, 20 from international universities, and eight from other regions of Iraq. The conference also featured strong institutional engagement, with 18 ministries and academic institutions from both within Iraq and abroad actively participating. Notably, 17 local universities and 12 international universities were represented.

A collaborative approach

Through cross-sectoral dialogue and multidisciplinary engagement, ICCCSUE-2025 successfully fostered collaboration among governments, academic institutions, and industry experts. The conference provided a platform for the exchange of policy frameworks, research findings, and technical innovations, all aimed at advancing joint initiatives for climate resilience.

Key discussions also addressed climate-induced displacement, the challenges faced by climate refugees, and the broader socio-political implications of environmental change—highlighting the urgent need for proactive policy measures and comprehensive humanitarian strategies.

Way forward

ICCCSUE-2025 marked a significant milestone in the region's ongoing climate journey. It showcased how collective action and strategic partnerships can empower the Kurdistan Region and Iraq to take a leading role in addressing climate challenges and implementing sustainable solutions.

As we reflect on the insights, recommendations, and collaborations that emerged during the conference, we are reminded of our shared responsibility to take decisive action for a climate-resilient future.

Conference Link: <https://conferences.su.edu.krd/icccsue2025/>

Always a Refugee

Kurdistan Chronicle

The air hangs heavy with unspoken grief in Ranya Park. Amid the bustle of the town, it offers a rare space for contemplation. But this park is not just a place of rest – it is a memorial.

Dominating the scenery is ‘Being Lost’, a haunting art installation showcasing the faces of Ranya residents who died trying to reach Europe, alongside portraits of their grieving parents who still search for answers. It is a daily reminder of the allure and the peril that lie across distant lands and seas.

Sarkawt Mawloud, 41, sits beside the installation, his gaze fixed on the faces that seem to stare back. Just four days ago, he walked through the park’s gates as a returnee, ending a seven-year stay in the UK. Driven by the hope of a better life for his family, he had left behind a one-year-old son. Now, back on familiar soil, he offers a stark warning: the dream of Europe is often a dangerous illusion.

“I deceived myself with the false promise of life in Europe,” Sarkawt confesses, his voice tinged with regret. “I lived in the UK for seven years and didn’t like it one bit. I was miserable leaving my family behind. I was always look-



A grieving father holds a photo and ID card of his son, a stark reminder of the families left searching for answers after loved ones died attempting to reach Europe.

Photo: Safin Hamid



Sarkawt Mawloud, recently returned from the UK, stands in Ranya Park in the Kurdistan Region behind the ‘Being Lost’ art installation. The display shows parents holding a portrait of their son, symbolizing the grief of families who lost loved ones attempting to migrate to Europe – a tragedy Sarkawt now warns others against.

Photo: Safin Hamid

ing for a decent job and trying to get residency.”

Years passed in limbo, ultimately ending in disappointment.

He remembers the hope that once propelled across borders: a desperation to provide for his family. Now, as he looks at the faces in the park – young and old lives cut short – his heart aches for those planning the same perilous journey.

“Please, do not be deceived,” he pleads, his voice rising with emotion. “Please don’t put your children’s lives in danger by crossing the sea in overcrowded inflatable boats. Kids don’t understand why you are doing this. They don’t understand the risks.” The sacrifices, he now sees, were too great.

The mirage of migration

Sarkawt’s experience reflects a stark reality: Europe is becoming increasingly unwelcoming to refugees. “You feel it everywhere you go,” he says, a weariness settling over him. “You’re not welcome. Even if you get citizenship, they still see you as a refugee. You’ll always be a refugee in their eyes.”

His warning comes amid tightening migration policies across the EU. The European Commission is advancing reforms to streamline deportations of failed asylum seekers, including the creation of “return hubs” and a unified approach to returns across member states, policies Sarkawt deems creates unnecessary “hurdles.”

While intended to restore public confidence in migration policies, these measures have drawn sharp criticism from human rights groups such as Amnesty International, which argues that they represent a dangerous erosion of migrant rights.

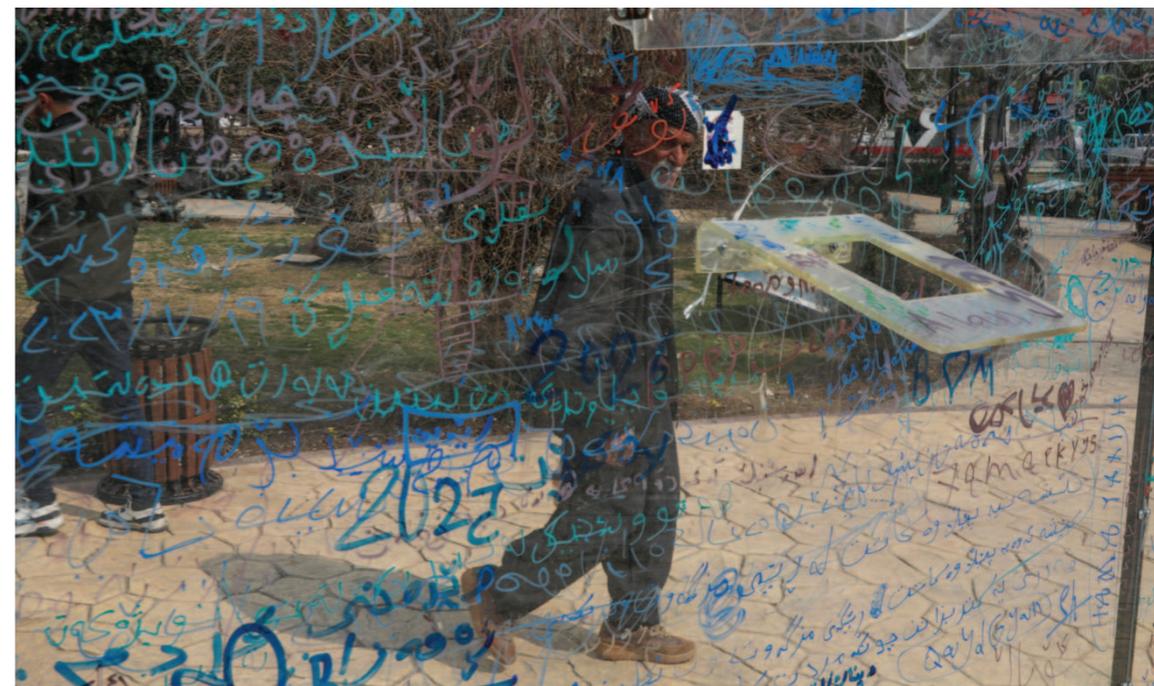
Sarkawt’s path mirrors that of Bakir Ali, another Kurd lured by the European dream, who returned home and is now dedicated to helping others avoid the same fate.

In Ranya, the office of Bakir’s Association of Returned Migrants from Europe to the Kurdistan Region is itself a stark reminder of shattered dreams. The walls are lined with photographs: young men, children, entire families – each face a silent testament to the perilous journeys taken in pursuit of a better life.



■ Part of the 'Being Lost' art installation in Ranya Park, Kurdistan Region, which displays portraits of locals who died or went missing while attempting to migrate to Europe.

Photo: Safin Hamid



■ A view through the 'Being Lost' art installation in Ranya Park, Kurdistan Region. Layered with names and messages, the memorial reminds people of locals who died attempting the dangerous journey to Europe.

Photo: Safin Hamid

“These are the victims,” says Bakir, 51, the association’s director, his voice thick with emotion as he gestures toward the images. “Those who lost their lives trying to reach Europe.”

Each picture bears a name, an age, and a location – Türkiye, Greece, Poland, Hungary – the final, tragic coordinates of their shattered hopes. “Sometimes, when I’m alone here at night, I sit in front of them and I just cry,” Bakir admits, tears welling in his eyes.

He and Sarkawt once shared the same naivete. “We all believed in a mirage,” he would later admit, “the kind that smugglers sell. The promise of wealth and happiness.”

Better to live in one’s own country

Bakir’s association, founded with fellow returnees, works to prevent more tragedies. “Our goal is twofold,” he explains. “To warn people about the dangers of illegal immigration and to help returnees rebuild their lives here in Kurdistan.”

“
You’ll always be a
refugee in their eyes
”

Having lived in Europe, Bakir believes the reality falls far short of the dream sold by smugglers. “People imagine Europe as a paradise, where money grows on trees and life is easy. But the reality is often a life trapped between four walls, a relentless cycle of work and isolation,” he says.

To counter this illusion, his association holds workshops and seminars, showing harrowing videos of refugees packed into overcrowded boats, praying as the waves crash around them.

Bakir’s mission stems from personal tragedy. In the 1990s, facing severe economic hardship, he made the illegal journey to Europe. “I walked for

14 days, from Kurdistan to Iran and then into Türkiye,” he recalls. But tragedy struck at the Turkish-Greek border. “Turkish border guards opened fire. I lost a friend that day.”

After 11 years in Europe, Bakir returned in 2010. The tragedy of his friend’s death never left him. “It became a pain in my heart,” he says. “That pain inspired me to start this association.”

Now, Bakir turns once more to the photographs on the wall. “Look at these beautiful young people,” he says, his voice barely a whisper. “Lost on the route to Europe. So many mothers and fathers are living in agony now, mourning these beautiful souls.”

Like Bakir, Sarkawt visits Ranya Park regularly, standing guard against the dangers of believing in the mirage of Europe. He shakes his head and says, “Don’t believe in the illusion of moving to Europe. It’s better to live in your own country.” ●

Catholic Church and *Peace on Earth*



Archbishop Yusuf Touma is the Archbishop of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah for the Chaldeans, Kirkuk, March 19, 2025

Humanity has always longed for peace. Despite this aspiration, war has continually reshaped history. However, something seems to have changed in Western Christian culture, where armed conflicts have become increasingly unimaginable. Undoubtedly, the Catholic Church has contributed to this change.

In 1963, Pope John XXIII published the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*). The work attracted global attention in the wake of the previous year's Cuban Missile Crisis and the failed U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1961, known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. At that time, the im-

minent threat of nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union loomed over the world.

Amid these Cold War tensions, Pope John's message in *Peace on Earth* became a guiding charter for Catholics worldwide, especially in the context of the revolutions and decolonization in the Third World. Against this backdrop of global changes, the Pope aimed to lay the foundations for a lasting peace through effective communication and mutual understanding.

A call for human rights

In *Peace on Earth*, the Pope raised a new



Pope John XXIII blessing the crowd, 1958

Photo Courtesy: AP



A mockup of *Peace on Earth* (*Pacem in Terris*) by Pope John XXIII

“Nonviolence, as a moral philosophy, does not imply passive submission to evil. Instead, it demands rejecting hatred and resisting injustice and violence”

and timely question that coincided with the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961: how can true relationships be fostered between humans? The answer was clear – everyone must respect the rights of others and fulfill their responsibilities. True human relationships can only be built upon respect for dignity and freedom, ensuring that all enjoy a decent standard of living, education, freedom of the press, religious liberty, fair working conditions, freedom of movement or migration, and participation in public life, including the right to assemble and form associations.

At the same time, these rights must be balanced by duties, which he summarized in the phrase: “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” This ethical approach requires a spiritual mindset, urging individuals to empathize with the needs of others, share resources, and exchange spiritual values.”

Based on this ethic, Pope John's message addressed the issue of war, rejecting the arms race, denouncing a civilization based on fear, calling for respect for a healthy environment for the planet, and proposing, as his predecessor Pope Pius XII had, global

disarmament with safeguards, particularly in the nuclear domain. He emphasized that material demobilization would be meaningless without removing hatred from human hearts. To achieve this, he asserted, national and international organizations must be built on four pillars: truth, justice, charity, and freedom. For Pope John, peace was, above all, a moral and spiritual matter.

The evolution of just war theory

In its early history, Christianity leaned toward what is now known as “con-

scientious objection," with early Christians refusing military service based on personal, religious, or ethical beliefs. While they condemned war in the name of the Gospel, some Church Fathers argued that the use of arms for defending the homeland and restoring order could be justified. For example, Saint Augustine saw war as justifiable only when aimed at restoring peace and achieving justice, and only after all peaceful means of resolving conflicts had been exhausted.

In the 13th century, Saint Thomas Aquinas elaborated on the conditions

good for all in the world, what we today would consider "global order." With the rise of nation-states in the 17th century, the idea of just war began to lose credibility, as it became a justification for princes to wage war against each other. The term then faded from public discourse after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, as European public law recognized the right of sovereign states to declare war while seeking to regulate conflicts and thus minimize destruction and protect civilians.

ican Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, published in 1965, which articulated the Church's role in the modern world.

The shift to peacebuilding

By 1963, the Church had moved away from endorsing war as a means of justice. Pope John XIII declared that every effort must be made to prevent war, advocating for a global authority to ensure security, safeguard justice, and uphold human rights. He called for international agreements to curb the arms race and promote disarmament. However, he acknowledged



■ Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Ankawa, Erbil, Kurdistan Region

Photo: Safin Hamid

for a just war: legitimate authority, a just cause, right intention, and proportionality between the expected harm and the injustice being addressed. This framework established war as a last resort within international law.

By the 16th century, theologians such as the Dominican Francisco de Victoria and the Jesuit Francisco Suarez emphasized the organizational aspect of warfare, arguing that states bore responsibility for acting against disruptors and maintaining the common

The failure of European public law to regulate warfare, however, became quickly apparent. Wars were declared without legal foundations, resulting in widespread violence that culminated in the two World Wars. This carnage prompted a reevaluation of war's legitimacy, and the Popes began calling for alternatives to armed conflict and the need for global disarmament. Pope Pius XII, recognizing the dangers of nuclear weapons, laid the foundations for the Church's modern stance toward warfare. These views later influenced the Second Vat-

that as long as war remained a threat and global security was not realized, states cannot be deprived of the right to self-defense.

Regarding deterrence, it could be considered morally acceptable so long as it served as a step towards gradual disarmament, but *Gaudium et Spes* cautioned against reliance on military buildup, asserting that true peace cannot be sustained through acquiring technologically more advanced arms but must be achieved through diplomacy and humane solutions.

Modern warfare

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the international approach to peace has evolved. After the UN ramped up operations after the Cold War ended, it faced questions regarding its ability to intervene in civil wars or to maintain peace or even impose peace. Some states defended intervention for humanitarian reasons, with international authorities determining how to assist vulnerable nations. For example, the UN led an international coalition that declared war against Iraq after it invaded Kuwait, a modern revival of just war theory. However, Pope John Paul II opposed the war, arguing that it could have been prevented and warning about its potential religious implications between Islam and Christianity.

nounced the principle of self-defense. It increasingly supports pacifists and conscientious objectors who advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflict.

Nonviolence, as a moral philosophy, does not imply passive submission to evil. Instead, it demands rejecting hatred and resisting injustice and violence. Some contemporary thinkers trace the roots of nonviolence to the Gospel, when Christ said, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other side as well." Early Christians upheld this principle, which reemerged through figures like St. Francis of Assisi, who acted in a nonviolent manner during the Crusades.

Nonviolence also found salience in leaders outside the Church, such as Mahatma Gandhi in India, Martin Luther



■ Pope Francis during his visit to Erbil, Kurdistan Region (March 2021).

Photo: Safin Hamid

The September 11, 2001 attacks opened similar questions, as they marked the rise of global terrorism, blurring distinctions between traditional combatants. While many nations adopted "counterterrorism" policies, the Church condemned war as a means of combating terrorism. Pope John Paul II, along with other Christian leaders, condemned the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq, advocating instead for peaceful solutions that respected the value and dignity of every culture and laid the foundations for preventive defense policies.

King, Jr. in the United States, Lanza del Vasto in Europe, Dom Helder Camara in Brazil, and many others, who advocated for peaceful solutions to injustice. The anti-war movement also spread worldwide in the 1960s, with the ideas of nonviolence penetrating fields like psychological research, academia, and civil defense.

The Church and pacifism

The Church is, by nature, peaceful, though it has never re-

The Second Vatican Council ultimately called for a reevaluation of all war-related concepts, included just war theory, with Pope Paul VI declaring before the UN in 1964: "Humanity must put an end to war, or war will put an end to humanity." This marked a turning point, elevating conscientious objection to a recognized human right that endures to this day. ●

Mufti of Erbil's Prayer at Church



Ihsan Rashad Mufti

*Legal Advisor, Researcher,
and Writer*

In the early 1960s, during his visits to various places and meetings with friends, I always loved accompanying my late father, Rashad Mufti. As the youngest son in the family, I was especially dear to him, and he often fulfilled my requests with love and patience.

In keeping with his personal habit, my father would visit Erbil's Qaisari Bazaar several times a year. Although I hesitate to raise this matter, as it astonished me at the time, shop owners would often ask my father for a small amount of money and place it in their cash boxes. As I grew older, I came to understand that they considered this money a form of *tabarruk* (blessing), a way to invoke prosperity and

ensure the continuity and growth of their businesses.

"Uncle Paulos"

Among the notable figures at that time was the Christian pharmacist Paulos Mirza George, one of the city's earliest pharmacists. He opened the Northern Pharmacy in Erbil in 1930, located at the beginning of Bata Street. At that time, our home was in the center of the Citadel near where the Kurdistan flag is now raised and next to our family mosque – the Grand Mosque, one of the oldest mosques in Erbil. We lived there until 1964, when we moved to a new home on the Citadel side, near the current governorate building.



■ General Mustafa Barzani with Paulos Mirza George (right), owner of the Northern Pharmacy in Erbil; Professor Izz al-Din Fayzi (middle); and former Justice Minister of Kurdistan Maroof Raouf (left)



■ Rashad Mufti, 1912-1992



■ Dr. Paulos Mirza George, owner of the Northern Pharmacy in Erbil

“Uncle” Paulos’ house was close to ours, situated across from the home of the late Maroof Saleh Dzayi. His son was a sociable and respected man who frequently visited my father’s *diwan* – the same library and reception hall that remained open even after my father’s passing in 1992. The *diwan* serves as a gathering place for guests and has become a valuable resource for university students conducting research.

In the 1970s, during my visits to downtown Erbil, I would often stop by Uncle Paulos’s pharmacy either to buy medicine or simply to greet him. What always caught my attention was how he was always tucked into a corner of the pharmacy, carefully preparing special medications for patients. Undoubtedly, the work of dispensing medicines at that time was in the hands of trustworthy individuals like Uncle Paulos, who were committed to their profession and far removed from any form of deceit.

“Is it permissible to pray in a church?”

In the mid-1970s, Uncle Paulos passed away. To pay our respects, I accompanied my father and my brother Kanaan Mufti to the condolence gathering at Mar Gorgis Church, the oldest church in Ankawa. The funeral was attended by several notable figures from Erbil, including Judge Qado, Judge Nazim Said Ozeri, Judge Fattah, Judge Maroof Raouf, and Mohsin Haji Saleh. The Christian ceremony took longer than the Muslim funeral prayers we were used to. The church was filled with

Christian attendees as well as Muslim friends of Uncle Paulos. As the hours passed and the Islamic prayer time approached, the call to prayer from a nearby mosque – likely Judge Muhammad’s mosque, which my father had helped establish through donations – reached our ears.

Wearing his religious garb, my father quickly stepped aside within the church hall, spread his cloak on the floor facing the Qibla, and began the prayer with the takbir: “Allahu Akbar.” All eyes turned to him in surprise. Many Christians looked on, wondering: Is this correct in Islam for the mufti and judge of Erbil to pray in a church?

After completing his prayer, my father shook out his cloak and put it back on. At that moment, Judge Abdul Qadir Nour al-Din, my father’s dear friend, approached and asked:

“Rashad Effendi, is it permissible to pray in a church?”

My father replied: “They worship God here, and our religion is one of tolerance. We must embody that tolerance in our actions. We did not come here intending to pray in a church instead of a mosque, but since we are here for Paulos’s funeral and the ceremony has not concluded, it is necessary to pray on time. Doing so also sends a message about the beauty of our faith. These are People of the Book, and it is our duty to protect them. We must build the teachings of Islam on this foundation.”

“

Many Christians looked on, wondering: Is this correct in Islam for the mufti and judge of Erbil to pray in a church?

”

Word of my father’s prayer and the wisdom he shared spread throughout the church hall and became a topic of discussion across Erbil.

Protecting Christians

After the funeral, on our way back to Erbil, my father recounted an incident from the end of World War I. In 1917-1918, during the Ottoman army’s retreat from Erbil, some officers, incited by extremist voices in the name of religion, attempted to carry out a massacre against the Christians of Ankawa.



■ Mar Gorgees Church in Ankawa, the oldest church in the city of Erbil

When this news spread, the Christians of Ankawa fled their homes, taking refuge in Erbil. Some found shelter in the Citadel’s Grand Mosque, while others fled to the village of Badawa. To prevent the attack, two leading scholars – Mullah Effendi and Muhammad Mufti, my grandfather, both descendants of the great scholar Mullah Abu Bakr (Mulla Kijka, 1778-1855) – issued a fatwa declaring that it was the duty of every Muslim to shelter and protect Christians, warning that anyone who harmed them would face God’s punishment on Judgement Day.

