

Interview of Dr. Hassan T. WALLI AYDINLY

President of the Committee for the Defence of the Iraqi Turkmen Rights

Dr. Hassan T. WALLI AYDINLY is an Iraqi Turkmen, he was born in 1942 in Bashir, village which was razed to the ground in 1986 during the policy of Arabization of the Kerkuk region. He arrived in Europe in 1960 to accomplish his University studies. Back in Iraq after graduation he started his professional career as Professor at the Institute of Technology in Baghdad. Later he returned to Europe where he worked as Project Manager for petrochemical projects in several European countries. He is currently Consultant in Projects Management and is militating in favour of the liberation of Iraq and for the establishment of a true democracy in his country. He is an active member of SOITM (Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation) an independant self financed association. SOITM's main goal is the defence and promotion of the Iraqi Turkmen rights.

Q: At how much do you estimate the number of Turkmen in Iraq ?

HWA : We estimate the number of Turkmen in Iraq at 3,25 millions, i.e. 13% of the total population of the country.

Q: On what or on which census do you rely to give that number ?

HWA: We rely on the 1957 census results which were declared in 1959 according to which the number of Turkmen in the two provinces with Turkmen majority, Kerkuk and Erbil, was 567.000 for a total population of Iraq which was 6.5 million at that time according to this census. This means that Turkmen in these two provinces only represented 8,72% of the total population of Iraq in 1957.

It is well known and admitted by everyone in Iraq that the Turkmen population was not limited to the provinces of Kerkuk and Erbil, but there were, as there are still today, Turkmen living in other provinces such as Mosul, Diyala, Baghdad, Kut and Kerbela, where the Turkmen population was important.

It is estimated that in 1957 "as this is still the case today", over a third of the Turkmen of Iraq lived in these provinces, which means that a minimum of 283.000 Turkmen were living outside Kerkuk and Erbil during that census who were not included in the figure declared for Kerkuk and Erbil .

Adding Turkmen of these provinces to those of Kerkuk and Erbil, one arrives at a total Turkmen population of 853.000 in 1957 on a total population of 6.5 millions, i.e. 13% of the Iraqi population.

As today the Iraqi population is estimated at 25 millions, and admitting that population growth has been consistant and equal for all the ethnic communities in Iraq, one arrives at a number of about 3.250.000 Turkmen in today's Iraq (13% of 25 millions).

Q: What is the distribution of Turkmen on the Iraqi national territory ?

HWA: As already briefly mentioned above, the distribution of the Turkmen in the national territory today is as follows: - Turkmen are distributed and still live in the provinces of Mosul, Erbil, Kerkuk, Salahaddine, Diyala, Wassit, Baghdad and Kerbela.

In reality the Turkmen region in Iraq consists of a territory in the shape of a parallelepiped which separates the two other regions, Arab and Kurd, of this country. This territory stretches from the Iraqi-Syrian border (region of Tell Afar) at the north-west of Mosul, passing through the towns of Erbil, Kerkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, Baaquba and Kut (region of Bedre-Jassan-Aziziya) at the south-east of Kut at the Iraqi-Iranian border. To be more precise with regards to the distributioin of Turkmen in Iraq one can say that:

A – In Mosul province: - The Turkmen region includes the town of Tell Afar, the eastern part of the city of Mosul, as well as the villages on the Tigris river north and south of Mosul.

B - In Erbil province: - The Turkmen region comprises the city of Erbil.

C - In Taamim province: - The Turkmen region includes the cities of Kerkuk, Altun Kopru, Taze Khurmatu and Tawuq and surrounding villages.

D - In Salahaddin province: - The Turkmen region includes the city of Tuz Khurmatu and its surrounding villages.

E - In Diyala province: - The Turkmen region includes the cities of Baaquba, Khaneqin, Mendeli, Qarakhan (Jalawia), Quislarbat (Sadiyya), Kifri, Qara Teppe, Shahraban (Miqdadiyya), Delli Abbas (Mansuriyya) and Qazaniyya (I).

F - In Wasit province: - The Turkman region includes Bedre, Jassan and Aziziyya.

G -In Baghdad : - Turkmen in Baghdad are estimated at 300.000, they are distributed in all districts of Baghdad, but with a considerable concentration in the districts of Adhamiyya and Ragheba Khatun.

H – In Kerbela : - Turkmen in Kerbela are concentrated close to and around the shi'ite's sacred sites.

Q : A certain number of Iraqi Turkmen are shia's. Do they have the same aspirations as the majority of the community ?

HWA : All Iraqi Turkmen, shia's or sunnis, share the same aspirations, that of finally being recognized as the third important ethnic community of this country, they are true patriots and have proven this since the creation of the Iraqi state in 1921.

