

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HELSINKI ACCORDS**

# **SITUATION OF KURDS IN TURKEY, IRAQ AND IRAN**



**Briefing of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Washington, DC**

**May 17, 1993**

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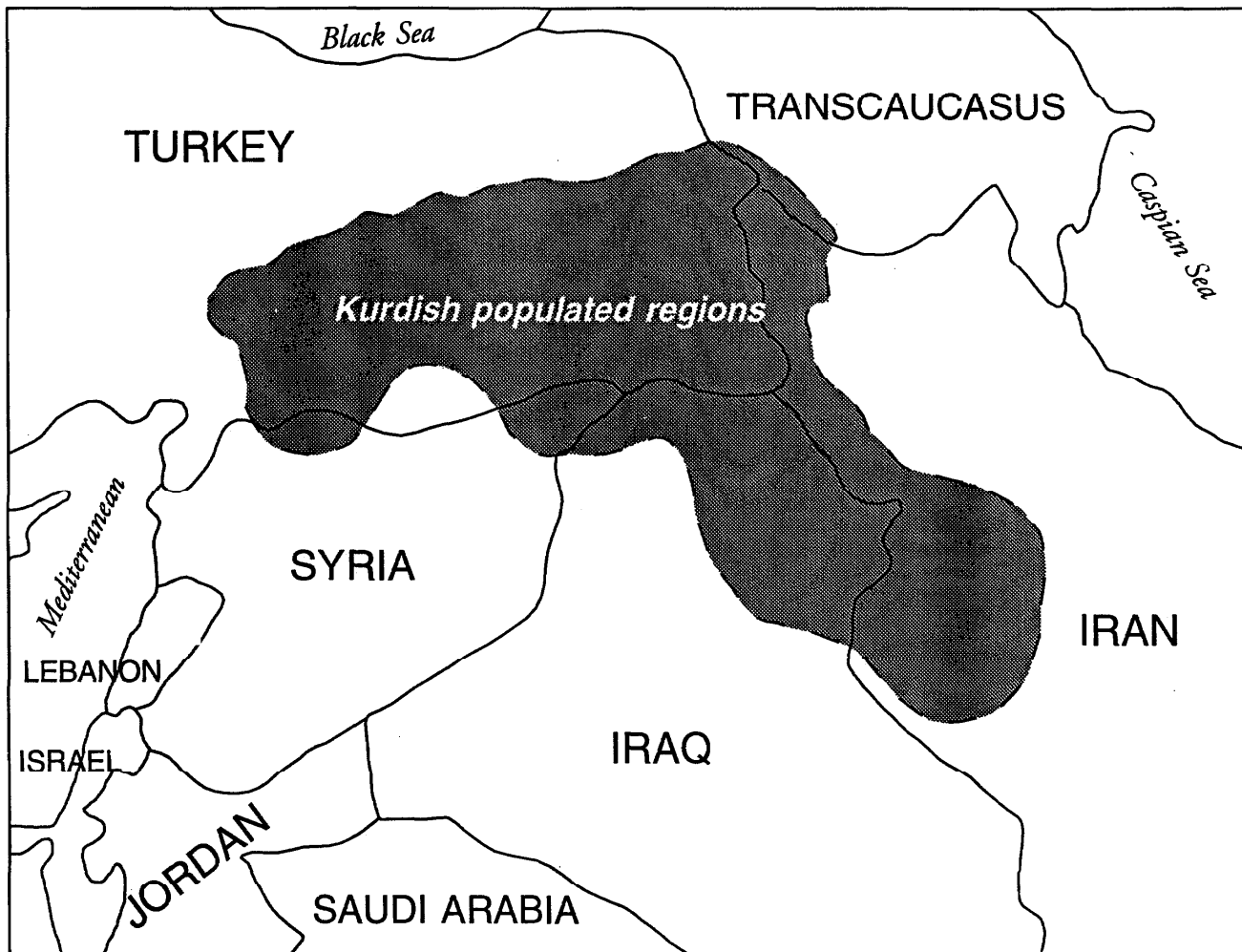
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## **THE SITUATION OF KURDS LIVING IN TURKEY, IRAN, AND IRAQ**

Monday, May 17, 1993.

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Washington, DC.

The briefing was held in room 2226, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, at 10 a.m., Mary Sue Hafner, Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel, presiding.

Witnesses: Ahmet Turk, Barham A. Salih, and Doctor Mark Epstein

Interpreter: Kani Xulam.

**Ms. Hafner.** I think we will begin now. I'd like to welcome everyone to this briefing being conducted by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Commission, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a human rights monitoring group. It is mandated by law to monitor implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. It is composed of nine members from the House of Representatives and nine members from the U.S. Senate. It also has three Executive Branch members who are appointed by the President. They come from the Departments of Defense, Commerce, and State.

Basically, we focus on human rights issues by holding public briefings and hearings, issuing reports, leading Congressional delegations to countries to discuss human rights concerns, participation in CSCE meetings as well as CSCE missions, and also, by monitoring elections.

Today, we are very pleased to focus on the issue of the Kurdish minority, who constitute the fourth largest nationality in the Middle East, of approximately 20 to 25 million, primarily concentrated in the states of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, which of course is a CSCE signatory state, and to a lesser extent in Syria. What is common to the Kurdish minority in all of the countries in which they live is the lack of institutional protection of human rights and individual freedoms, albeit in varying degrees.

This briefing today is another chapter in the Commission's ongoing examination of minority issues within the CSCE, and is also in preparation for the CSCE seminar which will be held next week on minority issues in Warsaw, Poland.

As an aside, I would like to add that at the end of the Gulf War, the Commission's Chair, Senator Dennis DeConcini and its Co-Chair, Representative Steny Hoyer, put forth the idea of a Middle East Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which they called the CSCME. The basic thrust of this proposal was to set in motion a political process or framework within which the major players of the Middle East could sit down and discuss certain standards and principles which would govern relations between the states as well as between a state and its own citizens.

At that time, it seemed that there were three CSCE principles that had proved to be very meaningful within the European context, that of territorial integrity, self determination, and respect of human rights, all three principles which seem entirely relevant in the Middle East context. It is those principles that we are hoping to explore today with our guests.

First, I would like to introduce Doctor Mark Epstein. He is presently a senior associate of international affairs in a Washington, DC, consulting firm. He has been a staff member in both chambers of the Congress, and has served as a scholar in residence at the U.S. Department of State. Doctor Epstein was a Fulbright Fellow in Turkey and has lectured at universities in the United States, Germany, and Turkey, on topics concerning Turkey and the Ottoman Empire.

I think we will begin this morning's discussion with Doctor Mark Epstein. After he concludes, I will then introduce the rest of our speakers, and we will then open it up to discussion from members of the public. Thank you.

Mark?

Mr. Epstein. Thank you, Ms. Hafner.

I am pleased to appear before the Commission to deal with a timely and complex subject. I will try in a very few minutes to offer brief descriptions of an historical context and the political framework, at least as seen from Washington, for the issues being discussed here today: Kurdish nationality; Kurdish political rights; Kurdish aspirations.

Like so much in this part of the world, the historical record is long and the problems are complex. Indeed, as we approach the last few years of the 20th Century, we are confronted once again with the problems of war and diplomacy, which were important at the beginning of the Century. The issue of Kurds in the Ottoman Empire was to have been handled in the Peace Conferences ending World War I. But for the most part, that question, thorny as ever, is what we will be discussing here today.

If my comments place greater emphasis on Turkey, it is for both historical and policy reasons. We are dealing here with various successor states to the Ottoman Empire, but only Turkey, as Ms. Hafner pointed out, is a

member of the CSCE and is also a NATO member. Thus, in addition to being our ally and of great concern to us in any case, affairs in Turkey fall directly within the mandate of this Commission. Indeed, the task of establishing a CSCME, as Senator DeConcini and Representative Hoyer have proposed, seems to me a wonderful, yet difficult goal, and perhaps a hearing of this kind will begin to demonstrate its value as a forum for such a discussion.

Here, I must remind us all of the historical complexity this issue involves. In 1600 and 1700 and 1800, or even in 1900, virtually all of the territory where Kurds lived, either as Nomads or settled in permanent villages, was part of the Ottoman Empire, or was close to ever-shifting Ottoman borders in areas disputed over the course of the previous two centuries. Until the end of World War I, Iraq was simply an Ottoman province. Baghdad and Basra were local administrative centers, and the world was beginning to fight over petroleum in the heavily Kurdish areas around Mosul and Kirkuk, as well as on the Russian side of the border.

Syria was also an Ottoman province with its administrative center at Damascus. Jerusalem and Beirut were secondary administrative centers among its dependencies, despite the distinct character which the Druse and Christian communities lend to Lebanon and the special significance of Jerusalem for the three great Monotheisms.

Whatever borders there are today between Iraq and Turkey, Turkey and Syria, Syria and Iraq, with Kuwait and with the Saudis, or elsewhere in the region, are the results of World War I and beyond. One need only recollect the career of Lawrence of Arabia, perhaps the best known story of these events in our popular consciousness. There were disputes over League of Nations mandates, and in place of the independence for the Arabs, you will hear of conflict in mandate Palestine and other thorny issues which have been with us since the beginning of the Century. We should also recall that, after World War I ended, remnants of the defeated Ottoman Army were still fighting on in Russia, at least in Russian ruled territory where there is fighting again today, and where oil pipelines are again the subject of discussion.