My grandfather’s brother, Ahmad Othman – who was then mayor of Erbil and later the first governor of Erbil District and Sulaymaniyah District and a member of the Iraqi Senate – worked with local tribes to send armed men to defend Ankawa. This was partly done out of the fear of repeating the tragedy that the Turks had inflicted on the Armenians in Türkiye in 1915.

After the situation calmed down, the Christians returned safely to their homes and possessions. That fatwa remained a symbol of religious protection and was often cited by local leaders in the years that followed.

Continuing Muslim-Christian relations

The legacy of coexistence endured

thereafter. During Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, Christian clergy from Ankawa were often the first to visit Rashad Mufti at his *diwan*, followed by Christian figures from the city. Likewise, during Christmas and New Year, my father would visit the church, accompanied by other Muslim scholars like Mullah Abu Bakr al-Hamoundi, Mullah Jirjis Ibrahim, and Mullah Muhammad Khanqah, to offer greetings and well wishes.

I remember clearly that my father once received a letter from His Holiness the Pope at the Vatican, which he would read to guests in his *diwan*. He had a habit of storing such letters between the pages of his books. Unfortunately, I have not yet located that letter in my archives, though I hope to find it while preparing my book, *Imprints of Events*, which will be published in both Kurdish and Arabic. When I do, I intend to publish it as a valuable historical document.

I share these events and reflections here to affirm that religious tolerance in Erbil is not new, but has deep historical roots. These should be promoted and celebrated, so that everyone understands that religious figures, through their guidance, ethics, and actions, played an important humanitarian role and were competent leaders of their time. They never lost sight of their national identity regardless of the circumstances and were always ready to defend their homeland,

Kurdistan.

Short Biography

Rashad al-Mufti (1915-1992) was a prominent religious and scholarly figure from the city of Erbil. He held several positions, including imam and preacher of the Citadel’s Grand Mosque, judge of Erbil, and head of the city’s Scientific Council. He played a key role in promoting religious tolerance, fostering social harmony, and serving as a trusted authority in resolving community disputes.

Al-Mufti was widely known for his courage and patriotic stances. He notably rejected a request from the Erbil Division Commander to issue a fatwa against the 1962 Kurdish Revolution, and in 1964, he intervened to secure the release of female teachers and students who had been detained for chanting slogans in support of the Kurdish movement.

His cultural and scholarly contributions were equally significant. In the 1940s, he helped promote the Kurdish language through his religious poems. His legacy is commemorated in one of Erbil’s largest mosques, Rashad al-Mufti Mosque, located on the Erbil-Kirkuk road.

He was also the father of Adnan al-Mufti, a prominent Kurdish leader and former President of the Kurdistan Parliament. ●

Newroz in Westminster

Kurdistan Chronicle

We are used to seeing music played on the *davul* and *zurna* and traditional Kurdish dancing at weddings and community celebrations. But hearing their echo through the halls of the UK Parliament during *Newroz*, the Kurdish New Year, is something truly rare and remarkable.

In the past, Kurds in the UK would gather to mark *Newroz* in public parks or on city streets. Today, the celebration has moved into the very heart of British political life: Parliament itself. And this is not even an isolated event. Several *Newroz* celebrations now take place throughout the spring, including special receptions at the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

In one of Parliament's most historic and ornate rooms – the official residence of Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker – the sounds of Kurdish music and song filled the air. But Kurds were not celebrating alone. The event brought together guests from a range of backgrounds and

nationalities. Many non-Kurds joined in, singing along with genuine enthusiasm.

Hoyle, one of the UK's most senior political figures, personally hosted the celebration. In his opening remarks, he said:

"The Kurdish New Year... what a wonderful celebration!" He went on to reflect:

"We have seen the Kurdish people suffer under occupation and oppression, unable to celebrate *Newroz* freely in their own countries. Many had to do so in secret or were even banned from speaking their language. Today, they are celebrating openly in the UK Parliament, and we will host this celebration again next year."

"Everyone is welcome"

Around the venue, men and women in vibrant Kurdish attire filled the room, singing the patriotic song:

"*Welate Me Kurdistan e*" – "Our homeland is Kurdistan."



■ *Newroz celebrations in Westminster, London*



■ *The davul and zurna provide music for the Newroz celebrations in Westminster, London.*

The Speaker watched on, smiling warmly, visibly moved by the joy and cultural richness unfolding within his official residence.

Reflecting on the UK's relationship with Kurdistan, Hoyle added:

"This is the work of parliamentarians: building bridges and fostering relationships. I am here to serve and represent all communities."

A vibrant Kurdish *se pey* (three-step) dance broke out, led by a young man in full traditional attire. Beside him, a Scottish guest in a national kilt joined in, dancing with spirited enthusiasm.

James Young, one of the attendees, said:

"Next year, I hope to be in Akre for *Newroz*. I've heard it's the capital of *Newroz*!"

Among the guests was Arya Temo, a Kurdish doctor originally from Afrin, Western Kurdistan (northeastern Syria). She wore an intricately embroidered Badini-style dress – a traditional design from the Duhok region – that perfectly complemented her striking green eyes. Standing with her mother and aunts, she said:

"We're truly proud to see this celebra-

tion take place in the UK Parliament. It's wonderful to welcome other communities to join us. Everyone is welcome."

In years gone by, the Kurdish community in the UK would mark *Newroz* with a single public gathering. Now, it has evolved into a season of events held in various venues across the country and, most notably, inside Parliament. In a powerful expression of cultural exchange, Kurdish music fills the air while British and Kurdish guests dance shoulder to shoulder in a celebration of heritage, resilience, and unity. ●



■ *Kurdish officials and diaspora community dance during the Newroz celebrations in Westminster, London.*

LEGEND

Matran Issa A tale of Love and Justice

Kurdistan Chronicle

On the banks of Lake Van in the heart of Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye), where the lake's waters meet the dark colors of the sky, one of the most remarkable stories in history arose. In an act of courage, faith, and tolerance, a cleric stood up to a superpower, challenging the norms and traditions that governed the destiny of lovers. Part of the Kurdish oral tradition, the story of Bishop Issa tells of the moment when he united two different faiths, fighting the forces of authority to protect a love that recognized no boundaries.

But what happens when one man's moral courage defies the might of an empire—for the sake of love?

The love story

About a century ago, in the Kurdish city of Van, Ali, a young Kurdish Muslim, and Maryam, a beautiful Armenian girl, resisted the constraints of their time for a love that knew no walls or borders. Their love faced extreme difficulties in that era, when religious and social norms imposed strict divisions between faiths and communities. Despite these challenges, destiny could not stand between them.

When the *Wali* (Ottoman governor) of Van set eyes on Maryam, he was captivated by her beauty, asking her to come to the palace to be his wife. Maryam, however, was

Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Akdamar

Photos: Mohammad Davgalayi

stuck between sadness and fear; after all, her dreams revolved around her love for Ali. As the pressure and threats mounted, she decided to run away with her lover.

Escape to Akdamar Monastery

One dark night, the two lovers decided to escape their fate. They boarded a small boat and sailed across the turbulent waves of Lake Van until they reached Akdamar Monastery, where Bishop Issa, a man known for his wisdom and courage, was living. At that moment, their fate was in his hands.

When Ali and Maryam arrived at the monastery, Bishop Issa was fast asleep. Ali called out to him in a voice filled with tension and fear:

“
The story of Archbishop Issa is not just a memory; it has become an enduring symbol of resistance and tolerance, immortalized through the arts across generations

When the bishop awoke, he found himself stuck in a quandary: Should

“O Ali, you are not a sinner, and I will not abolish Sharia (Islamic law). I am not one to devalue the religion of Muhammad in the courtyard of this monastery for the sake of a girl you love. I will not let you abandon Islam.”

The bishop was not just a cleric; he held in his heart a faith that placed humanity above religious traditions and obligations. After a few moments of reflection, he said in a firm voice:

“I swear by the light of Jesus that I will not disappoint anyone who seeks refuge at Akdamar Monastery.”

A steadfast defender

The bishop wedded Ali and Maryam, with Maryam converting to Islam.

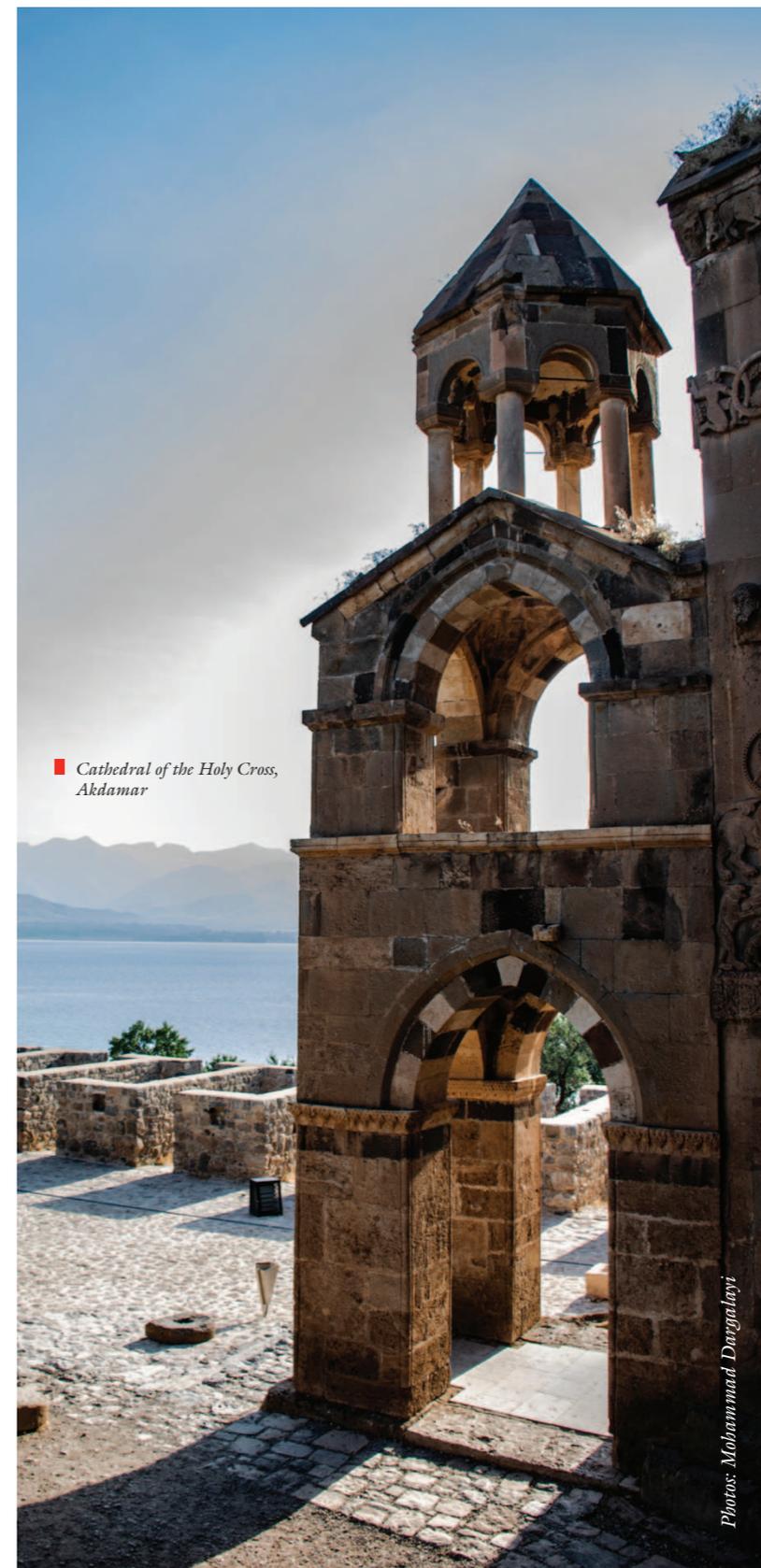


■ Muhammad Arif Jizrawi, the Kurdish singer who immortalized the story of Matran Issa in a revered piece of music

“Bishop, please wake up! I have done what no one has done before—I’ve kidnapped the *Wali*’s beloved. Help us. Marry us, if you will, in the Islamic faith. Otherwise, I’m willing to become Christian.”

he obey the pressures of authority and shatter the lovers’ fate, or follow his consciousness and contravene his society’s norms and traditions? The Bishop thought for a while before responding:

When the *Wali* learned of the news, he sent a letter to Bishop Issa, saying, “I saw in my dream last night a pair of doves entering the monastery. Hand Ali and Maryam over to me, and I will give you a thousand purses of gold.”



■ Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Akdamar

Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi

But the bishop firmly refused, saying, “I will not convert to Islam, and I will not insult the religion of Muhammad in my monastery.”

The *Wali* was enraged and sent his men to detain the lovers, but the bishop stood his ground, upholding the honor of the Akdamar Monastery.

In a heroic stand, Bishop Issa confronted the governor’s authorities, refusing to let the law become a sword that blocked the path to justice. When the Ottoman Empire sent its soldiers to take Maryam from the monastery, it was not a mere threat, but a true confrontation between power and free will.

Knowing that his life might be the price, the bishop stood firm, believing that love and justice are stronger than swords and soldiers. He did not compromise his honor, becoming a symbol of resistance in the face of injustice, and his story became a legend passed down through the generations.

An immortal legend

The story of Archbishop Issa is not just a memory; it has become an enduring symbol of resistance and tolerance, immortalized through the arts across generations. In 1971, the renowned Kurdish singer Mohammed Arif Jazrawi sang “Armenian Archbishop Issa” in Baghdad, bringing the story to new generations. Other artists, such as Hassan Jazrawi, followed suit.

Today, the name of Archbishop Issa the Armenian remains dear to Kurds and all those who believe that courage lies not only in bearing arms, but in confronting injustice and adhering to love and justice forever. ●

The Ehmede Xani Yearbook

“As long as Kurds read and write in Kurdish and keep reading the works of their great poet Ehmede Xani, they will not be lost.”

— Wolfgang Gunter Lerch



Nihat Gültekin

is a writer and PEN Kurd member. He led the Ehmedê Xani Association for five years and currently serves on the İsmail Beşikçi Foundation board in Istanbul.

Ehmede Xani is considered the greatest master of classical Kurdish poetry, a sage who defended the rights of the Kurds as a community. He is seen as the intellectual father of Kurdish patriotism and the crown jewel of Kurdish literary history. The ideas that feature in his works are, moreover, far more advanced than those of his time, a feat that amazes many Western scholars and researchers.

The great Kurdish poet and philosopher Ehmede Xani is one of the most famous medieval and modern poets of the Middle East and one of the most widely read poets abroad. His work has been translated into Arabic, Armenian, French, German, Persian, Romanian, Russian, Swedish, and Turkish, and numerous books and articles have been written about him.

His epic *Mem u Zin* has now been translated into many languages outside of the Middle East, with a German translation being published most recently. Two separate translations have been made into English in the last decade alone. Prior to that, it had been translated into French and published by a well-known publishing house in France, a translation that attracted great interest in Europe because it is considered of such high quality. Despite the lack of systematic support and encouragement from any state or institution, Xani’s fame thus continues to spread rapidly around the world, and almost every year we witness the translation of his works into a different foreign language or

the publication of books and research articles about him.

Celebrating Xani’s legacy

Dogubeyazit is a city rich in history and culture, prominently associated with Xani, where he is affectionately known as “Xani Baba.” In our efforts to honor his legacy through the Ehmede Xani Yearbook project, we drew inspiration from Xani’s literary contributions, the essence of Dogubeyazit itself, and the broader developments that shaped the city and its region. This initiative culminated in the publication of five yearbooks, known during Ottoman times as *salname*.

During my tenure as president of the Ehmede Xani Culture and Enlightenment Association (Xani-Der) from 2005 to 2009, we engaged in various activities including educational programs, commemorative *mevlut* ceremonies for Xani, participation in local festivals, organizing conferences, erecting a bust of Xani, and providing scholarships for students. Eventually, we embarked on the Ehmede Xani Yearbook project to further celebrate his influence.

In Türkiye, the concept of creating a yearbook dedicated to an individual is quite rare. To our knowledge, there are no existing examples of such practices in the country. Historically, during the Ottoman Empire, there were city-specific yearbooks for places like Diyarbakir and Erzurum; however, these did not focus on individ-

■ The Ehmede Xani Yearbook project



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Between 1856 and 1857, significant scholarly attention was directed toward Ehmede Xani in the West, marked by the publication of various studies, articles, and writings

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uals. This absence of a tradition in Eastern cultures prompted us to study the practice of creating the yearbooks dedicated to figures like Goethe and Shakespeare that have emerged in Western contexts.

A symbol of Dogubeyazit's cultural heritage

Our team of three undertook this project with a specific focus on Xani because we share a deep connection to Dogubeyazit, where we were born and raised. There, Xani is a prominent figure frequently discussed among our community members. His legacy is so significant that his name has been prominently displayed on signboards throughout the city for many years, and even a neighborhood bears his name. In our opinion, Xani is the symbol of our region; he is an influential character who positively represents and symbolizes our country for other countries.

The fascination that the residents of Dogubeyazit hold for Xani can be attributed to several factors. Historically, the number of scholars in this region was limited, making him stand out as the preeminent intellectual figure of his era. His contributions were not only significant, but also marked by a high literary quality that remains unparalleled. Although subsequent scholars emerged, none matched the depth and richness of Xani's works, which is why he is revered as a sage, philosopher, and scientist among the local populace.

Xani's legacy is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Dogubeyazit and extends into the Serhat Region and the city of Hakkari. His name resonates widely within folk literature, where numerous tales celebrate his life and teachings. Furthermore, dervish *kilams* – poetic verses passed down through generations – often honor him, reflecting his enduring influence on spiritual and literary traditions.

The Kurdish poet behind the national epic *Mem u Zin*

The selection of Ehmede Xani for this project does stem not solely from his identity as a Kurdish poet and philosopher, but rather from the significance of his work, *Mem u Zin*, which is recognized as a national epic. In 1856, French scholar Peter Lerc affirmed this status by declaring *Mem u Zin* an epic of Kurdish literature. Furthermore, Wikipedia, the largest encyclopedia globally, lists *Mem u Zin* alongside the Persian poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and *Sirat Bani Hilal*, an Arab folk epic, highlighting its importance among the world's most significant epic poems.

According to Joseph Orbeli, who led the Kurdology department at the St. Petersburg State University, Xani is recognized as one of the three eminent poets of the East, alongside Ferdowsi and Shota Rustaveli. During his visit to Dogubeyazit for the Ehmede Xani Festival in 2007, Professor Celile Celil highlighted the significance of the Xani Library, pointing out that a note found on a book in a library in Vienna indicated it had been “taken from the Xani Library.”

Beyond these noteworthy details, it is crucial to acknowledge that there exists a substantial body of articles, writings, and interviews dedicated to Xani and his literary contributions, enough material to compile an entire book. In initiating the Ehmede Xani Yearbook project, we thus gathered, over the course of a year, all relevant articles published. We made a conscious decision to include every perspective and thought expressed in these writings, irrespective of their ideological stance or underlying beliefs.

In the initial three volumes, we compiled nearly 70 research articles and papers contributed by at least 60 different authors. Alongside these contributions, we also produced a considerable amount of original content ourselves. Each member of our

team focused on specific research topics, which were then included in that year's yearbook alongside other relevant articles. The yearbook was published in both Kurdish and Turkish, and we ensured that all articles were presented in their original languages, irrespective of the language of publication.

While the first three volumes predominantly featured research from writers of Turkish descent, subsequent editions expanded to include scholarly works about Xani authored by individuals residing outside Türkiye, particularly from neighboring countries. We meticulously gathered these studies into our publications. Notably, there has been a wealth of research conducted in the West since the 1850s, with numerous studies appearing in academic journals during that period. We systematically incorporated these findings into our yearbooks and reached out to the authors to express our appreciation for their work, emphasizing the importance we placed on their contributions.

Our research also encompasses a wide array of scholarly contributions, including research articles, opinion pieces, commentaries, conference proceedings, interviews, and significant news articles published in various newspapers and magazines regarding Xani from 2009 to 2013 and earlier. The compilation consists of five volumes totaling approximately 1,770 pages, with each volume featuring a selection of poems by Xani. Notably, the back cover of the 2010 edition includes Abdullah Baydar's manuscript alongside a copy of *Mem u Zin*. Furthermore, the 2012 and 2013 yearbooks incorporate articles written in foreign languages that discuss Xani's work. The publication of these books has significantly broadened our understanding and knowledge about Xani, revealing new insights that I would like to elaborate on now.

