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October 16, 2011

Summary of the outcomes of the 1st World Kurdish Congress, WKC2011 Rotterdam 7-9 October 2011

1. Introduction

The first World Kurdish Congress took place at Rotterdam from October 7-9, 2011. This congress offered a unique opportunity to researchers interested in Kurdistan and Kurdish issues. For the first time in our history Kurdish and non-Kurdish scientists, businessmen, academicians and members of the cultural community from twenty countries discussed the future of our nation through science and culture. The goal of the Congress was to share our research and to discuss the potential reshaping for the future of Kurdistan and to reinforce Kurdish and non-Kurdish scientists' cooperative relationships.

Our mission is to come up with creative and scientific solutions to address the many possibilities for the Kurdish society and culture to step into the modern world as a contributing member and to strengthen the relationships with Kurdish and non-Kurdish organizations for international recognition. With WKC and utilization of our capacity, we wish to build a bridge between the Kurdish people from Kurdistan and those abroad through an independent source and channel to offer the leadership in Kurdistan scientific-based guidelines and a long-term strategy dealing with vital issues for all Kurds and Kurdistan as a whole (a 'Think Tank' type organization).

Other major tasks include providing expertise in different fields to assist the development of Kurdistan's institutions and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The vision of WKC is to define a research strategy to transform the ideas and knowledge generated from networking and lobbyist activities to bring about increased global awareness towards Kurdistan as a highly developed nation—and to assist Kurdistan in becoming an active and successful part of modern society.

A relatively large number of dedicated people with different economic, social, political and cultural points of view complementary and interrelated backgrounds attended the Congress. The composition of the participants and the research they presented was consistent with the aims and objectives of the Congress – namely to present a multi-disciplinary and strong emphasis upon the establishment of a strong link between academia, business society and governance, with presence of media. We were honored to receive the support of honorable Leyla Zana. Her role is very important for the struggle of our people in Kurdistan as well as the support of honorable Nechirvan Barzani – who inspired us at the very first stages of the WKC establishment.

We are most grateful for the interest that many researchers have shown to the Congress and for the high quality of contributions from both Kurdish and non-Kurdish contributors that made the Congress most successful.

2. The program

The program of the Congress consisted of eight sessions, each with three or four scientific papers, with a total number of 28 presentations conducted within two full days dedicated to various important aspects of Kurdish health, education, economy and political science, as well as culture. The objective was to exchange and develop knowledge regarding progress within Kurdish society – including suggested ways that health, life quality, political, social and economic development, human rights and education could be improved.

The keynote speech was delivered by Leyla Zana who said she was ecstatic that for the first time, an international Kurdish conference was being held. She spoke of the long-held desire of many Kurds to have an independent nation. She said, “Often when I think about the Kurdish situation, I ask myself which is better for a nation: to have their own country but oppress others or to be without a country and never oppress others.” Zana said, “It is true we have faced many difficulties but what the Kurds should be proud of is that 100 years from now, our future generations will not have to be ashamed or apologize for oppressing others.” She received a standing ovation.

Zana also spoke about how the basic human rights of the Kurds have been ignored within a country where the Kurds’ mother tongue and culture have been banned. She described how even today in Turkey, children at school must take the following oath: “I am Turkish. I am right and I am hard working...” She added that it is shameful for Turkey and all of humanity to impose an official ideology which seeks the assimilation of the Kurds — which is not even common in other fascist and military regimes. Zana also added that thus far the Kurds have continued in their peaceful struggle for freedom and human rights against these repressive regimes and all injustices done in all parts of Kurdistan.

In her opening remarks, Venezuelan writer, Carol Prunhuber said “You have come from many countries, many cities. You represent many walks of life, professions, many age groups and nationalities. Yet each person here shares a common thread: the desire to positively set forth new threads to weave a new tapestry for Kurdistan. For this reason, we have called this gathering the ‘World Kurdish Congress.’

“You have all come with the following responsibility and earnest wish: to listen, widely share your individual knowledge with others and imbibe the ideas and experiences of many

others within your own. Our work in this Congress is ground breaking. Take a moment to reflect upon the uniqueness of today. Because what we want to do is to create interest groups as others are doing.”

Harry von Bommel, as spokesperson on foreign affairs for the Socialist Party of the Netherlands, said –We show solidarity with the struggle for democracy of the countries of the Middle East and the emancipation of Kurdish societies in all those countries.” He added that the Socialist Party –wants Turkey, Syria and Iran to become democracies and give all the necessary political rights to the Kurds. This important conference is seen by me as a call for democracy and human rights for all Kurds worldwide.” He concluded by stating that his party was –onvinced of the potential of the Kurdish communities and the ability to develop a high skilled society.”