Kurdish tribes moved habitually through these areas, oblivious to lines on maps until the modern political borders were drawn, and often afterward as well. In its last major report on Turkey in June 1988, the staff of this Commission pointed to the matter of Kurdish nationality and aspirations as one of the very few important issues confronting Turkey. Their observation has certainly proved correct.

Until recently, the Turkish government held steadfastly to the view that, as Muslims, the Kurds were not entitled to special treatment and not protected by special minority rights according to the treaties at the end of World War I, which defined the terms by which the Turkish Republic was recognized. A separate Kurdish nationality did not exist. They were simply nomadic Turks.

Briefly, in negotiating the terms under which the Turks were allowed to establish an independent state in part of the defeated Ottoman empire, the 1923

Treaty of Lausanne entailed specific guarantees to non-Muslims. For some centuries, the Western powers considered themselves to be the protectors of the non-Muslim minorities in the Empire, and in the 19th Century, used that special status as the lever by which they intervened in Ottoman affairs, helping the Christian populations of the Balkans, including Yugoslavia, to gain independence as they angled to promote their own claims and position regarding the eventual break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the sick man of Europe as a Russian Czar once put it.

They, the Europeans, therefore, felt fully justified in demanding treaty clauses to assure the continued cultural and religious autonomy of the Ottoman non-Muslims, especially the Greek, Armenian, and other Christian communities. The Turks argued, however, that the Kurds were, for the most part, Sunni Muslims, were a part of the majority, and thus, neither entitled to nor in need of special considerations, as they had not had the special protected status of the non-Muslims previously. This principle, and a Kurdish revolt, lead quickly to a policy of strictly repressing a *separate Kurdish* cultural identity in favor of a general, secular Turkish identity.

The memory of the Kurdish uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s remains strong, and the policy of building a modern, secular Turkish state remains in place. Until quite recently, Kurdish speech in public life in Turkey was prohibited, let alone cultural institutions. References to Kurds and Kurdish in the Turkish press were, for many years, considered illegal attacks on the integrity of the Republic. Complicating the situation, and also provoking the current political debate, there has been, as we will certainly hear this morning, an armed insurgency based primarily in the Bika'a Valley area of Lebanon, generally calling itself both Kurdish and Marxist.

Until the collapse of the USSR, the Kurdish Workers' Party, PKK, was said to receive financial support from various East Bloc countries, with the stated goal being to establish a *separate Kurdish* state on Turkish territory. Today, there is an apparent cease-fire in place at the suggestion of the PKK, and a discussion of the terms under which the Turkish government might treat with them, if at all, is now taking place.

In the political realm, compared with the silence of a previous age, there are openly separatist Kurdish deputies in the Turkish Parliament, a wide-ranging discussion in the press, and Kurdish cultural rights are widely and sharply debated. Others will have more to say about this subject this morning, so, I will simply point out that the question as formulated by this Commission and its staff in 1988 was "whether Turkey can find a way to accommodate legitimate Kurdish cultural aspirations while maintaining its integrity as a state and a functioning democracy." That question is indeed as relevant today as it was then.

In Iraq, the case is different. It is not in the CSCE. It does not have a parliamentary democracy. Since the end of the Gulf War, primarily Kurdish areas of the North are a zone protected by the U.S. and other allied military



units, supported from bases in Turkey, preventing the Iraqi army and air forces from exercising their will there. In those areas of Iraq, local provisional political institutions are in place, but the larger issues of eventual independence, secession, and sovereignty remain unresolved. Others on the panel will certainly deal with this.

The problems and questions which seem to me to define the problem today are as follows: For Turkish Kurds, is there a solution acceptable to all sides to the issue of Kurdish aspirations within the democratic Turkish state? If such a solution is conceivable, what are the appropriate and acceptable means of preserving Kurdish culture and identity in the absence of a tradition of written literature? For Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and other Kurds, who are divided along traditional family and tribal lines, speak different dialects, live among people speaking different languages and in different nation states, what do they actually have in common and what can they actually do together?

For the United States, the CSCE and NATO, what do we want, and what can we do, that might actually have a chance of success, not violate the national sovereignty of the states involved and, all the while, not harm our general interests in the area?

Thank you very much.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you, Mark.

The Commission is very pleased to welcome Mr. Ahmet Turk, who is Chairman of the People's Labor Party and a member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly from Mardin, Turkey. He formerly chaired the Human Rights Commission of the Turkish Parliament. I had the honor of meeting with Mr. Turk at his office in Ankara about a year-and-a-half ago. And so, we are very pleased to have him join us today.

Following the 1980 military coup in Turkey, Mr. Turk was jailed for a period of one year because of his support for political rights of Kurds in Turkey. His political activities thereafter were restricted, and he was not permitted to participate in the 1983 Parliamentary elections. In 1986, he was jailed again for speaking out on behalf of Kurdish rights. When, in 1987, he was elected member of the Parliament as a write-in candidate, he was released from prison. In 1989, he was expelled from the Social Democratic Party because he attended a conference on the Kurds in Paris.

We are very pleased to welcome Mr. Turk.

**Mr. Turk.** Thank you.

**Ms. Hafner.** Could we please have the translation as we go along?

**Mr. Xulam.** He's going to make an introduction. I have translated his speech and I'm going to read it for you.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you.

[Mr. Turk presents his introduction, to be followed by his speech which has been translated and is being read by Mr. Kani Xulam, Interpreter.]

**Mr. Xulam.** Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the opportunity to address you on the plight of the Kurds. My helpless and often persecuted

people need all the attention you can give. Your concern is gratifying. On behalf of some 30 million Kurds, I appreciate it.

History is witness to the fact that we Kurds have been living in what today is known as Kurdistan for about 4,000 years. Sometimes free, sometimes not, we have had our share of different neighbors and succeeding governments. Today, we still live on our land, but subjected to the rule of others. The Turks, the Arabs, the Persians have shared Kurdistan among themselves as a colony without any rights. We have been exploited, not only materially but also spiritually, to the degree that our existence as a distinct nation is in jeopardy.

In Turkey, we Kurds live a very precarious life. Though promised equality with the Turks, we have been subjected to a policy of total assimilation. Our language is denied. We can not--in our God-given mother tongue. Those of us who come to terms with the truth and accept the fact that we are Kurds face double standards in the so-called Turkish democracy. Instead of promotions, we face demotions. Instead of freedom, we are imprisoned as potential separatists. Life has become a political struggle, one that ties the individual to its people, because our people suffer and because we want to end their suffering.

The individual or collective Kurdish response, as could be expected, has been both violent and non-violent. In different parts of Turkish Kurdistan, year in and year out, the Kurds of both sexes and all ages have risen in arms to let the Turks know that they're Kurds and that they are not going to accept assimilation to be Turks. In Diyarbakir, in Dersim, in Kocgiri, and in various other parts of Kurdistan, they have participated in uprisings and invariably, they were silenced with violence. The Kurdish masses, together with their leaders, were crushed or exiled. Today is no different. The fight is still for freedom, for liberty, for basic human rights as 20th Century citizens of this world.

Turkish Kurdistan is in turmoil today. Some of us are engaged with a non-violent political struggle to redeem a people who haven't joined the family of nations on an equality basis. Others among us have resorted to the armed struggle, losing hope with the slow pace of reforms, to validate the nation. Our means are different; are goal is the same.

My hope is that I make you privy about struggles and have you side with the democratic forces and help us expedite the work of non-violence. All we are asking is to have you give democracy a chance for the stability in the region and for the brotherhood of the nations in the Middle East.

I am here as the leader of the People's Labor Party, an 18 member entity in the Turkish Parliament, dedicated to advocating the rights of the Kurds through political means. But our road is blocked. Our staff is harassed. And our party is prosecuted with a closure by the Turkish Constitutional Court. This says a lot about the status of the Kurds in Turkey. Our duty to our conscience as Kurds, and to our people as representatives, is putting us at variance with the state laws.

Allow me to cite you an example to make my point. I and a number of my fellow Kurdish Parliamentarians were elected on the Social Democratic Party ticket to the Turkish Parliament. Some of us attended a conference in Paris. Among its topics was the issue of human rights' abuses of the Kurds in Turkey. When we returned from the French capital, we found ourselves dismissed from our party for attending such a meeting. I give this example to make a point about the fragility of the democracy in Turkey. Ours is a task to be truthful with the aspirations of our people as Kurds, and also, not to be caught by the long arm of the Turkish law that prohibits such an activity.

Since 1980, we have been at odds with the Turkish state laws more than ever before. The Kurds have asked for more political rights. The government in Ankara has responded with more force. First, the military rule has replaced the civil administration in the Southeast. Village guards system has been established to pit the Kurd against his fellow Kurd. An Islamic fundamentalist group, Hizbi Kontra, housed, trained by the MIT, the Turkish Secret Service, is free to gun down the secular and democratic forces in the Kurdish movement.

To have you glimpse at the toll the Kurds have suffered just last year alone reminds one of Eli Weisel and his reflections on the Jewish Holocaust. 300 villages have been burned and leveled to the ground for harboring Kurdish freedom fighters. 600 of them have been evacuated of their inhabitants by force. 640 Kurdish political activists--among them 46 members of my own party--have been murdered under mysterious circumstances, sometimes with a single bullet from the back of their head, indicating the callousness and uniformity of the barbaric crimes.

