

## **A Report on the International Conference on Kurdish Women for Peace and Equality**

**By: Soraya Fallah**

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

I am honored to speak today as the Chairperson of the International conference on Kurdish women for Peace and Equality and to have the privilege to give you an update on this historic event. I welcome you all.

On March 8th, 2007 the Kurdish National Congress of North America held its first International Women's Conference in Southern Kurdistan in Erbil (Hewler). The conference was held in Yaki Shubat Hall (House of Ministers) of the KRG to address issues relating to Kurdish women around the globe. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), through the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, sponsored the conference. The conference was held under the leadership of the President of the Kurdistan Region Mr. Masoud Barzani, and was attended by the Speaker of the Parliament Mr. Adnan Mufti, the Governor of Erbil (Hawler) Mr. Nawzad Hadi, Minister of State for Women Affairs Dr Jinan Qasim, Members of the Kurdish Parliaments, Ministers, Government officials, President and Secretaries of the Kurdish parties from Eastern and Western Kurdistan, Kurdish and non-Kurdish NGOs, scholars, researchers, intellectuals and personalities from all parts of Kurdistan.

The conference discussed a variety of subjects and addressed the obstacles facing the advancement of the Kurdish women's movement within every aspect of Kurdish women's lives inside and outside of Kurdistan. The conference created a new debate platform and a fresh look at the problems facing Kurdish women.

The conference indicated in one session and 3 panels. I began the conference with my opening remarks, stating specifically that "panels have been established in the past to discuss the issues that women face in Kurdistan but that does not mean just as many changes have taken place that does not mean that we have no more room or urgency to speak of these issues again. Issues that cost this society valuable lives of incredible women on the account of ignorance and apathy, issues ranging from lack of social support and medical and mental assistance, which has led many women to horrific incidents of self mutilation and suicide, to gender inequality on a macro and micro level, honor killings, polygamy, female genital mutilation, public stoning, to issues of the lack of representation in the power force, lack of opportunity in the educational and economical arena and gender discrimination in the job market.

During the first panel "Role of Women in Politics and Nation Building" by 4 panelists was discussed. Dr. Sharon Faye Linzey Associate Provost of Vanguard University (Costa Mesa, California); Professor of Sociology, Human Rights Lawyer and Kathryn Dovel: Senior student at Vanguard University (Costa Mesa, California) discussed Gender Equality: Kurdish Women and Politics. Their speech was being simultaneously translated

for the non-English speaking audience.

Mrs. Shirin Amedi who was one of the members of the Conference Coordinating committee and part of the Law committee to protect the women rights in Iraq, which is a committee including 48 women organizations network in Iraq, had a speech in the Kurdish language “Beshdari jn le Siaset” (Kurdish women’s political participation) Mrs. Ferda Gemilgul talked about the important role of Kurdish women in the Kurdish Economy. Charmaine Jamieson had a talk about “Using your talent in the Market place” Dr. Saman Shali was moderator at this panel and administrated the panel and discussion in a very democratic manner.

Second Panel, “Women, Religions & Civil Rights”, was moderated by Mrs. Pakhshan Zangana who works in the parliment of Kurdistan. In this panel Simin chaichi poet and writer talked about Art and Women (Jin u Hunar). Hemno Naqshbandi who is the president of organization for freedom of Kurdish women (Rekxrawey azadi jniani Kurd) and board member of Kurdish freedom Party (Party azadi Kurdistan) talked about the role of Kurdish women in independent Kurdistan. Wezera Jalal founder of New Life organization, which works on the Anfal women in Kurdistan, focused on Anfal: Women and Widow. In this panel Venus Shamal member and representative of the Kurdish Human Right watch talked about Women and Democracy and Civil Society Programs. The Third Panel focused on violent behavior, Cruelty and Honor Killing. Mrs. Khanim Latif the manager of Asudeh organization was the moderator of the panel. Mrs. Juliana Ditty Co-Founder and Executive Vice President of Global Operations and Development (GO&D) talked about “Breaking the Cycle of Abuse”. Mrs. Seyran Duran Kurdish woman researcher from Sweden had a research about Honor killing abroad, emphasize on Sweden. Mrs. Kurdistan Daloy who is Project Director of International Human Rights Law Institute in Suleimaniya, presented Kurdistan women after war and their contribution towards peace and Justice.

