

# THE REVIEW KURDISTAN REGION

ISSUE 10  
JANUARY 2016

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

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**HIWA AFANDI**  
KURDISTAN'S IT STRATEGY



**REZAN KADER**  
KURDISTAN IN ITALY



**HAVAL SYAN**  
KURDISTAN IN AUSTRALIA



**THE PROJECT:**  
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**MERI FORUM 2015**  
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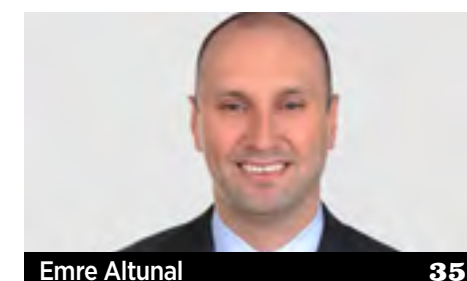
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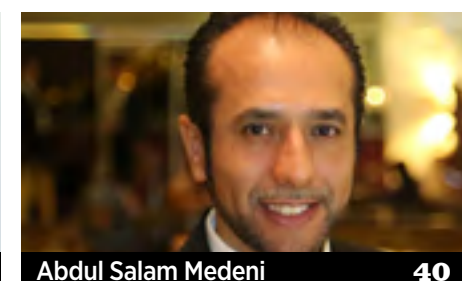
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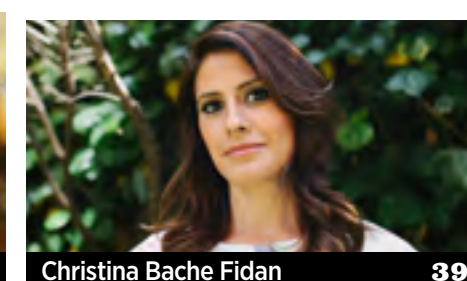
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## KURDISTAN IN ITALY

### DIPLOMACY



Rezan Kader  
KRG Representative in Italy

### IIG talks to Rezan Kader, the KRG Representative in Italy, on the KRG - Italy bilateral ties.

#### How would you characterize the current bilateral ties between Italy and the Kurdistan Region?

The exponential growth of the economy of the Kurdistan Region has attracted more and more Italian entrepreneurs. Italy is among the Kurdistan's biggest trading partners, and many Italian companies are successfully operating in the fields of engineering, infrastructure, and tourism. Both the Italian government and Italian entrepreneurs have shown a keen interest in investing in the Kurdistan Region.

Several memorandums of understanding were signed with the Italian regions, such as the Veneto Region and the Region of Lombardy, with the aim of facilitating and strengthening bilateral relations on various levels, and we hope to soon sign other MOUs with other Italian Regions. In addition to the agreements between the regions, MOUs were also signed between several Italian and Kurdish universities introducing cultural exchanges, and in order to help new generations of Kurdish graduates develop their skills with precious Italian know-how.

Furthermore, we aim to organize an economic forum in Kurdistan in order to introduce

Italian businessmen to local partners and ongoing projects. In turn, in collaboration with ANCE, the National Association of Builders, we will organize an Italy- Kurdistan economic forum in Erbil.

I also would like to underline that the KRG Representation in Italy provides full assistance to Italian entrepreneurs who request information about investment opportunities in Kurdistan and if they decide to register their companies at the local chambers of commerce, we facilitate the authentication of documents of the company by sending them to the relevant Kurdish authorities. Successful examples include the FG Tecnopolo who designed the metro network in the city of Erbil, Duhok and Suleimania, Studio Galli, Impregilo, and Ansaldo, operating mainly in the field of infrastructure.

Clearly, we recognize the presence of around 2 million refugees and IDPs in the Kurdistan Region and that the KRG's valiant Peshmerga forces are fully engaged in the management of the humanitarian crisis and in the fight against ISIS. However, I can say with certainty that despite the current difficulties that the Kurdistan Region is experiencing due to ISIS' terrorism, Italian

business will always be a source of interest for the Kurdish government thanks to its high-level of know-how. I therefore believe that bilateral relations between Italy and the Kurdistan Region should be intensified in all fields, since Italy has always been and continues to be a good friend and a strong supporter of the people of Kurdistan.

#### Have you noticed any misconceptions among members of the Italian business community with regard to the security situation in the Kurdistan Region?

Frankly, I have not noticed any misunderstandings among members of the Italian business community with respect to the security situation in the Kurdistan Region. Kurdistan has always been considered an oasis of peace in the Middle East, as well as being the gateway to the rest of Iraq. We have always preserved the security of our region. For this reason, and due to the significant investment opportunities offered by the Kurdistan Region, Italian investments have grown steadily in the Kurdistan Region. We have strong ties with Italy and would like to diversify our relationship at all levels. ☺

“We aim to organize an economic forum in Kurdistan in order to introduce Italian businessmen to local partners and ongoing projects. In turn, in collaboration with ANCE, the National Association of Builders, we will organize an Italy-Kurdistan economic forum in Erbil.