Six sizeable towns, Sirnak, Cizre, Lice, Kulp, Hazro, and Nusaybin have been bombarded with the BRD tanks, courtesy of the German government, and its shopping districts set afire without a declaration of war. Responding to the atrocities of this nature and committed to eradicating the very existence of the Turkish presence from the soil of Kurdistan, the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party and its guerrillas have battled the Turkish army for the last nine years. Notwithstanding the Turkish claims, both sides have inflicted on each other deadly blows. Our rather unscientific reports indicate that 3,000 guerrillas and as many Turkish soldiers have lost their lives.

As many as 4,000 civilians were killed by special units, death squads, sent to the region to deter the Kurds from aiding the Kurdish freedom fighters. Up to half-million have been forced to relocate to other parts of Kurdistan. All because of our inability as political leaders, both Turkish and Kurdish, to sit down and negotiate an end to this enduring Kurdish question with candor and respect for the rights of the Kurds.

To bring an end to this violence, the leadership of PKK declared a unilateral cease fire on March 20, 1993, until further notice. Thanks to this step, the Kurdish New Year New Roz celebrations were less bloody this year. To reassure the government in Ankara and to let the world know that the Kurds

have sided with peace and non-violence, the cease fire was extended again on April 15, 1993, this time indefinitely, so long as the political and non-violent steps were pursued in a most genuine manner.

I believe this cease fire represents an opportunity for understanding and peace in Turkish Kurdistan. It will stop mothers to shed their tears and their sons to shed their blood. It will allow democracy to grow deeper roots in Turkey and contribute to the political stability of the region. The cease fire demands respect the territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic, and if pursued, will pave the way for the brotherhood of the Turks and the Kurds on an equality basis.

If I could sum them up for you.

- (1) The Kurdish identity must be recognized.
- (2) Use of the Kurdish language in conversation and in writing should be legalized.
- (3) All cultural rights should be recognized.
- (4) The regional governorship to be abolished.
- (5) The village guards should be disarmed and disbanded.
- (6) Kurdish political parties must be given full legal and constitutional rights.
- (7) A general amnesty for all political prisoners.
- (8) An open forum must be created to resolve remaining issues in a peaceful manner.

Ladies and gentlemen, this conflict is not between the peoples of Turkey, the Kurds and the Turks. It is rather between the Kurds and a politically bankrupt and myopic government in Ankara, Turkey. The conflict is also a crisis of the Turkish democracy because some 20 million Kurds are treated with contempt and denied their most elementary human rights. In a world that is truly becoming a global village, peace and democracy are no longer the concerns of a few, but rather, the preoccupation of us all. That is, if we want to have truth, understanding and peace in the world. Thank you.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you very much for that compelling statement.

We are pleased also to have with us, Mr. Barham Salih, who is the Iraqi Kurdish representative in the United States, and the principal liaison between the Iraqi Kurdish movement and the U.S. government, as well as media and academic community. Mr. Salih is a senior foreign policy advisor to the Kurdish leadership, and has served as spokesperson for the Kurdish movement in London.

Thank you very much for joining us this morning, Mr. Salih.

Mr. Salih. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address you and talk to you about the plight of the Kurdish people, and specifically in my case, the whole situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Doctor Epstein gave a historical background and a context in which the present situation of the Kurds could be viewed. The conflicts that have

engulfed the Kurdish homeland and the predicament in which the Kurds find themselves today find their roots in the peace treaties that emerged in the aftermath of the first World War. From a Kurdish perspective, it was the peace that ended all peace.

The plight of the Kurdish people ever since then has been summarized by the human rights organization, Helsinki Watch, to have been "a staggering list of human right abuses, arrest, torture, assassination, chemical warfare, mass deportations, expulsions, appalling conditions in refugee camps, denial of ethnic rights to language, literature, and music, and destruction of villages and towns."

As a consequence of this, resistance and conflict have been the dominant features of Kurdish contemporary history. Aside from its moral and human rights dimensions, the Kurdish issue has constituted a major destabilizing factor with serious repercussions throughout the regional order. This reality has often been overlooked, or not entirely recognized as analysts and policymakers considered the Kurdish issue to be too marginal and containable and confined to the mountains of Kurdistan--too marginal to have any impact on wider peace and stability in our region.

But I would like to cite a specific example that is constructive for us, to illustrate the inaccuracy of such an approach. I would cite a recent episode of Iraqi Kurdish history. In 1974, the government of Iraq, unwilling to concede Kurdish demands for autonomy, and in 1975, unable to crush Kurdish insurgency militarily found itself obliged to make significant territorial concessions to the Shah of Iran in return for the end of resistance to the Kurdish movement. This Algiers Accord, which was abrogated by Saddam Hussein in 1979 set the stage for 8 years of destructive war between Iraq and Iran which in its own right was the prelude to the invasion of Kuwait and the recent conflict in the Gulf. I would argue, ladies and gentlemen, that the recent conflict in the Gulf in no small part emanated from repercussions relating to the Kurdish national issue.

The Kurds have been, and remain, a potent source of regional conflict. They have the further distinction of being the one source of serious conflict in the Middle East that the foreign ministries of major powers have refused to deal with in an adequate way, and indeed, many independent analysts as well. For decades, diplomats have toiled ceaselessly on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and many other regional issues commanded attention by policymakers and analysts. But it's the Kurdish issue that has been ignored and not given attention. Governments have had a Kurdish policy only when they sought to achieve some strategic gain by manipulating the Kurds, invariably in secret. Otherwise, the common reaction has been to wish them away.

In consequence, I would argue, ladies and gentlemen, that the Kurdish issue today has reached a stage that it can only be ignored at the risk of major upheaval in our region. No stable regional order can be obtained without consideration being given for Kurdish aspirations and Kurdish national

concerns. In this context, I will be elaborating on the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The advent of the Baath government and the rise of Saddam Hussein to power mapped the turning point in the relationship between the Kurdish people in Iraq and the Baghdad government. The Baath government sought to destroy and assimilate Kurdish identity by all means. It escalated a program of urbanization in Kurdistan that was effectively bringing Arab tribes, settling them in Kurdish homelands, in the hamlets of the Kurds, and importing Kurds away from these areas. These Arab colonies became, more-or-less, a permanent feature of Kurdish politics, and figured in treatment of the Baghdad government of the Kurds, ever since 1974 and 1975.

In the early 1980s when the war against Iran was not going so well for him, Saddam Hussein sought to conciliate with the Kurds, but once again, once he regained the upper hand, he struck out in a frenzy of destruction and killing unlike anything perpetrated by any earlier Iraqi government. Iraqi poison gas attacks on Kurdish towns and villages during 1987 and 1988 are conservatively estimated to have taken some 10,000 lives. During the infamous campaign, more than 118,000 people were killed or disappeared. The Iraqi army erased some 4,000 villages. Over half a million Kurds were expelled into the so-called new towns that were, in reality, strategic hamlets, enabling the regime to keep tight watch over the population.

In light of all this, it should be considered with little wonder that the Kurds of Iraq rose in revolt at the moment Saddam Hussein's army was defeated in Kuwait in February 1991. Some 2 million Kurds fled in panic into the mountains to Turkey and Iran when the Iraqi dictator turned what remained of his forces against them. Now the Kurds now have set up their own regional self-governing administration in an area they control.

Despite allied intervention in the Spring of 1991 and the consequent stabilization of the situation, the Baath regime continues to harass the Kurds in a very serious way. Some 300,000 Kurds and Turkomans from Kirkuk have been expelled from their homes and prevented from returning. The government of Iraq has been sponsoring attacks in Kurdish villages, carried out by terrorists and have carried out terrorist bombings in other Kurdish cities and towns. To prevent international humanitarian assistance from reaching the Kurds, the Iraqi government has clamped an illegal embargo on the Kurdish administered region and massed an army of some 200,000 along its borders.

From the crucible of suffering inflicted upon them by Saddam, there has arisen amongst the Kurds of Iraq, a sense of national unity and purpose, unique in our history. For the past 2 years, our people have, for the first time, been free of Baghdad's yoke and able to begin to exercise the right to self-government, a promise made to them by the allies in the aftermath of the first World War.

In May of last year, the first free elections in the history of the Kurdish people, sanctified free and fair by international observers, were held in Iraqi

Kurdistan. A parliament and a potential executive were brought into existence as a secular Kurdish leadership. This democratic process in Iraqi Kurdistan could be the prelude for a wider solution to the political crisis in Iraq, and indeed, may be the catalyst for the democratization of the entire country.

In both secular and democratic terms, the Kurdish movement in Iraq, I would argue, ladies and gentlemen, is strategically placed to make a major contribution to stability in our region. Its democratic character sets an example for the other peoples of Iraq. In pursuit of its vision of regional order, based on democratic values and respect for human rights, the Kurdish leadership has been seeking to play a constructive role in the politics of our region. And it has been attempting to illustrate and prove that Kurdish aspirations need not be viewed as a threat to our neighbors. To this end, the Kurdish leadership has cultivated good relations with Turkey, skewed our borders with Turkey, and has been active in helping to bring about a cease fire by the PKK, with the hope of promoting better understanding between Ankara and Turkish Kurds.

The relationship between the Kurdish leadership in Iraq and Turkey has been rather interesting--and has progressed in a very significant way, despite understandable difficulties and sensitivities. Turkey played and continues to play, a major role in the international efforts to help the Kurdish people in Iraq. The task ahead of the Kurdish leadership in Iraq, and I hope Turkey too, is to further develop this relationship and dialogue in a way that will provide and promote an environment conducive for democracy and stability in our neighborhood.

