

The Future of (a United) Kurdistan, One vs. Multiple States

KNC-NA Presidential Address
23rd Annual Conference
April 29-30, Calgary, Canada

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to our 23rd annual conference. Special thanks to the chair of the conference and other conference committee members. The chair and his team of volunteers worked very hard to make this event happen. I understand it was difficult for many members to travel to Calgary. Yet I am glad that we had the event here, where we could rely on the hard work of its main organizers.

As you know the Kurdish National Congress of North America (KNC-NA) is a pluralistic, secular, and democratic organization that promotes a united free Kurdistan. It is home for anyone in North America who believes in the national rights of the Kurds. Independent from KNC-NA there are a few other organizations with similar names and agendas in Europe. We hope at some point all such national organizations unite in a body that has representatives from all parts of our homeland. Other nations have succeeded in forming such a body and liberated their homeland via their national congress. We are optimistic that we too can do it sooner or later.

At this stage, our hope for unity and liberation is still a dream. We are facing some states with fascist policies. Most of them discriminate against minorities, women, believers of other faiths and ideologies, and non-believers. They are guilty of various suppressive crimes in general and for dividing our homeland and keeping it divided without our consent. The division not only weakened us but made us fight each other for many years. It seems that we have overcome the stage of fighting each other, yet we are far from unity. At home and in exile there are hundreds of organizations and personalities who are aware of the Kurdish national challenges, yet for various reasons they have not become part of a unified body.

Some argue the era of nationalism is over as globalization is spreading. They ignore the fact the globalization is spread by those who already have their national identity and at least one state. Without going through the developmental stage of nationhood and statehood and without having a recognized national identity, it is unlikely that the Kurds could jump into the era of globalization. We could move towards global unity once we have secured our membership in an international body such as the United Nations.

Considering the long history of our division some argue we are better off to unite with the dominant ethnic groups of the states that control our affairs. While such a unity might be noble in a democratic state, it has never fulfilled the Kurdish dream for equal treatment in the Middle East. Except in Southern Kurdistan, the Kurdish children are still denied the opportunity to learn their language in public schools. Such a discriminatory denial is simply racist, insulting, and humiliating. Except for some intellectuals the majority of the

dominant ethnic group can not understand the depth of such racist policy by the controlling states in the Middle East.

Undoubtedly the Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Hebrew language and culture are rich, but so is the language and culture of the Kurds. Imagine telling the Turks, the Persians, and the Israelis that the majority of the Middle East is Arabs and they are better off to forget their own language and culture and unite within the Arab league. Imagine telling the Arabs they are better off to forget their culture and identity and reunite with the former Ottoman and Persian Empire empires again. They would rightfully feel insulted the way we feel now. The Kurdish movement is about fighting such racism, insult, and humiliation and about equality of all nations. We do not claim we are better than anyone but we claim we are no less than anyone in the family of nations and deserve to have the same linguistic, cultural, and national rights.

Depending on our views, we might agree or disagree on how we achieve those rights in the future. During the planning of this conference I suggested to our board members that the theme be The Future of Kurdistan, One vs. Multiple States. Initially some of our members were concerned that the theme might imply that we are accepting the division of our homeland. To clarify the ambiguity and since our ultimate goal is rather unity with whoever believes in equality, the theme was modified to The Future of a United Kurdistan, One vs. Multiple States.

Considering our division into multiple states, we wanted to know if the Kurdish aim should be having one state or multiple states in order to secure our human rights. We rather have questions than answers. We are wondering if all parts of Kurdistan should first unite in one state and then with other states that represents different ethnic groups. Should we unite with the dominant ethnic groups of each state and demand a federation in those states? Should we encourage each part of Kurdistan to seek its own independence? Should we ask for elimination of the border between the states that have divided Kurdistan so that the obtained linguistic rights in Southern Kurdistan spread to other parts? How about if we just wait for another century!

Unfortunately our unity with the states that control our affairs has been similar to a non-consensual marriage. Such a marriage has been determined by very traditional, conservative, and patriarchic leaders who consider any territory or person under their control as their private inheritance. Such leaders tend to hand their state control to their next of kin when they pass. They also tend to discriminate not only against their political opponents, but also against women, those who belong to a different sect or religion, those who are non-believers, and those who have a different mother tongue.

People with Turkish and Persian mother tongues have at least few states. The Arabs have 22 states. Don't you think the Kurds deserve to have at least one state? If yes, what should the language of such a state be? Would it be Kirmanji, Sorani, Kalhori, Zazaki, Hawrami, or an amalgam of all Kurdish dialects? Does the state need a sect to unite people spiritually, and if yes what should it be Sunni, Shia, Sufism, Alawi, Yaresan, Zartoshti or should it separate religion and politics and respect non-believers and

believers of all faiths equally? Should the state include all 40 million Kurds from Ilam to Dersim and from Sina to Qamishli? Or should it be limited to 4 million people in Slemany, Hewler and Duhok which KRG introduced to the world as Kurdistan?

KRG's vision of Kurdistan reminds me of the vision of Iran that has limited its Kurdistan province to Sina and a few surrounding towns and excluded Kermashan, Ilam, and West Azerbaijan to be part of the Kurdish province. I hope KRG does not learn other bad behaviors from Iran, such as suppressing the human rights of those who disagree with the supreme leader.

If we believe Kurdistan is beyond the designation of Iran and the KRG, how could we explain it to the Middle Eastern leaders and to the world? It is a hard fight and puts us in the position of multiple opposing states. To win this fight I am wondering if we should use the method of Che Guvara or Gandhi. Should we join pishmarga forces in the mountain and fall behind from the latest developments in the world. Or should we distance ourselves from any form of violence and promote peace, civil disobedience, and boycotting work and school until Kurdish becomes an official language in Turkey, Iran, and Syria, and until our people have the option to determine their destiny in a referendum?

Although there is no wrong or right answer to these and many other opinionated questions, in a free society we can find democratic answers via people's vote. My personal answer to obtain our rights is by bringing the primitive colonialism of the states that control Kurdistan to its knee via peaceful civil disobedience the way Gandhi did it to the British government. I also believe that promoting four Kurdish states is more practical than one state. Of course some of you might disagree. To have an idea about your answers and to practice democracy directly right here, I have put 10 questions to you and would like your vote on them so we can utilize the answers in formulating our vision for the future.

1. Should all parts of Kurdistan unite in one state?
2. Should each part of Kurdistan seek its own independence?
3. Is federalism in the states that control Kurdistan reasonable?
4. Should the dividing borders in Kurdistan be eliminated?
5. Should the term Kurdistan refer to the land of all 40 million Kurds?
6. Should KRG change its name to SKRG?
7. Does armed struggle today benefit the controlling states?
8. Is boycotting schools that don't teach Kurdish in Kurdistan feasible?
9. Should Kurdish dialects be unified in one official language?
10. Should all believers and non-believers have equal rights?

The result of this survey will be published.