

# Summary of the 19th Annual Conference of the KNC N.A.

## *The Kurdish National Congress of North America*

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### Summary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the KNC N.A.

March 23-24, 2007 Irvine, California

#### "From Struggle to Statehood"

The Kurdish National Congress of North America concluded its 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Saturday March 24, 2007. Under the Conference theme "From Struggle to Statehood", the goal was to encourage in-depth discussions on all four parts of Kurdistan and to bring political leaders, intellectuals and independent activists from East, West, North and South together. As in the past 18 years, the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference got under way with the raising of the Kurdish flag and singing of the national anthem *Ay-Raqeab*.

The Mayor of Irvine, Mrs. Beth Krom, opened the conference by welcoming all attendees and indicated that Irvine is a place for all cultures and peoples, and that she was delighted to have the conference in Irvine.

The first panel focused on **Kurdish organizations and their activities in the United State and Canada.**

Ms. Lana Salah Salih (Moderator), opened the session by emphasizing the significant role that can be played by the Kurdish American youth to promote Kurdish issue, and Kurdish interest in the US. She asked the Kurdish youth to be well educated, to work hard, and to be involved in all political, and non-political aspects in the American society.

Mr. Goran Sadjadi, president of the Kurdish American Youth Organization (KAYO), a KNC affiliate, spoke of the organization's first Kurdish Youth Conference in Nashville,

Tennessee held February 2007. He thanked the KNC for their support and sponsorship of the conference. Mr. Nezar Tovi also spoke on the activities of KAYO including ways to reach out to all Kurdish youth in the US and Kurdistan. Then Mr. Luqman Barwari talked about the relief aid project organized by KAYO for victims of the November 2006 floods in North Kurdistan. He presented a slide show on the area affected by the flood, emphasizing the ongoing need for rebuilding the area. Finally, Mr. Brusik Reshvan spoke of the activities of Kurdish organizations in various Canadian cities and the need to organize their efforts to best serve our nation.

On behalf of the KAYO Mr. Goran Sadjadi presented a plaque of appreciation to the president of KNC Dr. Saman Shali for KNC's continues support for KAYO and promotion of the kurdish youth rights. in return the KNC president on behalf of KNC thanks Mr. sadjadi and the KAYO for the plaque and promised that KNC will continue it is support for KAYO and the youth movements, because KNC truly believe that the future of our nation is in the hands of our youth.

Several guest speakers followed with a diverse set of topics. Mr. Tahseen Atroshi, president of Kurdish Community Center in San Diego warned about the pullout of American military from Iraq, the future of the Kurds, and what Kurds in Diaspora can do about it. Mr Atroshi praised the KNC for the work they are doing in serving the Kurdish people. Mr. Steve Tataii discussed his three books on Kurdish issues and noted how closely these books related to the theme of the conference.

The second panel was devoted to the **International Conference on Kurdish Women for Peace and Equality** held in Hawler, Southern Kurdistan on March 8, 2007.

[Mrs. Soraya Fallah](#) gave an update regarding the International Conference on Kurdish Women for Peace and Equality. In her opening statement she stated that the conference was an historic event and it was indeed the first International Conference on Kurdish Women in the Middle East. She focused on the input, aims and goals of the conference and followed with the conference outcome and resolutions. Mrs. Juliana Ditty, Executive Vice President of Global Operations and Development noted she was truly impressed by the many individuals who traveled from the United States to be part of this conference and their desire to serve their nation. After traveling to Halabja she expressed her full support for those who want to bring to light the atrocities committed against the Kurdish people.

Professor [Sharon Faye Linzey](#) said the International Kurdish Women's Conference for Peace and Equality was a historic gathering of all those concerned for equality for Kurdish women. It was impressive that a good number of men also attended and saluted women's rights as a necessary precondition for progress in Kurdistan. Miss [Kathryn Laurraine Dovel](#), stated that it was a privilege and honor to participate in the conference and commented how the people of Kurdistan proved to be hopeful and resilient despite decades of suffering - showing an immense desire for change politically, economically,

and socially. Through seeing the memorials in Halabja and Barzan, the health deprivation within the villages, and the hope and enormous potential within Southern Kurdistan, she became further committed to the cause and noted her plan to return to Kurdistan in September for several months. "I am very excited and honored for this opportunity, and encourage anyone who is capable to visit this amazing land and see for yourself the endless opportunities that are available to assist in rebuilding Kurdistan."