The theme of the 2011 Congress was science and culture for progress in Kurdistan. The presented papers covered areas of general, mental and social health, education, politics and governance, economics, business and management, political movements, the role of women in development, and language, culture and music.

3. Summary of the contributions

A. General, mental and social health

The health-related research concerned a number of areas of great importance to health provision and practitioners of health care. The first contribution by Alan Dilani was on the salutogenic approach to health infrastructure in the search for a healthy society. Here health is defined as a state of complete physical, psychological and social well-being and not only absence of illness. The focus is on promotion of and prevention in health with limited resources which leads to strong positive effects on the wellbeing of individuals. The salutogenic approach promotes health and prevents non-communicable disease by creating the context of healthy life style.

A second research presentation, authored by Sultan Cetiner and Sertip Zangana, attempted to apply medical education, training and development in the UK system to Kurdistan. They suggested the UK medical program as a model for Kurdistan. The new teaching and research promotion systems could serve as a blue print for development in Kurdistan’s medical educational and health care systems. The years of war has displaced a large number of medical personnel with no prospect of repatriation. In order to utilize their capacity, Deiry F. Kader research involved surgical voluntary work in Kurdistan organized and financed by charity organization. During five visits in 18 months conducted more than 200 surgical procedures and patient treatments.

In another paper Prasad Godbole elaborated on the experiences of pioneer health care in Kurdistan. His visit aimed at providing an overview of existing processes, improvements that can be made and to provide surgical expertise for children. The suggested improvements have enhanced the local service capacity.

The session on the challenges of mental and social health and prevention of disease dealt with a presentation by Kamal Artin on a comparative analysis of individual versus society. The role of psychiatry among the medical and social sciences was also discussed. He

clarified the role of physicians, social scientists and psychiatrists and the dysfunctions in organ, society, and brain and mind, respectively. He explained how the latter result in traumatic experiences and had its origin in the effect produced by oppression.

The issues of child and adolescent mental health in Kurdistan were discussed by Abdulbaghi Ahmad. The process and outcome of the establishment of an academic unit specialized in child mental health education and research was described. The increasing public awareness combined with the rapid social transition in Kurdistan has led to a new demand in this area.

Ata Ghaderi's research dealt with the design of an effective healthcare system to promote health and prevent illness instead of only treating severe diseases. He explained how the emphasis should be on the medical and social health care among the most neglected areas in the Kurdistan region which require special attention to create a better balance in the sector. Prevention interventions should be integrated into the health care system to build a sustainable and cost-effective system that promotes health and prevents illness.

Abdulkadir H. Hasan discussed his experience and need for a breast cancer screening program in Kurdistan. He explained that there is no formal cancer registry in Kurdistan which limits the knowledge about its prevalence. Due to the rising incidence, he suggested the introduction of a screening program to enable satisfactory treatment and reduce suffering. Society is obliged to reward women with their basic rights given their struggle during the past dark years.

B. Economy business and management

Economy and business are important issues that concern the realities of economic development in the Kurdistan region. Almas Heshmati discussed the economy from the perspectives of a sustainable economic development where quality of education, developmental government plan and policies, skilled labor, supportive public sector and infrastructures play a major role in the development of manufacturing, services and agriculture and creation of jobs and welfare. The gap between education produced and skilled required has increased dependency of the region to foreign labor. A lack of basic statistics and transparency limits quantification of indicators of economic progress in the region.

Saman Shali discussed the issue of risk and its assessment in doing business in Kurdistan which seem to be an important factor in the context of attracting foreign capital, skill, management and technology. The shared oil revenues, tariffs, foreign direct investment and international airports have contributed to the formation of a stable government, security, economic support for its citizens and growth in investment. Shali provided recommendations on what the regional government needs to do from a business standpoint to resurrect the Kurdistan economic region.

C. Education and nation-building

Serwan Baban focused on the role of KRG higher education institutions in the process of nation-building. According to Baban, the current old system of higher education, with a curriculum designed to produce civil servants without taking in consideration the evolving market needs and competition, is rather outdated. He recommended the modernization of

higher education institutions in terms of vision, mission, curriculum, teaching methods, research and training and university management to increase quality and capacity of human capital to play a direct role in the process of nation-building and wealth creation.