Mrs. Jula Haji looked at reasons for Honor Killing, she is an active member of Kurdish women Union .

Nyan Bakhtiar, a Kurdish woman activist from the United States, as the MC of the Conference, worked very hard to introduce all presenters in the best way.

The conference was closed by discussion questions and answers. Conference ended with a ceremony where delegations from United States, Iran, Canada, and Europe were able to meet in a friendlier environment.

The conference hall was well prepared by high quality equipments, such as PowerPoint, High quality computers, enough microphone for the panelist, podium, Video, audio system to show movie or documentary and simultaneous translation system which was necessary for this particular event. The local coordinator committee also prepared 500 roses for all attendees, patches, pins, poems in two Kurdish dialects, Fashion Show and a surprising intersession presented by a young woman who is deaf and literate representing the Deaf society.

Conference logo which showed equality and peace symbol in a large size has been designed by Christopher Flick: Graphic Designer at the Art Institute of California (LA).

Hayv Karaman young Kurdish artist from the United State prepared conference art exhibition. The art exhibition was in the center of attendee's attention. Simon Allmen young documentary and movie maker from Hollywood ( Her documentary "Thank you for my eyes" is about Kurdistan ) filmed the conference and our delegation journey. The conference was also covered by the Media, such as Kurd sat, Rojhalat, zagros TV and Arabic news.

I would like to mention some of the sponsors and supporters of this conference, whose help we could not have done without:

- Kurdistan Regional Government,
  - Ministry of State for women Affairs (KRG),
- The following organizations supported the conference.
- Kurdish Human Rights Watch (KHRW),
  - Global Operation and Development (GO&D),
  - Kurdish American Education Society (KAES),
  - ASUDA COMBATING VIOLENCE AGIANST WOMEN SULAYMANIYAM,
  - Coalition of Women from Asia and the Middle East (CWAME),
  - The Women Intercultural Network ( WIN),
  - Women committee of Xabat Organization(Sazmani xebat Komitey jnan,
  - Women's freedom Organization of Kurdistan –Nina
  - Al Shrooq society for Iraqi women, Kirkuk
  - Kurdish National Assembly of Syria ,
  - Kurdish American Committee for Democracy in Iran ,
  - Women Law Network in Kurdistan Region – Iraq , and the
  - Voice of Kurdish- America (VOKRADIO.COM).

Message of goodwill from all different organizations and individuals:

Some US. Senators such as Senator Dianne Feinstein, Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator Kay Bailly and other senators sent messages of good will and success for our conference. Women's Study Department of CSUN, associate professor of women's studies at CSUN Internationally acclaimed Kurdish filmmaker, Bahman Gobadi, TV show, The Oprah Show

Institute for the Study and Prevention of Hate Crimes

American Kurdish Information Network(AKIN)

Kurdish Society and Cultural Center in Tehran ,

Amnesty International Danish branch and London Denmark

Nobel peace prize winner Mrs. Shirin Ebadi

Presidents of Political parties from Eastern Kurdistan such as KDPI (Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran), Komale, Party of Iranian Kurdistan participated at the conference and sent message of success for the conference.

Kurdish women activist form Northern Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Turkey)

All our Kurdish sisters from other countries, all researchers who sent their amazing research about Kurdish women and could not participate.