The Third panel outlined the progress of **The Halabja Committee**

Dr. Fouad Darweesh said that it is very hard to imagine that any human being can endure such pain just because they are Kurds and urged the international community to help ease the suffering of the victims of the chemical attacks. Dr. Kirmanj Gundi started by expressing his gratitude to the late Soraya Serajeddini, executive vice president of the KNC. He referred to the victims of Halabja as one of the most forgotten and oppressed people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All who committed such hideous crimes, other than a few top former Iraqi leaders and Frans Van Anraat, went unpunished. Those who assisted the Iraqi government in obtaining chemical weapons should be brought to justice, Gundi noted. [Dr. Saman Shali](#) emphasized one aspect of the committee was to bring the companies who assisted the Iraqi government in developing chemical weapons to the court of law, to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again and to make them pay for what they have done to our people. The United Nations should be pressured to release the complete list of all the companies involved in helping Saddam's government to make such weapons.

The last panel of the day related to **KNC Affairs**

Each of the KNC Board Members spoke on activities for the past year and what is their agenda for the coming year. Accomplishments for the past year have included:

- 19 Annual Conferences in North America with participation from leading Kurdish and non-Kurdish scholars and politicians
- The March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 International Conference on Kurdish Women for Peace and Equality in Hawler
- November 2006, KNC delivered Medical supplies worth \$530,000 to Ministry of Health (KRG) in Southern Kurdistan.
- Conducted Air quality test in the city of Hawler in coordination with Ministry of Environment, Higher Education, Hawler Governorate and the University of Southern California, Irvine, USA.
- Organized meeting for delegations from Eastern Kurdistan with United States officials April 2006
- Organized the first conference for the Kurds from Western Kurdistan in Washington March 2006.

**Day 2 - March 24**

After welcoming the attendees and the guest speakers, [Dr. Artin](#), the chair of the conference, appreciated the hard work of all of his fellow KNC members who helped him

to organize the event. He emphasized that despite softer attitude of Kurdish established political parties, KNC as a pluralistic organization should insist that nothing less than independence for all parts of Kurdistan is acceptable in the long run. Dr. Artin also gave the same message during the Newroz banquet in a creative slide show titled "Kew in Animal Kingdom".

Professor Asad Khailany, founder of KNC made a special presentation on the late Soraya Serajeddini and her husband Thomas Ver Ploeg - their dedication to human rights, their contributions, and sacrifices toward Kurdish national rights in general and to the KNC in particular. Professor Khailany quoted many people from around the world expressing their admiration for Soraya and to all members of Ver Ploeg family for their contributions and sacrifices to human and national rights for all. [Dr. Saman Shali](#) added that Mrs. Serajeddini's early departure was a great loss to our nation and especially to the KNC. He presented a special commemorative plaque on behalf of the Kurdish National Congress to her husband Mr. Tom Ver Ploeg. Mr. Ver Ploeg thanked the KNC and everyone for their kind thoughts and remembrance. Mrs. Serajeddini passed away on July 24, 2006.

Guest speaker Mr. [Serdar Sengul](#) spoke of the current phase of Kurdish struggle, noting both opportunities and risks. Coming to power in the either side of the 36th parallel creates new opportunities and areas of problems for Kurds. Only a critical intellectual engagement can grasp the complexities of the situation and produce the necessary knowledge we need to overcome problems and make the gains sustainable. While Mr. Ali Qadri, representative of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran emphasized the role of KDPI during past 61 years of struggle, and the sacrifice of over 6,000 Peshmmerga and 3 national leaders - Mr. Qazi Mohammad, Dr. Qasemlou and Dr. Sharafkandi.

Professor [Sharon Faye Linzey](#) related four stories of Kurdish families in Northern Kurdistan, which serve to illustrate the problems that the Kurds suffer are common in the area. Whether they are from North, South, East or West Kurdistan, Kurdish families have suffered similar fates under the dominant powers that continually deprive the Kurds of their rights, homes, livelihood, and freedom. Dr. Shali read a letters of congratulation and support from Mr. Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Dr. Mohammad Ihsan, Minister of Extra Regional Affairs, Mr. Mohammad Haji Mahmud, General Secretary of Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, Mr. Ali Gazi, President of Kurdistan Freedom Party, Mr. Hussen Yazdan Bana, VP of Kurdistan Freedom Party, and Mr. Baba Shaikhusseini, General Secretary of Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle.

[Dr. Saman Shali](#), KNC president, addressed the attendees describing the situation in Iraq and the commitment of the Kurdish leadership to supporting federalism as the best solution to hold Iraq together. He stressed the role of the Iraqi constitution to bring trust between the Kurdish people and central Government by implementing Article 140, addressing the issue of the forced Arabization in the area. Failing to implement this article will take the country further away from stability and security. Also, he addressed the Kurdish issues in Iran, Turkey and Syria and suggested the best solution is to grant

Kurds in these countries their rights for self-determination. Dr. Shali reviewed the KNC achievements and accomplishments for the past year and other projects to come.

