

The Syrian Uprising and Future for the Kurds

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honoured to be here with you today to discuss the Syrian Revolution at this critical time. We all have a responsibility to do our best to avoid the worst case scenario.

Please let me give you a few key points about the Syrian Uprising and the future for the Kurds.

While some people may say that the Syrian Uprising began in March 2011, it is better to consider its origins in the 2004 Kurdish Uprising. When more than 30 Kurds were killed, hundreds injured and thousands arrested and displaced as the result of security brutality, Kurds responded with large demonstrations. Marches quickly spread to the cities of Aleppo and Damascus. At this time the Arab opposition showed no sympathy towards the suffering of the Kurds. The regime was allowed to blame Kurds on the grounds of being separatists without any reaction from the Arab opposition.

I believe that this year's uprising is an extension of the peaceful demonstrations that took place in the Syrian Kurdistan regions in 2004.

Kurds have participated actively in the 2011 revolution in solidarity with Arab protesters. However, many voices today still claim that Kurds are not participating in the revolution. International media has played a negative role in reproducing this inaccuracy, for example, Michael Kennedy's article in the New York Times suggests Kurds are passive and on the 'sidelines' of the Revolution. A recent publication by Thomas McGee in the Guardian newspaper has highlighted the true extent of Kurdish participation in daily demonstrations. While it is clear that the Syrian regime has tried not to provoke a major reaction from the Kurds, it is important that we all recognize that Kurds have long played a role in the revolution. This will assist in ongoing negotiations between Kurds and other elements of the Syrian opposition.

Now, after many months of peaceful demonstrations, some sections of the opposition have become armed against the regime. This was unfortunate as it gave the regime an excuse to use greater violence in response. We do not believe that arming the revolution will be in the interest of the Syrian people.

Currently, the Kurds are facing two main challenges. The first is the Syrian regime and the second is the Arab opposition, particularly the Syrian National Council mostly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. The regime has always been opposed to the Kurds, yet now the Syrian National Council (headed by Burhan Ghalioun) also refuses to recognize Kurdish participation within the revolution and excluded their interests in the political process. This,

unfortunately, is dividing and weakening the opposition to the benefit of the current Syrian regime.

I would like to present a constructive criticism of the Kurdish National Council. They need to clarify their vision and agenda and to negotiate about this better with other parts of the Syrian opposition. It is important that one singular Kurdish platform exists in order to deliver a clear message of Kurdish demands and to avoid tensions within the Kurdish political opposition. It is important to go beyond the differences of personalities that characterise many of the Kurdish political parties and to find the appropriately skilled individuals for the tasks ahead of us. It is necessary to clarify what is understood by terms included in Kurdish claims, specifically the 'right to self-determination' and its possible interpretations.

Dialogue must not be restricted to the Syrian National Council alone. It must also engage actively with the more secular and liberal components of the opposition. The Kurds can play a vital role in the Syrian revolution if given the chance. Indeed, a recent report has described Syria's Kurds as the 'decisive minority'. I would like to stress that the Kurds need a written acknowledgement of their claims by other sections of the opposition. Spoken promises are not enough. Neither is it enough to say this will be discussed later. A written promise is required now, and this will further strengthen the opposition and weaken the regime.

Those who are standing against the rights of the Kurds are obstructing the revolution in achieving its goals of freeing Syria from Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship. We need to end the era of daily killing and injustice, and begin the transition towards a better future.

The future of the Kurds in Syria is linked to the establishment of a democratic and pluralist system, which will respect human rights, the rule of law, and separation of legislative, executive and juridical powers. The new constitution must secure the rights of all Syrians and will guarantee an independent judiciary.

These are the values that the Syrian people have demanded and we must now respect them and ensure that they are incorporated in the new Republic of the free Syria. The Kurds of Syria have demanded these same values, which if applied properly will also ensure their own national rights. At the same time, all Syrians must respect the diversity of the Syrian people, which is multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-national.

Thank you very much.....

Dr. M. Yussef Anwar