Ehmede Xani was revered as a sage by the Kurdish community and lo-



■ A mockup of *Mem u Zin* by Ehmede Xani

cal leaders during his lifetime. For instance, the Bitlis poet Ahmed Faik translated *Mem u Zin* into Ottoman Turkish in 1730, just 23 years after Xani's death. Thereafter, the influence of his name and writings began to permeate European literature around 1830. That year, Felician Martin Von Zeremba visited Dogubeyazit, where he encountered Mahmud Bayazidi and a scholar from the Zilan tribe who introduced him to Xani's literary contributions. Subsequently, various orientalists such as Alexander Chodzko, Richard Gosche, and Otto Blau published articles that referenced Xani's works in several journals. The collaboration between Alexander Jaba, the Russian consul in Erzurum, and Bayazidi also facilitated the dissemination of many of Xani's writings

to Russia and Europe, leading to an increase in scholarly interest and numerous publications about him across various European languages.

Scholarly focus on Ehmede Xani: Peter Lerc's contributions

Between 1856 and 1857, significant scholarly attention was directed toward Ehmede Xani in the West, marked by the publication of various studies, articles, and writings. A notable figure during this period was a young professor named Peter Lerc, who played a crucial role in organizing manuscripts sent by Jaba for library classification. Lerc also contributed to the academic discourse

surrounding Xani's literary contributions. His inaugural article, published in 1857, focused on eight Kurdish poets, showcasing the rich literary heritage of the region. The following year, in 1858, he produced an extensive article dedicated to *Mem u Zin*, an effort partly inspired by a summary of *Mem u Zin* that Beyazidi had prepared at Jaba's request and eventually reached Lerc. Drawing from it, he crafted a comprehensive review that elevated the significance of the epic within the literary canon.

In the 1860s, additional manuscripts were compiled in various regions, primarily by German scholars, which are housed in different libraries across Europe. Notably, the oldest manuscript – dating to 1709 – can be found

in the University Library of Malburg, Germany. This is particularly significant as it follows the presumed death of Ehmede Xani in 1707. The manuscript includes a note indicating that Xani had already passed away by that time, which helps clarify the somewhat ambiguous date of his death. The year 1707 was not derived from any ancient texts but was instead inferred from a date inscribed on the back cover of another book. This note serves as an important confirmation of Xani's death date.

such as Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Damascus, and Sulaymaniyah. The academic interest expanded further in Türkiye and Iran, ultimately leading to a renaissance of research that reached maturity and sophistication by the 1990s.

In 1992, researcher and writer Mehmed Emin Bozarslan made a significant appeal to UNESCO and various institutions to designate 1995 as the year of *Mem u Zin*, coinciding with the 300th anniversary of the epic's composition. This initia-

scholarly articles. Consequently, these endeavors led to the publication of numerous research books about Xani, translations of *Mem u Zin* into various languages, and new editions of nearly all his literary works.

In the 2000s, the legacy of Xani gained significant recognition across numerous countries, particularly in Europe. This period saw a surge of events and publications dedicated to his work, especially within Türkiye and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Numerous publishing houses un-

dertook the task of reprinting all of Xani's works, leading to an increased presence of his name in various media outlets, including magazines, newspapers, and television programs. Now, we encounter articles, news stories, or events related to Xani almost monthly. A notable advancement during these years was the efforts of researchers who unearthed Xani's divan by locating poems preserved in archives in St. Petersburg and gathering them from diverse sources.

Xani has also been honored through a variety of events in his native Dogubeyazit since his passing. This area is home to Xani's tomb, which has served as a pilgrimage site for centuries, particularly for the local populace. The verses inscribed on the stones of the madrasa he established during his lifetime remain intact to this day. This educational institution, which utilized Kurdish as its medium of instruction, laid the groundwork for future scholars such as Ismaile Bazidi, Miradxane Bazidi, and Mahmud Bayazidi, all followers of Xani. The initiative to preserve Xani's legacy and works in Dogubeyazit began with the establishment of the Ehmede Xani Association in 1978. Between 1989 and 1994, significant restoration efforts were undertaken by Mahmut Kotan, then Mayor of Dogubeyazit, along with his council, to renovate Xani's tomb and its surroundings.

During my tenure as president of the association and while working on the Ehmede Xani Yearbook project from 2005 to 2015, I often contemplated a thought-provoking scenario: what if Ehmede Xani had been German or French? One can only imagine the multitude of streets and avenues that would bear his name across various cities in those countries. Numerous educational institutions, including schools, universities, and research institutes, would likely be established in his honor. Significant funding would be allocated to explore the philosophical, linguistic, and sociocultural dimensions of *Mem u Zin*. Statues commemorating him would undoubtedly grace public squares in countless urban centers.

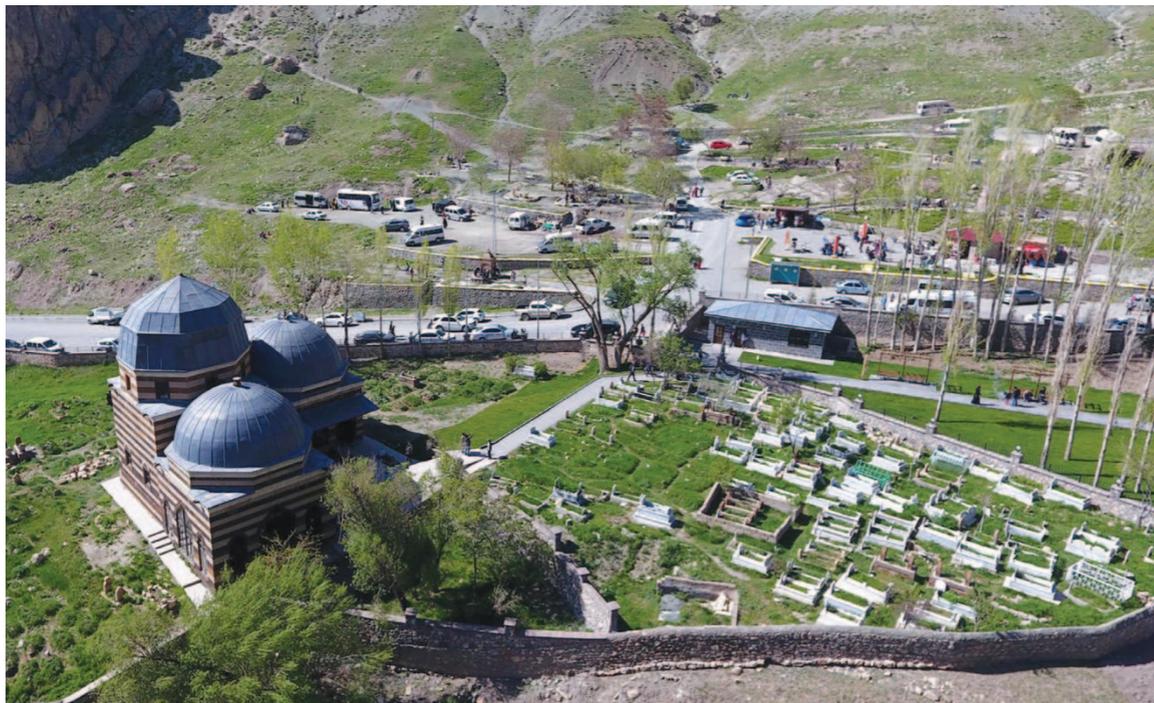
Regrettably, because Xani was Kurdish, such recognition has not materialized. The scarcity of scholarly studies on his contributions is disheartening; it suggests a lack of appreciation for a poet and philosopher of his caliber within our culture. This reality is difficult to accept but must be acknowledged.

Reviving the spirit of Ehmede Xani

Kurdish people, but also for global audiences. Unfortunately, this masterpiece has yet to fulfill its potential in shaping thought within Kurdish society. Xani envisioned his work as a transformative force, akin to sacred texts that have historically influenced societies. He believed that literature possesses the power to rejuvenate a nation, enabling it to rise and sustain itself. Had *Mem u Zin* been embraced

from its inception – interpreted widely, reproduced extensively, and discussed fervently – Kurdish society might have evolved differently. For over three centuries, the Kurds have needed awakening, yet their engagement with *Mem u Zin* came far too late.

Ehmede Xani represents a profound spiritual heritage that we hold dear. It is essential to recognize that his ideas serve as a potent catalyst, guiding us toward new horizons. Every Kurd should have a copy of *Mem u Zin* in their household, as it embodies our cultural essence. Xani is not merely an author; he is a treasure trove of wisdom and insight. To truly appreciate this wealth, we must engage in contemporary studies that explore his work more deeply. Now, more than ever, it is vital to amplify Xani's voice and ensure his messages resonate within our communities. As he poignantly reflects in one of his poems: "Xani's nature is full of the gem of wisdom, but what can the owner of meaning do if there is no reader of the text?" This underscores the importance of readership and engagement with his literary contributions. ●



■ Ehmede Xani's mausoleum in Bayazid, Agri Province, Türkiye.

Photo Courtesy: TRT



■ A bust of Ehmede Xani in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region.

Our collective endeavors aim to ensure that the Kurdish nation embraces *Mem u Zin* as a fundamental literary source. The revival of Xani's spirit and works is more crucial now than ever. Texts like *Mem u Zin* hold significant importance not only for the

Life in Pieces



Jalal Barzanji

is a poet and novelist, based in Alberta, Canada.

When I look back, I see a life – from birth to childhood to adulthood – that never flowed smoothly, a collection of fragments punctuated by unforgettable journeys. I want to share a few of those pieces with you: my escape from war and the long, challenging path of exile from my native home to my chosen home in Canada.

It was a cold February day in 1998 when my wife, our three children, and I landed at Edmonton International Airport. Identifiable by our UN refugee bags, we were soon met by our settlement officer. With nothing but a suitcase and empty pockets, I carried within me dreams too big to measure.

I was born in a small village in Kurdistan called Ashkawt Saqa, where every day was a journey – not just a physical one, but an inner voyage of growth, revelation, and survival. Our journeys, though imperfect and fraught with hardship, hold beauty in their constant call for change and learning.

My first journey began at the age of seven when our village school opened its doors. As my father walked me inside to register, he said, “Son, I do not want you to go through life like me. This is your journey to learn; hurry up.”

Attending school was my first internal journey seeking knowledge. It was a privilege no one in the village had ever experienced, including my parents, igniting in

me a passion for learning. Yet, that journey was abruptly cut short. I could not finish first grade before the Iraqi regime unleashed war upon our doorstep – burning our village, our school, our books, and my dreams.

Forced to flee and move to Erbil, the bus-

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As I reflect on all the pieces of my story, I realize it is not where you begin that matters most, but where you grow into the best version of yourself

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ting capital of Kurdistan, I undertook another vital journey. Leaving a familiar life in an innocent village where I knew all my neighbors and where my identity was connected to street corners and other spaces, I now had to navigate a city that I knew nothing about.

I began anew on the path toward knowledge and self-improvement. In high school, stifled by a crowded home that hindered my studies, I discovered the



Jalal Barzanji and his wife, one day after being married, 1982.

sanctuary of a local library. While others played outside, I lost myself in reading and writing, which meant escaping reality and exploring new ideas – even as a dictatorship sought to impose its will.

As a young writer, I often employed symbolism to evade censorship. Without the benefit of creative writing classes, my love for reading evolved into a passion for prose. In 1979, I published my first collection of poetry, *Dance in the Evening Snow*. Despite heavy censorship – the Iraq regime stripped away any poem that did not conform – I persisted.

Then, in 1986, in a tragic twist, the secret police arrested me. A blindfold-

ed prisoner, handcuffed and humiliated. In a cell designed for 15, sixty of us were packed like sardines.

I spent two years in prison without trial or legal representation, only to be pardoned on Saddam Hussein's birthday, in the regime's attempt at manufactured humanity. The scars of the inhumane treatment I received in prison have never left me.

As the years passed and the pain grew unbearable, I resolved to embark on another journey – something I had once only read about. Trusting smugglers to guide me to safety, I found refuge in Türkiye, where I claimed refugee status with the UN and was offered a lifeline: Canada.

I still remember my Grade 9 geography teacher describing a distant land called Canada, with its vast forests, serene lakes, and breathtaking landscapes. I often wondered what it would be like to wake up in those woods. Compelled by that childhood vision, I resolved to make Canada my home and its forests my backyard.

Rebuilding our life from scratch in Canada was yet another formidable journey. Through every hardship, I never abandoned my passion for writing. In 2007, I was honored as PEN Canada's first writer in exile – a recognition that opened many doors.

It also expanded my literary relationships. With the support of the



■ Jalal Barzanji with his classmates at Kurdistan High School in Erbil, 1973.



■ Jalal Barzanji in his youth, Erbil, 1972.



■ Jalal Barzanji, a few days before being arrested, 1984



■ Jalal Barzanji, delivering a speech while receiving PEN Canada's first writer in exile award, 2007

University of Alberta and the Edmonton Arts Council, I published my memoir, *The Man in Blue Pajamas*. I also published a collection of poems titled *Trying Again to Stop Time* with the University of Alberta Press. They have both become bestsellers, and I have won several awards.

Here, as I reflect on all the pieces of my story, I realize it is not where you begin that matters most, but where you grow into the best version of yourself. My journey is far from over; I will continue to seek out the moments, places, and experiences that help me become even better. ●

Kurdish Heritage in Afghanistan



Goran Shakhawan

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

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Rakazada remains hopeful for the unity of the Kurdish community in Afghanistan, where cultural connections flourish and individuals can learn from one another

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■ A view of an undeveloped neighborhood on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan

A significant Kurdish community resides in Afghanistan, having been relocated from their original homeland in northwestern Iran during Persian rule in the 1500s. This group has preserved its native language, known locally as Kurdi, while also adopting Turkmen or Dari as a primary language.

In an exclusive interview with Mohammad Nader Rakazada, a prominent Kurdish activist and author from Afghanistan, Kurdistan Chronicle explores the rich history, language, and cultural identity of the Kurdish people in Afghanistan. Rakazada, who relocated to the United States after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, shares insights into his family's roots, the historical significance of Kurds in Afghanistan, and the challenges they face today.

From Iran to Afghanistan

Rakazada was born in 1966 in Kabul Province. He comes from a military family with deep Kurdish roots, tracing his lineage back to Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran). “My ancestors are Kurds from Kurdistan, and our fathers were professional soldiers,” he recounts.

His family settled in Bojnord, Quchan, and Dargaz during the period that spanned from the reign of Abbas the Great

(1588-1629) to Nader Afshar (1736-1747) to guard Iran's borders against the Turks and Mongols. Eventually, they migrated with Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-1772), along with other Kurdish tribes, to Afghanistan. Rakazada emphasizes the historical context of Kurdish migration, stating, that “This migration was not merely a quest for safety, but a testament to the Kurds enduring spirit and resilience.”

According to Rakazada, there are over 350,000 Kurds residing in Afghanistan today, a community that has significantly contributed to the country's social and political fabric. Over the years, Kurds in Afghanistan have participated in various struggles for freedom, including the Anglo-Afghan Wars. Their involvement has left an indelible mark on the nation's history. “Kurds have held ministerial positions and high-ranking roles within the country's security forces,” Rakazada states proudly.

He points to the notable figures from Kurdish history – such as Kake Atta Muhammad, Dost Mohammad Khan, Sarkarda Mohammad Jan Khan, and Qoli Khan – who died alongside their Kurdish soldiers in the Anglo-Afghan Wars. He also relates how the Amir of Afghanistan Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) killed Jernail (Commander) Abdur Rahman Khan and other 35 Kurdish commanders, after which Kurdish people were marginalized and forced to leave their villages. Following the death of Jernail Abdul Rahman Khan, the kingdom of Emir Amanullah Khan



■ The entrance to the 250-year-old Kurdish Mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan.

(1926-1929) came to power and the Kurdish people emerged again and had prominent roles in his kingdom.

Identification politics

Rakazada's passion for documenting Kurdish history led him on an eight-year journey across Afghanistan to reconnect with his lost kin. "I have been researching about the Kurds of Afghanistan for eight years and have collected the data from the Kurdish people." He stated.

Thanks to Rakazada's continuous efforts, the National Statistics and

Information Authority (NSIA) made Kurdish a possible ethnicity to appear on the country's electronic identity cards. This came in 2018, when NSIA made a controversial decision to add a total of 54 new ethnic designations to the existing 14 groups, which critics argued that the additions could deepen divisions among Afghans at a crucial time in the nation's history.

The NSIA defended its decision, arguing that these ethnic groups were added based on requests from their representatives and that there were no legal barriers preventing the authority from including them. Therefore, after



■ Mohammed Nader Kurd, a Kurdish activist and writer from Afghanistan

the government established a commission to recognize ethnic groups, following extensive efforts and legal approvals, the Kurdish ethnic identity was officially recorded in the electronic register. This permitted two types of identity cards, "one standard card recognized by the government and another issued by the Kurdish Ethnic Council for its members," Rakazada explained.

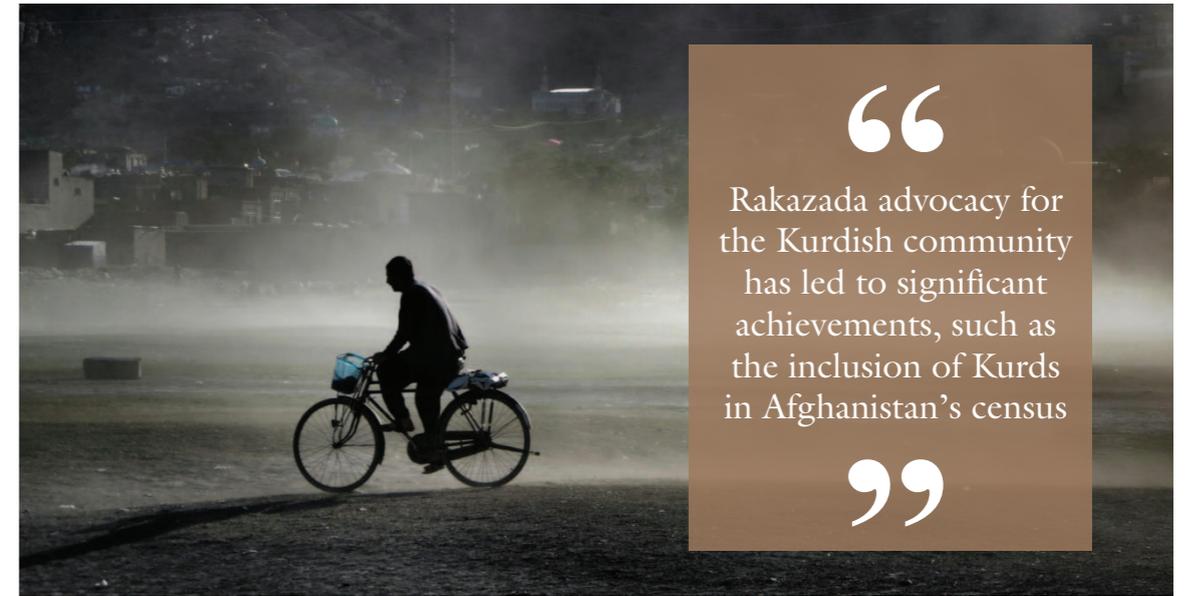
Rakazada's efforts on these fronts culminated in the publication of two books on Kurdish life and history in Afghanistan, which he plans to publish in multiple languages, including Pashto, Dari, Baluchi, Kurdish, Persian, and English.

Language and freedom

Preserving the Kurdish language is a vital component of cultural identity, and Rakazada emphasizes its importance. "Ancestry and inheritance cannot be denied. Blood, language, and culture give us our identity," he asserts. However, he expresses concern about the younger generation of Afghan Kurds, who have not learned the Kurdish language and struggle to preserve their cultural practices due to their integration into Afghan society. The Kurdish community in Afghanistan faces several challenges, among which Rakazada highlights the risk of their language being forgotten, the lack of resources to preserve their history, and the socioeconomic struggles many Kurds endure. He notes that closed schools and limited job opportunities have forced many Kurds to leave their homes, further isolating them from their cultural roots.

Despite these challenges, Rakazada remains hopeful for the unity of the Kurdish community in Afghanistan, where cultural connections flourish and individuals can learn from one another. "Freedom is the best blessing." He states.

He dreams of a future where Kurds can celebrate their identity and culture freely, without fear of persecu-



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Rakazada advocacy for the Kurdish community has led to significant achievements, such as the inclusion of Kurds in Afghanistan's census
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Photo: Mohammad Hu / Pexels

tion or marginalization. Rakazada's journey has not been without its obstacles. He recalls the Chindawol uprising in 1979 led by the Kurds and the Afghan Qizilbash that was suppressed by the regime. Many leaders were imprisoned, including General Jafar Khan and Mirza Ali Khan. This historical event serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles Kurds have faced in their quest for recognition and rights within Afghanistan.

Vision for the future

Reflecting on the current state of the Kurdish community in Afghanistan, Rakazada identifies several key challenges. "We must work towards cultural relations, employment opportunities, and addressing ethnic conflicts within the diverse fabric of Afghan society," he states. He believes that unity and cultural preservation are crucial for the Kurdish people to thrive.

