

CONTINUED MARGINALIZATION OF THE TURKMEN AFTER THE FALL OF THE BA'ATH REGIME

Kerkuk which belongs to '**Turkmeneli**' (1), a region where the Turkmen are the majority, continues to be the focal point of the conflict in northern Iraq because of its oil resources and its strategic importance.

The Turkmen who were the victims of systematic Arabization policies since the creation of the Iraqi state in 1921 - and whose number has always been deliberately underestimated, first by the British and later by the Ba'ath regime - are now faced with a new marginalization policy, this time by the US/UK supported Kurds who are imposing their hegemony in the north of Iraq.

The Turkmen areas were kept out of the '*safe haven*' while the Kurdish areas benefitted from 15 years of protection by the US/UK. Now the Kurds are sidelining the Turkmen and are denying their basic rights.

In April 2003 the US allowed the peshmerga to take control of Kerkuk and the Kurds immediately began to Kurdicize this originally Turkmen city. The PUK and armed Kurdish gangs committed serious abuses and raided Kerkuk, attacking Turkmen and Arabs and looting their homes and shops.

To eradicate the Turkmen nature of Kerkuk the Kurdish militias first targeted the Land Registry and the Population Registry offices: thousands of dossiers, files and stamps were stolen, original unused identity cards and passports were stolen, the buildings were burned.

The Kurdish militias attacked a great number of government and private sector buildings, they removed all their contents and filled hundreds of stolen vehicles and tractors to carry the booty to Suleymaniyya and Erbil provinces. They stole all the equipment of the municipality's Post, Telephone and Telegraph offices of Kerkuk city, Taze Khurmatu, Tavuk and Duz Khurmatu. As a result these Turkmen towns suffered severely due to lack of communication. They also took all the equipment and the important Turkmen archives from the Kerkuk Television station.

The first action of the US occupying forces was to unfairly appoint and impose Kurds in the most important official posts, i.e. the posts of Governor, Mayor and Head of the Police in Kerkuk and other Turkmen regions in order to Kurdicize the personnel of all governmental offices, thereby preparing the conditions to bring in tens of thousands of Kurds to the Turkmen areas, particularly to Kerkuk.

After they looted the government buildings in Kerkuk, the Kurds brought in Kurdish families from northern provinces and even from outside Iraq, these Kurdish '*immigrants*' were settled in these buildings and in the sports centers, prison, schools etc.

Although the number of Kurdish families who were expelled from Kerkuk province by the Ba'ath regime was admitted to be around 11.000, the Council brought 120.000 Kurdish families from Erbil, Duhuk and Suleymaniyya to Kerkuk in order to change the ethnic composition of the city before the January 2005 elections.

Everywhere in the city they put up signs in Kurdish: in the streets, in governmental offices and even in hospitals, creating problems for the non-Kurdish inhabitants of the city. Such actions prove that they have no respect for their non-Kurdish compatriots and that all they seek is to impose their hegemony in the north of Iraq.

During the 30th January 2005 elections thousands of Turkmen were prevented from casting their votes, their representatives addressed reports listing all the irregularities and violations which took place during these elections to the Independent Election Commission in Iraq demanding an investigation, but to no avail.

Copies of these reports were also sent to the General Secretary of the United Nations, to the Members of the European Union, to Human Rights Watch offices worldwide and to the Press.

Turkmen do not deny others their rights and they never resort to arms to settle their problems and as a result they often lose their rights.

The Turkmen wish to live in peace with their Kurdish, Kald-Assyrian and Arab compatriots in a free, sovereign and united Iraq, where all citizens irrespective of their ethnicity or religion can enjoy equal rights and where the country's oil wealth is shared in an equitable manner among all Iraqis.

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Mons, Belgium – 3rd March 2005

(1) Turkmeneli is the land of the Turkmen it stretches from Talafar near the Syrian border in the north to Mendeli on the Iranian border in central Iraq. For centuries, the Turkmen territories were considered a buffer zone separating the Arabs from the Kurds.