Research Report

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Forum: *General Assembly Third Committee*
Issue: *The Situation of the Kurdish People in the Middle East*

Position: *Deputy Chair*

Introduction

The Kurdish people make up the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, numbering between 25 million and 35 million. Their history, as a community, dates back to 612 BC[1], but historians guess, that they, as a people, have been around for much longer. The Kurdish people, also referred to as the Kurds, are situated mostly in a mountainous region of the Middle East, straddling multiple countries. As such, they live within the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Armenia, united by their language, culture, race, heritage and history, but divided by modern principles of sovereignty. The Kurds are recently much involved in global current events, such as fighting against the IS, the Turkish government's "synchronised war of terror"[2] against IS and the PKK, an armed Kurdish group, and the call for an independent Kurdish state by the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. At the root of each of these issues is the same fact that the Kurdish people have been repressed, denied basic rights, and even citizenship in some countries. It is the root of theses multiple issues, the discrimination and suppression of an entire people, that will be explored here, and during the committee sessions.

Definition of Key Terms

Arabization:

The adoption, by a non-Arabic people, of the Arabic language and Arabian culture, leading up to the assimilation of these people into the Arabic identity. Can be achieved through Arabian conquest of a region, migration of Arabian settlers into a non-Arabic area and, currently, through legalisation.

Discrimination:
As described in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "discrimination is the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people". [3]

Kurdish People:
Fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. They face racial discrimination, in various degrees, depending on which country they inhabit.

Kurdistan:

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[1] *Nezan, Kendal. "Qui Sont Les Kurdes ?" Institut Kurde. Foundation Kurde De Paris, n.d. Web. 07 Aug. 2016.* http://www.institutkurde.org/institut/qui_sont_les_kurdes.php .
[2] *"Who Are the Kurds?" BBC News. BBC, 14 Mar. 2016. Web. 7 Aug. 2016.* http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440
[3] *Discrimination. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2016, from* http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discrimination

The name given to a Kurdish State. Currently, there exists a regional government in Iraq called the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Iraq's Constitution recognizes the KRG as the ruling body in this part of Iraq, though Kurdistan is still not an independent state.

Repression:
The state of being controlled by force, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary.[4]

General Overview

The Kurdish people date back to 612 B.C. Traditionally nomadic, they herded sheep until forced to settle down in the early 20th century due to the creation of new states' borders. Historically, the Kurdish people were recognized for their military prowess. Today, they form a very large part of Middle Eastern society. They represent 18 per cent of Turkish society [5], 15 to 20 per cent of Iraqi society, less than 8 per cent of Syrian society, and 1.1 per cent of Armenian society. Surely, they are a minority group in all regions, yet they are present. They have their own language, though not one dialect. They share a culture and a heritage. Further, they have often been labelled as the largest ethnic group in the world without a country to call their own. However, the greatest injustice done to this people is their treatment as second-class citizens. They have faced discrimination since before the 20th century, but after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, this devolved into violence and intolerance. Without a country to call their own, the Kurdish people have been grossly mistreated; their language and culture have been banned and their practices branded as illegal. This, of course, is the heart of the issue.

In the 19th century, the Kurds enjoyed, if not full autonomy, a relative liberty in the Ottoman Empire. In the latter part of the century, the first Kurdish revolt in the Empire is recorded, though it was suppressed and the Kurdish wish for political autonomy was never reached. From 1916 to 1934, many Kurds in Turkey were deported by the Young Turks, from Eastern to Western Turkey. Once they were deported, the government then settled Arab Turks in the zones up to that point occupied by Kurds, to arabize the region. This type of event would characterize the coming years and situation of the Kurdish people.

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[4] *Repression. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2016, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repression*
[5] *"The World Factbook." Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency, n.d. Web. 08 Aug. 2016. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html.*

After World War 1, the treaty of Sevres (1920) provided for a sovereign Kurdish State, however, this treaty was never implemented internationally, and was replaced by the treat of Lausanne (1923), which does not include recognition of a separate Kurdish state. [6] Instead, the Ottoman Empire was broken up into the modern Middle Eastern countries. As such, the Kurdish people were divided into several countries, separated from one another. As of 2016, the Kurds inhabit Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. They are not all treated in the same way in each of these states. Their situation differs from place to place, and for one to fully describe the true situation of the Kurdish people, one must portray it in each state.