Furthermore, ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that the Kurdish role in Iraq is crucial for long-term stability in the Gulf region. The security of the Gulf depends in a critical way on reshaping the political order in Iraq in a way that precludes the possibility of another dictator like Sadam Hussein ever gaining power. To this end, the Kurdish leadership is an active partner within the Iraqi National Congress, which is the umbrella organization for the Iraqi opposition, and we are trying to bring about a democratic, pluralistic constitution in Iraq in which the rights, collective and individual rights of its people, are recognized.

To be able to make our contribution to regional order, stability and to democracy, the Kurds of Iraq must survive. The four million who live in the Kurdish self-governing region are suffering under internal blockade by the government of Iraq and also by United Nations embargo. The internal embargo established in 1991, prevents basic commodities of food, medicine, and fuel from reaching the Kurdish region. This has created a rather difficult situation for the population of our area, especially during Winter months.

In addition to this internal blockade, the self-governing territory suffers also from the United Nations' embargo against Iraq as a whole. This embargo, which was meant to punish Sadam Hussein's regime for its seizure of Kuwait prevents the Kurds from obtaining badly needed spare parts and equipment to rehabilitate industry in our culture. It is a serious obstacle to rebuilding our

economy and revitalizing our economic infrastructure which has been ravished so badly by war and by the deliberate destruction by the Baath regime of over 4,000 villages and towns in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The biggest threats, however, to the Kurdish region emanate from the very large forces the Iraqi government maintains along our borders. Iraqi forces threaten Kurdish territory with tanks, artillery, and other heavy weaponry. Iraqi air power is also to attack Kurdish forces equipped with only light weapons, who may not be able to hold off an Iraqi assault for too long. Another mass flight of Kurdish families in the millions across the borders into Turkey and Iran would force the world community to be confronted with a repetition of the refugee exodus of April 1991.

The deterrent to an Iraqi attack on Kurdish territory is the allied task force in Turkey, known--as Operation Provide Comfort. Saddam Hussein is deterred from attacking the Kurdish region because of the presence of that protection force based in Southeast Turkey. However, uncertainty over the future of this task force, whether the allies will maintain it and whether Ankara will continue to allow it be stationed on Turkish soil, raises the risk of miscalculation by the Iraqi leader, a trait that has characterized his rule. To guard against this, the western allies and the government of Turkey should make clear that the allied task force will be maintained, so long as Saddam Hussein and his regime remain.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that the challenge both to major powers and to regional governments is to cultivate the potential of the Kurdish community as a pillar of regional security. The challenge is to comprehend a strategic role that the Kurds can play in promoting stability, democracy, and respect of human rights. Failure to do so will inevitably perpetrate the cycle of violence and brutality in our neighborhood.

The Kurds can and want to shed their traditional role as a source of conflict and instability in the Middle East. They want to become a partner to the democracies in our region, in the construction of a new and more secure regional order. To this end, ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that support for the fledgling Kurdish democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan is vital--thank you.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you very much, Mr. Salih.

I would like just to take a moment to acknowledge the presence of Leyla Zana, who is also a member of the People's Labor Party and a member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. We are very pleased that she was able to join us and perhaps she may want to join the discussion as we proceed.

Before proceeding do any of our panelists want to respond to any of the remarks that they have heard yet?

Mr. Epstein. Let me, perhaps, return to a question I posed at the end of my testimony, which Mr. Salih touched on at the end of his comments.

It seems to me that, for anybody involved in policy, be it in Washington, in Ankara, or anyplace else, that the issues of cultural identity are ones in which it's probably possible now to find some common ground. My



impression is that in the last few years, the discussion of cultural rights, linguistic rights, and so forth, has matured and it seems to me that some solutions may be in sight.

The issue of democracy, of political institutions, and of sovereignty strike me as much more complex, and I posed the question at the end of my paper in terms of what the vision is and what the commonalities are. I wonder if either of my two colleagues here would care to begin to discuss for the benefit of this audience, and the Commission and its Staff, as well as my own benefit, what their vision is for cooperation and collaboration?

I know that very recently, for the first time, Turkish Kurds, Iraqi Kurds, and Kurds from other countries and from varying organizations have met and at least spoken with each other. That's something that nobody could have anticipated five years ago, let alone 10 or 15 years ago. What then comes next in your vision?

**Mr. Turk.** Like all the peoples of the world, we Kurds also want to live in freedom and liberty. But we are also aware of the fact that there are about 6 billion people in the world and there are only 1.72 billion of them free.

We realize that it's difficult to change borders and we know that our solution at the moment lies within the borders of the countries in which we live and on an equality basis, perhaps in a democratic federation.

**Mr. Salih.** I would like to say, regarding the Iraqi Kurdish situation in particular, that our issue is not one of cultural identity. To be precise, the Kurds of Iraq have enjoyed their cultural rights for quite some time. And not only that, the Kurdish right to autonomy in Iraq has been included in the Iraqi constitution. But all this did not prevent the government of Iraq, Saddam Hussein's government, from committing what we consider to have been genocide and annihilation of the Kurdish people.

I think the issue is one of seeking to reform the Iraqi political system, and providing the Kurdish people in Iraq with stringent constitutional guarantees that Iraq will be different from what it has been so far. I would not want to underestimate that task. To us, as a Kurdish movement, we envisage a pluralistic democracy and concept of federation to be two cornerstones of our future. That is what we are seeking and we feel that we will be safe with them.

I think the challenge before us is to make sure that this will be a viable solution, and recognize the difficulties and the problems that are in the way of achieving that goal. But our assessment is that it is a cost effective solution for Kurdish National aspirations in Iraq to seek a united, democratic federal Iraq, within which the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people are recognized.

**Ms. Hafner.** If I may pose a question and then we will ask members of the public to please come forward. This will be part of a record, so if you will please give us your name and if you're with an organization, the name of your organization.

It seems to me that on the issue of what is common to the Kurdish minority in all of these states, it appears that there are those who are willing to

seek democratic changes within borders and those that seek to perhaps change those borders.

In Iraq, the two major Kurdish political parties, perhaps at great cost--and I may be wrong on this and Mr. Salih, you may want to perhaps expand on this a little bit--supported a major Turkish military campaign into the Kurdish zone, which basically delivered a devastating blow to the PKK. Was this a cost in getting the Turkish government's support, perhaps?

Mr. Salih. I think to be accurate about the situation, there was no Turkish military activity into Iraqi Kurdistan that was supported by the Kurdish leadership in Iraq. We recognize that the Kurdish leadership in Iraq or the Kurdish regional government is the defacto authority in northern Iraq. And we have an obligation to our neighbors to secure our borders.

Efforts undertaken to secure our borders and were a Kurdish operation. There were a couple of incidents in which there were Turkish military incursions during that process, but they were not in collaboration or in coordination with Kurdish leadership.

No doubt Turkey has been insisting for a long time that it can not take the Kurdish leadership in Iraq. Turkey assurances it can not take them seriously unless we act in a way that will address the legitimate security concerns of Turkey, namely the security of our borders. And I think the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, what it did was in essence, was a domestic Kurdish decision to secure our borders and to act in a responsible way and to ensure that our neighbors get the message that we are not a security threat to them.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you.

Mr. Turk, do you want to respond or add anything to that?

Mr. Turk. We think it was an unfortunate war. We know Turkey views PKK as a danger. We also know that the Middle East--the powers that are in the region, would like to have us Kurds fight their wars rather than them fight their own wars.

There are a number of reasons for this war. One of them is the different views of the leadership in the North and in the South. These are basically different philosophies in the South and in the North. We believe that Turkey played a coercive role in forcing the Kurds to fight one another.

I sum it up as such.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you.

I'd like to open this up now. We have microphones in the front, if you would care to step up, please?

Mr. Haynes. I didn't mean to preempt you, but let me say Hosh geldin to all of our friends from Turkey and Salaam Aleikum, we're glad to have all of you here and to listen to this major basic problem that we face in that part of the world.

I'm Fred Haynes and I am the president and chairman of the American Turkish Friendship Council. We have only one major agenda and that's peace. We are interested in educating people with respect to politics, with respect to

commerce, with respect to culture and so on. We fully support many of the ideas that we have heard here today.

I would particularly, Madam Chairman, like to make one point and then lay a question before your panel. The first point is that I am delighted to see representatives of the Majlis, of the Turkish Congress here, who represent the People's Labor Party and who represent the Kurds of eastern Turkey. I think that's a major step forward and I would object to Mr. Turk's statement in his speech that the government of Ankara is bankrupt and myopic. They're not. I just make that flat statement. I'll be glad to argue with anybody privately about it.

The second and more fundamental question is whether or not the economics of the southeastern part of Turkey will see the kind of improvement as a result of G.A.P. of the irrigation projects in the southeast and so on, which will enable the economy of Diyarbakir and of the other cities that have been mentioned earlier to become more prosperous? I have lived a long time and fought in more wars than I want to say I did fight in. But I will say this, that in most places where people have reasonable economies or they're reasonably well fed, where their children can be educated--and I agree with you--where they have a vote, we don't have wars. Parties like the PKK ultimately die.

And so, my question to the panel and particularly Mr. Turk, and Doctor Epstein, and anyone else is present who knows the situation, are the economics likely to improve? And what can we do to develop those to the point where the Kurdish minorities and anybody else can live reasonably and well? Thanks.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you, Mr. Haynes.