Rakazada advocacy for the Kurdish community has led to significant achievements, such as the inclusion of Kurds in Afghanistan's census. However, he acknowledges the political obstacles that persist. "We faced numerous challenges during our fight for recognition and finally were able to get Kurdish listed as an ethnicity

on the National Identity Card," he shares.

In addition to his advocacy work, Rakazada has emphasized the importance of education and cultural exchange among the Kurdish diaspora. He recounts efforts during the republican era to establish connections with Kurdish communities across the region, including Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Turkish Kurdistan. "We invited our Kurdish brothers to come, connect, and define our identity together, but unfortunately, we were not successful," he says.

Rakazada envisions a future where the Kurdish community in Afghanistan works together to revive their language and cultural practices. "We need to build schools, promote our language, and ensure that the next generation understands their heritage," he states passionately.

As he concludes the interview, Rakazada reflects on the importance of unity among Kurds. "In the face of challenges, we must endure hardships." He emphasizes. "Our identity is rooted in our shared history, language, and culture. We must work together to preserve it for future generations."

As Rakazada navigates his new life in the United States, he continues to champion the Kurdish cause, both in Afghanistan and around the world. Through his efforts, Rakazada embodies the spirit of resilience that defines the Kurdish people. His story serves as a reminder of the importance of cultural identity, the struggles faced by marginalized communities, and the power of hope in the pursuit of freedom and recognition. As the Kurdish community continues to navigate the challenges of the future, Rakazada's voice will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in shaping their narrative and preserving their legacy.

Rakazada would also like to acknowledge some prominent Kurdish ethnic elders from the last 100 years in Afghanistan, including Sarkarda Commander Mohammad Yousuf Khan, Mohammad Qasim Khan Askaryar, Mohammad Hassan Khan Raka, Mohammad Akbar Khan Raka, Baba Khan, Clonal Abdulqader Khan Raka, Malik Ghazi Baba, Sarferaz Khan, Zaman Khan, Ghulam Nabi Khan, Haji Mohammad Zahir Raka-zai, General Mohammad Jafer Khan, Mirza Ali Khan, Engineer Gul Mohammad Khan Raka, Abdul Rasheed Khan, Waz Ail Bakhtyari, and Ail Bakhtyari. ●

Kurdish Learning Book Published in Denmark

Kurdistan Chronicle

The first Kurdish language learning book in Denmark, *Learn Kurdish*, was published by Kurdish journalist Deniz Berxwedan Serinci on March 18. It is designed for both Kurdish refugees and immigrants in Denmark, as well as non-Kurds interested in learning the language.

Serinci's parents are originally from Corum in northern Türkiye, and he was born in Denmark. His family came to Denmark in 1970. Serinci is regularly cited as an expert source in the Danish media on the Kurds.

"I was sitting with a Kurdish friend from Konya in Copenhagen. We were talking about Kurdish dictionaries in Denmark and then it occurred to me that there was no Kurdish language learning book here," he told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

"The Kurds are one of the largest minorities in Denmark and have also lived here for a long time. That is why it is time for a learning textbook for them. In addition, many Kurds do not know their language, so I wanted to help them learn it."

Around 25,000 to 30,000 Kurds live in Denmark, and during the last elections on November 1, 2022, there were 12 Danish-Kurdish candidates.

"The dialect in the book is Kurmanci, which is spoken by most Kurds in Kurdistan and in Denmark. Most Kurds in Denmark are from Konya in central Türkiye. Therefore,

I have also added local words from the Konya dialect, known as 'Anatolian Kurdish'. I have now handed the book over to a close friend who will translate it into the Sorani dialect," he added.

The book includes illustrations, dialogues, and Kurdish grammar overviews. Dialogues start off simple and gradually become more complex, covering topics like colors, family, food, and electronics. Kurdish words are provided with Danish translations.

A clear need

Like many other Kurds from Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Türkiye), Serinci did not know a word of Kurdish until 15 years ago. "I actually learned Kurdish by myself, without going to a course or anything. I learned it with the help of music that I found on cassette tapes and CDs. While my friends downloaded Kurdish music online, I would go to a Kurdish greengrocer in Copenhagen and buy Kurdish cassette tapes or CDs to get the lyric covers as well.

"That way I could read the lyrics and, over time, understand the grammar of the Kurdish language. The singer Sivan Perwer made a huge impression on me. But it wasn't enough to read the lyrics. If you're going to learn a language, you also have to practice it – that is, speak it. I made friends from Urmia in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran) who had just come to Denmark.



A mockup of the *Learn Kurdish*, the first Kurdish language learning book in Denmark

“Around 25,000 to 30,000 Kurds live in Denmark, and during the last elections on November 1, 2022, there were 12 Danish-Kurdish candidates

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■ A street in Denmark

Photo: Thomas Chizzali / Unsplash



■ Deniz Berxwedan Serinci.

“I ended up spending a lot of time with them. At the time, those men didn’t know Danish, and I couldn’t speak Kurdish. So, we had to learn each other’s languages. That’s how I learned Kurdish. Only through practice can you truly learn a language.”

Serinci has also been teaching Kurdish in the Danish capital of Copenhagen since the summer of 2023. “I opened Kurdish schools in Copenhagen and Aarhus (Denmark’s second-largest city) in 2023. We offer classes in both Kurmanci and Sorani. There are approximately 200 registered pupils. Of these, around 60 people usually attend our Kurdish school in Copenhagen every Sunday.”

The author also stressed that there was a need for a Kurdish language book since Kurds in Denmark are unwilling to travel several hours on their only day off to send their children to Kurdish school.

“Sometimes, it is not their preferred dialect that is taught. In addition, there are often students at different levels in Kurdish classes: some who know a little Kurdish and others none at all. Students range from five to 60 years old.

“Are there enough Kurdish teachers who have the necessary pedagogical training?” Serinci asked rhetorically. “Not at all. For these and other reasons, very few Kurds attend Kurdish

classes in person. Even those who do, often drop out quickly. So I thought: if students won’t come to Kurdish school, Kurdish school must come to them – through this book.”

Serinci spent about approximately one year writing the book. “It may sound fast to some, but I am used to writing books. This is my 15th book in 12 years. However, I spent over 10 years learning Kurdish. The book is the result of that journey.

“Four states have suppressed or are suppressing our language. That is why we must keep speaking and learning it. Our language defines our existence. Without it, we will disappear.” ●

Empowering Kurdish Studies in America



Wladimir van Wilgenburg

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

The Kurdish Political Studies Program at the University of Central Florida (UCF) recently hosted the conference “Kurds on the Global Stage: Clashing Identities, Interests, and Perspectives” held from February 27 to 28, 2025. The event was funded by the Serbest Foundation and the Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI).

Established in 2015, the Kurdish Political Studies Program at UCF has played a pioneering role in expanding knowledge and understanding of the Kurdish issue in the United States.

Sierwan Najmaldin Karim, President of the WKI and son of the late Iraqi Kurdish politician Najmaldin Karim, explained the aims of the program founded by his father. “It legitimizes and formalizes the study of the Kurdish nation, placing their history, language, and culture within scholarly discourse. Through research, documentation, and education, the program also helps preserve Kurdistan’s heritage, especially when it is at risk of erasure,” he told Kurdistan Chronicle.

“Members of the stateless Kurdish nation gain access to academic tools and platforms to tell their own stories and contribute to the global narrative. The advisory board includes longtime friends of Kurds. The new director, Professor Mehmet Gurses, has done an excellent job and is dedicated to making the program a success.”

Ensuring international recognition

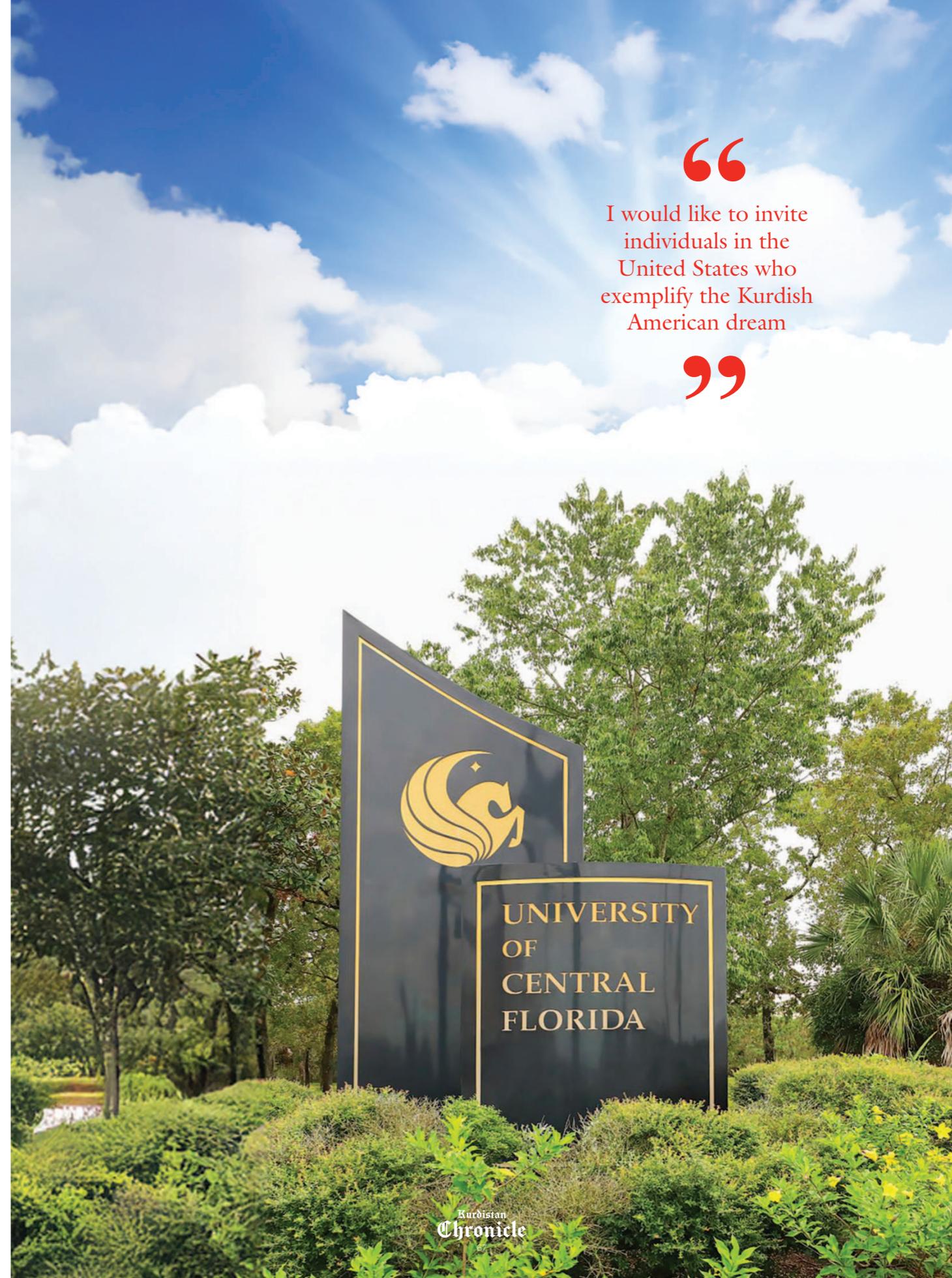
Mehmet Gurses, the Najmaldin Karim and Jalal Talabani Chair of Kurdish Studies, joined UCF in August 2024. “This is only my second semester at UCF and my first conference here. I’m thrilled to welcome guests from Iraqi Kurdistan, Russia, Germany, Holland, the UK and the United States,” he said.

“This is the only academic program in Kurdish political studies and is truly one of a kind. Established through a generous contribution from the late. Najmaddin Karim, the program not only advances Kurdish studies, but also increases Kurdish visibility.”

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I would like to invite individuals in the United States who exemplify the Kurdish American dream

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Gurses told Kurdistan Chronicle.

“One of the reasons I organized this conference and chose the title ‘Kurds on the Global Stage’ was to ensure that the Kurds receive the recognition they deserve from the international community,” he added.

Metin Serbest – President of the U.S.-based Serbest Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to preserving and promoting Kurdish heritage – emphasized their mission to advance Kurdish academic discourse globally.

“Since launching our inaugural conference series in 2017 at Northwestern University, the Serbest Foundation has continuously supported and co-organized academic events with top-tier institutions,” he said, citing partnerships with Northwestern University, Yale University, and UCF.

“These conferences have brought together leading and emerging scholars in Kurdish studies to engage in rigorous dialogue, exchange ideas, and present groundbreaking research. Through these contributions, the Serbest Foundation has helped Kurd-

ish studies flourish, supporting scholarship that informs both academic institutions and public discourse worldwide.”

The rapidly evolving role of the Kurds

The Kurdish Studies Program is housed within the UCF’s School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs, where Gurses serves as a professor of political science. “Upon joining the School of Politics, I simultaneously became the director of the Kurdish Political Studies Program. The school also offers a range of specialized programs and courses,” Gurses added.



es added.

The school hosts a PhD program in security studies, admitting 7-8 fully funded students annually. Each year, at least one PhD student focuses on Kurdish studies.

“Currently, we have one PhD student researching Kurdish politics, and next year, I hope to admit two more, one from Iran and one from Türkiye. This will bring the total number of PhD students working on Kurdish issues to three – a first for UCF – and I’m very excited about this milestone,” Gurses said.

The conference itself featured speeches by lawyers, academics, journalists, retired diplomats and military officials, and Kurdish officials, including retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, former U.S. Under Secretary of the Army Joe Reeder, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) U.S. Representative Treefa Aziz, and former U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith.

“Comprising more than 40 million people, the Kurds are a key player in



Participants at the “Kurds on the Global Stage” conference.

the Middle East and yet are only superficially known in policy circles and largely unstudied in Western academic institutions,” Galbraith told Kurdistan Chronicle.

He added that the UCF conference provided a rare opportunity for scholars and practitioners to “consider the rapidly evolving role of the Kurds in the region and beyond. Even after following the Kurdish issue professionally for more than 40 years, I gained new insights from my fellow participants.”

Diverse perspectives on Kurdish-related issues

During the conference, Representative Aziz expressed gratitude to the Kurdish Studies Program at UCF for hosting the conference. “On the behalf of the KRG, I’m honored to participate in and engage with you all today on the role of Kurds on the global stage,” she said.

Aziz emphasized the importance of the long-standing partnership between the Kurdistan Region and the United States in advancing stability, security, and progress. “The United States has been a critical ally in supporting the Kurdistan Region’s secu-

rity, particularly in the fight against terrorism,” she stated, noting the U.S. role in strengthening the Kurdish *peşmerga* forces.

Aziz also underscored that coordination between the Kurdistan Region and the U.S.-led coalition has been instrumental in dismantling ISIS’s territorial operations. However, she warned that ISIS “remains a deadly threat, making the coalition’s continued presence essential for long-term stability.”

Diverse perspectives on Kurdish-related issues

Meanwhile, Professor Gurses stressed that the conference aimed to present diverse perspectives on Kurdish-related issues. “While academics cover Kurdish politics and society, they are not the only voices. We also have journalists who play a key role, as well as businesspeople active in the Kurdish community in the United States.”

“We had participation from people across different walks of life, so although the presentations were schol-

arly and high-level, the event was not narrowly academic,” he added.

“This is a very important event,” said David Romano, the Thomas G. Strong Chair of Middle East Politics at Missouri State University in the United States. “We have had a Chair in Kurdish studies here for some time, but I don’t recall a major conference like this before. With Professor Gurses now leading the program and organizing events like this, we may see UCF become a linchpin for Kurdish studies throughout North America.”

In the future, Gurses plans to invite individual speakers, including Kurdish musicians and successful Kurdish businesspeople from the United States and abroad.

“I would like to invite individuals in the United States who exemplify the Kurdish American dream. There are many accomplished Kurdish businesspeople, and I hope to honor their achievements while helping them reconnect with the Kurdish community in both the United States and Canada,” he said. ●



The University of Central Florida.

Women Unite in the Fight Against Cancer



Qassim Khidbir

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

In Kurdistan, symptoms like a lump or persistent pain are often shrouded in silence. But for Ahang Kawany, a lump in her breast was not something to hide; it was a call to action. Like Srwa Osman, a poet who faced cancer not once, but three times, Kawany chose defiance.

Osman and Kawany are part of a growing movement, a force of Kurdish women turning personal battles into communal action, shattering stigmas and empowering others to fight for their lives. Kawany, an entrepreneur, focuses on early detection and open conversations, while Osman uses her poetry and personal experiences to encourage resilience.

Ahang Kawany

In 2023, Kawany, a 44-year-old entrepreneur and cancer advocate, discovered a lump in her breast. “The worst thing is that it could be cancer,” she says. “I was prepared to fight.”

That resilience stems, in part, from a previous health scare. A decade earlier, at the

age of 30, Kawany experienced numbness on the right side of her body. Doctors discovered a brain tumor. Thankfully, it was benign. But the experience left a lasting impression, compelling her to learn as much as she could about cancer.

So, when the 2023 diagnosis came, she was ready, beginning treatment immediately. Alongside the medical interventions, she drew strength from her family and friends. Their firm belief in her ability to overcome the disease became her bedrock.

Among her inspirations was a friend, Della Murad, a Kurdish image consultant and fashion designer who had battled cancer not once, but twice. “Della was my role model,” Kawany says with admiration. “I told myself I needed to be brave like her.” Now fully recovered, Kawany has regular three-month checkups to monitor for any recurrence of cancer cells for at least five years.

Kawany sees her experience as a call to action for other women facing similar chal-

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These women are transforming fear into knowledge and silence into strength in Kurdistan.

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■ Ahang Kawany.

■ *Abang Kawany, on the top of the Halgord Mountain, the tallest peak in Iraq.*



lenges. “If I can convince just one woman facing cancer to be brave and not give up on life, that will be a great achievement.”

She emphasizes the importance of early detection and self-exams in a region where cultural stigmas and a lack of awareness can delay crucial diagnoses. “Early detection,” she says, “can be the key to avoiding chemotherapy.”

Her advice is simple but powerful: “Check yourself regularly. By doing so, you serve yourself tremendously. And don’t be afraid if you find you have cancer.”

Kawany regularly visits universities and high schools for girls, sharing vital information about health and breast cancer awareness. She encourages young women to speak openly with their parents about any changes they notice in their bodies. “Girls should not be afraid to tell their parents if they see a problem,” she stresses.

She recounts a particularly moving experience at one school, where students confided their fears about discussing bodily changes with their parents. “They said their parents might blame them for any problems,” Kawany recalls. “It’s so important for parents, especially fathers, to completely support their daughters. They need to know they have their full support.”

She credits her father’s lifelong support as a source of her confidence and resilience.

Kawany runs several guest houses in the touristic town of Shaqlawa, beneath Safeen Mountain, using the business to fund her cancer awareness projects. She emphasizes the importance of connecting with nature. “Nature is a cure for sickness,” she says. “When I’m hiking, I completely forget about my sickness.”

Her story has since been documented in a 30-minute film, showcasing her resilience and optimism. Screened several times, it portrays her as a role model, inspiring others with her determination to fight cancer and embrace life.

Srwa Osman

Srwa Osman, a 59-year-old high school teacher, also understands the power of sharing her story. Diagnosed with cancer three times over the past decade – breast cancer in 2009, cervical cancer in 2012, and stomach cancer in 2019 – Osman has faced death and emerged each time with renewed purpose.

“When I first received the news, it was a shock,” Osman admits, recalling her initial diagnosis of breast cancer at the age of 44. “My son was still a child. I told myself, ‘I have to live because my son needs me.’”

She remembers a time when Kurdistan’s healthcare system was less developed. “In 2009, I had to travel to Jordan and then Germany for treatment.” Her younger brother in Hanover played a crucial role, taking her tests to German doctors. Osman was also



■ *Srwa Osman.*

Photo: Safin Hamid



■ Ahang Kawany.



■ A patient receives a CT scan at Nanakali Hospital, Erbil.

Photo: Safin Hamid

among the first to receive a German visa when the consulate opened that year, marking the start of regular trips for treatment.

Osman was invited to speak at Nanakali Hospital in Erbil, a facility dedicated to treating patients with cancer, leukemia, and hemophilia. She shared a powerful message of resilience in the face of adversity at an event organized by Davin Organization, a Kurdistan-based nonprofit working to empower vulnerable populations. The organization addresses the pervasive belief that a cancer diagnosis is a death sentence.

At the event, Osman's words moved her audience. She recited poems shaped by her experiences, painting a vivid portrait of pain, hope, and courage. Her resilience is exemplified here in one of her poems:

*You were a ghost
In my heart and soul
You blazed like a hurricane
There was no subduing you
No mercy... no compassion
You brutally destroyed me.
...
But a thousand, thousand sighs of relief,
I lit a candle,
With it, I chased away much darkness,
With it, I warmed the embers of my*

*hope,
With the spear of my sunbeam hand,
With it, I pierced the darkest night.*

When a 13-year-old girl bravely shared her own cancer survival story, tears streamed down her face. Osman immediately embraced her, whispering, "Don't cry, you are a hero. You are a survivor."