First, in Armenia, the relations with the Kurds are tame. There is no forced arabisation, nor violence within the communities towards Kurdish people. For example, in 1969, at the Armenian Academy of Sciences, a department of Kurdish studies was founded. The Kurdish represent a small percentage of Armenia, but are treated as any other citizen of the country. That said, the Armenian government is known for its interference in peaceful protests, and its ill treatment of prisoners. Further, reporters and journalists face the limitation of their free speech. Activists face unfair imprisonment and unfair trials.[7] The situation for the Kurds is somewhat precarious, as there are a number of Kurdish activists in the country, who face being silenced. That is the situation of the Kurdish people today in Armenia.

Secondly, in Iran, the Kurdish people have gained in recent years more freedoms then previously enjoyed. In 1945, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPIK) was founded, which called for a separate Kurdish state, though nowadays it is more concerned with attaining Kurdish rights. With Soviet aid in 1946 they established an independent state called Mahabad, but as soon as the Soviets withdrew, the fledgling state collapsed, exposing it to be a Soviet puppet state. During the years before the revolution, the Kurds were repressed socially and culturally, which lead them to support the revolution in 1979. However, the new regime, lead by Ruhollah Khomeini, started a religious persecution of the Kurds, as most of them are Sunni Muslims, oppositely to the Shi'ism supported by the state. They face religious persecution, leading ultimately to many Kurds becoming Shi'ite Muslims. Further, their language and customs, both different to mainstream society's, are seen as threats to the unity of the country, and were the cause of them being targeted. In

[6] *"Kurd". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 10 Aug. 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurd>.*
[7] *"Armenia." Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch, n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2016. https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/armenia*

the past decade, the repression seems to have abated. More people have been speaking and teaching in Kurdish, to such an extent that has not been seen since before the Iranian Revolution. The mayor of Tehran is even half-Kurdish. That said, Iran has a history of supressing its Kurdish population. All activists are treated harshly, the judicial system having a heavy hand in these types of matters. Though the last few years have given the Kurdish people a modicum of civil rights, they are still repressed in Iran.

Thirdly, in Iraq, the Kurdish people are said to have the most rights out of all countries in which they exist. However, this was only attained in the past decade. In the 20th century, the Kurdish people did not face much assimilation into Iraqi culture, but rather large-scale governmental repression. Starting in the 1930's, through to the 1940's, the Kurdish people staged rebellions against the Iraqi government, in vain attempts to settle a Kurdish state. In 1975, fighting started again, which lead to many Kurds fleeing the violence. Moreover, at this time, the Iraqi government started a policy of arabisation, forcibly removing about 200 000 Kurds to other part of Iraq.[8] In the 1980's, the Kurdish people, who were unhappy with the discriminatory policies of the government, were targeted by Saddam Hussein's regime. The relocations intensified, and many Kurds were killed as a result of chemical attacks perpetrated on Kurdish villages. These attacks were all part of a campaign called "Anfal". About 182 000 Kurds were killed in the latter part of the decade. Entire villages were destroyed, there were mass deportations and civilians died due to chemical attacks, lack of food, and weather exposure. This mistreatment lead the UN Security Council to pass resolution 688, which reprimands Iraq for its actions against the Kurds, mentioning these by name. In 2003, after the fall of the Hussein regime, the United States of America created a no-fly zone over, a so-called "safe haven", over many Kurdish settlements. [9] This is the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, which is an autonomous region– to a degree. The Iraqi Constitution recognizes this area as an official federal entity. In Kurdistan, there was an economic boom in the early 2000's, compared to the rest of the country, which experienced an economic repression. However, this was short-lived, as in 2014, the Islamic State attacked the relatively peaceful region of Kurdistan, killing 5000 Kurdish Yezidis. As of now, the Iraqi Kurds are at the forefront of the battle against IS. Further, though the Kurdish people have attained a region to call their own, they are still considered a minority in the government. As well, the countries

[8] M. Farouk-Sluglett, P. Sluglett, J. Stork, Not Quite Armageddon: Impact of the War on Iraq, MERIP Reports, July–September 1984,
[9] "Kurd". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 11 Aug. 2016 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurd>.

surrounding "Kurdistan" are opposed to it, and the idea of a Kurdish sovereign state, which harms the Kurdish people as a whole. In Iraq, the Kurds have more liberty than in other countries, however this has not always been the case, and the history must not be forgotten to solve the mistreatment of the Kurds.