I think, Doctor Epstein, we'll start with you, who has just returned from Turkey.

Mr. Epstein. Well, I certainly would not quarrel, Fred, with your assessment--places that have a solid economy, a viable political system, and a population which is reasonably well cared for are less likely to be sources of conflict than other places.

Second, I think that everyone on the panel knows, and you know as well, that in the last decade and more, there has been an attempt by the Turkish government to not only build dams and provide irrigation and electricity in the southeast as the basis of economic development, but also, a political decision was taken to promote economic development in the belief that that was a key to reducing tension and to creating stability. I don't think I'm going to make a prediction as to what the actual economic outcome is going to be in the next 5 years. I think that's one of the things that your organization engages itself in, trying to promote activity there.

In the end though, if we're speaking about conditions in Turkey, whether one accepts Mr. Turk's assessment of his position and his party politics or not, we're dealing with an elected official in a Parliament, freely elected, who is representing people whose views are the subject of this controversy. And so, whatever argument you or I or anybody else in this room

might make about the bases of prosperity and peace--and I share them--in the end, those other issues also have to be dealt with. And so, whatever success we may expect from this massive investment, we also are going to have to acknowledge, as I think the government in Ankara does, that there are other questions which speak to people's lives and identities.

And in the case of Turkey and the surrounding area, it is perhaps easy for historians because so many of these themes seem to recur in very much the same form over centuries, and so, we have a tool to assess them. But for policymakers, and I've worn both hats, there is a fundamental frustration that the same old questions reemerge. I hope that, at least, offers to my colleagues on the panel an opportunity to comment further about their view of something that really is exceedingly complex and not easily dismissed.

**Ms. Hafner.** Mr. Turk, would you like to add something?

**Mr. Turk.** I agree with the observation that prosperity will bring peace, but there is also a political problem in the region. That problem, as it stands, stands above economic prosperity and it stifles democracy.

The Kurds are fighting, literally, for their lives. When there's no stability, it's difficult to imagine that there will be prosperity. Peace of mind precedes richness a person could acquire. Just to give you an example, 30 percent of the Turkish petroleum consumption comes from the Kurdistan of Turkey. 50 percent of the dams that give electricity to the Turkish metropolis get their electricity from dams in the southeast. Both riches, literally, are transported to the west for the prosperity of the western section of Turkey.

The countries that are rich and stable and prosperous solve their political problems before. I have a message for the president of the American Turkish Friendship Association.

**Mr. Xulam.** He wants to comment on your observation that the Turkish government in Ankara is not myopic and bankrupt.

**Mr. Turk.** I want to bring it to your attention again. About 640 Kurdish intellectuals, sports, writers, singers, who carry no guns have been murdered in Turkey. Though I was a member of Parliament for two terms, within that time, for 6 and a half months, I was imprisoned in the Turkish--jail, a Turkish jail, and lived under unsanitary conditions.

Let us see the reality. In the countries where the military dictates policy, it's hard to say there is democracy. Those who do not recognize or understand the politics in Turkey will not see the invisible power that's the military. In the Turkish Republic in its life, 48 years of its life have been under military rules. Three military coups have replaced the democratic reelected governments. It would be naive to expect one to say that there is democracy in Turkey under even this history of the Republic.

I thank you.

**Ms. Hafner.** Doctor Karim?

**Mr. Karim.** I'm Najmaldin Karim from Kurdish National Congress. I just have a couple of statements to make.

The first point I'd like to make, since this is a briefing about the Kurds in general, for logistical reasons, regards Kurds of Iran, who could not be represented here. There are seven million Kurds who live in Iran who are deprived of basic rights. Again, just like in Turkey, the Kurdish language is not taught in schools. Even though Kurdish books are published to a slightly greater extent, there is significant repression. You are all aware of the Iranian regimes' record on human rights.

Just last month, there was a military attack by the Iranian forces against the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, headquartered in Iraqi Kurdistan which is supposed to be the no-fly zone and a safe haven for the Iraqi Kurds. But the bombardment and the attack by the Iranians lead to killing of many, and hundreds of people who were refugees, just resettling in new areas, many more became refugees again. I would like to bring that to everyone's attention here.

The Kurds of Iran do ask for democracy for Iran and autonomy within Iran. This is the demand of the Kurdish leadership in Iran and it has been like this and has really not been changing, or changed at all.

I'd just like to make another remark as far as Doctor Epstein's question regarding the fate of the Kurds. Being a representative of an organization that includes Kurds from all parts of Kurdistan, I have some information and familiarity with all the parts of Kurdistan. I'd just like to make one point as far as Iraqi Kurdistan is concerned.

I think Iraqi Kurdistan is unique in a sense, historically, it was never part of Iraq, historically. It was annexed to Iraq just to form a new state for economic and political reasons in the early 1920s. This newly established state of Iraq has never lived up to its expectation to respect human rights and to be true representative of all the peoples. The Kurds have been like Doctor Salih has mentioned, subjected to genocide, repression and the Kurdish region has been totally devastated not only by the government of Sadam Hussein, but the previous governments, although not to the same extent.

And also, in Iraqi Kurdistan, there are treaties and agreements between the colonial powers and powers in those areas that clearly recognize the rights of the Kurds of Iraq to have self determination, especially the Treaty of Sevres, which allowed the Kurds to form their own independent state. And having the Kurds going through the genocide and oppression that they have been through and in the aftermath of the Gulf War, I think creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq should be an option and should be discussed.

There may be other alternatives that may come out to solve this problem. However, that should be one of the viable options because as far as I'm concerned, and a lot of other people, you know, the 70 years' history of association with Iraq has not proven anything not only for the Kurds, but for the rest of Iraq and the region.

Thank you.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you.

**Mr. Panahi.** Good morning. My name is Paris Karim Panahi. I am of Iranian descent.

Everybody should condemn what has been happening to the Kurds as a minority in those countries and those areas. But I have two questions for the panel.

First, doesn't this panel and Kurdish people think that during the past 22 years or 40 years, the United States government and other powers have been manipulating and using the courts against any government that was not following their policy? For instance, during the Shah, they were using the Kurds. They're right now using Kurds against Sadaam. But the point is that, doesn't the panel or members of this Kurdish organization understand that rather than really solving the Kurdish problem, they are being used by the United States government in that region?

My other question is that what is the stand and position of this subcommittee and the panel regarding the violations of human and civil rights of the minority in this country by the United States government? You know, everybody has feelings regarding the codes and their violations. What about the United States government against minorities here and Middle Eastern people?

**Ms. Hafner.** I will take the latter question. The Helsinki Commission is mandated by law to oversee implementation of the Final Act. And indeed, we do look at our own record and have done so on a number of occasions. We held numerous hearings a number of years ago and issued an extensive report on political and civil rights in the United States, which was fairly critical in certain areas.

The Commission staff issued a major report on homelessness about two years ago. And 3 days ago, the Commission issued a compilation of 5 days of public briefings and findings resulting from staff trips to the western part of the United States, as well as parts of Florida and other areas on the very unjust situation confronting migrant workers in this country.

So, we take very seriously, the United States' record. And in fact, at any time, any constituent anywhere in this country can write the Commission and request that we look at an issue, and we will gladly do so if it is within our framework.

**Mr. Salih?**

**Mr. Salih.** I think first of all, the concept of minority in people, I think that also I certainly have problems with it. I don't think that you could consider the Kurdish people a minority in the sense that some indications suggest. But I think I would be speaking for an overwhelming majority of my own community when I indicate that we will settle very happily for the constitutional rights--Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States. There is no comparison with the rights of the Kurdish people and the situations here, without commenting on the specifics of migrant workers and so on. But I think this is detracting from the specific nature of the Kurdish issue in the Middle East.

The other issue raised here regard the question of manipulation of major powers, of international powers, of Kurdish issue to their own ends. The Kurdish perspective is exactly the contrary. Major powers, international powers, have sought to support regional states, various capitals, and their policies to assimilate and subdue Kurdish activities. And I think this is part of the--political culture, or for that matter, perhaps Middle Eastern political culture, to try to avoid addressing the issue itself and blame it on the outside.

The Kurdish problem in the Middle East is a problem of national identity. It's a political problem that has its origin in the region and whatever international dimensions it has is secondary to its own indigenous nature. I think rather than blaming it on the outside, we the peoples of that region should be addressing the problem itself, to try to find solutions for it.

**Ms. Hafner.** Yes, sir?

**Mr. Hamparian.** I'm Aram Hamparian with the Armenian National Committee of America.

At a recent CSCE briefing, Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch concluded that the human rights situation in Turkey had actually deteriorated over the past year. The State Department in its recently released Country Reports on Human Rights concluded that the Demirel government had not taken any reforms which might reduce incidents of human rights abuses in Turkey, and actually said that reports of torture were on the rise.

What effect is this going to have, or might this have, on the level of aid that the U.S. government extends to Turkey in the coming years?

**Mr. Epstein.** I'm very familiar with the briefing you just mentioned since I participated in it. I certainly don't feel competent to speak on behalf of any Congressional committee involved in appropriations or in the authorization of foreign aid. And so, I think, for a comment on that specifically, you need to ask them directly.

With respect to the premise of your question though, I commented in a previous hearing and I'll reiterate here, my general observation at that time regarding the broader human rights question. My view hasn't changed. What I said on that occasion was that indeed, the amount of violence in Turkey in the last year, year-and-a-half, had risen and that it seemed very directly connected to the amount of fighting going on in the southeast with respect to the PKK insurgency.