The first Panel was titled "**Struggle, Challenges and Opportunities**"

Dr. Wafa Khorsheed (Moderator) stressed that a common agreement is there among superpowers and they will dictate world diplomatic policies that serves their own national interest. Sometimes these diplomatic policies are full of contradiction and hypocrisy. Dr. Khorsheed made a comparison between the Palestinian and the Kurdish People as an example of the double standard dealing with these comparable cases. He added that a strong and independent Kurdistan is in the national interest of the US and Europe. The need for a strong and independent Kurdistan will override the need to support Turkey. Turkey cannot afford to be in direct conflict with the US and Europe.

[Mr. Serdar Sengul](#) described how Kurds have been deprived of our own educational institutions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first practices of the nation-states that were established in the historical lands of Kurds was to eliminate the educational systems. This has had tremendous effects on Kurdish culture, Kurdish society and the way in which Kurds pursue knowledge. At the present period, the significance of and the need for devising a modern Kurdish education system is clearer than ever for Kurdish intellectuals, politicians and technocrats. Within this context he told the audience he is certain the madrasa system that historically sustained the backbone of Kurdish intellectual class would prove to be productive.

Mr. Arif Bawajani, congratulated the KNC for their work in serving our nation and especially the work by Dr. Saman Shali to form a front comprised of various Kurdish parties in Eastern Kurdistan. He added that the area is going through dynamic changes and urged Kurds to be united to have a role and say in these changes. He said the Kurdistan Regional Government has many enemies like Turkey and Iran and they are the traditional enemies of our nation, protecting this government is duty of every Kurd. Throughout their history the Kurdish people in Eastern Kurdistan fought for self-determination. Sarbesty Party believes the only way to self-determination is by working for complete independence and creating a Kurdish State. He also stressed the significance of forming a united agenda and to be prepared for the days ahead with one united front.

Prof. Daniel Gibran, an expert on terrorism, emphasized how the crimes of religious extremists are in fact against their own faith and against the achievements of the civilized world.

The Second Panel was titled "**Political Dynamics of the Region**"

Dr. Hikmat Fikrat (Moderator), pointed out that dynamics is defined by the dictionary as "an interactive system or process of social, intellectual or moral forces that produce activity and change". As such, life is all about dynamism. From the moment we are born, we interact with our environment, and the society, physically, mentally and socially - a process that makes us what we are. The same is true for any nation within a group of

nations that it cohabitates with in a region. Historically, the Kurdish nation has always been in a state of active interaction with the other nations in the region. This dynamic flux in our history is what has shaped us so far.

For Kurdistan to go forward, to attain its full sovereignty and prosperity, we need to study the dynamics of the political forces in the region. It was in light of such an understanding of the gravity of the present political situation and the alliances among the States that surrounds the Kurdish nation, as well as their rivalries, that the panel discussed the challenges that face Southern Kurdistan and the Kurdish nation at large.

"The future of Kurdistan will be more determined by policies framed in Washington than in Baghdad," said Ralph D. Fertig, President of the Humanitarian Law Project and Associate Professor at the University of Southern California. He called for active intervention in the politics of the United States, now, in the framing of foreign policies by the candidates and platforms of both parties. As one place to begin, he invited Kurdish Americans to present a draft resolution on the independence of Iraq-occupied Kurdistan as an element of peace and withdrawal from Iraq to the Democratic Party state convention meeting in San Diego on April 27 - 29.

Dr. Rashid Karadaghi said: The occupiers of Kurdistan continue their oppression of the Kurds and there is no hope they will ever change their ways. The Kurds must continue to push for attaining their rights and end the master-slave relationship imposed on them. They must be united and rely on themselves even as they seek the assistance of the US and other Western powers.

[Mr. Azad Moradian](#) stressed that Kurds potentially and exceptionally, are well prepared for liberal democracy in Iran and Middle East. He also considered that any political opposition to the Islamic regime without the involvement of Kurds, Turkmen's, Baluch, Azeri, and Arab groups would fail. He pointed that federalism in Iran is the first step to move Kurds towards independency in the future.

The third panel was titled "**Why Independent Kurdistan**",

[Dr. Saman Shali](#) (Moderator) opened the panel by asking "Why would the United States support an Independent Kurdistan while putting their interest with Turkey, Iran, 22 Arabic countries and over 300 millions Moslem in jeopardy? What can an Independent Kurdistan offer the United States and the West? What does it take to support Independent Kurdistan? Is Kurdistan of sufficient interest to them - geographically, economically and strategically - to shift their attention? What will happen if the United State leaves Iraq? We hope that distinguished panelists answer these questions and others."