Osman refused to let cancer define her, continuing to teach, exercise, and socialize. "I didn't want to stay at home as a sick person. I tried as much as I could to live my life."

Now, she is a passionate cancer advocate, regularly visiting patients and bringing flowers and a powerful message: "Don't think of yourselves as sick. Think of yourselves as people receiving treatment."

Surviving cancer, she insists, gives life new meaning: "You love life more. You want to travel and become more adventurous."

Beyond hospital visits, Osman holds seminars and participates in conferences, raising awareness and advocating for better support. Her message to families is clear: "Don't look at cancer patients with pity. Support them, inspire them." Through her social media presence

and evocative poetry, she continues to share her journey and offer solace, reminding everyone that even in the darkest of times, light can be found.

Mental health support

At Nanakali Hospital, the fight against cancer extends beyond medical treatments. It is a battle against fear, isolation, and the pervasive belief that a cancer diagnosis is a death sentence.

Rwan Abdulmajid, a 39-year-old psychologist at Nanakali and a key member of the Davin team, provides crucial mental health support to cancer patients, focusing on creating a positive mindset. "My goal is to help them think positively," she says.

A cornerstone of her approach is connecting current patients with cancer survivors like Kawany and Osman. By sharing their experiences, survivors provide invaluable strength and inspiration. Abdulmajid also utilizes visual aids, showing patients videos and films of others who have triumphed over cancer to boost their morale. "Suddenly," she observes, "we see changes in their behavior. They start to become more lively."

But Abdulmajid's support extends beyond the patients themselves. Recognizing the immense emotional toll cancer takes on families, she helps prepare them for the challenges ahead and providing them with the necessary emotional support.

These women are transforming fear into knowledge and silence into strength in Kurdistan. They are not just battling cancer; they are building a future where fear gives way to knowledge, and silence is replaced by the strong voice of hope. ●

A Home of Hope

Kurdistan Chronicle

The newly opened Daik Care Complex (DCC) in Soran, located within Erbil Governorate, is the first of its kind in the area. Before the DCC was established, residents had to travel over 100 kilometers to Erbil for these services. Now, the DCC has become a welcoming and vital facility offering essential services to those in need, filling a significant gap in Soran.

The complex consists of six specialized buildings: an autism center, a nursing home, an orphanage, a cultural center, a center for the visually impaired, and a center for the hearing impaired. It also provides sports and recreational facilities for all its residents and students. The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) owns and manages the complex, offering all services free of charge.

In an interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Pewist Salim, the head of the visual- and hearing-impaired sections at the DCC, emphasized that there has been a growing demand for these services in the Soran Administration, particularly after the BCF opened the DCC. He explained that the name Daik – which means “mother” in Kurdish – reflects the nurturing role the complex plays in the lives of many individuals, offering both a home and a place to learn, grow, and build relationships. Salim also highlighted the complex’s role in raising awareness among the public about the needs of impaired individuals.

Empowering marginalized individuals

Established in 2024 under the leadership of President Masoud Barzani and the BCF, the DCC was founded to address the urgent needs of vulnerable populations in the Soran Administration of the Kurdistan Region. The initiative stemmed from a recognition of the lack of resources for individuals with impairments, elderly citizens, and orphans.

Led by the BCF’s President Musa Ahmad, the foundation took on the responsibility of managing the project, ensuring it met international standards. With the goal to provide specialized care, medical services, and educational opportunities for individuals with impairments, the elderly, and orphans, the DCC aims to empower marginalized individuals, integrate them into society, and promote their dignity and well-being.

The belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives, regardless of their condition, remains central to its mission.

At the DCC, education is a key component of empowerment for individuals with impairments. The complex offers specialized educational programs for the visually impaired, hearing impaired, and physically impaired. These individ-

“The DCC is not just a place of care; it is a place where lives are transformed”

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Photos: Pewist Salim





uals, often facing significant barriers in traditional educational systems, are given the opportunity to learn and grow in a supportive, tailored environment.

Hazhar Ramazan, a special educator and trainer at the complex, shared that the educational programs employ adaptive learning tools and methods

to ensure every student receives the support they need. “We use tactile materials for the visually impaired and sign language with visual aids for the hearing impaired. For those with physical impairments, we provide assistive technologies like modified keyboards and voice-activated devices to ensure full participation,” Ramazan explained.

These programs are not only designed to enhance academic knowledge, but also to foster life skills, boosting independence and confidence. Ramazan shared the story of a young girl who had difficulty understanding math concepts before joining the program. “After using tactile materials, she was able to understand and confidently solve math problems – a break-



Photos: Pevist Salim



Photos: Pevist Salim

through she never imagined possible before.”

The success of these programs is seen in the stories of students like this girl, whose confidence and independence have grown significantly. The educational initiatives at DCC go beyond academics, focusing on building life skills and social integration, offering a pathway for individuals with impairments to reach their full potential.

Social integration

In addition to educational programs, the DCC emphasizes social integration. The complex organizes various social events and activities, such as art classes, cooking sessions, and inclusive movie nights. These activities allow residents and students to connect with one another and the broader community, creating a sense of belonging.

Ramazan emphasized the importance of these activities for emotional well-being. “Social interaction is vital, especially for people with impairments. We organize activities that bring people together and offer them

opportunities to engage with the wider community,” he said.

One highlight is the annual Community Integration Day, an event that brings local residents and DCC participants together through performances, discussions, and activities that promote inclusivity and break down societal barriers. This initiative has been instrumental in fostering understanding and reducing stigma surrounding individuals with impairments.

As Salim pointed out, “these activities allow residents to form lasting friendships and feel connected to a larger society, rather than isolated. It is a crucial part of empowering them to live fulfilling lives.”

While the DCC has made remarkable progress in providing vital services, it faces several challenges. Ramazan shared that securing sufficient funding to maintain and expand services is one of the primary obstacles. “The demand for our services continues to grow, but funding remains a constant challenge,” he said.

Raising awareness about the complex-

ities of impairments, especially in rural areas, is another challenge. “There is still much stigma surrounding impairments, and in some areas, people may not fully understand the needs of those who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, or physically impaired,” Ramazan noted. “We aim not only to provide care, but also to educate the public and change perceptions.”

Looking ahead, DCC plans to expand its programs, including vocational training to help residents gain skills that will enable them to become more independent. “We want to offer a wider range of skills that will help our residents integrate into the workforce and lead self-sufficient lives,” Ramazan explained. The complex also hopes to extend its services to other areas of the Kurdistan Region, with community support being essential to this goal.

“The DCC is not just a place of care; it is a place where lives are transformed,” Salih emphasized. “It provides individuals with impairments the opportunity to live independently, participate in society, and find their place in the world.” ●

Health System Initiative in Zakho



Dr. Nawfal R. Hussein

is the Dean of the College of Medicine at Zakho University, a Professor of Infectious Diseases, and the first infectious disease consultant in the Kurdistan Region

The demands of reforming the healthcare system in our region reflects the needs for development, progress, and stability. To be sure, crucial advancements in the healthcare system are being made, allowing for a better understanding of the methods of reform and the best way of moving forward.

However, grave challenges persist in developing a system that delivers efficient, accessible, and patient-centered health-

care, and reforming the sector is both an urgent necessity and an opportunity to create a model of excellence. At the same time, wholesale reform may create issues and obstacles, especially if the public lacks understanding about the process. Therefore, the author suggests that it start with a pilot project in Zakho – a city of strategic importance, rich culture, and ancient history that offers an ideal setting to test out health initiatives that could transform lives.

■ Zakho Hospital.

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Launching such reform plans in the city of Zakho is expected to deliver measurable improvements in healthcare quality, accessibility to services, economic growth, medical tourism patients, and local job opportunities

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Photos: Mubammad Maqid

The need for healthcare reform

Wars and political instability in Iraq have weakened healthcare delivery in the Kurdistan Region. While some modern equipment and infrastructure are available, the system suffers from insufficient oversight to regulate services. This lack of regulation leads to fragmented services, resource constraints, and over-reliance on private sector referrals. These challenges place substantial financial and emotional strain on healthcare workers, the healthcare system, and patients and their families.

One of the main objectives of the reform is to transition from a reactive, illness-focused approach to a preventive, wellness-centered one, which prioritizes prevention, strengthens primary care, and integrates services to ensure equitable access for all.

Why Zakho?

Zakho has three unique characteristics that makes it an ideal candidate for a pilot program. First, its strategic location bordering Türkiye and Syria gives the city the potential to be a regional healthcare hub that can attract patients from neighboring countries. Second, the community in Zakho is eager to support reform in the healthcare system. Third, the city leadership, represented by the Zakho Independent Administration, has already demonstrated a commitment to healthcare development and is planning to initiate state-of-the-art projects to reduce the city's dependency on external services.

Proposed reforms

1. Enhancing primary healthcare services: Primary healthcare is the foundation of a strong and effective healthcare system. Reform efforts could focus on expanding the network of primary healthcare, integrating digital health tools for patient records, and promoting ongoing community health education and pre-

ventive care training for healthcare professionals.

2. Building specialized medical facilities: The establishment of centers of excellence for specialties such as cardiology or oncology would be the cornerstone of such a plan. Such centers can reduce the need for external referrals and attract patients from outside Zakho.

3. Workforce development: A skilled and motivated healthcare workforce is crucial to the success of the reform plan. This can be fostered through partnerships with institutions like the University of Zakho's College of Medicine to train future healthcare professionals.

“
Zakho can establish a benchmark for the Kurdistan Region and beyond
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4. Public-private partnerships: The success of the reform plan relies on cooperation between the public and private sectors. To achieve this, a collaborative framework is proposed, enabling both sectors to work together to deliver healthcare services more effectively and efficiently.

5. Leveraging technology: To enhance accessibility and efficiency, Zakho can take the lead in implementing digital health technologies including telemedicine, electronic health records, and mobile health applications.

Anticipated impact

Launching such reform plans in the city of Zakho is expected to deliver measurable improvements in health-

care quality, accessibility to services, economic growth, medical tourism patients, and local job opportunities.

The Kurdistan Region as a whole can utilize the city's pilot program as a replicable model to guide more extensive reform initiatives, guaranteeing fair healthcare advancements in both urban and rural regions and offering a model for long-lasting reform by tackling systemic as well as local issues.

The role of stakeholders

Transparent governance, adequate funding, and a clear roadmap will be critical to the pilot's success, but achieving meaningful reform requires collaboration among the following stakeholders:

- Government bodies: Provide funding and governance.
- Healthcare providers: Deliver high-quality, patient-centered care.
- Academic institutions: Train the next generation of professionals.
- International partners: Offer technical expertise and financial support.

A vision for the future

The healthcare system in the Kurdistan Region has the opportunity to set an example for the rest of Iraq in terms of quality. Zakho has demonstrated its dedication to creativity, equality, and resilience by launching reform initiatives in other areas. The reform project gives optimism to the residents of Zakho as well as the Kurdistan Region, demonstrating the transformative power of strategic planning and focused investments.

Zakho can establish a benchmark for the Kurdistan Region and beyond with teamwork and perseverance. We can work together to establish a system that guarantees each person has access to the care they require and are entitled to. ●

From Exile to Excellence

Kurdistan Chronicle

Across the Kurdish diaspora, many carry the weight of displacement while working tirelessly, achieving great professional success, and remaining proud of their Kurdish language and heritage. Niga Sirwan Nawroly is one such Kurd. After fleeing from Saddam Hussein's regime to Iran, she moved to the UK, where she continued her studies, raised her children, and promoted Kurdish language and history. Niga recently sat down with *Kurdistan Chronicle* to discuss her life and journey.

Niga was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to a patriotic family, with both her mother and father hailing from distinguished families in the region. Her father, Shahid Mlazim Sirwan Nawroly, was from Halabja and belonged to the Nawroly lineage, known for its commitment to peace among the diverse communities in Kurdistan Region. Her mother, Roonak Mirza Karim, comes from a family with a legacy in art and literature in Sulaymaniyah. Her maternal uncles, the renowned poet Jalal Mirza Karim and the historian and writer Ghafour Mirza Karim, both made significant contributions to philosophy, poetry, and literature.

A *peshmerga* upbringing

In the late 1960s, Niga's father studied military science

at the University of Baghdad, while her mother worked as a teacher. "My father became a *peshmerga* and a leader during the Kurdish Revolution. He was known as 'Shorshi Ayloul' and went to the mountains," she stated. "In the 1970s, while my father was still in his twenties, he was elected as the deputy of Hezi Rizgari, a *peshmerga* group fighting for Kurdistan's independence. My mother also played a crucial role, teaching children from *peshmerga* families and supporting the revolution alongside my father."

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In preserving and promoting Kurdish culture, there are multiple challenges that the Kurdish diaspora faces
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Due to her father's political role, her family faced constant danger from the former Iraqi regime, which brutally targeted the families of *peshmerga* fighters, imprisoning and torturing them. "My mother was also in her twenties, raising three small children under the age of five. To keep us safe, our extended family helped us relocate to a house in Sulaymaniyah. To avoid detection, the main entrance of the house was disguised to look like a shop. The front was covered with shutters, so that when they were shut, it appeared to be an unused shop rather than a family home," she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

peared to be an unused shop rather than a family home," she told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

Niga still remembers those long, frightening nights, when they had to keep the lights off and always stay quiet. Her mother would discretely listen to Kurdistan Radio for any



■ Niga Sirwan Nawroly.

updates on *peshmerga* activities. She listened carefully to the names of fallen fighters, constantly dreading that she might hear her husband's name. These were difficult times for many families across the Kurdistan Region.

At the time, Niga was nearly five years old, her sister was two, and her brother was less than one. They stayed in the house in Sulaymaniyah until the Iraqi secret services discovered their hiding place. "My father arranged for us to be taken out of the city and into a village in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran)," Niga explained. "This was my mother's only option to keep us safe, even though it meant leaving behind her family, her teaching job, and everything she had ever known. She sacrificed everything."

Learning in Iran

Their journey to Iran was perilous. "I remember we had to travel at night in an old Jeep to avoid being detected. Even the headlights had to be turned off as we drove along rough, unpaved roads for hours. At one point, we heard gunfire and had to stop suddenly. We were told to jump into a shallow lake, hiding among the bushes in the darkness. I still remember the fear and the cold water as we waited quietly, hoping to remain unseen."

Eventually, they made it to Paveh, a small town in Iran's Kermanshah Province where most of the population was Kurdish, allowing them to feel at home and communicate easily.

Most importantly for Niga and her siblings was that their father was able to visit them. "I still remember the first time I saw him after our escape. He looked exhausted, having just come from the front lines. It was always difficult, missing him and constantly fearing he might not return." Later, they moved to Karaj, near Tehran, where Niga started school and learned Farsi. Adjusting to her new home was challenging; unlike in

Paveh, the people in Karaj were not Kurdish. "My parents did not speak Farsi at first, so as a child, I learned quickly by playing with the neighborhood children," she recounted. "Soon, I became my family's translator, handling errands, shopping, doctor visits, and even talking to landlords – all at just five years old."



This responsibility helped Niga grow more resilient. Despite all these challenges, her father played a crucial role in ensuring that his children never missed out on their education. "He also wanted us to enjoy our new environment, taking us to see different places and encouraging us to learn about Iran's rich history and culture. Despite everything, he found ways to make life in Iran more than just about survival – it became a time of growth and learning."

Rebuilding in Kurdistan

After the collapse of the Kurdish Revolution, they returned to Sulaymaniyah under Mustafa Barzani's orders. "My father was assigned to work undercover as a *peshmerga*, continuing his fight for Kurdistan's independence," she explained.

Niga's family began rebuilding their lives. She and her siblings returned to school in their hometown, and her mother resumed her teaching career. On the surface, life seemed normal, but in reality, they faced constant challenges. "My father was always under strict surveillance by the Iraqi government, yet he never ceased his work as an undercover *peshmerga*. He remained dedicated to the cause until the Kurdish uprising in 1991," she stated.

"Coming from a *peshmerga* family, we were always fighting for the freedom of Kurdistan. Tragically, this dedication came at a great cost. In 1997, my father was assassinated while serving in the Kurdistan Region Parliament," she added.

After completing high school in Sulaymaniyah, Niga moved to Erbil to study biology at Salahaddin University and, upon graduation, returned home to work as a teaching assistant at Sulaimani Technical Institute. "It was during this time that I developed a strong interest in hematology, blood disorders, and blood cancers," she says.

Professional success in the UK

In 1995, Niga moved to the UK to join her husband and pursue a master's degree at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Imperial College London. "I completed my degree with distinction, focusing on the immunology of heart transplantation," she recalls. She has since dedicated her career to immunology, cancer biology, blood disorders, and diabetes research.

Niga currently resides in London with her husband, Aram, and their two children, Shazo and Dyako. When I asked her how she feels as a stateless Kurd achieving success abroad and how her Kurdish background has influenced her academic and professional journey, she reflected on her upbringing. "I was surrounded by ambitious and successful people – my parents, uncles, and extended family. My parents made sure we had every opportunity to study and succeed, so working hard and achieving was the natural path for me," she said.

"Being Kurdish is something I take great pride in. It motivates me to push even harder to succeed and challenge the negative portrayal of Kurds in the media. My parents made enormous sacrifices for Kurdistan's freedom, and their legacy has had a deep impact on my own journey," she added.

When I inquired about Niga's long-term goals and career aspirations, she eagerly shared her aim to continue advancing cytometry for use in cell and gene therapy, mentor future scientists, and collaborate with researchers. "My goal is to apply my 25 years of experience to benefit Kurdistan in healthcare, medical research, and academia."

During her research, she developed a particular interest in flow cytometry, a technology used in biomedical analysis with various applications, such as leukemia and blood cancer diagnosis. This passion led Niga to her involvement in the London Cytometry Club for eight years, as well as serving as a Committee Member of the Royal Microscopical Society for 12 years. "I have worked as an educator and mentor in cytometry for over 15 years, holding positions at Imperial College London, the Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology, Queen Mary University of London, and the Institute of Child Health. Eventually, I transitioned into the biotechnology industry, working as a cytometry specialist for global biotech companies," she explained.

I was also curious about how individual Kurds living abroad and achieving success in various fields feel about their Kurdish identity and how it has influenced their work. "Being Kurdish is my identity," Niga immediately responded. "The challenges we faced have taught me resilience and determination. Our history of struggle and perseverance is a constant source of inspiration."

Mentoring future generations

This drives Niga to support and mentor the next generation of Kurdish scientists, helping to highlight their contributions to the global scientific community. Despite growing up abroad, Niga's children speak Kurdish fluently. She recognizes the importance of the mother tongue for the new generation, especially those born abroad, and emphasizes the significance of introducing Kurdish culture to them.

"As a family, we have always believed in maintaining our Kurdish identity. This includes preserving the Kurdish language, poetry, music, history, and literature. We emphasize the importance of maintaining our Kurdish culture while also embracing our British identity and being proud of having dual nationality," Niga explained.

In preserving and promoting Kurdish culture, there are multiple challenges that the Kurdish diaspora faces. One of these is the language barrier; maintaining fluency in Kurdish can be difficult, especially for younger generations who might be more exposed to the language of their new country. "Being proud to speak Kurdish at home is important," she suggested. "Taking children to Kurdish schools can also be beneficial, providing parents with an educational support system and giving children access to those resources."

Niga views her contribution to the development of the healthcare system in Kurdistan as a duty. "I mentor and support Kurdish academics and scien-

tists and have done so for the past 27 years," she stated.

In 2006, Niga and her brothers, Sarkhell and Rawand, established a network connecting universities in Kurdistan with academics from the UK, Europe, and the United States who were willing to collaborate and provide scientific support. They created a website where they published profiles of these academics, including their contact details and areas of expertise. "This initiative was outstanding, as it provided a system to facilitate open communication and collaboration between Kurdistan and academics."

Lifelong learning

To end the interview, I asked Niga how she balances her passion for science with her hobbies. "Balancing hobbies such as photography and traveling with my main career brings me so much joy. Seeing different places enriches my life with new experiences and perspectives," she said.

Her passion for science and technology also keeps her intellectually engaged and stimulated. By integrating these interests into her daily routine, she maintains a lifestyle that supports both her professional growth and personal satisfaction.

Moreover, Niga encourages the younger generation in Kurdistan to embrace learning with dedication and curiosity. "I often share the example of my uncle Ghafour Mirza Karim, a historian and writer, who started learning Farsi in his 70s because he wanted to read Farsi books firsthand," she said.

Niga advises the younger generation to be proud of their Kurdish heritage and stay connected by building and maintaining relationships with people who share their interests and goals. "Collaboration and support from others can open doors to new opportunities and ideas," she concluded. ●

Mam Khidr's Mill The Soul of a Century Still Grinding On



Mōhammad Dargalayi

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

In the town of Koy Sanjaq in the Kurdistan Region, tucked behind an old walnut tree that has curved slowly with age, there lies a story not of bricks or machines, but of memory, devotion, and a century-long heartbeat. This is the story of Mam Khidr's mill, a place that not only grinds wheat into flour, but also serves as a guarantor of life in the hardest times, and a place of refuge on the darkest of days.