## KURDISTAN IN AUSTRALIA

### DIPLOMACY



Haval Syan  
KRG Representative in Australia

### IIG talks to Haval Syan, the KRG Representative in Commonwealth of Australia, on the KRG-Australia bilateral ties.

#### Could you provide our readers with a brief background of your Representation's history?

The Representation was established in Sydney in 2009. We work to build a strong relationship between Australia and the Kurdistan Region, and also make businesses and entrepreneurs who wish to visit Kurdistan aware of its development and commercial opportunities. The Representation also serves those from Kurdistan who are now living in Australia, and supports the needs of Kurdistan-Australian citizens who want to return to live in Kurdistan. It assists students from Kurdistan who are studying in Australia by offering advice, liaising with universities, and processing necessary documents.

#### What does the Kurdistan Region offer to Australian business community?

Kurdistan is home to a thriving economy and a young, rapidly growing population. It is a region that is both rich in natural resources and governed by an investment law that benefits foreign investors. We are home to international banks and international airlines run regular flights that connect us to the world.

The relationship between Australia and Kurdistan is, and has for a long time been, positive. This relationship bolsters our efforts to become a modern state, with commercial and economic growth to support the ever-growing population.

There are several Australian

companies working in the Region, some in energy and construction. There is plenty of room for more, particularly with industries such as agriculture, where Australia's experience and the similarities of climate make Kurdistan an ideal investment.

We have yet to tap into the full potential of our mineral resources and our logistics, hospitality and tourism sectors. Australia's expertise and experience in mining technology make it a natural partner for the full exploitation of Kurdistan's natural resources.

#### What areas does your mission prioritize in terms of promoting Kurdistan in Australia?

For centuries, the Kurdistan Region was known as the 'bread basket' of the Middle East. However, with the destruction of thousands of villages during the reign of Saddam Hussein, the Region's agricultural industry suffered immensely. It is only now slowly recovering; much expertise and knowledge has been lost. Australia is renowned for its agricultural industry and modern farming methods, and as such we encourage Australian firms to invest in restoring Kurdistan's natural agricultural potential.

Higher education is a top priority in the Kurdistan Region, with a growing young population eager to gain knowledge and new skills. Australia has many internationally competitive universities, and investment in educational capacity building in the KRG will help build long-term

relationships with universities in Australia and the KRG. These young people will be the future leaders of business and government in the KRG, and strengthened ties can only benefit the long-term relationship between Australia and Kurdistan. We would like to see a larger number of students from the Region discover the benefits of higher education in Australia. We hope to bring their knowledge and skills back to Kurdistan.

#### What is your key message to the Australian business community?

Before the rise of ISIS in mid-2014, Australia had designated the Kurdish Region a 'safe area' of Iraq. Unfortunately, the travel status was reverted to 'unsafe' with Australia advising its citizens not to travel to the Kurdistan Region. However, since the recent advances against ISIS, the KRG's Australia office has been working hard to have the 'safe' status reintroduced for Kurdistan. In any case, international companies, banks and airlines continue to work in Kurdistan.

We encourage the Australian business community to take full advantage of the current situation in Kurdistan. The KRG provides a strong base from which to do business in the rest of Iraq while the current security situation is being resolved. We will be pleased to provide Australian companies with any information they like, and will provide assistance for their visit to the Kurdistan Region. ☺

“We encourage the Australian business community to take full advantage of the current situation in Kurdistan. The liaison office in Australia will be pleased to provide Australian investors and companies with any information they like, and will provide assistance and support for their visit to Kurdistan.



# THE FUTURE IN ACTION



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As a multi-service conglomerate, Falcon Group's mandate is to successfully manage a wide spectrum of dynamic business ventures. Whether in the real estate, security, construction, oil & gas, travel or agriculture sectors, Falcon Group is committed to world-class product and service delivery here in Kurdistan.



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## DIPLOMACY



Gary Kent  
Director, APPG - Kurdistan Region

## How a dynamic, pluralist and moderate Kurdistan can help the world overcome Daesh

Iraqi Kurds are increasingly seen as pivotal in the struggle against Daesh and parliamentary interest has reached a new plateau. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which has been sent parliamentary delegations to Kurdistan since 2008, initially found it difficult to persuade senior MPs to join but a recent delegation included a former Deputy Finance Minister, and chairmen of the Conservative and Labour backbench defense committees plus that of Labour's foreign affairs committee.