There are other issues as well, and I spoke to them at that time. They have to do with police detention and other questions. But I think in those areas, what you have is a fairly constant record that you have a decline of prison abuse and the great increase was, in fact, due to this kind of fighting. There is now a cease fire in place, and perhaps we can look forward to reduction in that kind of abuse. I don't think anyone can predict that for sure. I don't think anybody knows at this point, how long the cease-fire will last. But if what we anticipate in the near to medium future is an attack on the political aspects, and Mr. Turk referred to them--if what we are looking forward to now is that, then perhaps it will permit two things.

One, to actually make genuine political progress on the issues at hand, the economics, the politics, the cultural rights. And at the same time perhaps it will also permit all of us concerned with the CSCE process, this Commission, its staff, others of us, including authorities in Ankara, to return to the remaining issues in other areas and give them the attention they deserve. I, personally, do not doubt there is a commitment to dealing with those issues. I can't predict to you, however, what the pace of progress is going to be.

**Ms. Hafner.** Mr. Turk would also like to add a few remarks.

**Mr. Turk.** The Demirel and Inonu government did promise human rights, did promise that they would accept Kurdish reality, and did promise democracy wherever they went. The record, however, is clear. After 500 days in power, none of their promises have been kept. If we are at a turning point right now in the country, it's not because of their actions, rather, it's because of PKK's cease fire offer.

We believe that our people will solve its own problem, meaning the Kurds. We don't believe that Kurdistan or the Kurdish problems will be solved in Washington or in Paris or somewhere else. Our message as their representatives, is to make you privy to their depredations, to their sufferings.

**Ms. Hafner.** Doctor Lowry?

**Mr. Lowry.** Heath Lowry, Institute of Turkish Studies. I would like to direct my question to Mr. Turk.

While many of the things that he has said in response to his questions I find myself in agreement with, there are also a number of points where his comments are not only inaccurate, but so inaccurate that I've never heard them expressed by anyone in Turkey or outside.

Two examples, I think, will suffice to illustrate this and I'd like to ask him about both of them. During his opening comments in Turkish, that is before his translator read the prepared statement, he used the figure of 20 million Kurds in Turkey today. This is a figure which is not only inaccurate, it is so inaccurate as to make one question many of his ensuing statements. I wonder where that figure came from? Obviously, that would place the Kurdish population in Turkey today at over 35 percent. Normal estimates range between a low of six, which is certainly low, to a high of 12, which most people who have studied the population in that region would find a little bit high. His figure then comes in at almost 100 percent larger than that. Given the fact that the group he represents in Parliament holds 18 of 450 seats, it's a little hard to understand how 35 percent of the population, if they shared his sentiments, would only elect, what, five percent of the deputies?

The second point that I think illustrates this tone of exaggeration was the statement that to no extent whatsoever have the residents of the southeast benefitted from any of the economic development that has gone on in that area. He specifically used the two examples of development of water resources and development of petrol.

Having travelled extensively in the villages of Hakkari, Bitlis, Van, in the late 1980s, one of the things that struck me there was the extent to which



electrification--that is, providing electricity--to villages in that region, Kurdish villages in that region, had indeed expanded throughout the decade of the 1980s, and that was coupled with telecommunications as well. I wonder how that fact can be balanced against his statement that there has been absolutely no economic benefits in the area?

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you.

**Mr. Turk?**

**Mr. Turk.** I admit that my numbers are not scientific and this is because the Kurdish identity and reality is not recognized. It is difficult to count an entity that is not accepted. My numbers are approximate and I say that eight million Kurds live in their ancestral homeland, Kurdistan, and the rest of them live in major Western cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Ismir.

I would like to bring it to your attention an open forum that I participated in with Esref Bitlis, an army general, who admitted on the screen that 27 percent of his soldiers were Kurds. With that figure alone, the Kurdish number would rise to 17 million in Turkey.

It is true, there is electricity and there are some phones in some Kurdish villages, but don't we live in 20th Century? Do you see that as too much for the Kurds? You did say that you know Turkey very well and I have a question for you. How many factories are in Kurdistan and how many workers are employed by those factories? You couldn't count more than one or two.

I want to elaborate on the telecommunication aspects of your remarks. It is true, telecommunications have reached many villages, but my hunch is that it's because the government wants total control over the Kurdish insurgency so that they can control the activities of the PKK. It's, perhaps, because of them.

I'd like to also focus on the issue of my party. Yes, it is true, we do have 18 members. But I want to bring it to your attention that the election was moved forward so that we could not organize ourselves as an independent party. We had to agree with the Social Democratic Party to be on their ticket and they allocated seats for us as members of HEP. In a place like Diyarbakir where eight deputies were elected, all our deputies were elected. In a place like Mardin where I represent, five deputies were elected. All five were members of the HEP.

All we're saying is that the government provide an open forum where Kurdish demands, aspirations, longings be discussed openly, honestly, with candor. If they don't elect us, that's fine with us, as long as there's an open forum.

**Mr. Lowry.** Let me respond to that, if I may?

Thank you very much for your answers. I happened to be in Turkey when you were on the program with the late Esref Bitlis and saw the program you were talking about. I think it really makes the point that I am trying to make here today better than any other example I could have come up with. The fact is, you did appear on that program. You did appear as a Kurd. You did

appear as a Parliamentarian elected as a Kurd. And you appeared on the program with the Commander of the Turkish gendarmerie and you engaged in an open debate which was seen nationwide.

This is certainly a change. It wouldn't have happened 5 years ago. It wouldn't have happened three years ago. It did happen last year. I think that was the point I was trying to make with you. It seems to me that there are things changing in Turkey and it is perhaps counterproductive to express the view that nothing is changing, or to exaggerate numbers, or to talk about no economic development, or no political freedoms at a time when, obviously, things are in transition. It's irrelevant where the power or what the incentive for the change was.

Change is going on now and finally, the fact that you're sitting here at a hearing, at a briefing for the Helsinki Commission in Washington, DC, as a Turkish Kurdish political leader is, in and of itself, proof of that change.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you.

Mr. Turk and then I think Doctor Epstein would like to make a few remarks.

Mr. Turk. That's true. I did attend that and I sat as a Kurd. But you must also know that my party, for stating its views for advocating the rights of the Kurds is facing prosecution and maybe close at the end of this month. The constitutional rights that are given to us, the parliamentary immunity, is being prosecuted. 18 members of HEP face death threats retroactively because of our stand as Kurds and as advocates of their rights.

We are patient. We have been patient about the reforms that are taking place in Turkey. Our struggle is not only for our rights, it's also for the rights of the Turks to live in a democratic system. Make no mistake about it. We will give them our support in that respect as well.

Mr. Epstein. I'm reluctant to intervene in a very sophisticated exchange between an old friend who has distinguished scholarly credentials and a Parliamentarian whose personal engagement in the issues of human rights is inspiring. I will simply make one or two comments about some of the questions that arose in this exchange.

The first is to return to a question that was asked earlier regarding economic development. I really believe that on the issue of economic development in the southeast, the last ten years or so have seen substantial investments and we simply don't know what the results of those investments are going to be in the next 10 years. But clearly, the situation is not what it was a decade ago.

The second is with respect to telephones and telecommunications. Regardless of how one assesses the motives for introducing telephones, I would simply share with this public the experience of one who was involved in human rights issues in the Soviet Union which was, I think everyone here would agree, before it collapsed, a much more closed society than Turkey has been, ever, and where access to people and access to communications was much more highly restricted.

I would simply observe that there, as well as elsewhere, a few dozen people with a few telephones, a few telefaxes, and a few friends, were able to work immense change. That was one of the keys, in fact, to work on human rights in the Soviet Union. So, regardless of how telephones come about, or where you get a telefax, or what you can do with one computer, once you have it, the world is yours.

And the flip side of that coin, I suppose, is that once you're sitting in front of the camera with the minions of press from both Turkey and this country, again, that signal is out. It goes wherever you wish it to go. It can't be restricted. So, regardless of motives, the telephones are there.

The final comment I would make is with respect to this debate on numbers. Whether there are 20 million Kurds or 12 million Kurds or six million Kurds, seems to me at this point irrelevant. The issue at hand within the Turkish context--leaving aside for a moment Iraq, which we understand is different, and leaving aside Iran, which hasn't received treatment this morning, through no fault of the Commission, simply because no spokesman was available. But within the context of Turkey, if my assessment of today's debate is correct, it doesn't really matter if you are only 10,000 or 100,000, the issues you raise are being discussed, will be discussed further. And one hopes some solution will be forthcoming.

One of those questions I posed at the end of my testimony went exactly to that. Namely, "is there a solution acceptable to all sides of the issue of Kurdish aspirations within the democratic Turkish state? If such a solution is conceivable, what are the appropriate and acceptable means of preserving Kurdish culture and identity in the absence of a tradition of written literature?" Whatever those aspirations may be, 100,000 or 20 million, seems to me not the core of the matter at this point.

Ms. Hafner. Thank you, Mark.

Audience Member. Can I make a statement, please?

I don't have a question but when Doctor Karim spoke, this gentleman here, he took it as a joke. If you have any knowledge of Iraq's history with respect for Kurdish rights, their language, their land, everything. At any time if they abuse that, they should take Kurdistan away from them.