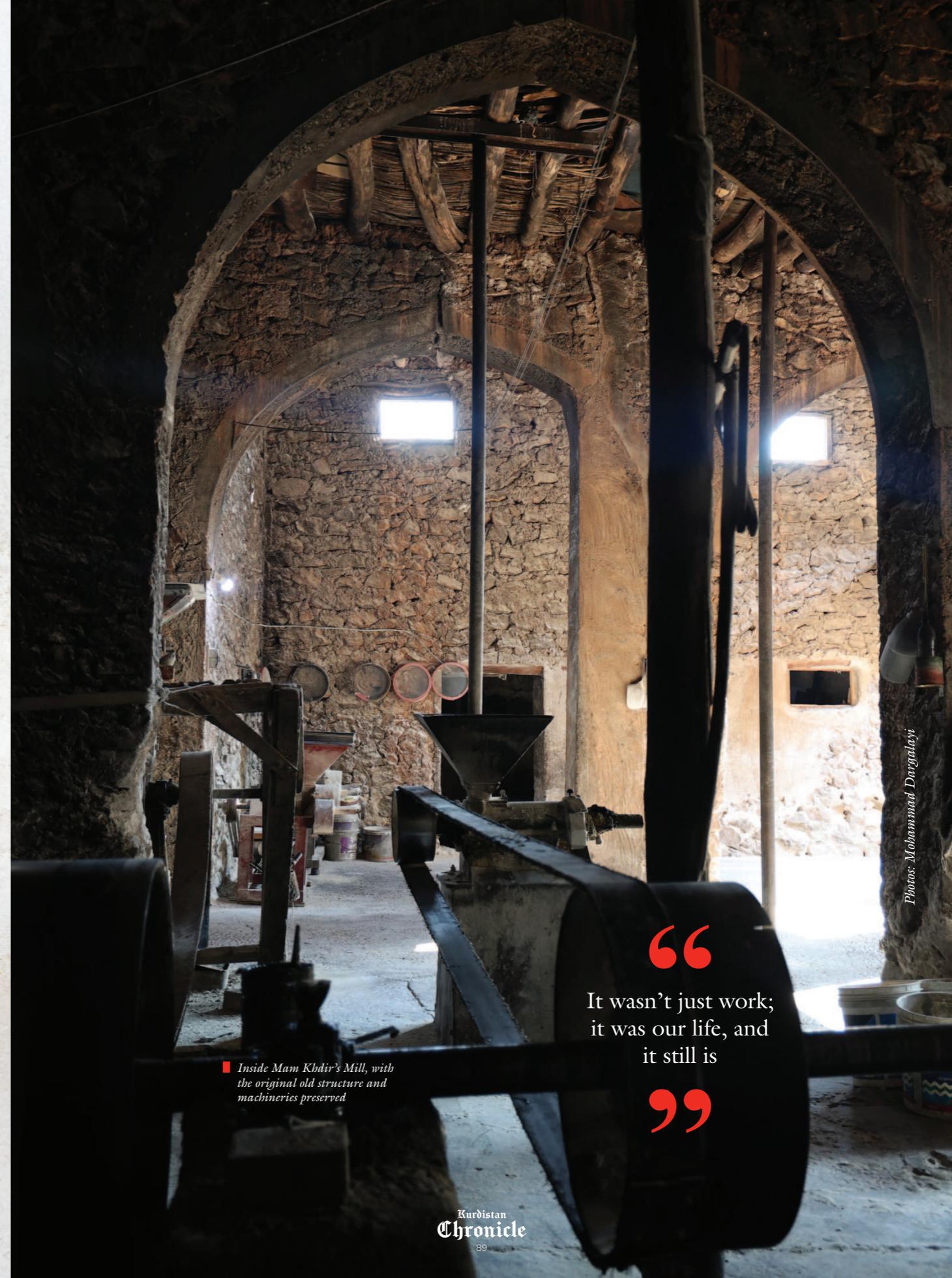
At first glance, the mill looks ordinary, consisting of stone walls and an old chimney. When one examines its wooden halls more closely, however, one can begin to feel the pulse of a mechanical heart vowing to make a difference.

Zana Khidr looks after this remarkable place. He moves with the confidence and wisdom of generations. He easily recalls stories even older than the mill.

"I inherited this mill from my father, and he from his father," Zana begins, voice steady, pride glowing softly. "My grandfather, Haji Kakamin, built it in 1927. Back then, this was empty land. But he had a vision, and the land slowly reshaped itself to fit that dream."

Before the mill took physical form, engineers and designers from a British company came, mapped the layout, and brought in machines – the core of the operation. These machines were bought for about 1,800 Iraqi dinars, a considerable sum in those days.

However, the construction process was costly in terms of both money and human life, as one engineer died in a tragic accident. "They took his body back with them," Zana continued his narration of the sad story in a mild tone. "They finished the work, but the memory never left this place."



Photos: Mōhammad Dargalayi

“

It wasn't just work;
it was our life, and
it still is

”

■ *Inside Mam Khidr's Mill, with
the original old structure and
machineries preserved*

Now, 98 years later, the mill is still working and supporting the lives of many people.

The ageless mill

Most machines of this age would have expired, fallen silent, or ended up stored in museums. But Mam Khidr's mill has defied time, not only surviving, but thriving through the years. Perhaps this was the very reason why the British company returned to try to buy the mill.

"They came three times," Zana says. "In 2016, 2018, and 2021. A team of 16 people, including the company's general manager. They offered us £3.8 million to buy the whole mill and take it back to the UK where it came from."

According to Zana, it was not just a business decision for them. They were fascinated by how the mill had remained functional for so long. They wanted to preserve it, perhaps as a symbol of endurance or to showcase it in a museum.

And yet, every time they came, they left with the same answer: an emphatic "No," Zana explains. "Even if they offered fifty times more, we wouldn't sell it. This is our heritage; my grandfather's hands are in these stones. This place belongs to Koy Sanjaq, to Kurdistan. It's not for sale."

Time-tested

The secret to how the mill has survived a century of hard work, war, and change perhaps lies in the skills and experience of the owners. Perhaps they have solved the mysteries of the machine better than the manufacturers themselves.

Zana explains that "we start working at 6:30 am every morning and continue until 1:00 pm. Sometimes, if work is heavy, we go until 4:00 pm. My brother and I acquired it from our father. We know every screw, every sound. If anything breaks, we fix

it ourselves."

More significantly, perhaps the heart of the operation was Mam Khidr himself, Zana's father. Zana's eyes soften as he speaks of the man after whom the mill is named. "He started working here at the age of nine and didn't stop until he passed away at ninety," Zana relates. "This place was his sec-

ond skin. He knew every corner like his own hands."

Khidr was more than a regular worker; he was the soul and spirit of the mill. Zana believes that Khidr's dedication and attention to detail are what preserved the mill for more than a century. "He treated the machines like they were part of his own body.



Zana Khidr sitting next to his father's portrait on a wall inside the mill.

Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi



Entrance to the main building of Mam Khidr's Mill

Photos: Mohammad Dargalayi



■ British-made machines at the Mam Khidr mill.

Photos: Mohammad Darzgalayi

You can't replace that kind of love."

More than grain

Over the years, the mill has processed barley, oats, corn, chickpeas, and animal feed. Customers from all over the Kurdistan Region come here, not just for the flour, but for the story, for the taste of something real. The mill itself has become an attraction, a source of local pride that attracts international visitors as well—a mill defying time and change, a mill like no other.

"We've had visitors from Türkiye,

Iran, Spain, Germany, and the UK," Zana shares. "Some are tourists, others are researchers or people curious about the story. They always ask the same thing: 'Why didn't you sell it?' And I always say, because you can't buy memory. You can't buy meaning."

A corner for a friend

During our tour, I notice an unusual corner in the back of the mill, an old bench with a coat hanging above it, untouched by dust. Zana walks over,

tenderly brushing a finger over the sleeves. "This belonged to Haman," he says. "He was a Christian. Worked with us for nearly 70 years. Never missed a single day. One day, right here while working, he passed away. We kept his coat, just like that. It's our way of remembering him—his loyalty, his spirit."

To Mam Khidr's family, the mill is a monument of friendship, memories, and loyalty. As Zana says, it is a small gesture, but it carries the weight of a mountain, an unbreakable bond of friendship, coexistence, and brother-

hood that life depends on in this part of the world.

The grain of a family

This mill has not just ground flour or built friendships – it has kept a family together.

"Our family has lived in this place for generations," Zana says. "It wasn't just work; it was our life, and it still is. My children, my nephews, all understand its value. And we will keep it running for as long as we can. Not for money, not for fame, but for what it stands for."

And what it stands for is clear. In an age of fast machines and faster profits, Mam Khidr's slow mill showcases a soft resistance, defying the rush of modern life and the laws of physics. It is a living reminder that not everything old is outdated, and not everything valuable has a price.

With the golden glint of its stone walls, the mill's presence and endurance echoes a heartbeat, the heartbeat of Mam Khidr, who gave his time and mind to it. It is not just the rhythmic movement of the wheels, or the soft click of tools; rather, it is a spirit guiding the mill's durability and resis-

tance. It is something deeper. A presence. A soul.

Mam Khidr's mill is not just a place that makes flour. It is a place that keeps memory alive. It grinds not just grain, but time, slowly, patiently, faithfully. A monument to love, labor, and the quiet power of togetherness. To Mam Khidr's family, a place is more than property. It is home. And no matter how much is offered, they remind us all that home is not for sale, memories are irreplaceable, love cannot be exchanged, and a legacy cannot be forgotten. ●

CARPETS

Kurdish Carpets Between the Woven Strands



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

Our first task in life is to walk, and with each step, we grow more aware of the surfaces beneath us. From our innate desire for comfort emerge colorful, soft carpets handwoven with care and tradition. Each knot tells a silent story, echoing the Kurdish saying that if you have a wish, you should tie grass together and knot your desire to the ground.

Among the countless types of woven carpets, Kurdish carpets (*town*) hold a unique place in craftsmanship, although they are connected to a wider tradition of carpet-weaving. “When discussing Kurdish carpets, we transcend the geographical boundaries of modern nations, as they do not define them,” explains Kawan Karimpour.

Holding a master’s degree in Culture and Crafts with a specialization in handwoven carpets, Karimpour is not just a salesperson, but a dedicated advocate of Kurdish carpets. As the founder of the first digital platform dedicated to Kurdish carpets, he works to revive awareness and share daily insights about these intricate works of art. Unlike durable objects such as tiles or vases, carpets are crafted from delicate materials and are thus fragile, making their preservation more challenging.

Though the exact number of surviving Kurdish handwoven carpets is unknown, estimates suggest that there are nearly 500 distinct types, each with unique characteristics. While Iran boasts some of the most renowned carpets, other countries such as Türkiye and India have their own distinct traditions. Appreciating this diversity is essential to understanding the cultural richness of handwoven carpets. To truly value Kurdish carpets, one must first respect and acknowledge the artistry of carpets from other traditions.



■ Kawan Karimpour repairing an old Kurdish carpet (*town*)



■ Kawan Karimpour.

Forgotten Threads

The greatest challenge facing *tewn* is obscurity. Public awareness is alarmingly low, even among art students. Few know that Erbil once housed two bustling carpet factories employing hundreds of people just 40 years ago.

kiye and northwestern Iran), but their cultural essence is being diluted as weavers increasingly cater to buyers' demands.

During his visits to Erbil's Qaysari Bazaar, Karimpour has informally surveyed over 50 shopkeepers about their carpets. His findings were trou-

ish handwoven carpets allows other countries to claim them, displaying them in museums and selling them in markets under different identities.

Karimpour has also searched for books about Kurdish carpets authored by Kurdish writers, finding that while Persian and Turkish re-

working to address through his platform, *Tewn_Carpet*, where he aims to shed light on the history, symbolism, motifs, and weaving techniques of Kurdish carpets. Motivated by a deep desire to highlight the richness of Kurdish culture, Karimpour is determined to ensure that *tewn* is neither erased from history nor forgotten.

Preserving and identifying

To preserve carpets, proper storage is vital: the temperature must remain between 25-30°C. Too low, and the calcium in the cotton breaks down, causing the carpet to crumble and disintegrate when touched. Too high, and larvae infest the fabric. Carpets must be exposed to sunlight during the summer to prevent such infestations and should not be displayed for extended periods to avoid damage. Instead, photographs should be used for exhibitions, with original pieces shown only on special occasions. Repairing carpets is another means of preservation, though this process is generally reserved for private collectors. Without proper conservation efforts, many of these cultural treasures may be lost.

Kurdish carpets are identifiable by color, patterns, and weaving techniques. Each area of Kurdistan uses unique natural elements for dyeing. For example, walnut shells create distinct hues uncommon in other regions. The native Shlera flower (*Fritillaria imperialis*) is another key source of dye, allowing experts to trace a carpet's origin to Kurdistan. Artistic patterns and motifs are another distinguishing factor. Each design reflects history, storytelling, and the intentions of the weaver. Lastly, different areas employ distinct weaving techniques, some blending styles due to proximity to borders. For example, Bijar carpets incorporate influences from neighboring regions, while Kurdish carpets made near Mosul blend Kurdish and Arabic weaving styles.

Karimpour emphasizes the impor-

tance of recognizing these factors, but also acknowledges that not everything found on Kurdish land is inherently Kurdish. Carpets, as luxury items, were often exchanged as gifts, making it imperative to investigate their origins carefully to avoid drawing incorrect conclusions.

A notable example is the Pazyryk rug, one of the world's oldest discovered carpets. "Claimed by the Persians – and increasingly by the Turks – it carries evidence of being Kurdish. Discovered almost 100 years ago, it was wrapped in a handmade item, and the weaving method of that item is unique to Bijar, Iran, where it is still practiced today. Historical records suggest it was sent as a gift to an important figure," Karimpour explains.

Karimpour also notes that during the time this carpet was made, the Bijar region was predominantly Kurdish. Similarly, some carpets displayed in the Erbil Citadel Museum are mislabeled, further emphasizing the need for accurate research and documentation.

Decline in woven legacies

Forgetting cultural heritage, of course, is not unique to the Kurds. According to Karimpour, 40 years ago, carpets constituted 25% of Iran's economy, but today, only 5 million out of 85 million Iranians are involved in carpet weaving, a decline driven by modernization and decreasing nomadic lifestyles.

In Kurdistan, the reasons for decline vary by region. Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) suffered most from conflict, which displaced weavers and disrupted production. Many Kurdish carpets from southern Kurdistan also now reside in foreign museums, including one in California housing over 50 Kurdish carpets. In Northern and Eastern Kurdistan, mechanized production has largely replaced handmade weaving. Weaving has always been labor-intensive, and people increasingly seek less strenuous, more

profitable work. Another major factor is the depopulation of villages – historically the heart of carpet production – brought on by conflict or the search for better opportunities in urban areas. Some countries addressed this development early, offering loans to artisans and opening rural factories to sustain traditional crafts. The changing design of homes has also played a role in the decline of handwoven carpets. Whereas in the past, dirt or concrete floors were covered in carpets, today carpets are primarily decorative, which has reduced overall demand.

A passion for handwoven art

"The mission of *Tewn_Carpet* goes beyond selling carpets – it's about educating people," says Karimpour, who was once an aspiring musician but found an unexpected passion for carpets. "I wanted to study an art form, but realized art exists everywhere."

Disturbed by the lack of awareness surrounding Kurdish carpets, he launched an Instagram page to inform the public. His efforts gained traction after a collaboration with the Nishtman Strategy Institute, where a video introduction to his work attracted thousands of followers. Encouraged by the response, Karimpour plans to publish a book on Kurdish handwoven carpets. He has also been approached by individuals seeking to restore valuable *tewn* pieces, requiring expertise in materials, dyeing, and preservation.

"There were times when I saw a valuable *tewn* lying damaged in someone's garage and would acquire it and restore it," says Karimpour, who would either add those salvaged carpets to his collection or resell them to interested individuals.

Clan, culture, and tradition

Unlike other art forms, many Kurdish carpet designs are communal, belonging to clans rather than individuals. Karimpour explains that weaving



In contrast, other countries have preserved their handcrafted carpets by integrating them into academic studies, thereby safeguarding and elevating their cultural value. According to Karimpour, Kurdish carpets are still produced in parts of northern and eastern Kurdistan (southeastern Tür-

bling: many misidentified Persian carpets as Kurdish, unintentionally deceiving buyers. This misinformation extends beyond carpets to other cultural artifacts, such as Kurdish women's tattoo traditions, which are often misrepresented for marketability. The lack of recognition of authentic Kurd-

searchers have published works on *tewn*, many contain inaccuracies due to a lack of firsthand knowledge or conflate common symbols in the carpets without accounting for their differences. These misunderstandings fuel ongoing misinformation, which is something Karimpour is tirelessly

is a collective art, influenced by the surrounding environment, cultural exchange, and neighboring traditions.

While other countries have systematically documented their carpet designs through mapping, Kurdistan has not, making it difficult to recognize and reclaim traditional patterns. Only a few regions – such as Bijar, Kermanshah, and Sanandaj – have undertaken this work. Without proper documentation, much of Kurdistan’s rich legacy risks being lost.

Kurdistan’s carpet weaving falls into three categories: city carpets, village carpets, and nomadic carpets, each shaped by lifestyle, beliefs, and geography, and reflected in the colors, motifs, materials, and weaving techniques. For instance, climate determines the thickness of carpets, with colder regions producing thicker weaves. Designs also vary dramatically according to the above-mentioned factors.

Karimpour underscores that weaving is not merely a craft; it reflects the weaver’s spirit, history, and identity. To preserve this heritage, thorough documentation and academic integration are essential – before these woven stories unravel completely.

Handwoven carpets of Erbil

According to Karimpour, the tradition of hand-woven carpets in Erbil traces its origins to the citadel, where carpets were an essential part of every building, covering its floors. Within Erbil, carpets can be categorized into three main types: those woven in Erbil itself, those from surrounding areas and villages, and those orig-

inating from Erbil’s clans. However, as Kawan notes, limited research and the fragile nature of these materials have left little data about each type. What is clear, however, is that many carpets came from clans that migrated to Erbil, especially as the city expanded rapidly in recent years.



The most notable and popular style of carpets from Erbil is *saranaz*, also known as lakeash, which translates to “rectangular.” This distinct shape led to repetitive artistic patterns that became a defining feature of these carpets over time. The primary material used in weaving Erbil’s carpets is wool, though cotton was occasionally incorporated. Among the most renowned carpets were those crafted by the Seeyan clan, whose creations were exported to Iran, Türkiye, Baghdad, and beyond. In contrast, most other clans wove carpets for personal use

rather than trade, further elevating the prominence of the Seeyan clan.

For a time, *tewn* was not considered an economically important product. However, this changed when the government established carpet factories, including two in Erbil. These factories primarily produced designs influenced by Turkish and Persian styles due to their high demand. The carpets were sold both within and outside Kurdistan, labeled as “Kurdish-Erbil.” Some examples of these factory-made carpets have survived to the present day. As a result, Erbil carpets can be divided into two distinct periods: those made before the establishment of factories and those made afterward. The first group is deeply rooted in local culture, while the second prioritizes economic value, often mimicking trends from other countries.

One distinguishing feature of traditional Erbil carpets is their vibrant red and purple hues. Unfortunately, much of the purple in surviving carpets has faded, with some having lost their color entirely. Carpets dyed using natural materials have retained their colors better, but most of these pieces are now held outside Kurdistan in foreign collections.

The weaving techniques used in Erbil carpets are also distinctive, with two primary styles being employed. The first is parallel weaving, where two knots are tied on the same string, appearing parallel. The second is semi-parallel weaving, which is similar but features one knot appearing as a half knot. These methods create distinct textures and patterns unique to Erbil’s carpets.



Another way to identify handwoven carpets from Erbil is through their motifs. Kawan notes that Erbil carpets feature over 500 distinct motifs, ranging from trees and animals to depictions of ducks and chickens. He emphasizes the importance of studying these motifs to understand their origins, the clans they represent, and

the history behind them. “Before asking which carpets belong to Erbil,” Karimpour cautions, “we should ask which clans lived in Erbil. Each carpet holds art and stories, and we must investigate what these illustrations mean and what history they carry.”

The need for thorough documenta-

tion of Erbil’s remaining carpets is urgent. To preserve this rich cultural heritage, researchers must record what survives, study the motifs and techniques, and recover the knowledge of what has been lost over time. This effort is essential to safeguarding an integral part of Kurdish identity for future generations. ●

Turning Beauty into a Voice for Identity



Iman Asaad

is a Kurdish journalist based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region.

In a world that often treats beauty as a silent image, Hayat Murad has chosen to empower it with a voice—one that echoes from the beautiful Sinjar, a land that has witnessed brutality, genocide, and tragedy but is still blooming with resilience.