Fourthly, in Syria, the Kurds have not escaped any injustices. They are badly repressed in this region. They are forced to show proof that they, or their family, have lived in Syria since 1945 or before, or they lose their citizenship. Since 1962, year when an inconsistent census was taken, about 20 per cent of Syrian Kurds have been denied citizenship. That amounts to approximately 120 000 people. [10] Those who have been denied their citizenship, have no rights. They cannot vote, own property, or even have their marriages recognized in the eyes of the law. Because they are not recognized as citizens, they do not have access to official papers. As such, they cannot have the recourse of leaving Syria as no passports, or travel documents, are issued to them. These Kurds, without citizenship can also not practice as doctors, civil servants or engineers. They do not have legal access to public programs like hospitals or the dole. The number of stateless Kurds in Syria now number 300 000. In 2011, the president of Syria Bashar al-Assad cracked under international pressure and promised to grant citizenship to those stateless Kurds. It is yet to be seen if that promise was kept, as the country erupted in civil war shortly thereafter. The Syrian government limits free speech, arbitrarily imprisons activists, including Kurdish politicians, and the Kurdish people as a whole are treated as second-class citizens. Further, no independent political activities are tolerated within the state, which limits Kurdish political activity in such a way that they do not have a voice in their government. Discrimination of the Kurdish people in Syria does not stop at the statelessness of some of them. All Kurds face discrimination. The Syrian government has banned the use of the Kurdish language, which leads to the ban of books in Kurdish and other pieces of writing in the language. As well, officials are allowed to refuse to register children with Kurdish names and even replace their Kurdish names with Arabic ones. Schools that teach in Kurdish are banned and businesses with Kurdish names are illegal.[11] In recent years, because of the civil war, the Kurdish people have managed to settle a

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10 *"The Kurds: People without a Country." Britannica.com: Worlds Apart: The Roots of Regional Conflicts. Britannica, 12 Mar. 2007. Web. 12 Aug. 2016. http://web.archive.org/web/20070312004743/http://www.britannica.com:80/worldsapart/3_timeline_print.html .*

11 *"Syria." Syria. Human Rights Watch, Oct. 1997. Web. 12 Aug. 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Syria.htm>.*

self-governed region in Northern Syria. As can be seen above, the situation of the Kurdish people in Syria may be one of the worst.

Finally, the situation of the Kurdish people in Turkey may be the most documented. In the 20th century, the Turkish government set out to "turkify" the country, a form of arabization. The idea was to perpetrate the idea of one nation, one people, when that is not the case. To dilute to Kurdish identity until it was absorbed completely into Turkish society, the government banned the Kurdish language from public and private use, prohibited the wearing of traditional Kurdish attire in or near large cities, and encouraged the Kurds' internal migration, the idea being that the less condensed the Kurdish population, the less they can retain their traditional identity. Until 1991, to further negate the Kurdish people, the government of Turkey recognized them as "Mountain Turks", which erases their culture and ethnic identity. Through the second decade of the 20th century, any publications in the Kurdish language were confiscated, the writers arrested. This was also seen with Kurdish singers and any television programmers who used Kurdish. In fact, only starting in 2004 were broadcasters allowed to use Kurdish in their programs, if they applied to the government for the right to do this. There is however, a time restriction to the length of the programs, all of them must be subtitled in Turkish, and no educational programs are allowed. [12] Further, there are no state schools that teach in Kurdish. The language is officially banned in political life. Any who use it are imprisoned. For example, Leyla Zana, who, after uttering a sentence in Kurdish at her inauguration, was imprisoned. Journalists and reporters also face punishment for the use of Kurdish. In response to this repression, the Kurds have rebelled a number of times. In 1978, the Kurdistan workers' Party (PKK) was founded. It is a Marxist organisation devoted to creating a Kurdish State. However, their methods are controversial and they are now a recognized terrorist group. Fighting between the PKK and the Turkish army started in 1984 and continued through to 1999, when the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was arrested. This stopped PKK activity, but only for a few years, as they activity started again in 2004 and continue on today. However, peace negotiations are under way, and have been since 2011.[13]

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12 *"Turkey 2006 Progress Report." COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (2011): n. pag. European Commission. EU, 2011. Web. 13 Aug. 2016. <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/tr_sec_1390_en.pdf>.*

13 *"Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 13 Aug. 2016* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurdistan-Workers-Party

As can be seen from the information above, the Kurdish people do not have it easy in any of these countries, though they face different amounts and types of discrimination. The role of this committee in the issue will be to solve these problems within these communities.