Q : What do you think of the Turkmen candidates on Sistani's list ? Are there any Turkmen on other lists?

HWA : A few Turkmen personalities such as Messrs. Taqi Mawla, Feryad Tuzlu and Abbas Bayati have joined the "United Iraqi Alliance" list also known as "Sistani List" because of their past connections with the shi'ite movement and because they were guaranteed positions. However, they asked their supporters to vote for one of the two official Turkmen lists.

Q : What is the situation of the Turkmen in Iraqi Kurdistan ?

HWA : Turkmen of Erbil are under pressure from Barzani to follow the 5 '*puppet parties*' (*Kurdmen*) created by the Kurds. But the Turkmen of Erbil will vote for one of the two official Turkmen lists.

Q : We hear of "ethnic cleansing" in Kerkuk; carried out by Barzani's and Talabani's parties. What is happening in the field ?

HWA : Today there are 120.000 Kurdish immigrants in Kerkuk, they were brought from Duhok, Erbil, Suleymaniya, as well as from Iran, Syria and Turkey. Some of them were settled in the houses of the 40.000 Arabs who were forced to evacuate after the Kurdish occupation, the others are still living on government properties and public lands and buildings, awaiting to evacuate the remaining 120.000 Arabs who were brought to Kerkuk by the Ba'ath regime in the eighties.

The majority of public offices and government services are occupied by the Kurdish officials brought from Duhok, Erbil and Suleymaniya. These officials oblige everyone to speak Kurdish. Anyone who can't speak Kurdish is not being served.

The Kurds are currently organizing a Kurdification campaign to give the city a Kurdish atmosphere by filling the walls with Kurdish graffiti, filling the poles with Kurdish flags, filling the streets with Kurdish written banners, buying hundreds of commercial stores and putting Kurdish written displays. Most of the policemen are Kurdish and most of the taxi cabs are from Duhok, Erbil or Suleymaniya.

Q : What are the relations between the Turkmen and the Arab community in Kerkuk ? Do Turkmen object to the settlement of Arabs over the past years in Kerkuk ?

HWA : Facing the Kurdish threat for the future and unity of Iraq, the Arabs and Turkmen are united in face of the Kurdish tide. In the eighties Turkmen were of course opposed to the settlement of Arabs in their region and were opposed to the policy of Arabization, but now they consider the presence of the Arabs is essential and necessary to balance the Kurdish mass immigration.

Q : What solution do you suggest for Kerkuk ?

HWA : Kerkuk by origin is a Turkmen city. This fact is accepted by Arabs, Assyrians and even original Kerkuki Kurds. But because of its oil wealth and the hidden political agenda of the Kurdish political parties, the Kurds insist to include Kerkuk in their dreamland '*Greater Kurdistan*'.

To realize their project of "*Greater Kurdistan*" the first step is to declare a federal state, then the second step would be the independent state, just like what happened in Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia.

As their project of "*Greater Kurdistan*" is not viable without Kerkuk's oil wealth, the Kurds want to annex this city to their region.

The solution we propose for Kerkuk is the following:

- a. - **STOP KURDISH FLOCKING TO KERKUK**
- b. - Determine and find out who are the original inhabitants of Kerkuk based on 1957 birth certificates
- c. - Accordingly, hold municipal elections. It is clear that the election results will be as follows: a Turkmen majority, which would allow to elect an administration which would be representative of the population, with a Turkmen governor and two deputies, one Arab and one Kurd. The Assyrians who do not represent more than 5% of the population would still be represented in the municipality.

Q : In case of Kurds boycotting elections in Kerkuk, how do you envisage the future ?

HWA : The Kurds will not boycott the elections because they already pressured the government to include 72.000 new-comers as voters which tipped the balance in their favour. On the other hand, there is talk about

Turkmen and Arabs boycotting the elections. That means that any election in Kerkuk will be null and void. If the Kurds pursue their hegemony and aggressive policy in the Turkmen region, the Turkmen and Arabs will become more militarized and ethnic violence will start.

Q : Can and will Turkey intervene to prevent the annexation of Kerkuk in the Kurdistan Region ?

HWA : Unfortunately Turkey is in a weak position today because of the European Union “carrot”, moreover, Turkey owes the IMF and World Bank 152 billion Dollars. In the past it declared Kerkuk and Mosul as redlines for Kurdish intervention, to-date this declaration has remained a verbal declaration despite the multiple oversteppings of this red line by the Kurds.

Today the Kurds who are supported by the anglo-saxon occupiers feel they are in a strong position and they pay little attention to the rest of the world.

The Kurds and the United States regard Turkish threats as ‘*bluff*’. Therefore, Turkish intervention is not an issue.

Note:

(1) *the names between brackets are the new arabized names of Turkmen towns.*

Comments collected via internet by Gilles Munier (20/1/05)