Kurdistan has long been known for the beauty and bravery of its women. It is the land of women warriors, princesses, *peshmerga* fighters, and civil society activists whose fame has crossed international boundaries. Kurdistan's history is also filled with remarkable women – like Kchi Kafirroos, or “the Hay Seller” – and now, Hayat Murad, whose beauty has taken her to the international stage.

A young Kurdish Yezidi woman, Murad has been nominated by the prestigious TC Candler platform as one of the world's 100 most beautiful faces for 2025. More than just a nomination, it marks a historic moment: she is the first Kurdish or Yezidi woman ever included on the global list, which has recognized unique faces from around the world since 1990. Yet Murad's story transcends beauty and glamor—it is a narrative of meaning, identity, and strength, with a woman using her voice to represent her people on the global stage.

Beauty and pain

Born in Sinjar, Murad grew up in a community deeply scarred by war, genocide, and displacement. For her, this was tripled: as a woman, a follower of a perse-

cuted faith, and a member of a marginalized ethnicity. These layers of oppression became especially vivid in 2014, when ISIS targeted the Yezidis in a campaign of violence and terror.

But time revealed something else. “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger,” as goes the aphorism of the 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. From the ashes of pain, some souls are born braver, and more determined to reach the light. For Murad, art and beauty became the windows into a softer world and tools to reshape the narrative of her life and people.

“I grew up in a place full of hardship,” she tells *Kurdistan Chronicle*. “But I found in beauty and art a way to express myself, my identity, and my people's struggles. I started with drawing, then moved into fashion and design. I saw it as a way to give my community a voice.”

More than just a pretty face

Murad's journey is not defined by physical beauty alone. She has a degree in English literature from the University of Duhok, and her love for art and design has shaped her into a multidimensional figure, who can speak, paint, and represent all at once.

She's not simply a beautiful woman posing for pictures; she's painting a more beautiful future. And she has already been recognized for it. Murad has exhibited her art internationally, won several awards,

Hayat Murad

“Murad remains deeply rooted to her Kurdish Yezidi identity”





“

She insists that beauty must reflect cultural richness and emotional depth

”



and even earned a special certificate from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for her work in a global art competition—an extraordinary achievement for such a young artist.

“She wasn’t just another name in a beauty contest,” says one local artist familiar with her work. “She’s a voice. A vision. A bridge between pain and healing.”

Merging art, beauty, and identity

Murad remains deeply rooted to her Kurdish Yezidi identity. When she speaks of her heritage, it is not with second-hand knowledge, but with the lived experience of someone who has survived its harshest realities.

“My culture is part of who I am,” she says. “We are a people who have faced persecution for centuries. That made me value art as a tool for preserving memory and expressing the collective soul of my community.”

In 2022, Murad competed in Miss Iraq. It was a bold move at the time that stirred pride within the local community. Her participation was not about fashion or fame, but a message to all saying that Kurdish Yezidi women are strong, proud, and silent no more.

Being named as one of the 100 most beautiful faces in the world brought Murad both joy and a sense of responsibility. For her, the recognition was never about glamor, but dignity.

“This nomination is about representing Yezidi, Kurdish, and Iraqi women on a global platform. In a region where women face so many obstacles, it’s a step toward proving that beauty can carry strength and speak for justice.”

Murad believes true beauty is not defined by symmetry or trends but is defined by authenticity and purpose. Through her art, she wants “to show the world that beauty is not just in appearance. It’s in the message, the meaning, and



the will to rise above everything. It is about using your platform to create change regardless of how small it might appear to be.”

In a global culture where beauty standards are often narrow and shallow, Murad represents rarity and diversity. She challenges the notion that there is only one way a person can self-manifest and look beautiful. She insists that beauty must reflect cultural richness and emotional depth.

A voice for Kurdistan

What gives Murad wings isn’t fame or talent but her people. From Sinjar to Dohuk, from Kurdish youth to fellow artists, she is embraced as one of their own.

“The support I’ve received has been amazing,” she says. “My family, friends, and people from my community believed in me. That belief gives me the strength to keep going.”

It is not easy to remain grounded in the spotlight, especially for women from conservative or traumatized communities. Yet Murad carries herself with dignity, inspiring a generation that is hungry for hope.

And she is far from done. Her future plans stretch beyond beauty contests or fashion shows. She hopes to manage projects that showcase her nation’s cultural, artistic, and humanitarian legacy, an activism woven into her very identity. “I don’t want to be remembered just for a title or a nomination,” she explains. “I want to use what I’ve gained to help others, to speak about the struggles of my people, and to build something lasting. Whether it’s through art or awareness, I’ll keep working.”

Her message to the next generation – especially to young women is clear: “Discover your talent. Embrace who you are. Don’t be afraid to express yourself through creativity. Let your voice be heard.” ●

What's Inside the Pickle Jar?



Gül Hür

is a writer and editor exploring Kurdish studies, literature, and the arts through a lens of storytelling, memory, and cultural expression, with an academic background that includes an MA in History from Istanbul Bilgi University.

It's been more than ten years since I read *My Father's Rifle*, written by the Kurdish author and director Hiner Saleem. The complicated emotions I delved into are still so vivid, as if I'm still experiencing them today.

I was fortunate to be among the early readers of his latest novel *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others*. As I finished it, my heart was shattered by the stories I had become a part of; yet, I felt myself carried away, drifting like ashes in the wind.

In *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others*, our protagonist Dilman decides to end his life and writes in his will that his body is to be cremated and his ashes to be taken to his mother's grave in the city of Akre in Kurdistan. The adventure begins as Dilman packs his own ashes in a pickle jar and searches for someone to fulfill his last wish, someone who can understand his will, someone who won't blame him for his suicide, and someone who will respect his decision to cremate his body despite being a Muslim.

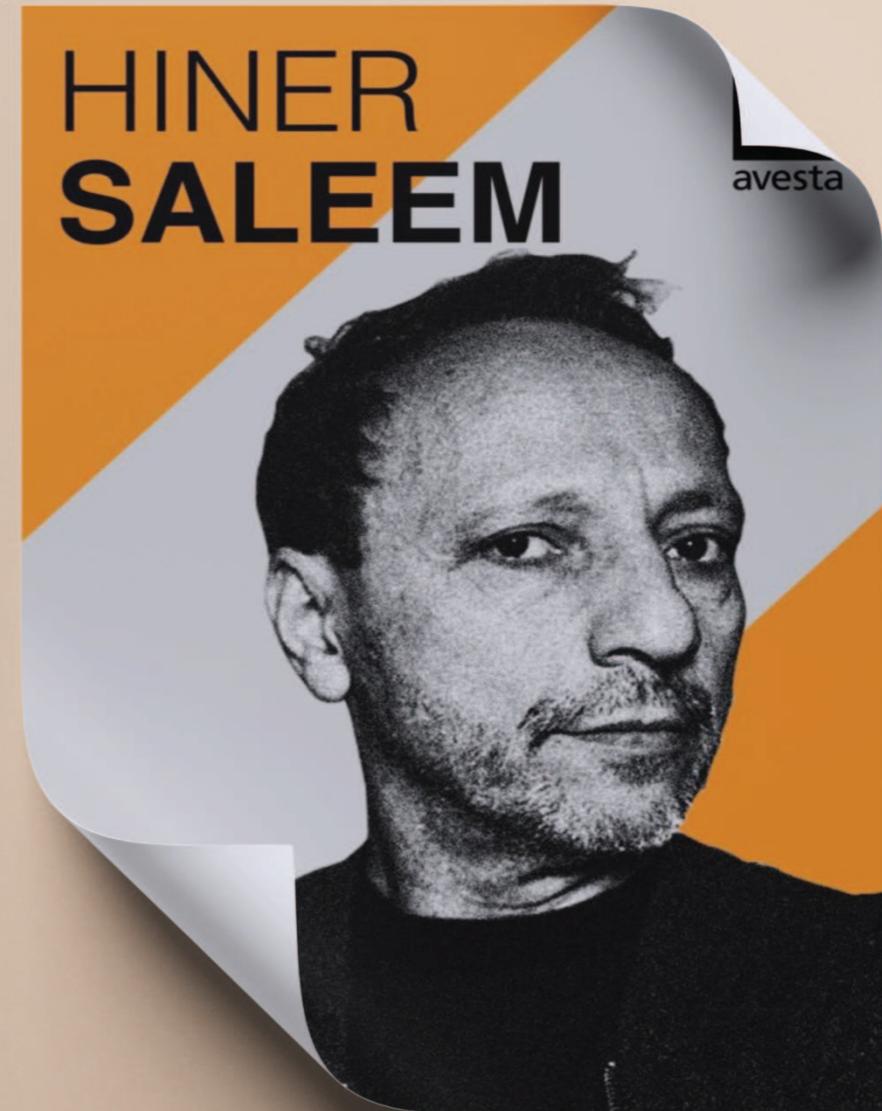
I find myself thinking that sorrow is a burden that weighs on each of us. It is universal, present in every language and every culture. It needs no elaborate explanation; it simply exists, raw and unmistakable, deep within us – in our palms, our eyes, and at the tips of our toes. This pain doesn't require fancy words to be understood; you just feel it so poignantly.

Throughout my reading journey, I was

immersed in sorrow. What I was reading were the disappointed stories of the Kurds who live not far from where I live as a Kurd. Although I've never been in exile and have never been forced to migrate to another country, I found myself deeply connected to Saleem's journey. Being an immigrant – without a country – is a place beyond my imagination. However, the dream of building a homeland with one's own hands, only to watch it remain unfulfilled, is painfully familiar. Hiner Saleem has been living in exile in France for many years. However, the concept of exile can be used interchangeably in this context, as the novel can also be interpreted as autobiographical. As a reader, I was able to be a part of Saleem's exile.

Dilman, whose body was cremated just as the work week ends on Friday, asks the crematorium worker if he will turn off the furnace. The man replies that he can only collect the ashes on Monday, to which Dilman replies: "But Mondays always come very late in Paris." Though I have never been in exile, I felt the ache of those words, as if a blow had struck both my head and my heart.

In both of Saleem's novels, the stories are built upon the ancient sorrow and disappointment of the Kurds, but it is infused with subtle humor. In *My Father's Rifle*, the reader first encounters a naughty joy intertwined with hope. The hints of joy throughout envelop the spirit of Saleem's stories. Even though *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others* also begins in hopelessness, the



■ A poster advertising Hiner Saleem's latest book.

humor still resonates. From his witty remarks about his mother's excessive religiosity to his friend Miso's home in Italy – jokingly called 'the White House' – Saleem weaves humor into the despair of his characters' experiences. Even the electricity cuts, caused by the visits of the Syrian President's brothers to their mistresses, become a source of dark comedy.

Throughout the book, Dilman carries the jar filled with his own ashes, and through it, recounts the events that followed his forced departure from Kurdistan, all with a sharp and witty tone. Yet, the jar holds more than just ashes – it holds the remnants of our hopes that were buried in history's forgotten corners. What's inside the jar is the relief that our people have been barred from for many years. The jar contains the pomegranates from our cherished garden, the last touch of a mother's hand, and the final glimpse into the depth of her heart. Now, I see those ashes as the embodiment of all cultures that could not find a place to call home. As I immersed myself in these stories, I realized how masterfully Saleem conveys emotions that are universally human.

The tales inside the jar are overwhelming, and I'm fully aware of

this. But once the jar falls to the floor, the ashes disappear into eternal emptiness. We, too, flow away with each speck of dust.

And so, I leave a few words for Dilman as well. While we struggle to open the jar's lid to free all our belongings, you must stand with us. Long live Dilman!

 These were my initial thoughts on *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others* as the editor of its Turkish translation. Known for his internationally acclaimed films *Vodka Lemon* and *My Sweet Pepperland*, as well as his debut novel *My Father's Rifle*, which has been translated into more than 30 languages, Hiner Saleem now returns with a new novel. He originally wrote *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others* in French, but Avesta Publishing simultaneously translated the novel into both Turkish (*Kullerim Golda ve Digerleri*) and Kurdish (*Ez u Ez*), releasing both editions at the end of 2024.

Beyond reading the novel, I had the opportunity to engage in a deeper conversation with the author. In the following interview, Saleem graciously answered my questions, offering

insight into his writing, his characters, and the themes that shape his work. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to him for his time and generosity.

During our conversation, you will come across some French and Kurdish expressions. I have intentionally left them unchanged, as these words best reflect the author's thoughts and emotions in their most natural form. Given the multilingual nature of both Saleem's life and work, preserving these expressions felt essential. I would also like to express my gratitude to Abdullah Keskin for his assistance during and after the interview in transcribing and translating Saleem's Kurdish expressions.

Gul Hur (GH): *Let me begin by congratulating you on your latest novel. As the editor of its Turkish translation, I've had the privilege of witnessing a small part of its journey and have seen firsthand the exciting process you've gone through. I'm curious about your writing journey. In *My Ashes, Golda, and the Others*, the protagonist Dilman's story starts with his decision to end his life. What inspired you to explore the theme of suicide?*



■ A mockup of Hiner Saleem's books.



“
 When I hear a Kurdish song, for example, one from the Caucasus, I cry
 ”

■ A poster for a film by Hiner Saleem.

Hiner Saleem (HS): I think if you're Kurdish, you are born with suicide. So, I wanted to talk about it through the eyes of someone who is born, who is alive, and yet experiences deprivation (*mabrum kirin*). I needed to find a way to talk about these things without taking myself too seriously. To speak about what really matters to me, I need humor. I need absurdity. I need to find a form, a way to express it.

And nostalgia is a part of it. At the very least, there is a person in my head, the most optimistic side of me, the part that is dead. And that part? It expects nothing. *Ew alema miri pir rehet e, alema sax muskile ye.* (The dead side is at peace; the living side is in trouble.) The side that is alive, though, is full of struggles, pessimism. But the dead side, it's strangely positive.

So, suicide, in a way, is an indirect way of expressing that if a person is not free, or if they are a minority among the savage parts of humanity, they feel like they are dying. Every day, they think about suicide. But in a literary sense, suicide is also a powerful artistic pretext. A way to talk about life itself. And in that, there is beauty. There is hope.

GH: *Did you experience something like this yourself, or was it purely in your mind?*

HS: Honestly, I think I would kill everyone else before I'd ever consider killing myself. Absolutely not—*ez ne wisa tirsonek im ku xo bikusim* (I am not so much of a coward that I'd kill myself). No, suicide is something very distant from me. And maybe because of that, it was easy to write about.

If I were actually suicidal, I'd have written like a French intellectual suffering from constipation, talking endlessly about frustration and suffering like they do. But fortunately, because I don't think about suicide, it was just a form, a pretext. That gave me the freedom to write about it however I wanted. To use it as I saw fit.

In a way, I'm saying: I'm alive, but I understand that there is no hope. And yet, I remain pessimistic – with a smile. But the ashes, they are my small remnants of optimism. It's a contradiction. And to some people, it might just seem absurd, meaningless. But that doesn't matter.

Because before literature is sociology, before it is narrative, it is art. And art is free. It has no borders. Take Marc

Chagall, for example. He's one of my favorite painters. He was Jewish, originally from Ukraine, but in the 1920s, he fled Bolshevik Russia and came to France. If you look at his paintings, you'll see a Jewish man floating above a village. In reality, of course, people don't fly. But in art? He can fly. Or in movies, we see someone jump out of an airplane, float in the sky, then climb back inside. None of that is real. Or maybe someday it will be, but that's not the point. It's art. That's how I see literature. It's art before it's sociology. Before it's narrative. Before it's history. If I wanted to write sociology, I'd write a book about Kurdish history, about what happened in Türkiye. But I don't want to. That's not my job. That's the job of intellectuals.

GH: *In what ways do you use the theme of suicide to explore life?*

HS: Which life? We grow older, we slowly start to say, okay, now I need to pause, to try to understand what happened before. Why did I end up here? Where am I? Why did I come here? What happened in the past? The people I love or hate, what role did they play in my life?

And, you know, this book is a mosaic. I talked about everything. When it

comes to traditional novel structures, I broke the conventional alphabet of storytelling. Have you ever seen a hand-knitted pullover? *Blûzên daykên me bi destan çêdikirin, gava davekî jê vedîkî, hemû vedibe.* (Our mothers used to knit sweaters by hand. If you pulled one thread, the whole thing would unravel.) That's what I wanted to do with my life, to pull at it and watch it come apart, to trace it back.

GH: So, you pulled on a thread, and the rest followed?

HS: The rest was already there. But I can't say it 'came' – it was always there. I just had to open it up. *Welatek an kesek zilmê li miletekî din an însanekî din bike, ez vê tucar nikarim qebûl bikim.* (If a country or a person oppresses another country or person, I can never accept that.) I see this as my personal struggle because I love myself. I can never accept someone telling me, 'Your language is forbidden.' Who are you to say that? How is that possible if you are a human being?

And how do people survive in secrecy? For a hundred years, Kurdish people have lived like that. I'm speaking on a human level, I'm not being political. Everywhere we go, there are guns pointed at us, ready to fire. Why? I refuse to accept this. I take great pride in my dignity. Not in being Kurdish, because that's not something I made. I can only take pride in something I create. But at the same time, I feel no shame about it either. I am Kurdish. Noqda (That's it). It's not good or bad, it simply is. If I were Senegalese, I would say the same. If I were Turkish, I would say the same. But why, because I am Kurdish, must I face all these difficulties? Why couldn't I see my mother for twenty years? This is a

struggle for freedom – for the affirmation of my freedom.

And sometimes, I just want to cry. When I hear a Kurdish song, for example, one from the Caucasus, I cry. I think, If I had grown up in Kurdistan, like everyone else, maybe I would have fallen in love with a girl from there. Maybe I would have done this, maybe I would have done that. But why was I deprived of this? Ez mehrûm kirim (I was deprived). Why did they take my roots from me? It



sounds like a rebellion, against nostalgia, against the past and the present. As my grandfather said: 'No future. Fortunately.'

GH: I'd like to talk more about your writing style. I sense that you deliberately avoid being overly dramatic or tragic. Instead, you express your emotions – what you truly want to say – through humor. I can see and feel humor in your writing. Is this something you intentionally want readers

to notice? Can you share more about your writing style?

HS: Humor is full of tragedy. L'humour est la politesse du désespoir. (Humor is the politeness of despair.) With humor, you can say things that people wouldn't normally accept or receive well, but they will still read them. If I wrote seriously about the Kurdish experience, nobody would read it because it's too sad. So, I have to find a tactic, a way to talk about this bordel (mess). Ez ditirsim her gav diqat dikim ku ew tiştê ez dinivîsim hestigiran nebe. (I'm careful to make sure that what I write doesn't overwhelm the reader.)

I don't like to deliver direct messages, but humor allows messages to pass through more easily, and in my life, I need humor. I can't be around people – friends – if they don't have humor. I think people who have suffered a lot throughout history develop a kind of tool for survival. And that tool is humor. Look at Jewish people – they have jokes about the Holocaust, about gas chambers. There are entire volumes of Jewish humor and jokes. I think Kurdish people have their own kind of humor to indirectly talk about what has happened to them.

Humor is also hope. Because if someone has humor, it means they believe in something. It means they have hope. I keep repeating this, this relationship between hope, humor, despair, tragedy, nostalgia, and exile. Exile is something deeply embedded in me. There's a difference between being an emigrant and being in political exile. If a Turkish person moves to Germany, they are an immigrant. They go there to earn money, to build a better life for their children and family. But for me and for most

Kurdish intellectuals, we didn't go to European countries to look for jobs. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, it was the worst period for Kurdish people, whether in Türkiye or Iraq.

I grew up in the 1980s. I was a teenager then. I saw all of it. What I write, it has to reflect me. I'm not afraid to write about very personal aspects of my life. I have no shame. I don't want to write in a politically or intellectually correct way. I don't like the classic, structured approach because it feels like a catalog on how to write a novel. I do the same in cinema. My filmmaking style is full of ellipses. In France, people call me the king of ellipses in cinema. I jump from one subject to another, then circle back later.

There are other things that are very important in a novel. One is music, the rhythm of the writing. It has to feel like a song, like a symphony. It has to have an ambiance. In a movie, painting, or novel, there must be some magic that passes through it. If there isn't, then it's not art. I don't claim to achieve all of this. But maybe, just maybe, I do something. And ultimately, it's not me who decides. When I finish a movie or a novel, it's no longer in my hands. I always believe what the audience says. I may not agree, but they are free.

A novel is what the reader feels when they read it. I can't tell someone, 'You're an idiot. You don't understand. Let me explain what life is.' No. If someone comes out of a movie and says, 'That film was really bad,' I say, 'Thank you very much.' And if another person says, 'It was amazing! A masterpiece,' I say the same thing. It doesn't affect me. Of course, I prefer it when people say it's amazing or beautiful, but if someone thinks it's bad, then okay. If that's how they feel, then they're right, for them. That doesn't mean the film or novel is bad. But for that person, I respect their opinion.

