

**INTERNATIONAL INTERPARLIAMENTARY
CONSULTATION ON THE KURDS**

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FOREWORD

An International Interparliamentary Conference on Kurdish Human Rights, organized jointly by the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Fondation France-Libertés and the Kurdish Institute of Paris, was held on 27 February, 1991, at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing Room in Washington D.C.. The purpose of this conference was to bring together parliamentarians from Europe and the United States sensitive to human rights issues, in order to examine the fate of the Kurdish people in the context of the Gulf crisis and to review the means by which Western governments could be persuaded to give greater priority to this issue within the framework of their Middle-East policy.

Chance so ordained that this conference, programmed well in advance, took place only a few hours before the end of hostilities in the Gulf war was declared. This, of course, lent even greater relevance to the conference but, at the same time, diverted the attention of the media away from the conference, resulting in less press and television coverage than expected. However, the conference was able to better inform several influential members of the Senate and increase their awareness of the plight of the Kurds, particularly in Iraq. To that end, the conference proved very valuable, because these members were to play an important role in modifying the American administration's policy during the Kurdish tragedy of April 1991.

This conference would not have been possible without the constant encouragement and support of Madame Danielle Mitterrand and senators Claiborne Pell and Edward M. Kennedy, to whom we express again our deepest gratitude. We also wish to thank Peter Galbraith of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and David Phillips, Executive Director of the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, Dr. Najmaddin Karim of the Kurdish National Congress of North America, for their precious help in organizing this gathering. Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to all the prominent American, European and Kurdish public figures who, by their speech or their presence, greatly contributed to the influence and success of the conference.

*Statement by
Senator Edward M. Kennedy*

I want to thank David Phillips for that generous introduction, and I commend him for his leadership in making today's conference possible.

All friends of human rights owe a special debt to the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, the French Liberty Foundation, and the Kurdish Institute of Paris for organizing this timely conference. Together, you are providing new hope for the Kurdish people and all those who suffer persecution anywhere on earth.

The Kurds have no greater champion of their cause than the Chair of this session, Danielle Mitterrand, and it is a privilege to join her in this cause.

Danielle has travelled to Kurdish refugee camps to learn first hand about their tragic history. Through the French Liberty Foundation, she has helped ensure that the Kurds will remain in the forefront wherever human rights are the issue.

The 1989 international conference on the Kurds in Paris brought their plight into the international

spotlight. And last year, through her efforts, the first official reception of the Kurdistan Front of Iraq in Paris brought important international recognition to the Kurdish struggle for human rights and democracy.

Today's conference is an important step in raising the conscience of Congress and the international community. We meet at a time of international crisis—and of unprecedented international cooperation to oppose the tyranny of the dictator Saddam Hussein. All of us hope and pray that peace will soon be achieved.

The world was shocked to learn of Saddam's brutal atrocities against the Kuwaiti people, his scorched earth policy against that land, and his flagrant violations of the most basic standards of human decency.

And yet, the Kurdish people have long known the cruel ways of this ruthless dictator. They have cried out for many years against their repression. They know only too well the high cost of international silence in the face of crimes against humanity.

The Iraqi persecution of the Kurds is one of the worst modern examples of man's inhumanity to man. Iraq has destroyed Kurdish villages, conducted a massive campaign for the forcible relocation of tens of thousands of Kurds, and systematically tried to annihilate their culture.

For years, the world turned a deaf ear to the cries of the Kurds. It turned a blind eye to the atrocities inflicted on innocent Kurdish men, women and children and remained silent to the Kurds' pleas for international condemnation of Saddam's brutal ways.

Perhaps the most deafening silence of all was that of the world community when Saddam Hussein committed one of the most unconscionable acts of recent times — using chemical weapons on Kurdish villages, killing an estimated 5,000 innocent men, women, and children.

I am sure that each of you here today will never forget the sickening photographs of the aftermath of that brutal attack — thousands of bodies frozen in their everyday activities, entire villages wiped out without a moment's notice.

And yet, the world took no action against Saddam Hussein. He committed these crimes with impunity and continued to terrorize his own population. Iraq has one of the world's most abysmal records on human rights, not only against the Kurds, but against any Iraqi who dared to cross Saddam in his brutal ways. And it has taken 700,000 troops, billions of dollars, and many precious lives to defeat him.

Aggression is not a new threat to the Kurdish people. Throughout history, they have suffered endless

persecution and tyranny. Their lands have been divided among five nations whose governments have systematically repressed the Kurdish heritage, language and culture. Twenty-five million Kurds, spread through Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Soviet Union, endure a daily struggle against persecution and eradication of their heritage.

Often in their history, the Kurds have been used as pawns in regional conflicts, and their people and culture have suffered heavy casualties.

For sixty years, Turkey has pretended the Kurds do not exist, although they make up one fifth of the population. For too long, Turkey has prohibited the Kurds from speaking their own language.

I welcome recent statements that this unjust ban will soon be lifted, and I urge the government to ensure that basic human rights are granted to all Kurds.

Kurds continue to suffer in many lands. Hundreds of thousands of refugees languish in camps in Syria, Turkey, and Iran, and their plight has been exacerbated by the Persian Gulf war. Only France and the United States have responded to the United Nations' pleas to accept those who face their third winter in crowded refugee camps.

I urge the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to

make a renewed effort to ease the plight of the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees fleeing persecution in their own lands.

Let us learn from the atrocities in Iraq that silence in the face of injustice only breeds further injustice.

When I last spoke to this conference in 1989, I urged the implementation of several proposals that stemmed from the Paris conference. Those recommendations have yet to be acted upon. If the crisis in the Gulf has taught us anything, it is the need to stand up to aggression anywhere. The plight of the Kurds deserves the world's fresh attention. Any efforts to address regional problems following the Iraqi crisis must include the Kurds.

The United States also must lead a renewed international effort to prohibit the use of chemical weapons. Never again should any individual or any nation use these deadly weapons of mass destruction with impunity. Just last week, the Senate passed a bill mandating sanctions against anyone who uses them. Although President Bush pocket-vetoed the bill last November, I hope he will now ensure it becomes the law of the land.

If we are to achieve the new world order of which we hear so much, we must stand up to injustice wherever it occurs. Perpetrators of repression, torture and other

violations of human rights must be called to account. Unless and until we accept that fundamental principle, there will never truly be a new world order.

The crisis of the Kurds and the actions of Saddam Hussein underscore the need for all of us in every land to stand up for those who have no voice. Out of the ashes and destruction of the Persian Gulf War, a new and better world may be born.

As Robert Kennedy said in Capetown in 1966:

"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Again, I commend Danielle Mitterrand for the ripples of hope she is sending out. May the Congress of the United States and the whole world hear and heed her message of justice and hope.