They visited Erbil and Slemani and met the Prime Minister and Ministers for Natural Resources, Foreign Affairs, and Planning, the three main parties and the British Business Group Kurdistan. They visited Kirkuk and surveyed frontline Daesh positions two miles away and were in country when Sinjar was liberated. Parliamentarians were left in no doubt that airstrikes play a major role and that the KRG needs more heavy weapons.

They were also left in no doubt about Kurdistan's economic crisis and the long term impact of hosting up to two million refugees and internally displaced people, with insufficient support from Baghdad. They visited two IDP camps and heard that even if peace were established soon they will remain until a lasting

political settlement is reached.

It was, I think, clear to all that the idea of reviving Iraq as a unitary state is either extraordinarily difficult or impossible, and much the same can be said about Syria once Daesh is dispatched. Their military defeat is possible but the root causes of the Sunni insurgency could yet spawn successors to Daesh and finding a means to assure Sunnis that they will no longer be marginalized by Baghdad or Damascus is an issue of growing importance.

Former British Foreign Secretary, William Hague recently argued, for instance, that "The UK and our allies should signal their openness to new solutions. The borders of Syria and Iraq were largely drawn by two British and French diplomats in 1916. They should not be considered immutable. If the leaders of either country cannot construct a state where all communities can live together, it will be right to consider international support for their partition. Kurds have shown their ability to run their own affairs. A subdivided Syria might now be the only one that can be at peace."

Such thinking was also mentioned in the fraught debates on the UK joining its allies in taking direct military action against Daesh in Syria as well as Iraq. Prime Minister Cameron has

long accepted the military logic but, after his defeat two years ago on taking punitive action against Assad's use of chemical weapons, sought a consensus across the parties.

Cameron convinced the Commons with the support of many Labour MPs and their shadow Foreign Secretary, Hilary Benn whose bravura speech quoted the KRG's High Representative to the UK, Karwan Jamal Tahir about the success of airstrikes and why Iraq and Syria are one battlefield against Daesh.

Support for the Kurdistan Region has been growing for a decade thanks to the willingness of its leaders to engage with British politicians and the wider public. Its dynamic economy and democratic aspirations won admiration. The emergence of the deadly Daesh virus places the Kurds in the frontline for the West, after the Paris atrocities and the danger of such acts in London.

A major and wide-ranging Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry into the UK's role in combatting Daesh offers an opportunity for the Kurds and their friends to highlight how a dynamic, pluralist and moderate Kurdistan can help the world overcome Daesh. The Kurds also need to widen and deepen British support for whatever they face in 2016. ☞

“Support for the Kurdistan Region has been growing for a decade thanks to the willingness of its leaders to engage with British politicians and the wider public. Its dynamic economy and democratic aspirations won admiration.”



## WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

### DIPLOMACY



*Professor Dlawer Ala'Aldeen  
President, Middle East Research  
Institute (MERI)*

“MERI has recently been awarded several grants by the European Commission and United Nations to study the fast-changing political and socio-economic dynamics and their future implications on the landscape in the Middle East.

### IIIG talks to Prof. Dlawer Ala'Aldeen about Erbil-Baghdad relations, the MERI Forum 2015, and Institutes's future projects.

The Kurdistan Region has undergone impressive economic developments between 2009-2014. However, the Region has faced considerable economic challenges since early 2015. At the same time, new opportunities are rising which have the potential to become decisive for the necessary reforms. Which immediate reforms are needed to respond these challenges?

Kurdistan Region's economy is that of a typical rentier state, with almost total dependence on oil revenue. The KRG needs to commit itself to a range of radical structural reforms and adopt a credible overall economic vision, a long term strategy and a serious plan of implementation. Several initiatives must be adopted in parallel in many key areas to regain the confidence of the business community. These include obvious ones, such as re-balancing the budget deficit, through increasing revenues and maximizing efficiency, and revitalizing the dormant sectors such as the agriculture, tourism, manufacturing and banking.

In addition, better legislation and policies are needed to integrate the entire economy, and provide long-term security

to international investors. The KRG ministries must be subject to scrutiny and performance assessments as very few are guided by clear visions or strategies and fewer still are working to their maximum potential. Inaction is not an option and the consequences can be dire.

**MERI held its second inaugural Forum in November 2015 with the participation of leading players from Erbil and Baghdad. Could any workable solution be reached between the both sides in the short term?**

Relations between Baghdad and Erbil are likely to be more stable than the past years. They have too many crises in common, including (among many) the war on ISIS, a financial crisis, and dissatisfied public. The only way of managing these crises is by reducing tension between the both governments. Fortunately, there are clear efforts from political parties on both sides to mend fences and normalize relations.

