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Situation in Iraq

1. In this statement our organization wishes to raise the human rights situation in Iraq, in particular concerning the Iraqi Turkmen. The very existence of the Turkmen in Iraq is being challenged today with the rapid developments following the fall of Saddam's regime on April 9, 2003. The Turkmen, in their long history in Iraq, exceeding a millennium, have been downgraded from being masters and rulers of the country to an unrepresented and forgotten minority that is under constant assimilation pressure in these days.

2. The Iraqi Turkmen, often confused with the Turkmen of Central Asia, live in an area called "Turkmenia" in Latin or "Turkmeneli" which means "Land of the Turkmen". It was referred to as "Turcomania" by the British geographer William Guthrie in 1785. (1) The Turkmen are a Turkic group that has a unique heritage and culture, who have linguistic, historical and cultural links with the surrounding Turkic groups like in Azerbaijan and Turkey. Their spoken language is closer to Azeri but their official written language is like the Turkish spoken in present-day Turkey. Their real population has always being suppressed by the authorities in Iraq for political reasons and shown as 2%, whereas in reality their number is estimated between 2.5 to 3 million, i.e. 12% of the Iraqi population.

3. Today, Turkmenia or Turkmeneli is located in northern Iraq. It is a strip of land 800 km long and 200 km wide. Main cities from north to south are: Telafer, Musul, Erbil, Altun Kopru, Kerkuk, Taze Khurmatu, Tawuq, Tuz Khurmatu, Kifri, Qara Tepe, Qizlarbat, Qaraghan, Khanaqin, Shahraban, Mansuriyya, Baquba, Mendeli, and Bedre. (2) Substantial numbers of Turkmen live in northeast district of Baghdad of Adhamiyya also in Aziziyya, Kut as well as Najaf and Karbala. The main feature of Turkmenia is that it is a hilly land and includes the oil fields of northern Iraq which is why it is the target of assimilation campaigns by both neighboring ethnic groups, the Arabs and the Kurds.

4. The exact date of their arrival into Iraq is unknown but the ancestors of the Turkmen established the principalities of Banuqlu and Batuqlu in Central Euphrates before the Islamic invasion of Iraq in the 7th century. (3) Constant migration from Central Asia increased their numbers and enabled them to establish 6 states in Iraq; 1. The Seljuks, 2. The Atabegs, 3. The Ilkhanids, 4. The Jalairids, 5. The Qara Qoyunlus and 6. The Aq Qoyunlus which were the last Turkmen state in the sixteenth century. After that they were ruled by the Safawids and the Ottomans.

5. Over the centuries, Turkmen played a constructive role in Iraq, either by defending the country against foreign invaders or bringing civilization. Their monuments and architectural remains exist all over Iraq. They lived in harmony with

all ethnic groups around them. They administered the people with justice and tolerance. There is no record in history of any mistreatment by the Turkmen against any of their subjects. On the contrary they became relatives with other ethnicities through inter-marriage.

6. However, after the British invasion of Iraq in 1918, the Turkmen began to experience a different situation. Branded unjustly as loyal to Turkey, they were removed from the administration, pushed into isolation and ignored. Then, their fundamental human rights in culture and education were violated by the closure of their schools in 1933-1937. In 1959 they were racially discriminated and their fundamental political human rights were violated by excluding them from constitutional rights given to the Kurds. On July 14, 1959 they faced mass executions in Kerkuk by the Communists and Kurds. In the Seventies and Eighties, they were subjected to ethnic cleansing by the Baath Party. Arab racism reached such heights that spoken Turkmen was banned in public, Turkmen names of persons and locations were changed while the historical monuments of Turkmen and Turkmen towns and villages faced destruction. Many Turkmen were relocated to southern Iraq. Thousands of Turkmen houses, lands and properties were confiscated. (4) They were even forced to change their nationality and banned from purchasing property or repairing their homes.

