By Mohammed A. Abdulqadir
The Globe

IRBIL - More than thirty months after the inva-
sion of Iraq, the country still suffers from lack of
security and stability, the very two prerequisites
for establishing a democratic system in the country.

"The current violence and bloodshed in Iraq is a
humiliating aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hus-
sein's regime,... and plays into the hands of those re-
gion's politicians who want to award a

democratic Middle East," says Bas Belder, a Dutch
politician and a member of the

Strasbourg-based European parliament.

Belder, who participated in a conference on democ-

racy in Middle East, held in Erbil last week, consid-

ers "security and the will to share power" and the

non-imposition of Sharia rule as "essential for hav-
ing a democratic rule in Iraq."

Kurdish part of Iraq has been spared much of the
bloodshed that plagued its Arab part. This is regarded
as an encouraging factor to start the democratiza-
tion of Iraq from north. "If there is a European hope
for democratizing Iraq, it shall begin here in Kurdis-
tan," adds Belder.

Apart from the impor-
tance of security and stability, Khalid Salih, a
Kurdish academic who lives in Denmark argues that
the burden of democrat-
izing a country is on the
élites' shoulder. "If the éliti-

ces want to apply demo-
cracy they can prepare the

ground for it," says Salih.

He rejects the argument
that the establishment of
democracy in a certain society has to do with the
readiness and ability of

that culture to adopt de-
mocracy. "Democracy is

a matter of political agree-

ment and once it comes to

power then it becomes a

culture," adds Salih. He
also says that every cul-

ture has democratic and

undemocratic aspects and the

fact that there is a long

tradition of democracy in

Europe, didn't prevent the

emergence of ideas such as

racism, fascism and

Nazism there.

A democratization proc-

dess has started in Kurdis-
tan, mainly after 1998, and

only when the politi-
cal leaders of the region

reached the conclusion
they can not settle any

thing through war and

conflict, Salih claims.

But to the ordinary peo-

ple, the current political

process in the country and

efforts to establish democ-

racy doesn't appeal that

much. "Democracy is not

nice when people are hun-

grly and suffer from pov-

erty. What should the poor
do with democracy if they
are hungry," says Nazim

Sabir, a taxi driver from

Dohuk.

In 1970s and 1980s Iraq
had a relatively high level
of prosperity and one of
the best health-care and

education systems in the
region while it didn't have
democracy. The situation

is now quite the reverse

and while Iraq enjoys a
democratic politics, it

lacks strong infrastructure

and basic services.

Despite the political and élites' rhetoric about
democracy, some critics contend that talking about it
without implementing basic principles of it, is

inappropriate. Dr. Afram

Issa Yusef, a Paris-based

university professor and

writer of Arab origin, says that

after a tour of Iraq he found out that democracy in

Basra and Baghdad, for

example, is just dealt with

as a means to gain power

and impose one's ideology

on others.

"Democracy has a philo-

sophical dimension and if

you used it without that
dimension, it would be in-
correct," argues Yusef who

participated in Erbil's con-
fereence on democracy.

He admits that in Kurdistan,

in comparison with the rest of Iraq, the readiness

to accept the philosophical
dimension of democracy is

more tangible.

The driving force of de-
mocracy in Kurdistan is

secularism.

Mark Cravez, a French

journalist who spoke at Erbil conference rejects the idea of the popularity of religious extremism in the long-run. "The majority of people want to make a life and want good things for their children and not an Islamic monarchy or republic."

Observers say Iraqis' vot-
ing three times in a year is a sign of the growing de-
mocracy in this country.

However, more than just a

process is needed for the

foundation of a long-standing
democratic system in Iraq. One of

the solutions offered for

Iraq and Middle East is

reestablishing state insti-
tutions, reshaping the po-

litical order and empow-

ering the governance of the

country's regions, to

strengthen democracy in

Iraq, Salih tells Globe.

Despite all the challeng-

es and shortcomings that
democracy faces in Iraq, the

country is believed to be the

launching pad for
democracy in the Middle East.

Kurdish national identity

Zakariya Abdullah who is

a well-known Kurdish

singer originally from

Irbil attended the stage amid the loud wave of clapp-

ing, whistling, and shout-

ing his name. Although he

was not even scheduled for

the festival, he was allowed
to present his fans with two

of his most beautiful songs

and cultures. Our intention is
to create habits like those."

The festival provided me
with joy and very pleasant
time when the music im-

abled me to see Zakariya in

person," said Rebaz Noori,

a Kurdish singer originally from

Iranian part of Kurdistan, not all of musicians received the same

warmth.

"Our participation in the

festival is to observe the
current level of music and
to criticize each other rather

than showing a national mes-

sage when the music, singers,

instruments are all Kurdish," said Sherzad Sarsipee, leader of

Kurdistan Party.

"Irbil conference rejects the idea of the popularity of religious extremism in the long-run. The majority of people want to make a life and want good things for their children and not an Islamic monarchy or republic."