That said, I do not expect any breakthroughs in relations. They have lost trust and confidence in each other, and Baghdad's political system is increasingly dysfunctional. Except for

some disputed oil and land issues, Baghdad has accepted the KRG's de facto economic, political and military independence and the KRG parties will not settle for anything less than what they have already earned. Therefore, we may see that both sides remain unhappy but tolerate each other.

**MERI conducted a research project on Kirkuk that remains one of the unsolvable problems between Erbil and Baghdad. Could you please highlight some key findings of the project?**

We found that the political stalemate has become too chronic to yield miracles, and, if left alone the communities' leaders are too divided to negotiate win-win solutions. Meanwhile, Kirkuk will remain depressed, polarized and ready to ignite further conflicts.

In our policy report, we took a bottom-up approach and considered the Kirkuk communities as the key actors in proposed solutions. Following extensive interviews and focus group debates, we highlighted the issues and possible solutions. We designed a roadmap and made specific policy recommendations to

“It is now time to think about the long-term future of these displaced populations and adopt new policies to promote economic resilience and social cohesion, because the signs indicate that many are here to stay.



MERI Forum 2015

local, national and international stakeholders. We presented the report to Kirkuk's leaders at the Provincial Council and urged them to seize the initiative, own its leadership and lobby for a lasting solution.

**Kurdistan hosts over 2 million refugees and IDPs. The influx of refugees & IDPs are imposing substantial economic and social costs. How do refugees & IDPs affect the social, security and economic environment in the Kurdistan Region?**

Population displacements have become fact of life in our neighbourhood, and there is no end in sight. The people of Kurdistan demonstrated their generosity and tolerance, despite a long history of tension between them and the Arab Sunni communities

where the vast majority of the IDPs come from.

The presence of refugees and IDPs has clearly added to financial and security burden, at a time when the KRI itself has numerous existing crises. However, the refugees can be a source of growth and long-term development in the Kurdistan Region. So far, the KRG has concentrated mainly on the urgent and short-term needs of these displaced populations, and due to its limited financial capacity it has relied mainly on international help to accommodate these needs. However, it is now time to think about the long-term future of these displaced populations and adopt new policies to promote economic resilience and social cohesion, because the signs indicate that many are here to stay.

**What will be the key projects & areas of focus of MERI in 2016?**

The key projects will include acting as catalysts for economic reform, institutionalisation of Peshmerga and enhancing relations between political parties within the KRG, and between Erbil, Baghdad, Tehran and Ankara. We will continue our studies on displaced populations and promoting human rights, women's rights, rule-of-law and democracy in Iraq. MERI has recently been awarded several grants by the European Commission and United Nations to study the fast-changing political and socio-economic dynamics and their future implications on the landscape in the Middle East. ☞



## MERI FORUM 2015: SHARING VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

**By bringing together leading figures in domestic and international politics, MERI aims to provide a platform for constructive dialogue to those committed to overcoming the crises currently facing the region.**

The Middle East has recently gone through unprecedented turmoil that is destined to change its political and socioeconomic landscape. The impact of these changes will continue to affect the Middle East for years to come. Divergence and fragmentation of nations and communities throughout this region have reached critical levels, and provided fertile grounds for extremism and terrorism to thrive.

This year's three day MERI Forum focused on Sharing Visions for the Future of the Middle East. It brought together senior ranking national and international policy-makers, respected academics, and opinion-makers who engaged in spirited debate on wide-ranging topics from the Kirkuk conundrum, combating ISIS, the displacement crisis, the Iran nuclear deal and its implications for the regional politics, the political crisis in Kurdistan, Erbil-Baghdad relations and the challenges of keeping Iraq

united. As in 2014, the second annual forum succeeded in generating a lively debate by prominent figures with the live participation of the audience as well as extensive national and international media coverage.

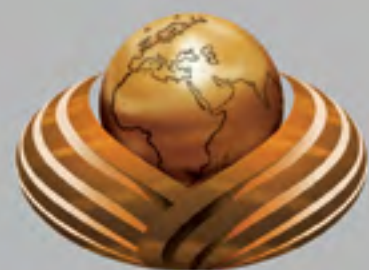
By bringing together leading figures in domestic and international politics, MERI aims to provide a platform for constructive dialogue to those committed to overcoming the crises currently facing the region – and will continue to do so in the future. ☉







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## KURDISTAN'S IT STRATEGY

ICT



Hiwa Afandi  
Head of the Department of  
Information Technology, KRG

### IIG talks to Hiwa Afandi about the DIT's current and future projects.

The Department of Information Technology (DIT) announced the launch of the top level domain suffix '.krd', in 2015. Could you brief our readers on the purpose of the .krd domain?