7. With the American invasion of Iraq, the Turkmen had high expectations from the American administration established after April 9, 2003. They expected to see democracy, fairness, an end to discrimination, right to self-determination and an end to violence. In reality, the opposite happened to them. The American policy in Iraq is based on promoting only three groups, which are the Shiites, Kurds and Sunni Arabs. The Americans were indifferent to the legitimate rights of the Turkmen and Christians. They have opened the way for Kurdish domination in the north. As a consequence, the Kurds, who faced discrimination in the past, have today become the oppressors. For example, on April 10, 2003, the Kurds entered Kerkuk and other towns and villages of Turkmenia without any opposition. Immediately they robbed and pillaged all governmental offices and buildings. They brought thousands of militias and officials from Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimania into Kerkuk and other Turkmen towns. They took over police force and control of the cities and administration. The American commander of Kerkuk, Colonel Mayville, set up, in a way unseen before, a Kurdish dominated city councils in the cities of Kerkuk and Tuz Khurmatu where Turkmen dominate.

8. The Turkmen, led by their political parties, The Turkmen Nationalist Movement (TNM) and the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), expressed their opposition and demonstrated peacefully against the new discrimination policies, on several occasions, in Kerkuk, Tuz Khurmatu and Baghdad, only to be shot at by Kurdish militias and American troops, turning those peaceful demonstrations into a blood bath. Moreover, to break the Turkmen resistance completely, Telafer which is 99% Turkmen with a population of 400,000 was attacked in September, 2003 by Kurdish militias and bombarded heavily by American forces under the pretext of foreign jihadists/terrorists, of which they could not find a single one.

9. The basic problem is that the Americans allow the Kurds, which are a minority, to become partners of the administration along with the Shiites and Sunnis. However, they want the Turkmen to become a minority of another minority (the Kurds).

By stripping the Turkmen of their fundamental right of self determination, the Americans are putting the Turkmen under the mercy of the Kurds who clearly declare that they want to make Kerkuk (the cultural centre of the Turkmen), the capital of Kurdistan and absorb all of Turkmenia into Kurdistan. These unreasonable Kurdish behaviors and actions are clear violations of the fundamental human rights of the Turkmen.

10. In the recent elections of January 30, 2005 and in the absence of sufficient international observers, countless irregularities and violations were committed in northern Iraq. Despite the closure of registrations after January 23, 2005, 100,000 Kurds who were not residents of Kerkuk were registered three days later with the encouragement of the American and British diplomats, including their ambassadors. 400,000 people were denied of their voting rights in the Turkmen region of Telafer and the Christian region of Bakhdeda (Hamdaniyya). On the other hand, more than 100,000 Kurds were transported into Kerkuk, despite a ban on transportation, from Erbil and Sulaimania. Thousands of Kurds in the Rahimawa district north of Kerkuk voted up to five times in front of the powerless or cooperating officials. In some cases under aged children voted and there were voting even in lieu of dead people. Too many ballot boxes have been confiscated and stolen to be replaced with fake votes. All those violations happened and protested by Turkmen to the so called "Independent Election Committee" but to no avail. (5)

10. Under these circumstances the Turkmen are facing a dilemma. If they submit to the Kurdish domination, then, in the near future they will face assimilation pressures and Kurdification campaigns, with methods similar to the Baath period. Otherwise if they resort to armed resistance, they will be exterminated by the dominating Kurdish military powers supported by the American military might. Therefore, it is vital and of utmost importance that the United Nations, including the Commission on Human Rights, to condemn the undemocratic situation in Iraq, including the conduct of elections in northern Iraq.

References:

- (1) Map of Turcomania- www.turkmenfront.org
- (2) Map of ethnic Iraq – www.turkmenfront.org
- (3) Iqdam Newspaper 1922, Amasyalı Hüsamettin Yaşar, Istanbul
- (4) Documents of Confiscated Lands and Properties
- (5) Election Irregularities Reports from Iraq:
 - Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), Letter of Protest to the High Commission for the Election in Iraq, 31st January 2005 , Ref: "*Contestation of irregularities during the voting process.*"
 - Turkmen Nationalist Movement (TNM), Report to the Independent High Commission for the Election in Iraq, Subject: "*Irregularities in Iraq Election*"
 - Election Observers reports on committed irregularities, January 31.st, 2005.
 - Turkmeneli Party (TP) report to the Independent High Commission for the Election in Iraq, January 31.st, 2005, Ref: "*Unfair Election Process*"