

Kurdish National Congress of North America
Proceedings - First Conference
August 27-28, 1988
Ann Arbor, MI USA.

A Message from the Chairman, Asad Khailany

The encouragement and moral support which we have received from Kurdish people here and abroad for establishing the Kurdish National Congress of North America is very hopeful and is a reflection of the burning desire of Kurdish people here and abroad to have an umbrella organization to represent all Kurds in North America. The idea of creating such an organization is not new. On many occasions numerous fellow Kurds pointed out the need for having such an organization. It was the encouragement of all these fellow Kurds that gave me the moral support to work to bring KNC into existence.

In the middle of July, 1988 a preparatory committee was formed to arrange and organize a Kurdish National Meeting to study the possibility of creating a Kurdish umbrella organization. The committee members were: Dr. Asad Khailany, Dr. Ibrahim Salih, Dr. Asfandiar Shukri, Dr. Ahmed Uthman, Mr. Jalal Shaban, Professor Wafa Khorshid, and Mr. Abdul Haleem Mostafa. Each member worked very hard to organize the agenda and conference which was held on August 27 - 28 at the Howard Johnson Inn, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Without their dedication, it would have been impossible to have such a successful conference.

Fifty-five delegates came from many parts of the U.S. and Canada and attended the conference which lasted for two days. In a very democratic environment at this historic meeting, the Kurdish National Congress of North America was born to become an umbrella organization to represent Kurds in the U.S. and Canada. An executive committee was elected to work to establish the organization as a non-profit corporation and to organize the next national meeting which will be held between March 19 - 21, 1989 in Washington, D.C. I encourage all the Kurds to attend this next important and historic meeting. The chairman for the next meeting is Kak Omar Halmat. Please contact him if you have an idea, suggestions, or proposals to make the next meeting a successful one.

As a final note I would like to thank my wife Laura Khailany for her dedication and hard work and all the time she devoted to the success of the conference, and to summarize and type the proceedings.

Note:

The following is an edited and summarized version of the discussions which took place at the first meeting of the Kurdish National Congress of North America on August 27 - 28, 1988 in Ann Arbor,

Michigan. If any person's words have been omitted or have been misrepresented here, I sincerely apologize for the error.

Laura Khailany

Session 1

Opening Remarks

Chair: Omar Halmat

Keynote Speech: Dr. Asad Khailany

The 55 delegates here come from all parts of Kurdistan: Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. There is a need for an umbrella organization for Kurdish people in the U.S. and Canada. For example, the Turkish lobby collected \$175,000 from American Turks last year. There is a need for an effective organization to speak on behalf of all Kurds in the U.S. and Canada, that has no specific ideology, and whose goal is to defend and promote Kurdish interests in the United States and Canada. The name to be chosen must be inoffensive. If such an organization is to be created, in my opinion, it should have the following characteristics. These represent my opinion only, just as each person present represents his own opinion only.

- 1) The organization should be non-profit.
- 2) A committee should be formed to legally establish the organization.
- 3) The organization should have an office and a full-time employee, and should be supported financially by the members.

Goals:

- 1) To defend and promote Kurdish interests.
- 2) To make itself known to the U.S. Government, U.S. Congress, United Nations Canadian Government, Canadian Parliament, and the news media.
- 3) Work to establish an immigration quota for Kurdish people and help newly arrived Kurdish immigrants.
- 4) Encourage Kurdish young people to study and help find admission for Kurdish students at colleges and universities and help them complete their studies.
- 5) Establish grants to universities for master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations on the Kurdish problem, Kurdish human rights, Kurdish history, Kurdish language, art, and music, etc.
- 6) Publish a Kurdish journal, scientifically respected, whose articles are refereed.
- 7) Publish a Kurdish newsletter.
- 8) Support social functions, such as a yearly campout and Newroz party.
- 9) Support the Kurdish Library.
- 10) Help find jobs and business opportunities for Kurdish people.

Funding:

- 1) To be effective, an annual budget of \$100,000 is necessary. Those who cannot donate money should donate their time.
- 2) The organization should become self-sufficient, through investments or matching funds from corporations, for example. A fund-raising company could be hired.
- 3) Kurds should specify in their will that a portion of their estate should go to this organization.

This meeting will be held in a democratic environment. Every person has the right to express his/her opinion.

Kurdistan - Iran: Ardeshir Amdjadi was slated to speak, but suffered an automobile accident and was unable to attend. Hadi Jalali kindly agreed to speak.

The times are very bad for the Kurds. There has been a lack of reporting the events in the West, even after Halabja. I agree with the need for such an organization. This meeting will be the first step as a voice for Kurds in the United States and Canada. The Kurds should learn from history. Division does not produce any results. The Kurds have been divided since the 19th century. Remember the British slogan: Divide and Rule. The Kurds have been fighting each other rather than the enemy. There is a need for unity. The success or failure of this meeting depends on every individual. We must relay the message to those who couldn't attend, and encourage all to attend the next meeting so that it will be an even bigger gathering. We must encourage all Kurds to participate.

Kurdistan - Turkey: Suleyman Kurtir

Many Muslim organizations have not dealt with the problems of the people in the Middle East. There is a strong Islamic movement in Turkish Kurdistan. Kurds there have begun scholarly projects in an effort to remove the Kamalist movement. Kurds in Turkey are turning back to Islam, whereas in the past they had been accused of being Communists, or other non-believers. The Kurds in Turkey are contributing to Islam because they have been able to influence the Turkish government to become more Islamic in very recent times.

Kurdistan - Iraq : Dr. Ahmed Uthman

The blame for the current disaster in Kurdistan must be placed not only on the governments involved, but on the Kurdish leadership, who underestimated the strength of the enemy and overestimated the strength of the Kurds. They have settled for paper promises or sided with one government or another to be sacrificed later. Now Khomeini's regime has extracted itself from the war and left the Kurds to the mercy of Saddam Hussain. The Kurdish refugees now in Turkey are forced to rely on a government that has shown no respect for the Kurds. The leadership of the Kurds must be held accountable for what happens. A whole generation of children has grown up as illiterates. There are three ways open:

- 1) Lay down arms, give up the armed struggle, join other civilian groups to bring down

the Baathists, who are hurting Arabs, too.

2) Unify all Kurds from all countries under one leadership.

3) Never settle for "paper" autonomy.

The future of the Kurds relies on the educated leadership abroad. They are the ones who can influence Western governments. Muslim governments have never protested on behalf of the Kurds. Rifles and illiteracy are no defense to tanks, airplanes and chemical weapons. Kurds in the U.S. and Canada must become full participants in the community life where they live, including politics. They must educate their children to be good citizens, because some day they may be senators or in some other position to help the Kurds.

A Kurdish Medical Association has been formed so that Kurdish doctors can get to know each other, help Kurds coming to the U.S. to study medicine and become licensed, and to establish contacts with the American Red Cross, Amnesty International, and Physicians for Human Rights. They have attempted unsuccessfully to get into Iraq to help the Kurds there who have suffered chemical gas attacks. Each Kurd should examine the way he lives. Our names are Arab or Islamic, but we must establish our Kurdish identity. It is unfortunate that it took an event like Halabja to make the plight of the Kurd known. Our publications should be made in English so that others may know about Kurds. I also affirm the need for such an umbrella organization. The events we hold, such as a national Newroz can attract media attention. There is a need for unity. If you work for a political party, it is important that it support the Kurds, not just the leadership of the party. We all need to work hard against our enemies.

Kurdistan - Syria: : Abdul Haleem Mostafa

The Kurds in Syria number about 3 million. During the 50's, 60's, and 70's, they followed the leadership of Mustafa Barzani of Iraq. During the 80's there has been a shift to the PKK and the PIK (Islamic party). The Islamic movement among Kurds is getting strong. There must be a stronger effort to bring Kurdish Islamic youths to the Kurdish movement rather than letting them go to Arab Islamic movements or Khomeini's movement. There is no Islamic government, even Iran, because the Kurds do not have their rights. Khomeini has cheated the Kurds. The mosques in Kurdistan are filled with young people who are being used by the Islamic movement for their own people. How to deal with other Muslims? Many Kurds in Syria don't have citizenship. A so-called Green Belt has been created by Syria to evacuate Kurds who live along the Turkish and Iraqi border and resettle Arabs in their place. There should be a democratic government in Syria to give the rights to all people. We must put all our efforts together and abandon back-biting, despite the differences of all.

Session 2

Goals of the Organization

Chair: Dr. Najmaldin Karim

The goals of the organization were outlined in Asad Khailany's keynote speech. The following goals 1 through 5 were discussed and approved. However, we regret that this section of Session 2 was not recorded on tape, therefore, the discussion surrounding each goal could not be presented in these Proceedings.

1. To defend and promote Kurdish interests.
2. To make itself known to the U.S. Government, U.S. Congress, United Nations, Canadian Government, Canadian Parliament, and U.S. news media.
3. To work to establish an immigration quota for Kurdish people and help newly arrived Kurdish immigrants.
4. Encourage Kurdish young people to study and help find admission for Kurdish students at colleges and universities and help them complete their studies.
5. Establish grants to universities for master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations on the Kurdish problem, Kurdish human rights, Kurdish history, Kurdish language, art and music, etc.

The discussion of the following goals was recorded and has been summarized as follows:

6. To publish a newsletter from this organization.
7. To publish a Kurdish Journal, a scientific journal containing refereed articles on the politics and topics of Kurds. It would be written for the U.S. scholarly community. Because of the few numbers of scholars who could contribute, this goal was postponed to a later time when the organization is better established.
8. To create and maintain a Kurdish Directory, which would contain the names of Kurds in North America and organizations related to the Kurds in North America.
9. To encourage the creation, support, and maintenance of Kurdish libraries. The Kurdish Libraries themselves should disseminate information about their contents.
10. To create a Kurdish Institute, which would be a place for Kurdish studies, and which could participate in scholarly exchange with universities. This goal, like No. 7, was postponed to a later time when the organization is better established.
11. To encourage and sponsor social gatherings, especially an annual Newroz celebration. It was also proposed that there be gatherings on Muslim feast days, and that there be a Martyr's Day. A Kurdish camping gathering would also fall under this goal.
12. To help find jobs for Kurdish people and promote business opportunities for them. (This discussion was not recorded.)
13. To propose proper suggestions to help our people in Kurdistan. This goal was added to the original list after a very lengthy discussion and which passed by a vote of 22 in favor, 15 against. The intent is to be able to influence events in Kurdistan while maintaining the perspective of being abroad. It was mentioned that the non-profit status of this organization may be affected depending upon how this goal is worded, and that the advice of a lawyer will be needed when drawing up the documents to register the organization.

14. To establish cordial relationships with Kurdish organizations and all other organizations which support Kurdish interests.

Session 3

Budget, Funding and Establishment of the Organization

Chair: Dr. Asfandiar Shukri

The first topic of discussion for this session was the discussion of ways to financially support the organization. The following ways to support the organization were suggested:

1. Create a for-profit corporation which is separate from this organization, which would sell shares to Kurds, start a business, employ Kurds, and whose profit would be shared 50% with the organization. The importance of good management and having business-minded people run the company was mentioned, and also that there was some risk of losing money.
2. Donations or membership dues from the members was another way suggested to raise money. The short term need for initial capital was contrasted with the long term goal of sustaining the money needed to run the organization.
3. Opening a Kurdish Heritage Museum or travelling exhibit was another method suggested for raising money. Contributions from Americans for this project could be solicited. There could be an art gallery of works by Kurdish artists, a music section, and other aspects of Kurdish culture could be displayed.
4. Fundraising events like a raffle or car washes could be used to raise money.

It was generally agreed that enough money must be raised to build a solid base, and that then there could be other methods to raise additional money, especially on an ongoing basis. It was decided that an annual membership fee be set at \$120, (student annual fee \$25). Students could donate their time as well. No money should be collected until the organization is legally established. Voluntary amounts beyond the minimum membership fee would be up to the individual. Large contributions, like \$5000 by some individuals who can afford it may be necessary as seed money to start the organization. The penalty for not paying the membership dues would be that the individual would lose voting privileges. Some sort of public relations campaign would be necessary to motivate the members to donate more money after the initial establishment of the organization.

The second topic discussed was the establishment of the organization itself. It was decided to create a non-profit corporation for two reasons:

1. The organization could gain tax-exempt status, which means that persons who contribute to it could deduct the amount from their income tax due.
2. The officers of the corporation could not be held personally liable for suits filed against the corporation

Three suggestions were proposed regarding where the corporation should be located.

1. The headquarters should be in Washington, D.C. or New York City, the center of government organizations and the news media.
2. The headquarters should be located where the highest concentration of Kurds live.
3. The headquarters should be established in Michigan because a special minority status may be approved for persons from the Middle East, and this may benefit the corporation.

After a lengthy discussion, the following motion was passed:

To create a non-profit corporation to be registered in the State of Michigan, and to have an office in the Washington, D.C. area.

The third topic of discussion was the selection of a name for the organization. The following names were suggested:

Kurdish National Congress of North America
Kurdish American Brotherhood
United Kurdish Congress of North America
Kurdish Community in U.S.A. and Canada
Kurdistan
North American Kurdish Foundation
North American Kurdish Association
Kurdish Congress for Survival
United Kurdistan Organization
Kurdish National Association

The name "Kurdish National Congress of North America" was chosen by vote. The name "North American Kurdish Foundation" was chosen as a backup if for some reason the first name could not be legally used.

The fourth topic of discussion was the creation of a committee to write the proposed by-laws for the organization, to register the corporation, to generally do whatever is necessary to bring the corporation into existence, to contact other Kurds and other Kurdish organizations to bring them into the organization, and to prepare for the next meeting. The committee would have to meet in the near future to begin these tasks. The make-up of such a committee was discussed at some length. Several points considered were that the members of the committee should come from each part of Kurdistan, that there should be an odd number of members to break a tie vote if necessary, and that if the members live in somewhat the same geographical area it would make it easier for all of them to come to all of the meetings. It was agreed that the committee should be composed of nine members, ideally two from each area of Kurdistan with one extra, and that at least five must be present to form the by-laws. The individuals nominated represented themselves and not any political party that they might also be a member of. The following individuals were chosen by vote to be members of the committee: Asad Khailany, Firoz Jalili, Asfandiar Shukri, Ahmed Aziz, Omar Halmat, Najmaldin Karim,

Mosaffar Partowman,
Shawbo Saaty, and Ahmed Uthman.

Session 4

Open Discussion of any Topic

Chair: Dr. Ibrahim Salih

We regret that this session was not recorded due to a technical oversight. Some said it was the most interesting session of the conference. We apologize that we could not publish it in the Proceedings. In this session the floor was open and every delegate had the right to come forward and to address the conference and speak on any topic he or she wished. After the chairman of the session opened the floor, a number of delegates came forward and spoke on many interesting topics. Among the speakers were: Abdul Razak Mangouri, Dr. Uthman Baban, Showbo Saaty, Nasreen Jalili, Dr. Mozaffar Partowma, Dr. Dr. Amin Saeed, Mohamad Sinjari, Ghazi Mizori, Tarik Nouri, Salah Aziz, Khasrow Kader, Shamsi Khuda-Feili and Anwar Azwar. We apologize if we missed any speaker's name. All the speakers expressed their satisfaction and happiness to see that the Kurdish National Congress is coming into existence. The speakers asked all fellow Kurds to come forward to support KNC financially, morally and in any other way that is needed. They reminded the audience that Kurds do not have any friends and they emphasized that to defeat the genocidal war which has been declared by the Iraqi regime and the other occupiers of Kurdistan can only be done by Kurdish unity and the Kurdish people themselves.

Session 5

Committee Structure and Next Meeting

Chair: Shawbo Saaty

This session was held on the morning of August 28, 1988. A proposal had been made to the floor the previous session to add two more members to the steering committee to get representation from Syria and Turkey. It was suggested that two from Iraq withdraw from the committee or that those with the least votes withdraw. Others pointed out that why should the members follow the artificial boundaries imposed on Kurdistan, that the members at the conference represent themselves only, and are citizens of Kurdistan. Others said don't change what had already been decided; enlarge the committee instead to include representatives from Syria and Turkey. Some spoke in favor of enlargement because of the need to have enough persons to make up the subcommittees. Others pointed out that there were not enough Kurds from Syria and Turkey at the conference and that the members do not know each other well enough from the different parts of Kurdistan to be able to approve the appointment of other individuals from those areas. Other persons felt that the democratic process should not be tampered with, and that the committee structure and size should remain what was approved at the previous session. Some of the persons who had voted had already left and it wasn't fair to override their decision. At the end, it was agreed that the committee structure and members would not

be changed from what was already approved, but that the bylaws should be written such that the future committee should contain at least one representative from each part of Kurdistan, and if no candidate is available, the position will be left vacant. A concerted effort must be made to bring more persons from all parts of Kurdistan to the next meeting.

The discussion of when and where to hold the next meeting was inadvertently not recorded. However, the decision was taken to hold the next meeting in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with a Newroz celebration on the weekend of March 17 - 19, 1989. Omar Halmat assumed the responsibility to organize the next meeting. There was a request that alcohol not be served.

Closing Session

Resolutions and Announcements

Chair: Dr. Asad Khailany

At this closing session, a number of resolutions were approved and are listed on the following page. It was also suggested that a pamphlet be produced about Kurdish issues as public relations for the American people. The question of whether the names and addresses of conference attendees should be distributed to all other attendees was brought up. It was decided that the names and addresses will remain with the committee. When the Kurdish Directory is ready to be published, each member will be contacted to voluntarily release his name for publication.

An announcement was made that meetings of two organizations would be held the following week: The Islamic Society of North America and the Islamic Friends of North America. It was stated that these two organizations would provide a forum where Kurdish support could be gained.

Omar Halmat announced that he has posters for sale from the Kurdish Relief Society at \$7.00 each.

A1 Fatihah was read on the souls of those who had died for Kurdistan. The meeting was closed with the singing of Ayrrakeeb.

KURDISH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF NORTH AMERICA FIRST ANNUAL MEETING RESOLUTIONS

1. To create a non-profit corporation to be registered in the State of Michigan, and to have an office in Washington, D.C.

2. The name of the organization will be: Kurdish National Congress of North America.

3. The annual membership fee shall be \$25 for full-time students and \$120 for non-students, which will entitle the member for voting.

4. A committee of nine members is formed to establish the organization legally, write the bylaws, and prepare for the next meeting.

5. To be sent to the U.N. and Arab League:

On August 27 - 28, 1988, sixty delegates attended the first meeting of the Kurdish National Congress of North America in Ann Arbor, Michigan and unanimously passed the following resolution: U.N. Resolution 598 regarding the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq makes no mention of the Kurdish people and contains no guarantee of Kurdish rights. There will be no peace unless the rights of the Kurds are recognized and respected. The Iraqi government has taken advantage of the ceasefire and has mounted a large offensive against the Kurdish people in Iraq using all of its remaining arsenal including internationally prohibited chemical weapons. At the time of this meeting, approximately 150,000 civilians had been encircled in the Badinan area of Iraq and are in danger of complete annihilation. The survival of these people is in extreme danger. We ask your good offices to protect the lives of these people, and to ensure that the rights of all the Kurds are recognized to establish a just and lasting peace in the area. We further ask that an impartial third party be appointed to represent the interests of the Kurdish people in the peace talks between Iran and Iraq.

6. To be sent to the Islamic Mission of the U.N:

U.N. Resolution 598 regarding the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq makes no mention of the Kurdish people and contains no guarantee of Kurdish rights. There will be no peace unless the rights of the Kurds are recognized and respected. As an organization you have failed to condemn the atrocities being committed against your fellow Muslims, the Kurds, and by your silence, seem to imply your support of those very actions which violate the most basic principles of Islam. The Iraqi government has taken advantage of the ceasefire and has mounted a large offensive against the Kurdish people in Iraq using all of its remaining arsenal including internationally prohibited chemical weapons. At the time of this meeting, approximately 150,000 civilians had been encircled in the Badinan area of Iraq and are in danger of complete annihilation. The survival of these people is in extreme danger. We ask your good offices to protect the lives of these people, and to ensure that the rights of all the Kurds are recognized to establish a just and lasting peace in the area. We further ask that an impartial third party be appointed to represent the interests of the Kurdish people in the peace talks between Iran and Iraq.

7. We the Kurdish people in the U.S. and Canada, condemn injustice against the Kurds in all sections of Kurdistan, particularly the Ba'athist repression and genocide against Kurdistan of Iraq, and support the ongoing struggle there.

8. We feel that the Kurds cannot function in their full capacity unless all the governments recognize the dire need for a full development of the sections of Kurdistan and relax

every rule that discriminates against the Kurds.

9. We, the Kurds of U.S. and Canada, condemn the continuous use of chemical warfare against Kurds and Kurdistan.

10. We, the Kurds of U.S. and Canada, demand that all governments involved in Kurdistan respect the national identity of the Kurds as expressed through the religion of Islam, Kurdish language and the cultural heritage of our people.

11. The future Board of the Kurdish National Congress of North America should contain at least one representative from each part of Kurdistan.

12. The next meeting of the Kurdish National Congress of North America will be held in Washington, D.C. on March 18 - 19, 1989. The chairman of the meeting will be Omar Halmat.

13. The steering committee shall work with Kurdish artists to ask their help to create a Kurdish poster or posters to reflect the Kurdish national struggle and interests, and to create an emblem for the Kurdish National Congress of North America.