The purpose of the .krd TLD is to promote Kurdistan and raise the people of Kurdistan to the international stage by providing an online space over which to promote and develop the institutions, businesses, culture and language of the Kurdistan Region and its people. As such, the TLD aims to establish a dedicated, open namespace that represents Kurdish people within Kurdistan and internationally, and offers a new and innovative approach for internet users globally to engage with the people of Kurdistan.

Eric Schmidt, the executive chairman of Alphabet (Google) Inc in his co-authored book, "The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business" states that establishing the .krd is a step towards virtual statehood.

.krd is our pride and national flag in cyber space and plays a strategic role in validating our institutions in an age of expanding globalization. It will enable Kurdistan to take part in the increasing amount of global, cultural and commercial activities that take place online and will give Kurdistan the ability to bring its rich language, cultures and traditions to the world.

We are working hard to make sure the rights of registrants are protected and that policies are in place that safeguard transparent



operations.

.krd has a dedicated website answering any questions at: [www.dot.krd](http://www.dot.krd)

**What are the key components of Kurdistan's e-Government strategy? And what are your current and future projects for e-government initiatives and for improving the way the KRG interacts with its citizens?**

The key components of our e-Government strategy are:

- 1) Designing and implementing a connected and secure IT infrastructure
- 2) Developing and sharing government-wide IT applications,

including utilities, data hubs and e-Services

- 3) Providing clear IT governance and leadership for government-wide programs

- 4) Building capacity in the region through education and training
- 5) Implementing sound IT policies enshrined in appropriate legislation, standards and regulations

- 6) Encouraging IT participation in order to nurture the emergence of a dynamic IT industry, and helping raise the level of internet penetration in society
- 7) Ensuring efficient and transparent mechanisms for IT investment

“

The recent economic crisis showed the value of Information Technology, with DIT playing a significant role in quantifying and measuring government expenses.

The difficulties that the Middle East as a whole and Kurdistan in particular are facing have slowed down our progress. Achieving the strategic goals mentioned above requires significant resources and powerful IT governance. Therefore, it is essential to identify the projects that are of higher priority and urgency. Delivering any IT services requires crucial infrastructure components and businesses that will utilize them. Creating KRG's first datacenter and ensuring secure access network are the two most crucial infrastructural projects that the Department of Information Technology is working on. Digital

### .KRD

The purpose of the .krd TLD is to promote Kurdistan and raise the people of Kurdistan to the international stage by providing an online space over which to promote and develop the institutions, businesses, culture and language of the Kurdistan Region and its people.

Identity Management Systems as well as HR and Payroll are the first business applications that will be implemented with other e-services following.

**How do you envision the DIT growing and evolving in its role over the next five years?**

Running a government without IT is nearly impossible or at least extremely inefficient. The recent economic crisis showed the value of Information Technology, with DIT playing a significant role in quantifying and measuring government expenses. We believe our leaders see great value in taking advantage of technologies

in general and IT in particular.

Kurdistan is currently blessed with a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister who have a clear understanding of the importance of Information Technology. If this support continues, we believe the next five years will bring huge steps forward.

Payroll, Human Resources Management, Education, Health etc. will all be managed efficiently and transparently within the next five years. Having these systems in place will contribute to a transparent and healthy economy where decisions are made based on solid facts and data. ☞

“

Kurdistan is currently blessed with a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister who have a clear understanding of the importance of Information Technology. If this support continues, we believe the next five years will bring huge steps forward.



## THE FUTURE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF KURDISTAN

### ECONOMY



Dr. Anwar Anaid  
University of Kurdistan-Hewler

“If approached wisely, the current challenges faced by the Kurdistan Region will become opportunities in the future.”

The majority of people in the Kurdistan Region are financially dependent on the government, which is itself dependent on oil income. Like many oil-based economies, the region's economic booms and busts are heavily influenced by the oil sector.

With this framework in mind, where is the Kurdistan region's economy heading in the foreseeable future?

#### Public Sector

On one hand, balancing revenues and expenses for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is dependent on oil prices and the rate of export. On the other, it is determined by public spending and the rate of borrowing. Though the KRG's capacity to export oil will gradually increase, it has no control over the global price of crude, while the boost in oil production will not necessarily translate into significantly better economic conditions over the next few years. The KRG's public borrowings of more than \$15 billion are higher than its annual income and these have not been spent on productive investments. Most of the KRG's budget is allocated to paying \$700 million worth of monthly

salaries. The number of public employees is estimated to be an extraordinary 1,350,000.

It is true that these salaries stimulate demand for goods and services, encouraging everyday business in the region. However, wasteful public expenditures simply inject more cash into the economy, increasing inflationary pressures on imported consumer goods. Local production is hardly helped by this trend. Goods and services produced in the Kurdistan region can hardly compete with better, cheaper imported foreign products and services.