Major Parties Involved

European Union (EU):

Turkey has placed a bid to join the EU, but first must fulfil all Copenhagen criterion, namely universal human rights and the respect and protection of minorities. Of course, this is an issue in Turkey due to the mistreatment of Kurds. The large majority of European countries will be in favour of improving the situation of the Kurds in the Middle East. Concern for human rights is a primary concern for these countries.

Iran:

Iran is open to allowing more rights to the Kurds as long as they do not threaten the unity of the country. They look towards Turkey and other Middle Eastern States in these matters.

Iraq:

There already exists an almost completely autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq, so the issue of according them more rights is not an issue at all. The problem here would be that the Kurds wish Kurdistan to become a full sovereign state, which would lead to the break down of Iraq. Iraq therefore, must tread carefully, to protect itself, its people, and its relations to its neighbouring countries who do not share the same opinions as them.

Turkey:

Turkey is lifting some laws regarding the interdiction of Kurdish culture, and must be open to bettering the situation of the Kurds is they want to gain access to the European Union. That said, the Kurdish situation is a touchy subject, with altercations with the PKK still common. The Turkish government does not condone a separate Kurdish country and still aims for a semi-homogeneous Turkish state.

Western States:

Western States will want to champion the rights of the Kurds, being, as they are, prone to support equal human rights. However, their relationships with the countries where Kurds are situated may slant their positions.

Timeline of Events

1920	Treaty of Sevres was drawn up, which made concessions for a Kurdish State in what was the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Sevres was never ratified and was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which made no mention of a Kurdish State.
1925-1938	1 million Kurds were forcibly relocated in Turkey.
1962	Syria deprives about 300 000 Kurds of citizenship, which represents about 15% of the total Syrian Kurdish population
1975-1978	200 000 Kurds were deported from their native land in Iraq, to other parts of the country.
1980's	Saddam Hussein's regime targets Kurds and kills 182 000 Kurds from 1986 to 1989.
1991	UN Security Council Resolution 688 on Iraq. Condemns the repression of the Kurdish people[14]
2011	President of Syria Bashar al-Assad sets to grant citizenship to 300 00 Kurds. [15]

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Security Council Resolution 688

The first UN resolution to mention the Kurds by name. It "condemns the repression of the Iraqi civilian population in many parts of Iraq, including most recently in Kurdish populated areas, the consequences of which threaten international peace and

[14] *"Un Security Council Resolution 688 on Iraq." Humanitarian Action. Centre for the Study of Interverntionism, 05 Apr. 1991. Web. 08 Aug. 2016.* http://www.interventionism.info/en/UNSC-Res-688 .
[15] *"Syria to Tackle Kurd Citizenship Problem." ABC News. Australian Broadcasting Community, 31 Mar. 2011. Web. 08 Aug. 2016.* http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-04-01/syria-to-tackle-kurd-citizenship-problem/2633892.

security in the region" and "demands that Iraq, as a contribution to remove the threat to international peace and security in the region, immediately end this repression".[16]

NGO's campaigning on behalf of the Kurdish People

They examine ways to overcome problems in Kurdish regions, and help their plight. There are about two to three dozen NGO's focused on the situation of the Kurdish people, and some online initiatives. For example, the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) has sent missions to Turley and Iraq to examine the situation. As well, they have training programs for Kurdish advocates, to teach them how to deal with their national legal network, and the international human rights network.

Kurdish Politicians

Kurdish politicians have been trying to change the treatment of the Kurdish people for years, with limited success. If the country does not want to cooperate, the there is nothing to be done.

Possible Solutions

Solving this issue will take international cooperation, between not only the countries where Kurds exist, but with other, more stable states. Though cooperation is key, a lot of solutions may also come from working with NGO's, exploring their programs, as well as working with Kurdish political groups. Some examples of possible solutions could be: setting up communication pathways between the Kurdish people and their governments and NGO's helping poorer Kurds first-hand with the discrimination they face sending their children to school.

Useful Sources

BBC portrait of the Kurds

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440

CIA Factbook for base information

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

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16 "*Un Security Council Resolution 688 on Iraq.*" *Humanitarian Action. Centre for the Study of Interverntionism, 05 Apr. 1991. Web. 08 Aug. 2016.* http://www.interventionism.info/en/UNSC-Res-688 .

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