Currently there is lack of a well-defined policy to embrace the intellectual capacity of the Kurdish Diaspora leading to miss utilization of this resource. A public management perspective was used by Heja Sindi to investigate the challenges and potentials of developing a Kurdistan Diaspora intellectual model and policy. He suggested research to identify potentials and challenges experienced, and to draft a policy paper on how to attract and sustain the Diaspora capacity and intellectual capital. The changing character of Kurdish Diaspora from victim Diaspora to the practice of long distance nationalism and trans-border citizenship was presented by Khaled Khayati. He used the Swedish Diaspora as a successful example of transmuting past to future where the past struggles for survival are replaced with development efforts. He suggested the establishment of a Diaspora Ministry or another alternative structure with similar tasks.

D. Politics and governance

Politics and governance is an area that proportionally more Kurdish researchers show interest in. The EU-Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) and its significance for Kurdish question in Turkey by Karianne Westrheim was one key presentation at the Congress. The aim is to lobby for Turkish accession to the EU as a way to help solve the Kurdish problem in Turkey. This would necessitate Turkey's granting full political, social, economic, cultural, and education rights to its population including the Kurds. EUTCC monitors Turkey's full compliance with the accession criteria.

Hemin Hawrami focused on the current political situation of Kurdistan within the Middle East. He discussed the strategic landscape of the region and the position of the KDP in relation to the current developments and how Kurds should realize the opportunities and take action with the interest of our nation. He also shed light on the implications of a possible future American withdrawal from Iraq and the security vacuum it would create. This would include the transitional period from dictatorship to democracy, the process of nation building and the current tense, political situation with the Iraqi government and its tendency towards totalitarianism. He also discussed the relations with neighboring countries like Turkey and Iran with whom the KRG has a positive political, commercial and cultural bilateral relationship. He stressed that the KRG believe that military solutions and armed struggle are not viable solutions. He also discussed important issues of counter terrorism, radicalism, democracy and energy security as well as educated Kurds abroad.

Taha Barwary talked about his experience in the Nordic countries as representative of the KRG. He described this successful experience, the challenges and opportunities. Among his most successful achievement was the promising cooperation between the Nordic states and the KRG in the areas of politics, education, capacity building, woman rights and culture. The concept of a Kurdish Gala and reaching out to the Kurdish youth through a network were among the most successful projects. The office and its activities have enabled even more bilateral relations and policy exchanges than were previously possible.

The issue of the future of Kurdistan in the Middle East received much attention. Marianna Charountaki focused on the US-Kurdish relations. She started from the hypothesis about

whether a relation exists and with whom, whether US has developed any Kurdish policy, and the stages of any observed inter-relation. She paid special attention to the role of the Kurds as a non-state actor in their relations and explored the Kurds impact on regional and international politics. She explained that the Kurds as a player in the region are a significant force behind the implementation of US foreign policy strategy in the region.

E. Struggle for freedom and human rights

Several researchers emphasized the struggle for freedom and human rights among others, with the perspective of a multi-faceted problem requiring a single answer by Peter Herrmann. In his view, the challenge in finding an urgently needed answer on the violation of human rights has to focus on fully establishing and securing the rights of a people and their right to self-determination – not just in an individualistic perspective. Instead, self-determination means the right of a people to determine their genuinely own understanding of the role it wants to play in the global economy.

Fereydoon Rahmani and Media Royan presented two case studies: the first on an oral history project on Kurdish struggle and the second on Kurdish Diaspora elite. Rahmani explained that one of the most important methods of research and analysis in social sciences and history is the use of oral history by collecting and studying information and factual materials or narrations. Implementing such a model of analysis on the Kurdish politics and history could be of a great importance concerning research on Kurds and Kurdistan, as well as on related events about the Kurdish struggle for freedom and democracy. He proposed and established a working committee to prepare a small media center that would interview/record long-time members, activists and old Peshmargas of different Kurdish organizations and political parties.

Media Royan mentioned that while in the past the main focus of migration studies was the investigation of influences of immigrants on the host society and their integration into the country of settlement, nowadays the trans-nationalism studies put much more emphasis on the effects of living in Diaspora on the origin society and the trans-border citizenship. She investigated the characteristics that mean the Kurdish elites' contribution in Iraqi Kurdistan is categorized as transnational practice and how the specificity of the Swedish political context influences the trans-national practices among Kurdish Diaspora.

Gissou Nia's presentation concerned the challenges in documenting human rights violations against Kurdish populations and the potential legal avenues for redress. These challenges are attributed to: (i) the unique geographical and political status of the Kurds in the region; (ii) cultural practices stemming from a history of oppression; and (iii) linguistic challenges that make a shared common history difficult to record in a credible and consistent manner. She suggested that in addition to information-gathering, another important component of protecting the rights of the Kurdish minority populations in the transitioning states of the Middle East region is adequate representation and participation in transitional justice mechanisms, international criminal proceedings, and other potential avenues for legal redress under principles of "universality" in national jurisdictions.