Highly unproductive public spending is not sustainable, especially given that the KRG is facing a financial crisis. Such a spending pattern will keep the government's budget under pressure and divert scarce funds away from productive investments.

#### Private Sector

Unsustainable price rises have shaped unreasonable expectations for a high rate of return on investments and business activities. These expectations were formed in a context of political stability, superior investment opportunities, robust security and generous government

policies between 2004 and 2014. These factors were blunted by the fall of oil prices, the rise of ISIS and Baghdad's salary cuts in 2014.

We should not underestimate the impact of the business cycle, which has been overshadowed by security challenges and budgetary issues. For example, the real estate sector is witnessing a correction after a recent, steep rise in prices. It will take a considerable amount of time for this sector to recover.

Expectations in the private sector of high profits have slowed its adjustment to the changes in prices that have been dictated by market circumstances. This slow adaptation to new economic realities – a key shortcoming of the private sector in the Kurdistan region – will also slow down the KRG's broader economic recovery.

An important principle of economics suggests that rational people think at the margin: a dose of such marginal thinking is needed in Kurdistan's newly developing economy. Until the region has fully weathered the current economic downturn, businesses need to be content with a marginal rate of return and adjust their expectations

“Better infrastructure and a skilled, efficient labor force are essential for boosting productivity. In the case of the KRG, improving the quality of education will open the way to replacing the foreign workforce with a local one.”

to new economic conditions. To do so, they need to increase productivity, efficiency and competitiveness.

From a consumer perspective, the macroeconomic pressures on Kurdistan's private sector could be beneficial in the long run. Among others, the real estate, retail and restaurant sectors are facing increased competition. Many of the businesses that were price makers are gradually becoming price takers. They will be forced to improve the quality of their products and services while offering lower prices. The high, pre-ISIS rates of return are no longer feasible.

The key to the Kurdistan Region's long-term macroeconomic stability lies in policies that increase public and private productivity. Real gains in local productivity, rather than simple wage increases, will enhance economic growth and keep a lid on inflation. Well-researched policies that account for the region's comparative economic advantages are necessary and would be strengthened by the establishment of protective measures for local industry.

Privatization of unproductive public sectors, especially electricity, could be another solution.

Privatizing boosts efficiency and shifts some of the price burden away from the government.

In sectors where uncertainty and challenging economic circumstances make the private sector less likely to invest, the key to economic recovery is public spending on productive, long-term investments in infrastructure, including education and vocational training. Better infrastructure and a skilled, efficient labor force are essential for boosting productivity. In the case of the KRG, improving the quality of education will open the way to replacing the foreign workforce with a local one.

Merit-based employment in both the public and private sector is equally important. Addressing corruption in employment processes, avoiding further political appointments in technocratic positions and better economic management at all levels in the government and private sectors are needed in order to improve the efficiency of the economy.

Given the political nature of state appointments in the KRG, trimming down the public sector will be challenging and politically risky. However, responsible political and business leaders

need to make firm decisions and prioritize long term development over destructive, populist policies.

To enhance productivity in the public sector, the government can transfer surplus employees from overstaffed to understaffed ministries. A system could be introduced whereby in order to maintain positions employees must demonstrate a commitment to skills development. This will improve the skill level of KRG employees while improving the ability of the state to provide much-needed services.

Considering the burden imposed by low oil prices, large public debt, unstable security conditions and a downward market cycle, Kurdistan's economy will likely take several years to recover. Even if oil prices rise and energy exports grow, it will take years to pay back public borrowings and boost spending in key sectors.

Economies, like people, learn the most in hard times. But the KRG's problems can only be solved if its most pressing issues are correctly tackled. If approached wisely, the current challenges faced by the Kurdistan Region will become opportunities in the future. ☯



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### ECONOMY



Dave van Zoonen,  
Research Fellow at MERI

The vulnerability of Kurdistan's economy to volatility in the international markets was painfully revealed by last year's fall in oil prices. Now, almost a year and a half later, it has become abundantly clear that Kurdistan's dependence on the export of a single commodity as the main driver for its GDP is both economically undesirable and fiscally unsustainable. With the oil price hitting its lowest point in ten years, and no reason to suspect a turn for the better any time soon, the KRG finds itself in desperate need to come up with a comprehensive policy for diversifying its economy and increasing production in the private sector.

This situation is not unique to the KRG and many governments of oil-rich countries currently find themselves in the same position. In addition, history is laden with examples of governments attempting to steer their economies away from resource dependence by developing and implementing large-scale economic diversification strategies. Naturally, some have been more successful than others but all efforts, successful or not, can provide important lessons learned to those pursuing a similar objective.