Now Kurds are being persecuted and deported and killed. I think Kurdish people have the right to get their independence. This gentleman's anti-Kurdish stance is apparent in his question. I think he's a beneficiary, he's being paid to do that. Thank you.

Ms. Hafner. Well, I think the question, however, is one of the difference in approach between different members of Kurdish groups. Interestingly enough, Mr. Salih made the comment he does not view the Kurds in the context of a minority, perhaps within the sense that we use the term in the CSCE context when speaking of minority rights.

Therefore, it seems to me that in listening to our panelists, we have two very different approaches. One, which is the Iraqi Kurdish movement seeks to

promote the idea of self determination at the expense of territorial integrity. And again, I'd like for Mr. Salih to address that a bit more and give us a brief summary in terms of what are the implications of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan for Iraq and Turkey? The implications must be very serious indeed.

And then, I think, if we could perhaps have some concluding remarks from Mr. Turk regarding, obviously, the core vision--if one wants to call it a vision--of the PKK regarding a Kurdish state including parts of Turkey, but perhaps one that encompasses other areas as well.

Mr. Turk made the comment early-on in his statement that the PKK was moving towards objectives that other Kurds shared, but sought by very, very different means. I would like to know if, in fact, those are shared aspirations? Is it a fair assessment?

Doctor Lowry participated at our previous hearing at which he commented--and I think perhaps it's a question that needs to be asked and perhaps Mr. Turk would answer, of course--that the PKK no more speaks to the aspirations of the Kurds of Turkey than the IRA does for the Irish. So, I would ask both of our panelists, perhaps, if they could sum up what the aspirations of the Kurds are, both in Iraq and in Turkey.

Mr. Salih?

Mr. Salih. Our aspirations in Iraqi Kurdistan as articulated by the Iraqi Kurdish leadership is one to seek a democratic, united Iraq and a federal system of government within which the Kurdish people in Iraq would be accorded their national rights and recognition of their nationality within a federal united Iraq. We are not seeking an independent Kurdish state in Iraq because we feel that the circumstances, the international and the regional climate, is not conducive to such a course of action. And we feel that it is a cost effective solution for the Kurdish problem in Iraq to be resolved within the bounds of the present Iraqi state.

How viable is that dream or that objective? We feel it is not an easy task to rebuild a new Iraq that is democratic and that has constitutional guarantees to its communities and populations. But nevertheless, I think within the range of options that are available, that presents the most viable and the most realistic one for the Kurdish people in Iraq. And to that end, we are committing ourselves to retention of Iraq's territorial integrity and to seek a solution within the bounds of the present Iraqi state.

The question is if a democratic federal Iraq is not a possible option for the Kurds, if, ultimately, Saddam Hussein were to be replaced by Saddam II and another dictator replaces him, I feel this is an issue for us to discuss on further occasions. I would argue that the dynamics of Kurdish society are such that they will not be willing to go back under the yoke of another dictatorship and suffer the prospects of another holocaust, another genocide. Therefore, I would argue very strongly for those who are interested in retaining the territorial integrity of Iraq and keeping Iraq as an entity, our challenge is to really seek the democratization of the whole of Iraq and offer the Kurdish people stringent constitutional guarantees that they will be safe.

And please, ladies and gentlemen, understand and appreciate the dilemma and the concerns of the people that have been subjected to a holocaust, of a genocide of monumental proportions. It will take deeds, not just slogans and words to address those concerns and to make them active partners and willing partners in the state called Iraq.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you very much, Mr. Salih.

Now, Mr. Turk and then we'll take your question, sir.

**Mr. Turk.** We Kurds harbor no chauvinistic feelings. Our goal is to live in freedom and liberty where we are. The cease fire and its aftermath and the demands of the cease fire, I believe, are genuine.

The PKK has done some reality checking. It has accepted that the status quo can not be changed with the ease and impunity. As long as freedom and liberty are granted to the Kurds, they have said publicly that they will respect the territorial integrity of Turkey.

I believe we are at a crossroads in terms of the opportunity that's at hand. It must be seized and it must be pursued. To have permanent peace in the region both for the Kurds and for the Turks, this opportunity must be pursued. I also believe that the democratic forces in the world must do their share to give the political government or the government in Ankara moral support to solve this problem in political terms. This will be good for the people of Turkey and also, it will give the upper hand to the political parties in Ankara.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you very much.

Yes, sir. This will have to be our final question.

**Mr. Dawne.** OK. This is not going to be a question, actually. It will be a remark about the PKK.

My name is Ari Dawne. I am from the Kurdistan organization of Canada. In the United States, the PKK has been known wrongly as a terrorist group or the definition or translation of terrorism has changed.

I do believe 12 or 18 million Kurds in Kurdistan of Turkey holds their national identity to the Kurdish Work Party named the PKK. The PKK is not a terrorist organization which kills civilians. The PKK is not a terrorist organization which performs military attacks outside of their national borders. I do believe the panel and the people of the United States have been wrongly informed about the PKK. Their struggle is basically self defense. This is the reason it would be helpful to go to check the definition of terrorism.

Thank you very much.

**Ms. Hafner.** Thank you very much.

I would like to thank each of our panelists. I think this has been a very interesting discussion. The Commission views the issue of Kurdish human rights as a very critical issue, both within the CSCE context and within global affairs.

It seems to me that there is clearly a need that has come out of this briefing, to move toward fuller representation, responsiveness, and democratization. But what is also clear is the need for more engagement, not

just by the United States but by the human rights community on this very critical issue.

I thank all of you for joining us.

*[Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 11:52 a.m.]*

**A P P E N D I X**

**KURDISH IDENTITY AND U.S. POLICY**

**STATEMENT OF DR. MARK A. EPSTEIN**

**before the**

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

**May 17, 1993**

**SUMMARY**

## KURDISH IDENTITY AND U.S. POLICY

I am pleased to appear before the commission to deal with this timely and complex subject. I will try in a few minutes to offer brief descriptions of an historical context and a political framework, at least as seen from Washington, for the issues being discussed here today: Kurdish nationality, Kurdish political rights, and Kurdish aspirations.

Like so much in this part of the world, the historical record is long, and the problems are complex. Indeed, as we approach the last few years of the twentieth century we are confronted once again with the problems of war and diplomacy which were important at the beginning of the century.

The issue of Kurds in the Ottoman Empire was to have been handled in the peace conferences ending World War I, but for the most part that question, thorny as ever, is what we will be discussing here today.

If my comments place greater emphasis on Turkey, it is for both historical and policy reasons. We dealing here with various successor states to the Ottoman Empire, but only Turkey is a member of the CSCE and a NATO member. Thus, in addition to being our ally and of great concern to us in any case, affairs in Turkey fall directly within the mandate of this commission.

Here I must remind us all of the historical complexity this issues involve. In 1600, 1700, 1800, or even in 1900, virtually all the territory where Kurds lived, either as



nomads or settled in permanent villages, was part of the Ottoman Empire, or was close to ever shifting Ottoman borders in areas disputed over the course of the previous two centuries.

Until the end of World War I, Iraq was simply an Ottoman province. Baghdad and Basrah were local administrative centers, and the world was beginning to fight over petroleum in the heavily Kurdish areas around Mosul and Kirkuk, as well as on the Russian side of the border.

Syria was an also an Ottoman province as well, with its administrative center at Damascus. Jerusalem and Beirut were secondary administrative centers among its dependencies, despite the distinct character which the Druze and Christian communities lent to the Lebanon and the special significance of Jerusalem for the three great monotheisms.

Whatever borders there are today, between Iraq and Turkey, Turkey and Syria, Syria and Iraq, with Kuwait and with the Saudis, or elsewhere in the region, they are the results of World War I and beyond. One need only recollect the career of Lawrence of Arabia, perhaps the best known story of these events in our popular consciousness.

There were disputes over League of Nations mandates in place of independence for the Arabs, Jewish-Arab conflict in mandate Palestine, and a variety of other thorny issues.

We should also recall that after World War I ended, remnants of the defeated Ottoman army were still fighting on in Russian ruled territory where there is fighting again today, and where oil pipelines are again a subject of discussion. Kurdish tribes

moved habitually throughout these areas, oblivious to lines on maps until the modern political borders were drawn, and often afterward as well.

In its last major report on Turkey, in June 1988, the staff of this commission pointed to the matter of Kurdish nationality and aspirations as one of a few very important issues confronting Turkey, and that observation has certainly proved correct.

Until recently the Turkish government held steadfastly to the view that, as Muslims, the Kurds were not entitled to special treatment and not protected by special minority rights according to the treaties at the end of World War I which defined the terms by which the Turkish Republic was recognized. A separate Kurdish nationality did not exist --- they were simply nomadic Turks.

Briefly, in negotiating the terms under which the Turks were allowed to establish an independent state in part of the defeated Empire, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne entailed specific guarantees to non-Muslims. For some centuries the western powers considered themselves to be the protectors of the non-Muslim minorities in the Empire, and in the nineteenth century used that special status as the lever by which they intervened in Ottoman affairs, helped the Christian populations of the Balkans, including Yugoslavia, to gain their independence as they angled to promote their own claims and position regarding the eventual breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the "Sick Man of Europe," as a Russian Czar once put it.