Please let me go back to how the conference has been prepared and who was involved:

On Jun 2006 Dr. Saman Shali, our deceased colleague **Soraya Serajaddini**, and I discussed the possibility of holding a women's conference in Southern Kurdistan. I prepared the draft of the proposal and created a coordinating committee including all professional and activist in Kurdish issue. The draft of the proposal was distributed among KNC members and other individuals who are involved with women rights and Kurdish issues. During September 2006 to October 30th 2006 feedbacks and inputs were received, and the proposal was finalized after several revisions were made based on those feedbacks.

A brief bio of each Coordinator Committee member and a website for the conference was prepared by Azad Moradina. In power point presentation you will see who were involved). In the proposal I stated that ...The international conference will be "...focused on the role of Kurdish women in politic, science, art, and history inside Kurdistan and in Diaspora as well as marginal participation of women in politics."

The committee prepared letters to prominent Kurdish activists such as Layla Zana which has been hand delivered, Kurdish Parliamentarian Feleknaz, all other Kurdish parities. State Department, Many of US's senates such as Joseph R., Jr. Biden, Barbara Boxer Maria Cantwell ,Saxby Chambliss, Hillary Rodham Clinton,Larry Craig, Jim DeMint, Elizabeth Dole,John Ensign,Dianne Feinstein Judd Gregg, Kay Bailey Hutchison,Edward Kennedy ,John Kerry ,Amy Klobuchar Mary Landrieu Patrick Leahy ,Trent Lott,Claire McCaskill ,Barbara Mikulski ,Lisa Murkowski, Patty Murray,Barack Obama, Debbie Stabenow Many different I- media such as Kurdish media,Kurdnet,Klawrojna,Bruske,and others covered the news about the conference.

kncna.org and.vokradio.com posted all info regarding the conference. Conference Call for papers and press release were translated in many languages, such as Kurdish for our Kurdish sisters in Kurdistan, Turkish for our Kurdish and non-Kurdish sisters in Turkey, and Farsi for those who are living in Eastern Kurdistan and have not had the opportunity to learn their mother language. Invitation and announcement of the conference was sent to more than one hundred important research centers all over the world.

## WHAT MADE THIS CONFERENCE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CONFERENCES HELD IN THE PAST?

- 1- in goal
- 2-establishing ideas
- 3-resolution

1-One of our goals was to create an event where men will be engaged in addressing the most challenging issues facing women today in Kurdish society, in the hopes of moving closer to the goal of ensuring the rights and equality to which women are justly entitled. The conference strongly emphasized the role of engaging men in women's issue and the women were delighted by the percentage of men present at the conference and discussions. This was the first time that we have seen such a high percentage of men present in any women's conference in Kurdistan.

The overall goal of the conference was to study the contribution of Kurdish women in

politics, science and art and throughout history.

The conference looked into establishing channels of cooperation between women organizations in Northern America, Europe and Kurdistan for the purpose of advancing and enhancing women role in building the new civil society and democracy in Kurdistan.

## 2-Establishing Ideas:

Build idea of the power of networking to advance and coordinate women's rights globally:

1. Create a network between Kurdish women's organizations in Kurdistan.
2. Create a network between Kurdish women's organizations in Europe.
3. Create a network between Kurdish women's organizations and other worldwide organizations such as American and European women organizations

The conference addressed both quantitative and qualitative aspects of Kurdish women and politics, science and art. Studies on women and politics have suggested a variety of possible explanations for the paucity of women leaders and the marginalization of women in politics

## 3-Difference in Resolution:

The most important and fundamental improvement we seek for Kurdish women is that their rights become laws: discussed, passed, and implemented in Kurdistan to ensure their safety and growth.

The conference recognized that advancing the role of Kurdish women in society is crucial to the development and the Kurdish people.

- Understanding the importance of women's empowerment for the development of a free and democratic nation.

- realizing there exists no alternative to women's participation in all level or rank of the Kurdish community, pinpointing how crucial it is to increase opportunities for Kurdish women to network with each other, and valuing the exchange of ideas between individuals and groups

-believing in the power of a core group of people to create social change and advancement of their rights.