For example, in Chile, a country home to about 38% of the world's copper reserves, the government succeeded in steering its economy away from a single commodity and added important alternatives such as wine, timber, fruit and salmon to its main

exports, reducing the country's vulnerability to price fluctuations in the international markets. Historically, Malaysia was heavily dependent on the export of rubber and tin, but through a sustained governmental strategy was able to diversify its agricultural output by including palm oil as a major export product. Moreover, the country has made impressive progress in developing a competitive manufacturing sector, particularly in higher added-value products such as industrial electronics. By the early 2000's, this manufacturing sector produced over 30% of Malaysia's total GDP. Finally, Indonesia has a long history in government-led industrialisation, enabling it to reduce its earlier dependence on primary commodities in mining and agriculture.

While the KRG can benefit from the experiences of these countries, it has to establish its own model for recovery in accordance with its unique set of natural resources, economic potential and geopolitics. Nonetheless, the KRG should identify parallels with existing cases and actively seek to get technical assistance from leading experts experienced in implementing such economic reform plans. This should move beyond the mere diagnosis of the infamous 'Dutch Disease' and the consequential loss of competitiveness in agricultural and manufacturing sectors. No one needs to explain to Kurdistan the detrimental effects of oil-dependency on the rest of the economy, or the extent of the damage done

by the multiple external shocks. But, understanding the problem is one thing and taking meaningful steps to solve it is another.

There are a wide variety of policy-tools available to governments to enhance private sector diversity ranging from tax breaks, subsidies, public procurement and investment, to deregulation, reducing restrictions on investment, import-substituting policies, promoting public-private partnerships and increasing assistance to small- and medium businesses. Some of these tools require an allocation of funds that currently may be out of reach for the government. Others, however, are financially more feasible such as promoting public-private partnerships, implementing import tariffs and facilitating a better investment climate by increasing transparency and improving institutional oversight.

The need for a sustained and comprehensive approach to private sector development in Kurdistan has revealed itself beyond any doubt. Ultimately, what has worked in some countries may not work in Kurdistan and a successful policy-mix should always be tailored to realities on the ground. Nonetheless, the KRG would benefit from an outward-looking approach which draws inspiration from other countries further along in their process of economic reform. These countries can provide valuable council and serve as beacons along the KRG's own path to private sector diversification. ☯

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With the oil price hitting its lowest point in ten years, and no reason to suspect a turn for the better any time soon, the KRG finds itself in desperate need to come up with a comprehensive policy for diversifying its economy and increasing production in the private sector.

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Empire's multi-faceted and mixed-use approach to land utilization for residential, leisure and entertainment, service facilities and office/commercial space, affords the Project the distinguishing characteristic of a city within a city.

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Empire Business Towers

Empire Business Complex

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Empire Royal Apartments

Empire Residential Wings

Empire Diamond Towers

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## GEARED TO BUILD

### REAL ESTATE



*Peshraw Majid Agha  
Chairman, Falcon Group*

### IIG talks to Peshraw Majid Agha on Falcon Group's Empire World project, and the company's future goals.

Falcon Group is one of Kurdistan's top firms, and boasts a diversified line of businesses. What sectors do you consider to be the cornerstones of your company?

The sectors that stand out are our construction, security and real estate services. Together, they form the lynchpin of Falcon Group's development strategy. The continuous pursuit of growth and diverse business opportunities have driven our success.

What are Falcon Group's main objectives for 2016, and what is its medium-term development strategy?

Our goal is to maintain steady growth in core sectors, including security, real estate, construction, and oil & gas services, while looking out for new opportunities elsewhere. Kurdistan is still a growing region, and while many sectors of the economy have slowed in the past year, its long-term development model is sustainable and continues to attract investment.

Can you brief our readers on the construction of the Empire World project?

Empire World is a very large development that spans over 750,000sqm. It is probably the largest mixed-use development in all of Iraq. To date, we have completed about 75% of the project and are currently working on the Empire West Wings, which features residential towers and three business towers. We will be



handing over the keys of these landmark buildings next year.

**What distinguishes Empire World from other projects in the Kurdistan Region?**

It's the thought which has gone into every stage of development, from the design and layout of

Empire World, which was engineered by a top architecture firm in Dubai, to its facility management and prudent financial planning, which have ensured that the project has continued despite the credit crunch we are all witnessing in Kurdistan. ☞

“

To date, we have completed about 75% of the project and are currently working on the Empire West Wings, which features residential towers and three business towers. We will be handing over the keys of these landmark buildings next year.



Empire World continues to forge ahead, advancing the construction of the Empire World Project despite the economic challenges confronting the Kurdistan Region.