Nobody should try to explain a work of art. It's about feeling. A novel is

feeling. A painting is feeling. Someone reads a book, and whatever they feel is their truth. Someone sees a painting, and what they feel is their truth. It doesn't matter what the painter thought. What matters is what I feel when I look at it.

GH: You emphasize simplicity in your work. Why is that important to you?

HS: I don't like to make things complicated. Whether in a novel or a movie, it doesn't matter – I try to keep it as simple as possible. It's easy to make things complicated. But it's difficult to make them simple. For me, simplicity is important. I don't want to make people suffer while trying to understand. I don't like 'cholesterol' in my novels or my movies.

GH: Let's talk about the films you directed. Before writing your first novel, in fact, you directed films. Is there a connection between being a director and being a writer? Are there similarities or contradictions?

HS: I don't feel any contradiction. When I write a screenplay or direct a film, I do it with one eye. But when I write a novel, I do it with forty eyes. In a novel, you can unleash your imagination. You can say, 'I saw two million flies in the sky and the stars. And a huri descended from the heavens.' Everything is possible. You're free!

But in cinema? You have just one car, and it's so difficult and expensive. You need sixty people around you to make a film. The concept is completely different. Sometimes, I have the same idea for a film and a novel, but when I turn it into a film, I must find a new way to tell the same story. Cinema is a scandal because it requires so much money, so many people, so much energy. The biggest difference between cinema and novels? In a novel, you can write and rewrite whenever you want. But in film? You have only one chance. One shot. You can't say, 'I don't like this version. Let's reshoot.'

It's impossible. When writing a novel, you don't have to tell anyone what you're doing. You write in solitude. And when you're happy with it, you announce: 'I've written a novel.'

But with a film? Two years before shooting, everyone knows you're making something. And when the result comes out, if it's terrible, there's nothing you can do. This practical difference changes how you see the story.

GH: Are you happier being a writer now?

HS: No, I'm also very happy with cinema. Do you know why? Because – fortunately – I never studied cinema. If I had, I would never have made films. It's too complicated, too theoretical. Every year in Paris, at least thirty students graduate with PhDs in cinema. But after graduation, they never work in cinema. After the success of my first film, I said: 'I'm so happy to be an illiterate filmmaker.' Nexwendewar im. (I'm illiterate.) And because of that, I made good films. I wasn't afraid.

GH: I'd like to end with this question, something that I kept thinking about while reading *The Ashes and re-reading My Father's Rifle*. There are so many personal details about your life, your personality, your family. You even used real names. For me, that's terrifying. It feels so exposed, so open to the public. How do you feel about that?

HS: Sometimes, I like to provoke. I like to break things. I want to give electroshocks, especially to the Kurds. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

GH: Did any of the friends you wrote about react negatively when they saw their names in the novel?

HS: Fortunately, my friends don't read! ●

FESTIVAL

Film Festival in Netherland to Celebrate Culture

Kurdistan Chronicle

The annual three-day Amsterdam Kurdish Film Festival (AKFF) will take place on May 9 to 11, 2025, at Het Ketelhuis cinema, bringing a vibrant selection of films and cultural activities to Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands.

“The AKFF is much more than just a film festival. It is a gathering space where Kurds and people from various backgrounds come together to share stories, form connections, and challenge taboos,” said

AKFF Artistic Director Reber Dosky in an interview with Kurdistan Chronicle. Launched in 2022, the festival focuses each year on a different region of Kurdistan.

“Kurdish cinema is a dynamic and diverse expression of stories from Iran, Iraq, Türkiye, Syria, and the diaspora. For AKFF, this art form reflects the complexity, resilience, and creativity of Kurdish society. In the first year, we explored Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran), while last year’s theme was



Western Kurdistan (northeastern Syria). This year’s theme will be Southern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Region of Iraq),” Dosky said.

Celebrating freedom

In 2025, the Netherlands will commemorate 80 years of freedom since the end of World War II, an occasion to reflect on the value of freedom and

its global impact.

“For the Kurdish community, and specifically for Southern Kurdistan, freedom is not an abstract ideal, but a hard-won reality rooted in a complex history of struggle, resilience, and identity. This theme is central to the fourth edition of the AKFF,” Dosky said.

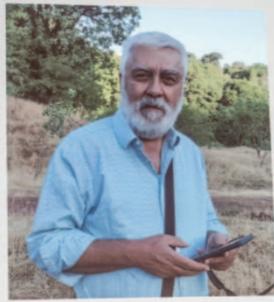
This year also marks the 34th anniversary of the 1991 Kurdish uprising against the former Iraqi regime. Though initially suppressed, the uprising led to the establishment of a Western-backed no-fly zone that protected hundreds of thousands of Kurds fleeing the regime’s onslaught.

This no-fly zone offered a degree of safety and autonomy, paving the way

Panel: Kurdish cinema throughout the years



HALIMA ILTER



SHAMALY ABA RASH



SHADAN FOUAD



for the region's first democratic elections in 1992 and the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The uprising followed years of resistance and atrocities against Iraqi Kurds, including the genocidal 1988 Anfal Campaign, during which over 100,000 Kurdish men, women, and children were killed.

Dutch-Kurdish connection

The festival aims to attract the 100,000 to 150,000 Kurds living in the Netherlands while also introducing Dutch audiences to Kurdish cinema and culture. It features an extensive side program of music, dance, panel discussions, workshops, and culinary experiences.

"The festival acts as a bridge between the Kurdish diaspora and other communities in the Netherlands, fostering understanding and dialogue," Dosky said. "Films and side activities together create a powerful platform for cul-

“The festival’s programming is designed to showcase both the rich history and the contemporary struggles of Kurdish life

“tural exchange, creative expression, and education.”

Dosky emphasized that for second- and third-generation Kurds, the festival offers a chance to (re)discover their roots and connect with others who share the same heritage.

"For many, including a generation that had to flee or endure trauma,

the festival offers a space to feel connected and gain new perspectives," he added.

"The festival's programming is designed to showcase both the rich history and the contemporary struggles of Kurdish life. By balancing mainstream appeal with niche storytelling, AKFF creates space for both seasoned filmmakers and emerging talent, while promoting a broader understanding of Kurdish culture and identity.

Supporting young talent

The festival also seeks to support a mix of established filmmakers with award-winning films on the one hand, and works by young, rising stars on the other. "With this approach, we hope to raise awareness, promote intercultural dialogue, and empower young talent," Dosky noted.

AKFF operates its own academy, offering aspiring Kurdish filmmakers



and Kurdish youth interested in film a unique opportunity to turn their creative ideas into real projects through workshops and mentorship.

"Young people can submit their film ideas to the AKFF Academy. From these submissions, 6 to 10 participants will be selected based on the originality, feasibility, and relevance of their concept and will take part in an intensive process over several months, working with experienced filmmakers to refine their ideas into strong film proposals."

Thanks to a partnership with the Adar Foundation, the participant with the

most promising film plan will receive a €3,000 grant to realize their project.

"This financial support enables young talent to realize their vision and take the next step in their filmmaking journey," said Dosky.

Community and collaboration

This year, AKFF is working with its cultural partner La Media to promote the festival, while Webkew and Hebun are providing support with digital media outreach. Sponsors include Lika, Stichting Adar, the Culture Fund, the Schepper Delft Foundation, Stichting

Human, PI Administration, and the Dutch Mathematical Institute.

"The AKFF has proven to be a professional and well-regarded cultural event in recent years, with a growing presence and strong foundation in the cultural sector. Our organization consists of an experienced team that is deeply rooted in both the Kurdish community and the Dutch cultural sector," Dosky added.

"With multiple successful editions at Het Ketelhuis and a dedicated network of partners, volunteers, and sponsors, we have the experience and resources to organize a high-quality festival," he concluded. ●

Collecting the Past in Hawraman



Pesbraw Mahdi

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

Among the many beautiful places of Kurdistan, Hawraman – the mountainous region stretching from the northeastern Kurdistan Region into western Iran – manages to steal our attention with its distinct history and rich culture. The remnants of its roots are found among the painted rocks that tell the story of our Kurdish ancestors who once resided there, leaving a legacy for generations to come.

Remnants of this ancient culture can be traced back as far back as the 8th millennium BC, revealing a civilization that was more sophisticated than a group of common settlers. The people of ancient Hawraman, in fact, adhered to a lengthy compendium of laws and displayed other proto-democratic features, such as a group decision-making similar to that of a modern parliament.

Timeless treasures

Inspired by such remnants from Hawraman's past, Syad Hawrami, a young Kurdish man from the town of Byara in the Halabja Governorate, felt a strong pull to preserve his ancient heritage. In 2009, he started collecting artifacts from various time periods. Over the years, his collection has grown to include more than 300 pieces, which he now showcases at a self-funded museum in Byara, established the same year. Each artifact is accompanied by an informational card, offering visitors insights into Hawraman's rich history.

With each step that our Kurdish ancestors took, they left behind valuable artifacts to remind us of our heritage. Hawraman, with its rich history, is no exception. One notable artifact from the region is an inscribed stone from the early 20th century, which provides valuable insights into the evolution of the Kurdish language, with a particular focus on the Hawrami dialect, also known as Gorani. While the Gorani dialect remains widely spoken in Hawraman today, these stones suggest that our Kurdish forefathers may have used a different form.

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Alongside the flute, Syad possesses several inscribed stones, which were sent to him by the British Museum and date to 78 BC

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According to the third discovered inscribed stone, Kurdish ancestors used a unique adaptation of the Aramaic alphabet to write their language over 2,020 years ago. This ancient script was employed for official records, including one detailing a vineyard lease agreement witnessed by a

■ *Syad Hawrami*

Photo: Pesbraw Mahdi



Photo: Peshraw Malahi

■ Syad Hawrami presenting a historic artifact from his collection.

government representative. The inscription highlights the cohesive legal practices among the residents of Hawraman and underscores the significance of agricultural activities and development in their society.

Another significant shaper of Hawraman's past was its isolated location, which had political and social ramifications. For instance, one of Hawraman's laws emphasized the importance of safeguarding independence, encouraging its people not to rely on the outside world and instead to

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One of Syad's goals is to familiarize today's youth with the lifestyles and cultures of their ancestors
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Photo: Peshraw Malahi

make their own equipment and tools used in daily work themselves. Hawraman's isolation naturally aided in the practice of this law, ensuring that its people remained self-sufficient and helping to protect and preserve their unique way of life.

A place of poetry and music

Being attracted to this special place with a unique story, Syad's collect-

ing quest makes sense, and his collection already impressive. His most prized artifact is a stone flute – which is perhaps unsurprising to those who know that Hawraman was the center of Kurdish poetry and music for many centuries. While historians believe that the flute dates to the year 728 BC, archaeologists believe it belongs to a more recent period, namely 1700 AD. Regardless of which is accurate, this flute represents the deep connec-

tion that Kurds have with music and art.

Alongside the flute, Syad possesses several inscribed stones, which were sent to him by the British Museum and date to 78 BC. These are some of the few items that were gifted to Syad – most he himself collected. Other items in his museum include tools that were used for daily work and tasks, such as old knitting tools, as well as vintage jewelry and archives that contain old photographs. Most impressively, Syad managed to salvage

some unpolished poems by Kurdish poets of the past.

In addition to preserving the region's history, one of Syad's goals is to familiarize today's youth with the lifestyles and cultures of their ancestors. “I will continue to voluntarily collect these items until a museum is established in Hawraman,” he says, noting that he would then donate every item of his collection to that museum. ●

Kurdistan's Equestrian Star



Riyadh al-Hamdani

is a journalist and author who has worked at many local and international media institutions.

In the sunny fields of Kurdistan, where the mountains whisper stories of women warriors, a wild rhythm carries the scent of nature. One young woman aims to reclaim this tradition on horseback.

Luna Mariwan Hussin is not an ordinary athlete. She's a Kurdish woman whose deep passion for equestrian sports and horseback riding has transformed a childhood fascination into her life's mission. Her sights are set on the international stage as she works tirelessly to earn global recognition. In Kurdistan the horse has long symbolized freedom, pride, and identity. Luna has reclaimed her people's deep attachment to horseback riding by showcasing her abilities in a graceful fusion of legacy and modernism.

In an exclusive interview with *Kurdistan Chronicles*, Luna shared the personal journey behind her growing reputation, which has been built on discipline, daring, and a deep spiritual bond with her horse.

Horseback riding: a lifelong passion

"I started riding seriously in 2021 after graduation from university," Luna says. "Even during college, I would ride whenever I had the chance. But the truth is, I've loved horses since I was a little girl." Luna's attachment to horses began in early childhood. What started as a hobby has grown into a dedicated pursuit, marked

by a fearless spirit and a persistence that often surpassed that of her professionally trained peers. After completing her studies, she knew the time had come to turn her dream into reality.

As she admits, from the beginning, it was not just her desire to ride, but a willingness to embrace a broader tradition. Equestrianism, for Luna, encompasses different sports, including archery, spear-throwing, acrobatics, and more. It is an entire culture, an adventure, that demands courage and a connection with the horse. "It just felt like a world that matched who I really am," she says.

Family and discipline

While Luna clearly has natural talent, she credits her family, especially her parents and brother, for supporting her every step of the way. "They are my main supporters," she says with a grateful smile. "They accepted my passion with open arms and hearts, and that gave me the power to continue."

Luna is not only passionate, but also remarkably disciplined. After finishing her day job, she heads to the training field and practices for up to 45 minutes daily, focusing on both technique and bonding with her horse.

Her relationship with her horse resembles a close friendship between two friends, or two parts of a well-oiled machine. Over time, she has learned to treat her horse

■ *Luna Mariwan Hussin.*



Photo: Arash Fekri



Photo: Abdullab Fars

■ Luna Mariwan Hussin competing during a horseback riding competition

with care, understanding his moods and body language. “Building that bond with a horse is a long, emotional journey,” she says. “You have to listen, respect its personality, guide it gently, and reward it when it trusts you.”

She often rewards her horse with his favorite foods, like apples and carrots. “He knows when he’s done well,” she adds with a soft laugh.

Stepping into the international arena Luna has competed in three international show jumping events and one race, acquiring not only experience, but also a sense of pride in representing Kurdish talent on the world stage. “Each competition teaches me something new,” she says. “But success depends on being prepared – mentally and physically. You have to feel calm and confident.”

A culture rooted in horses

“Kurdish culture has always honored the horse,” Luna explains. “We have our own breed – fiery, beautiful, and incredibly agile. There are festivals dedicated to showcasing Kurdish horses, and they’re truly something special.”

Indeed, the hot-blooded Kurdish horse, known for its agility and power, thrives in extreme climates, from freezing mountains to searing valleys. Through events and festivals, riders like Luna are keeping this ancient heritage alive, breathing new life into it through modern sport.

Despite her success, Luna admits the path was not always easy, especially as a woman in the sport. “At first, it was hard to ride freely,” she says. “But self-confidence helped me overcome that.”

Fortunately, she has received more support and encouragement than resistance and has become a role model for younger girls across Kurdistan.

“I tell every girl: try it. Explore this amazing world. It teaches patience, strength, courage, and how to communicate without words. You learn to understand a whole new language – the horse’s language.”

A story bigger than horses

Luna’s ambitions go beyond competition. She hopes to raise awareness and make riding more accessible. “I want to organize free riding lessons and public events,” she says. “I want more people – especially women – to experience what I feel when I ride.”

She also emphasizes proper training and safety. “Start with the right riding school. Learn the basics well. Al-



Photo: Abdullab Fars

■ Luna Mariwan Hussin competing during a horseback riding competition

ways wear safety gear: helmet, gloves, boots, and protective clothing, especially when jumping.”

More importantly, she emphasizes balance. “The successful person manages both their job and their passion.” Luna’s story goes beyond sport; it is

about identity and courage. She embodies the modern Kurdish woman who is rooted in tradition but whose dreams stretch far beyond the borders of time and place. She is keen on challenging stereotypes with hoofbeats, and with every gallop, jump, and confident stride across a dusty track, she’s

telling a different kind of story.

“This isn’t just a sport,” she concludes. “It’s a way of life.” To her, life is not measured in trophies, but in the strength it takes to forge your own path with an unshakable faith in yourself and your companion. ●

Hopes to Inspire

Kurdistan Chronicle

Farshad Gardakaneh – a 30-year-old Kurdish man hailing from Kangavar in Kermanshah Province in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran) who now lives in Belgium – became the European champion in the 94-kg division at the 2025 European IBJJF Jiu-Jitsu Championship held in Lisbon, Portugal, on January 20.

“This victory is incredibly significant because the European Championship is held only once a year and brings together the best athletes from all over the world, including those ranked in the top ten globally,” Gardakaneh told *Kurdistan Chronicle*.

“Although the competition is titled the European Championship, top athletes from around the world participate in it. Therefore, winning it is equivalent to becoming a world champion, as the level and quality of the competition are on par with that of a world championship,” he added.

Gardakaneh said he was introduced to jiu-jitsu after he migrated to Europe. “Before moving to Europe, I was deeply involved in wrestling, where I was very strong and successful. When I arrived in Europe, I discovered jiu-jitsu,” he said. “Since jiu-jitsu is a sport that combines elements of wrestling and judo, I was able to learn and progress in it very quickly due to my wrestling background. I found this sport fascinating and challenging, which made it even more appealing to me.”

Inspiring Kurdish youth

Gardakaneh hopes to inspire Kurdish youth through his

achievements in sports. “Many of them might believe that being Kurdish limits their potential to reach the highest levels of success in sports. They might think it’s impossible to become a world champion, a European champion, or even a national champion.

“I want to change this mindset and show them that a Kurd can achieve greatness on the international stage. I want Kurdish youth to realize that this path is achievable and that we, too, can reach the highest levels of success. My ultimate aim is to boost their confidence and make them believe that limitations only exist in their minds,” he said.

“

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Gardakaneh is now hoping to maintain and build upon his success by continuing to win championships consistently.

“I aim to replicate these achievements and reach even greater heights on the international stage. Two of my main goals are to participate in the World Championship in the United States and to compete once again in the next European Championship, which will take place in Rome,” he said.

He added that his participation in future championships depends largely on securing sponsorships. “In the short term, my primary goal is to compete in the Professional Championship in Barcelona, which is set to take place in a few months. This competition brings together Europe’s top professionals, and I have already begun my training to prepare for the upcoming season.” ●



Farshad Gardakaneh at the 2025 European IBJJF Jiu-Jitsu Championship

POETRY



Mewlûd Oguz

The Dawn's Lyric

I stood between a wound and a weeping—
for years upon years.
I severed my ancient and peripheral tongue.
Ships without direction were shattered.
Nothing remains in the twilight's sacred harbor,
but your path on the mountain,
your shadow at the break of dawn.

Translated by Nahro Zagros

Lîrika Berbangê

ez di navbera gir û giryanekê de mam
çendik û çend sedsalan. min zimanê xwe
yê kuhî û kenarî da ber meqesan. şikestin
keşiyên bê. nema li şibakeya qubletê şefeq da
dirbê te li çiyê tê, dirûvê te li berbangê



Palm Sunday

The Christian faithful of Ankawa, a suburb of Erbil in Kurdistan Region, Iraq, came together on Saturday, 12 April, to witness their faith and ecumenical unity during the annual Palm Sunday Procession.

Organized by the Catechetical Committee of the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil, the event was organized under the theme: “Hosan-

na in the highest, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The event drew hundreds of participants in a celebration rooted in shared faith and common witness, bringing together leaders and faithful from various Christian denominations in a shared act of worship and unity, culminating in prayer at the Shrine of Mar Elia.

Akitu



Photos: Safin Hamid

Akitu, the Assyrian-Babylonian New Year known as the world’s oldest holiday, was held on April 9 in Erbil’s Christian-majority district of Ankawa.

Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac Christians celebrate Akitu every year by marching streets, known as *Purple March*, and dancing to traditional rhythms in their traditional clothes.



A subspecies of the red fox, *Vulpes vulpes kurdistanica* is native to the Kurdistan and Armenian highlands, with populations found across northern Iraq, western Iran, southeastern Türkiye, and northeastern Syria. Adapted to mountainous, semi-arid, and forested environments, it has a reddish or grayish-red coat, bushy white-tipped tail, and distinctive black markings on its legs and behind the ears.

This fox is an omnivorous and opportunistic feeder, consuming small animals, insects, fruits, and human food waste. Primarily nocturnal and typically solitary outside the mating season, it remains elusive in the wild. While detailed conservation data is scarce, the subspecies faces threats from habitat loss, human conflict, and hunting.

Physical Traits

Body length: 45-90 cm (excluding tail)

Tail length: 30-55 cm

Height: 35-40 cm

Weight: 3-7 kg, heavier in colder areas due to thicker fur

Kurdistan Red Fox

(*Vulpes vulpes kurdistanica*)



A HOME YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD



 Amedi, Duhok Governorate,
Kurdistan Region
37.0917° N, 43.4877° E

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Kurdistan Region (21 March 2025)*