What are our expectations?

I divide this question into 2 parts:

### PART 1

OUR REQUEST and expectation FOR WOMEN IN KURDISTAN :

A. The establishment of an international steering committee for future activities; To commit them to become more organized on behalf of the empowerment of Kurdish women; Pledge them to create additional opportunities for Kurdish women to share knowledge and resources with each other; and Dedicate them to change the status quo for the betterment of all who live in Kurdistan.

### PART 2

OUR REQUEST FOR THE LEGESLATIVE BRANCH OF KRG:

B. the Resolution committee of the International Conference on Kurdish Women urges

the legislative branch to:

1. Build a housing complex for Anfal women, which must include a Culture center to:
  - \* Remove the negative emotional effect by providing continuous consolation, emotional therapy and medical help.
  - \* Eliminating high percentage of illiteracy.
  - \* Providing training with the tools to work and depend on themselves rather than the government or other members of the remaining family. Their dependence on the family often results in abuse and cruelty against them.
  - \* Create jobs for them as a priority for the government and the public to help them to get out of the depression they are in.
2. Ensure punishment by law for any kind of abuses against women.
3. Find powerful mechanisms for preventing abuse such as Honor Killing, self brining forced by abuse, beating, verbal and physical abuse under the law,
4. Prevent tribal settlement by law in Honor killing cases.
5. Ensure punishment by law for forced prostitution by the husband or any member of the family.
6. Prevent forced circumcision by law for women, which violates religious and civil rights.
7. Change the civil rights law, which has existed since 1959, by protecting women's rights regarding divorce and polygamy. The law must protect the rights of women and men at the same time, where women and men have the rights to 50% of all money, properties, business and household belongings held at the time of the divorce. The polygamy must be prohibited, only if there is a medical issue involved and this must regulated by law.
8. Establish Community Culture centers in every city, small town, and village to perform the following:
9. Ensure the Government provides land, financial support and security protection to the current NGOs to build new shelter homes to protect the women from cruelty and abuse in each city, small town and village to provide:
10. Increase the role of the women in the Kurdistan Regional Government and all other legislative branches. The women in Kurdistan must be given important ministerial posts to show true support by the government. The percentage of the women in Ministry is among the lowest in the world.
11. Ensure the Government creates job opportunities for women to be independent financially of their husband and other members of the family, because economic independence of women will result in self-confidence and lowering the abuse against them.
12. Increase the role of the women in the leadership of Kurdish political parties to reflect the true sacrifice they have given to advance the cause of the Kurdish people to gain rights for self-determination.
13. The Government must strengthen the responsibility of the Ministry State for Women Affairs, where they have control on all the women NGO to coordinate their efforts to advance women's rights in all aspects of life.

Thank you

This conference could not have taken place without the hard work of two Conference Coordinating Committees: The local committee are: Dr. Jinan qaasim; Dr. Saman Shali, Mrs. Shirin Amedi, Mrs. Ronak Raouf, Mrs. Khan Latef, Mrs. Ferda Cemilogu, Sliva cigerxwen from Kurdistan National Assembly of Syria Mrs. Hamno M. Nakhshabandi, and Miss Sliva Cigerxwin and United State Committee are:Mr. Azad Moradian, Mrs. Jualian Ditty, Dr. Asad Khalany, Dr. Pary Karadaghi, Miss. Cklara Moradian, Mr. Tom Ver Plog, Mrs. Elahe Amani, There are many individuals that I would like to thank that I cannot name them all.

I should heartily thank Dr. Saman Shali for his nonstop work , supporting me, and his high respect for women's rights. I thank you again for your presence, at the conference and being patient during my presentation. I want to sincerely thank sponsors of our conference for giving us the hope of working in Kurdistan and achieving our goal. I also should let you know that all present and non presents speeches and papers presented at the conference will be published in a special booklet soon. We have papers from the speakers and those whom did not attend and sent us their incredible research.