The research on the role of women in Kurdish society received much attention. The role of Kurdish women in the struggle for freedom and their impact in the contemporary Kurdish

society was investigated by Soheila Ghaderi. Education plays a role in the Kurdish national movement and its principal aim is the creation of an independent Kurdish State. The women, as mothers and teachers, became the agents of transmission of the Kurdish language to the children. The realization of Kurdistan is the greatest challenge facing the Kurds, while Kurdish women are facing several levels of oppression. The recent events in the Arab countries have shown that in the Islamic and traditional societies, there is no place for women and their claim for equal rights. If Kurds decide to be part of the international democratic society, the new challenge for them is to recognize women rights on the basis of universal values.

F. Brand, culture and music

In an interesting view, Deborah Morgan-Jones introduced the idea of a Greater Kurdistan and the consolidation of national identity through a strategic brand- building program. Brand components being people as the greatest asset and culture, tradition, history, beliefs, vision, values, mission and resources forming the remainder. Jones asks if a ‘locally adjusted’ Kurdistan as an overall brand with sub-brands was possible.

Currently a Nation within Nations already owns distinctive identities. Contemporary styles will be necessary to implement the shared vision. Internal buy in is the foundation of a robust brand. External launch would aim to attract exceptional professionals, employees, educationalists, consultants, advisors, inward and external investment. Tourism will be a major economic factor and marketing opportunity to secure growth and build identity in the global marketplace.

Mukadder Baran presented a case study on the impact of sociolinguistics on scientific education in the city of Hakkari. She focused on the effects of bilingualism inside a monolingual education system on the success of students. She conducted fieldwork in Hakkari where the bilingual situation is the most visible. The objective was to obtain information on the high school students' demographic and socioeconomic background, as well as what their mother tongue was and to what extent they could be considered – and indeed considered themselves bilinguals. She investigated whether the developments of a regional language lead to a cultural divide and its consequence for participation and democracy.

Badirkhan Sindi emphasized the impact of foreign regimes on Kurdish culture and education in Kurdistan. Dividing the Kurdish Nation in parts has significantly affected Kurdish culture and education, in which both were accordingly divided into four different segments. This has consequently led the Kurds to suffer from being in four different and deformed societies. The division of Kurdistan, hence ruled by four foreign regimes, resulted in a number of problems related to language. He proposed a strategy with eight items to overcome the limitations engendered. The first is to establish a higher commission responsible for implementing a rescuing strategy.

Ava Homa discussed her experience from recovery through creative expression. Her interest is in using structured writing to overcome trauma and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Painting, music and handicrafts have proven to help reduce anxiety and promote positive psychological emotions. By stimulating the mind, creative expression creates pleasure and satisfaction in the patrons. After years of being exposed to violence--

Including the unearthing mass graves, witnessing loved ones die in a chemical attack or being abducted by government soldiers -- the surviving but traumatized Kurds need creative expressions in form of literature and art to help youth and adult equally to recover from stressful experiences. Adding creative expression workshops to Kurdistan schools, libraries and community centers help transform lives, instill happiness and enrich Kurdish art and culture.

Finally, culture and music were given a prominent place and attracted attention. The impact of culture in Kurdish society was discussed by Mazhar Khaleghi. Kaleghi has recorded more than 150 pieces of Kurdish folk melodies with several types of orchestras, such as the Tehran Symphonic, Cultural Ministry and the Radio Tehran Orchestras.

After going into exile, Mazhar continued working with music and gave his oppressed nation hope and happiness in the hardest of times. After the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government, he returned to Kurdistan and founded the Kurdish Heritage Institute where he is currently working with the culture of Kurdish people. Khaleghi discussed the impact of culture and music in Kurdish society. From a historical perspective, he described how music communicates Kurdish history and how we can use our culture as a communication tool to express our value and identity as Kurds worldwide. He ended the sessions with a beautiful and moving video with music and dance that touched all the delegates. It was a highlight of the Congress.

4. Summary of recommendations for the WKC

“Many Kurdish people would have been proud to have witnessed the events of the 1st World Kurdish Congress. The aspirations of Kurdish people from all parts of Kurdistan were further realized as Kurds and non-Kurds brought their talents, knowledge and experience to bear upon the issues that face Kurdistan. It was fascinating to hear from a range of perspectives, from the creative arts, psychology, historical review, political science, health and education; all considering the question of how Kurdistan can become a united, stable and progressive society. It was very apparent that the road towards realizing this vision is long and fraught with difficulties, but the Congress has proved to be another important step on that journey. Without „hope“ it is hard to embark on any great endeavour, so it was deeply satisfying to see how the Congress played its part in fanning the flames of hope once again.”