They therefore felt fully justified in demanding treaty clauses to assure the continued cultural and religious autonomy of the Ottoman non-Muslims, especially the Greek, Armenian, and other Christian communities. The Turks argued, however, that

the Kurds, who are for the most part Sunni Muslims, were a part of the majority and thus neither entitled to nor in need of special considerations, just as they had not had the special, protected status of the non-Muslims previously. This principle, and a Kurdish revolt, led quickly to a policy of strictly repressing a separate Kurdish cultural identity in favor of a general, secular Turkish identity.

The memory of the Kurdish uprisings in the 1920's and 1930's remains strong, and the policy of building a modern, secular, Turkish state remains in place. Until quite recently, Kurdish speech in public life was prohibited, let alone cultural institutions.

References to Kurds and Kurdish in the Turkish press were for many years considered illegal attacks on the integrity of the Republic. Complicating the situation, and also provoking the current political debate, there has been, as we will certainly hear this morning, an armed insurgency, based primarily in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, generally calling itself both Kurdish and Marxist-Leninist. Until the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Kurdish Workers Party, PKK, was said to receive financial support from various East Bloc countries, with the stated goal being to establish a separate Kurdish state on Turkish territory.

Today, there is an apparent cease fire in place at the suggestion of the PKK, and a discussion of the terms under which the Turkish government might treat with them, if at all.

In the political realm, compared with the silence of a previous age, there are openly separatist Kurdish deputies in the Turkish parliament, a wide ranging discussion in the press, and Kurdish cultural rights are widely and sharply debated. Others will

have more to say about this subject this morning, so I will simply point out that the question was formulated by the commission in its 1988 report as: "whether Turkey can find a way to accommodate legitimate Kurdish cultural aspirations while maintaining its integrity as a state and a functioning democracy," is as relevant today as it was then.

In Iraq, the case is different. It is not in the CSCE, does not have a parliamentary democracy. Since the end of the Gulf War, the primarily Kurdish areas of the north are a zone protected by U.S. and other allied military units, supported primarily from bases in Turkey, preventing the Iraqi army and air forces from exercising their will there.

In those areas of Iraq, local, provisional political institutions are in place, but the larger issues of eventual independence, secession, and sovereignty remain unresolved. Others on the panel will certainly deal with this.

The problems and questions which seem to me to define the problem today are as follows:

For Turkish Kurds, is there a solution acceptable to all sides to the issue of Kurdish aspirations within the democratic Turkish state?

If such a solution is conceivable, what are the appropriate and acceptable means of preserving Kurdish culture and identity in the absence of a tradition of written literature?

For, Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and other Kurds, who are divided along traditional family and tribal lines, speak different dialects, live among peoples speaking different languages and in different nation states, what do they actually have in common and what can they actually do together?

For the United States, the CSCE, and NATO, what do we want and what can we do that might actually have a chance of success, but not violate the national sovereignty of the states involved, all the while not harming our general interests in the area?

May 17, 1993  
Washington D.C.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the opportunity to address you on the plight of the Kurds. My ~~brothers~~, helpless and often persecuted people need all the attention you could give. Your concern is gratifying. On behalf of some thirty million Kurds, I appreciate it.

History is witness to the fact that we Kurds have been living in what is today known as Kurdistan for about 4000 years. Sometimes free, sometimes not, we have had our share of different neighbours and succeeding governments. Today, we still live on our land, but subjected to the rule of others. The Turks, the Arabs and the Persians have shared Kurdistan among themselves as a colony without any rights. We have been exploited not only materially, but also spiritually, to the degree that our existence as a distinct nation is in jeopardy.

In Turkey, we Kurds, live a very precarious life. Though promised equality, with the Turks, we have been subjugated to a policy of total assimilation. Our language is banned, we can not write in our God-given mother tongue. Those of us who come to terms with the truth and accept the fact that we are Kurds face double standards in the so called Turkish democracy. Instead of promotions, we face demotions; instead of freedom, we are imprisoned as potential separatists. Life has become a political struggle, one that ties the individual to his people, because our people suffer and because we want to end their suffering.

The individual or collective Kurdish response as could be expected has been both violent and nonviolent. In different parts of Turkish Kurdistan, year in and year out, the Kurds of both sexes and all ages have risen in arms to let the Turks know that they are Kurds and that they are not going to accept assimilation, to be Turks. In Diyarbakir, in Dersim, in Kocgiri and in various other parts of Kurdistan, they have participated in uprisings and invariably they were silenced with violence. The Kurdish masses together with their leaders were crushed or exiled. Today is no different. The fight is still for freedom, for liberty. for basic human rights as 20th century citizens of this world.

Turkish Kurdistan is in turmoil today. Some of us are engaged with a nonviolent political struggle to redeem a people, to have it join the family of nations on an equality basis. Others among us have resorted to the armed struggle, losing hope with the slow pace of reforms to validate a nation. Our means are different; our goal is the same. My hope is that, I make you privy to both struggles and have you side with the democratic forces and help us expedite the work of nonviolence. All we are asking is to have you give democracy a chance for the stability of the region, and for the brotherhood of the nations in the Middle East.

I am here as the leader of People's Labor Party, an 18 member entity, in the Turkish Parliament, dedicated to advocating the rights of the Kurds through political means. But our road is blocked, our staff is harassed and our party is prosecuted with a closure by the Turkish Constitutional Court. This says a lot about the status of the Kurds in Turkey. Our duty to our conscience as Kurds, and to our people as their representatives, is putting us at variance with the state laws.

Allow me to cite you an example to make my point. I and a number of my fellow Kurdish Parliamentarians were elected on the Social Democratic Party ticket to the Turkish Parliament. Some of us attended a conference in Paris. Among its topics there was the issue of human right abuses -- of the Kurds -- in Turkey. When we returned from the French Capital, we found ourselves dismissed from our party for attending such a meeting.

I give this example to make a point about the fragility of the democracy in Turkey. Ours is the task to be truthful to the aspirations of our people as Kurds and also not to be caught by the long arm of the Turkish law that prohibits such an activity. Since 1980, we have been at odds with the Turkish state laws, more than ever before. The Kurds have asked for more political rights; the government in Ankara has responded with more force. First, a military rule has replaced the civil administration in the South-East. Village Guards system has been established to pit the Kurd against his fellow Kurd. An Islamic fundamentalist group, Hizbi-Kontra, housed, trained by the MIT, the Turkish Secret Service, and set free to gun down the secular and democratic forces in the Kurdish movement.

To have you glimpse at the toll, the Kurds have suffered, just last year alone, reminds one of Eli Weisel and his reflections on the Jewish Holocaust. 300 villages have been burnt and leveled to the ground for harboring Kurdish freedom fighters. 600 of them have been evacuated of their inhabitants by force. 640 Kurdish political activists, among them 46 members of my own party, have been murdered under mysterious circumstances, sometimes with a single bullet, from the back of their head, indicating the callousness and uniformity of the barbaric crimes. Six sizeable towns, Sirnak, Cizre, Lice, Kulp, Hazro, and Nusaybin have been bombarded with the BRD tanks, courtesy of the German government, and its shopping districts set afire without a declaration of war.

Responding to the atrocities of this nature, and committed to eradicating the very existence of the Turkish presence from the soil of Kurdistan, the PKK, the Kurdistan Worker Party and its guerilla have battled the Turkish army for the last nine years. Notwithstanding the Turkish claims, both sides have inflicted on each other deadly blows. Our rather unscientific reports indicate that three thousand Guerilla and as many Turkish soldiers have lost their lives.

As many as four thousands of civilians were killed by Special Units, death squads, sent to the region to deter the Kurds from aiding the freedom fighters. And up to half million have been forced to relocate to other parts of the Kurdistan. All because of our inability as political leaders --both Turkish and Kurdish-- to sit down and negotiate an end to this enduring Kurdish question with candor and respect to the rights of the Kurds.

To end this vicious cycle, to bring an end to this violence, the leadership of PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire on March 20, 1993, until further notice. Thanks to this step, the Kurdish new year, New Roz, celebrations were less bloody this year. To reassure the government in Ankara, and to let the world know that, the Kurds have sided with peace and nonviolence, the ceasefire was extended again, on April 15, 1993, this time indefinitely, so long as the political and nonviolent steps were pursued in a genuine manner.

I believe this ceasefire represents an opportunity for understanding and peace in Turkish Kurdistan. It will stop mothers to shed their tears and their sons to shed their blood. It will allow democracy to give deeper roots in Turkey and contribute to the political stability of the region. The ceasefire demands respect the territorial integrity of Turkish Republic and if pursued will pave the way for the brotherhood of the Turks and the Kurds on an equality basis. If I could sum them up for you:

- 1-The Kurdish identity must be recognized
- 2-The use of the Kurdish Language in conversation and in writing should be legalized.
- 3- All cultural rights should be conceded
- 4-The Regional Governorship to be abolished
- 5-The Village Guards should be disarmed and disbanded
- 6-Kurdish political parties must be given full legal and constitutional rights
- 7-A general amnesty for all political prisoners
- 8-An open forum must be created to resolve the remaining issues in a peaceful manner

Ladies and Gentlemen, this conflict is not between the peoples of Turkey, the Kurds and the Turks. It is rather between the Kurds and a politically bankrupt and myopic government in Ankara, Turkey. The conflict is also a crisis of the Turkish democracy because some twenty million Kurds are treated with contempt and denied their most elementary human rights. In a world that is truly becoming a global village, peace and democracy are no longer the concerns of a few but rather the preoccupation of us all, that is if we want to have truth, understanding and beauty in the world. Thank you.