Mr. Aris Anagnos of the Humanitarian Law Project, stated that an independent Kurdistan is in the national interest of the United States because the Kurds are the best friends- in fact the only friends - in that area. The Kurds are in danger from Turkish aggression, which Turkey has repeatedly threatened with the excuse that they will attack "terrorists" because President Clinton designated the PKK as a terrorist organization. The true goal

of the Turks, of course, is the oil of Mosul and Kirkuk, proven and documented by declarations from Turkish officials. Since the PKK has never attacked Americans but mainly resisted the atrocities of the Turkish army against the Kurdish population it is in the national interest of the United States to remove the terrorist designation from the PKK and eliminate the excuse for a Turkish invasion. We need to engage in an educational campaign with public officials, the Congress, and the public to put that point across.

Mr. Jeff Klein discussed the Kurdish dynamic in the Middle East, addressing the gradual emergence of the Kurds as a power player in the region and rise in pan-Kurdish sentiment in all parts of Kurdistan that has taken place since the creation of the KRG. He stated that the elimination of Saddam's regime challenged the established order of the Middle East, empowering both the Shi'a and the Kurdish people. Saying that the Kurds are leading the march of the democratic revolution in the Middle East, Mr. Klein discussed threats to Kurdish interests and spoke about eliminating sectarianism and corruption within the Kurdish national movement and working to insure that the Middle East of the future is one that will include more freedom and power for the Kurdish nation.

In his presentation, [Prof. Robert Olson](#) argued that if the Kurds were to have an independent state in southern Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) that it would contribute to the political, economic and social stability of not just Iraq, but of Turkey, Iran and Syria. Olson also argued that such a state would contribute to the lessening of tensions and hostilities among the central governments and the administrations of the largely Kurdish regions of the four states in which most Kurds live. He argued further that a Kurdish independent state in Iraq would also contribute to the economic development and vitality of the Kurdish regions, via international funds, of Turkey, Iran and Syria allowing for the central governments of these three states to allocate funds to other regions of their countries.

Mr. Kevin McKiernan, the renowned journalist and documentary director spoke of the situation in Iraq and noted that, while much of Iraq is literally on fire, Iraqi Kurdistan seems to be enjoying a Golden Age, with the potential for a Swiss-like tourist haven or a financial center like Hong Kong or Shanghai. Nonetheless, the Kurds may find it wise in 2007 to strengthen their base with Kurds in neighboring countries. *Sic transit gloria mundi*—the glory of this world passes quickly. With the looming showdown over Kirkuk, there is reason to doubt that the U.S. will back the census and referendum called for in the Iraq constitution.

The conference ended with calls and recommendations to the International community and the Kurdish leaderships:

1. Call for Unity among all the Kurdish parties and organizations for the creation of a National strategy to take on the new challenges facing our nation in all parts of Kurdistan.
2. Draft resolution on the independence of Iraq-occupied Kurdistan as an element of peace and withdrawal from Iraq.

3. The conference calls on KNC to continue their efforts to form a united front among the Kurdish parties in Eastern Kurdistan.
4. The conference calls on KNC to make same efforts to bring together and unite different parties in Western Kurdistan to form the same front in Northern Kurdistan.
5. The conference emphasizes on the importance in forming a strong lobby to inform the United States and the United Nations of the plight of the Kurds and the rights for self-determination by holding conferences and public hearing in the US and Canada.
6. Call on KNC to form a committee to lobby for the implementation of article 140 in the Iraqi constitution which deals with disputed area resulted from Arabization policy of Saddam's regime.
7. The conference calls on Halabja committee to continue its work until Justice is done in the court of law for the victims of the chemical weapons.
8. KNC to continue it is work with Kurdistan Regional Government to serve our people in any capacity they can.
9. KNC to follow up with recommendation and resolutions of the International Conference on Kurdish Women for peace and Equality and to coordinate its efforts with Ministry of State for women's affairs and the women organizations (NGO) in Kurdistan.

at 5:30 pm the conference is ended by signing ayraqep (kurdish national anthem).

during the banquet knc's **president Dr. Shali** presented two awards:

knc artist award to **Mr. Jamal Bakhtair**

long life achievement award to knc's past president **Dr. Hikmat Fikrat.**

**For more information please email: [knc@kurdishnationalcongress.org](mailto:knc@kurdishnationalcongress.org) and visit [www.kncna.org](http://www.kncna.org)**

**[pictures from the conference](#)**

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