Samuel McWhirter, October 11, 2011

One foreign participant told Rudaw, –The presentations and topics of the conference helped us to better understand the conditions in Kurdistan.”

The general view and recommendation, as well as our own experiences, show clearly the success of the 1st Kurdish World Congress. However, due to the lack of financial resources, limited time and staff resources, we could not reach our expectation in terms of logistic and organization. Nevertheless, we believe strongly that the quality of scientific presentations was very high, which contributed to the success of the Congress.

We have received many good suggestions and recommendations from the delegates regarding organizational structure, as well as an action plan and lessons learned from this initial Congress. We need to build up trust and collaboration tools to involve everyone who shares our value and supports us in our mission.

We feel we are heading in the right direction. Despite some shortcomings, there is opportunity for improvement. There is also a need to establish strong subgroups within the different fields that were touched upon during the Congress. This is very important and we need to work together to put in place these subgroups in different fields of research.

We will not limit our work to only one Congress per year. We will be continually working with the Diaspora as the intellectual capital of our people and learn from the World Jewish Congress how to manage and be efficient for the betterment of our people in science and culture and as active lobbyists in the modern Google society!

We do not want to have separate sessions, as suggested by some delegates, since we believe that an interdisciplinary Congress helps to inform our people. We learn from each other, from the different backgrounds and scientific approaches, we learn by exchanging knowledge and information which helps to better understand the complex problems of our society and provide better understanding and solutions.

We need to:

- Develop a forum of smaller groups on general topics such as Health, Education, Social Justice, Economy, and Culture. This will be important and beneficial in order to consolidate opinions on a particular issue, with the expectation of presenting some concrete proposals by the experts in the subjects with clear statements and recommendation.
- Introduce more informal discussion times over coffee. Networking with those who would like to discuss the topics they presented with them. This might be improved in the future by having more time during the coffee break and lunch. This could be easily achieved in the future with better logistic support and a professional Congress staff in the same place!
- Include translation into Kurdish since many could not follow well the discussion and presentation. And finally, clear financial support would greatly aid the Congress staff in creating and putting together future Congress sessions, to more efficiently perform this important task, without spending time searching for the necessary financial support.

5. Next Congress

The 2nd World Kurdish Congress is scheduled to be held in **Copenhagen, October 11-14, 2012**. The first announcement and call for papers will be available soon at: <http://ww.kurdishcongress.org> and for additional information please contact us at: info@kurdishcongress.org. We encourage the researchers, MSc and PhD students to prepare their papers for submission to the next Congress, WKC2012.

6. Call for Papers for publication in edited WKC2011 Volume

A Call for Papers for publication in an edited WKC2011 has been released. The paper presenters are informed about the opportunity to publish an edited volume by an

international academic publisher which will serve as the basis for a series of books to be published from the Annual World Kurdish Congress.

7. Books displayed at the Congress

The Economy of Southern Kurdistan by Almas Heshmati, NOVA Science Publishers, 2010. This book covers certain aspects regarding the economy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These include the labor market policy concerning different public and private employment programs; the gap between education produced and skills demanded for development; the economic development plan and policy of the regional government; reconstruction and development of capacity building for the region; the highly desired inflow of foreign direct investment to the region and adoption of an industrial development model and industrial policy of the region.

Integrated Water Resources Management in Kurdistan Region by Almas Heshmati, NOVA Science Publishers, 2009. This book examines the current economic practices of water management in the Southern Kurdistan Region and suggests ways to change environmental conditions to encourage the region's decision-makers to pursue sustainable resource development through interstate and within Kurdistan Region KRG-consumers' co-operation.

The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945, by Marianna Charountaki, Routledge, 2010. It investigates the role of the Kurds in US foreign policy from World War II until the Iraqi War (March 2003) and its aftermath. This book provides a detailed survey and analysis of US –Kurdish relations and their interaction with domestic, regional and global politics. Using the Kurdish issue to explore the nature of the engagement between international powers and weaker non-state entities, the author analyses the existence of an interactive US relationship with the Kurds of Iraq.”

The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan by Carol Prunhuber, 2010. Ava Homa finds this book more than a biography; it offers deep insight into a nation and an ethnic group's history. Poignant and intelligent, this engaging book focuses on the inspiring life of one of the most influential Kurdish political leaders, General Secretary of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou.