

OPEN LETTER TO HONORABLE NELSON MANDELA

Honorable Nelson Mandela
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December 31, 2004

Dear Mr. Mandela

The Kurdish National Congress of North America is an umbrella organization concerned with justice, democracy, and human rights for Kurdish people around the world. We request your support in recognition, and appeal for your attention in regards to the institutional racism prevalent in the Middle East against Kurds even at a time when the word *democracy* is being used in the same sentence as the future of Kurds.

As the most well known and well respected advocate for human rights in the last and present centuries and as a man of compassion and principle, we are hoping that with your appeal to the world community on the issue of Kurdish human rights, continuous atrocities against Kurds may be exposed and examined. Kurds have suffered and continue to be the object of the most outrageous human rights violations today. These human rights violations are sanctioned by current governments and many before them and have deep roots in ideologies such as Ba'athism, Kamalism, and others, which consider Kurds an inferior race.

In the 1960s Arab Ultra-Nationalist ideologists of the Ba'ath Party, much like the white minority in South Africa, documented their hateful theories trying to scientifically prove that Kurds are void of human civilization. They set out to explain *anthropological* considerations including: *the Kurdish people are a people without history or civilization or language or even definite ethnic origin of their own. Their only characteristics are those shaped by force, destructive power and violence, characteristics which are, by the way, inherent in all mountain populations.* In 1963 a twelve-step plan was published and put into place that included, but not limited to, the policies of dispersion, depriving Kurds of any education, divide and rule, cordon, colonization, non-Kurdish settlement and arming of settlers. Implementation of these policies in Iraq and Syria climaxed in the late 1980s when over 300 chemical bombs were dropped on Kurdistan and concluded with Halabja where an entire city was attacked, resulting in 10,000 deaths and injuries that are still continuing in the newborn disfigured Kurdish children in Halabja. The Anfal campaign (ethnic cleansing) of the late 1980s resulted in 200,000 deaths of innocent people. Those mass graves are being excavated today.

Turkish governments have been engaged in much the same activities based on theories that try to prove the lack of a national identity of Kurds. The Kurdish population was called *mountain Turks* and provisions were put into Turkish laws depriving Kurds of the most basic human rights including a ban on Kurdish names. Turkish regimes destroyed 4000 Kurdish villages, often giving the inhabitants 30 minutes of warning in early dawn before their homes were blown up and reduced to rubble. Many children and elderly died in the mountainous region before they ever made it to central parts of Turkey where they were supposed to be assimilated. The ones who made it found themselves in slums with no education or survival skills required for life in big cities. Rape of Kurdish women by Turkish police is so widespread that when a human rights organization registered women's complaints in Istanbul, over 80 percent of the abused were Kurds; this in a city where Kurds make up less than 20 percent of the population.

In Iran, the Kurdish language is banned from schools and nationalist aspirations of individual Kurds are answered by death. Even exiled Kurdish leaders such as Qasemloo and Sharaf Kandi - the heads of the Kurdish Democratic Party - were not immune and were gunned down by Iranian government agents in Europe. The only crime in Iran today that does not require a trial and is dealt with swiftly by execution is Kurdish Nationalism. Only two months after the Iranian revolution a Jihad was declared against the Kurdish people; an unprecedented move since the majority of Kurds are Muslims. The Iranian Army continued this "jihad", systematically bombing its own Kurdish villages and towns during the Iran/Iraq war under the pretext of fighting Iraq.

The Kurdish National Congress of North America is committed to bringing the world's attention to the tragedy of the Kurds and to stopping this silent genocide. In the words of Cornell West, the American intellectual, *Kurds are the Negroes of the Middle East*. We want to change this just as the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa wiped out and shook the basis of institutional racism.

The fall of the Iraqi regime brought some hope that Kurds populating northern Iraq might be able to achieve some level of equality with Arabs in Iraq. Unfortunately the June, 2004 UN Security Council Resolution 1546 did not make any mention of the federal state that had been promised to Kurds in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) the previous year.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurds inside and outside of Iraq mounted a grass roots effort to gather support for a Referendum on their future. Approximately 1,750,000 signatures in support of a Referendum were gathered in a short period, mainly in the safe areas of Kurdistan. The fact that an overwhelming majority of adult Kurds want to have a say in their own future is not a surprise, but the indifference that the officials in Baghdad have shown to this overwhelming cry for justice is.

The United States, its allies and the United Nations have systematically chipped away at the dreams and hopes they raised for a small portion of the world's Kurdish population by bowing once again to Arab nations, to terrorism and to oil interests. They are intent to

keep Iraq as one no matter what the price. A referendum that reflects the true desire of the people does not fit very well in this picture. Kurds have never resorted to terrorism during their century-old struggle for self-determination. We will follow this tradition by appealing to the United Nations and believing in the human race and its capacity for justice.

The Kurdistan Referendum Committee along with the KNC executives delivered 1,732,535 signatures demanding a Referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan to the United Nations offices in New York on December 22, 2004. We appeal to you for your support in asking the United Nations to conduct a referendum in all Kurdish areas of Iraq and respect the will of a people who have been victimized but will not surrender.

I thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue and I look forward to your response.

Truly Yours,

Dr. Saman Shali,
KNC President

Date published: Saturday, January 01, 2005