The Empire West Wing's residential projects are now 75% complete, with its grand opening expected in mid-2016. The shell structure of the three luxury Diamond Towers has been completed, while three out of five of the Empire Business Towers are due to be completed by mid-2016. Empire Business Complex, a series of six premium office blocks, was completed in early 2015 and is ready for commercial tenants.

Home to several major real estate and development projects, the Empire World Project spans a land area of 750,000m<sup>2</sup>.

## THE PROJECT:

# EMPIRE WORLD

Total construction area:  
**1,250,000m<sup>2</sup>**

Building plot area:  
**429,835m<sup>2</sup>**

Total green area and roads:  
**360,000m<sup>2</sup>**

Service plot area:  
**12,500m<sup>2</sup>**

Total cost of project:  
**\$2.7 Billion**

Total Units:  
**88 towers &  
300 luxury villas**

Utilizing land for residential, leisure, and work spaces, Empire's multi-faceted and mixed-use approach to land development is the project's most distinct characteristic, and lends it the feeling of a city within a city.





## KURDISTAN ENERGY UPDATE

### ENERGY



Shwan Zual  
Director, Carduchi Consulting

In the latest sign that Kurdish oil has established a foothold in the international market, November marked the third consecutive month of payments to firms exporting crude through the Ceyhan pipeline. Though the payments are not yet enough to satisfy the expectations of IOCs, they have become far more predictable. Three months of back-to-back payment is an industry first since IOCs began using Ceyhan in early 2014.

Investors and bondholders are now eyeing the frequency of payments, and will watch the next three months closely. The regularity of payment depends on the Kurdistan Regional Government, though the value of payments is tied to global oil prices. Even if payments now meet the costs of most contractors, however, extra cash for investment is lacking, and there is no indication as to when payments will rise.

In order to improve its outlook, the KRG should tighten public finances and reduce spending. Recognition is growing that reform in public sector finances is long overdue, with the deputy prime minister acknowledging in early December that the large number of employees on government payrolls is crippling KRG finances.

The KRG is seeking to add

value and kick-start its oil and gas industry with its infusion of state payments. Erbil appears set on quenching local demand and exporting considerable volumes of gas to Turkey by the end of the decade. Despite efforts by the KRG to boost the development of the gas sector, however, various obstacles have limited progress. Setting aside the global financial crisis, gas discoveries in Kurdistan have been a mixed bag. Extraction in some fields is technically challenging, pushing up the cost of development, while some firms have been prioritising oil over gas. Moreover, financing large-scale projects has proven challenging.

Kurdish gas is consumed locally and exported to Turkey, which has signed a 50-year gas deal with the KRG. The Turkish market is a ready buyer for discounted Kurdish gas, and demand may rise after Turkey's downing of a Russian jet in Syria put Ankara in direct conflict with its biggest gas supplier.

As calls for diversification grow in Turkey, which depends on Russia for more than half of its gas imports, Ankara is well placed to take advantage of Kurdish gas. Turkey's state entity, TEC, owns a number of concessions, while one of the KRG's largest operators, Genel Energy, is an Anglo-Turkish firm.

For now, Moscow seems to

have no appetite for cutting gas exports to Turkey, but diversification of the gas market in Turkey is likely to increase. Although Kurdish gas is not yet able to meet Turkish demand, it is one of the most viable medium and long-term solutions for Turkish diversification.

Once Kurdistan's gas fields are fully developed, an export volume of 10 bcm to Turkey would be feasible. The development of gas largely depends on financing. To date, neither Erbil nor oil companies who have found gas in the KRG have the finances to develop it. Coupled with low oil prices, the threat of ISIS, and internal political instability, financing projects in Kurdistan remains a difficult task. The bond market is effectively closed to both the KRG and the oil companies it hosts, while rates are at an all-time high.

Guaranteed financing from Turkey is one of the most viable solutions for now. Turkey has a stake in the Kurdish gas, especially in terms of diversification, pricing and geopolitics. Through either direct investment, the expansion of Turkish state-owned companies operating in Kurdistan, or financing guarantees for private stakeholders, Turkey has the incentive to encourage development. ☞

“

The Turkish market is a ready buyer for discounted Kurdish gas, and demand may rise after Turkey's downing of a Russian jet in Syria put Ankara in direct conflict with its biggest gas supplier.

## New Records Set in Oil Production & Exports

The oil & gas industry continues to form the bedrock of the Kurdistan Region's economy, and the last year has been one of groundbreaking accomplishments for Kurdistan's energy industry. The Kurdistan Region exported over 34 million barrels of oil in 2014. In total, more than \$2.87 billion-worth of oil has been sold to customers around the world. The KRG has set a production goal of 2 million bpd by 2020.

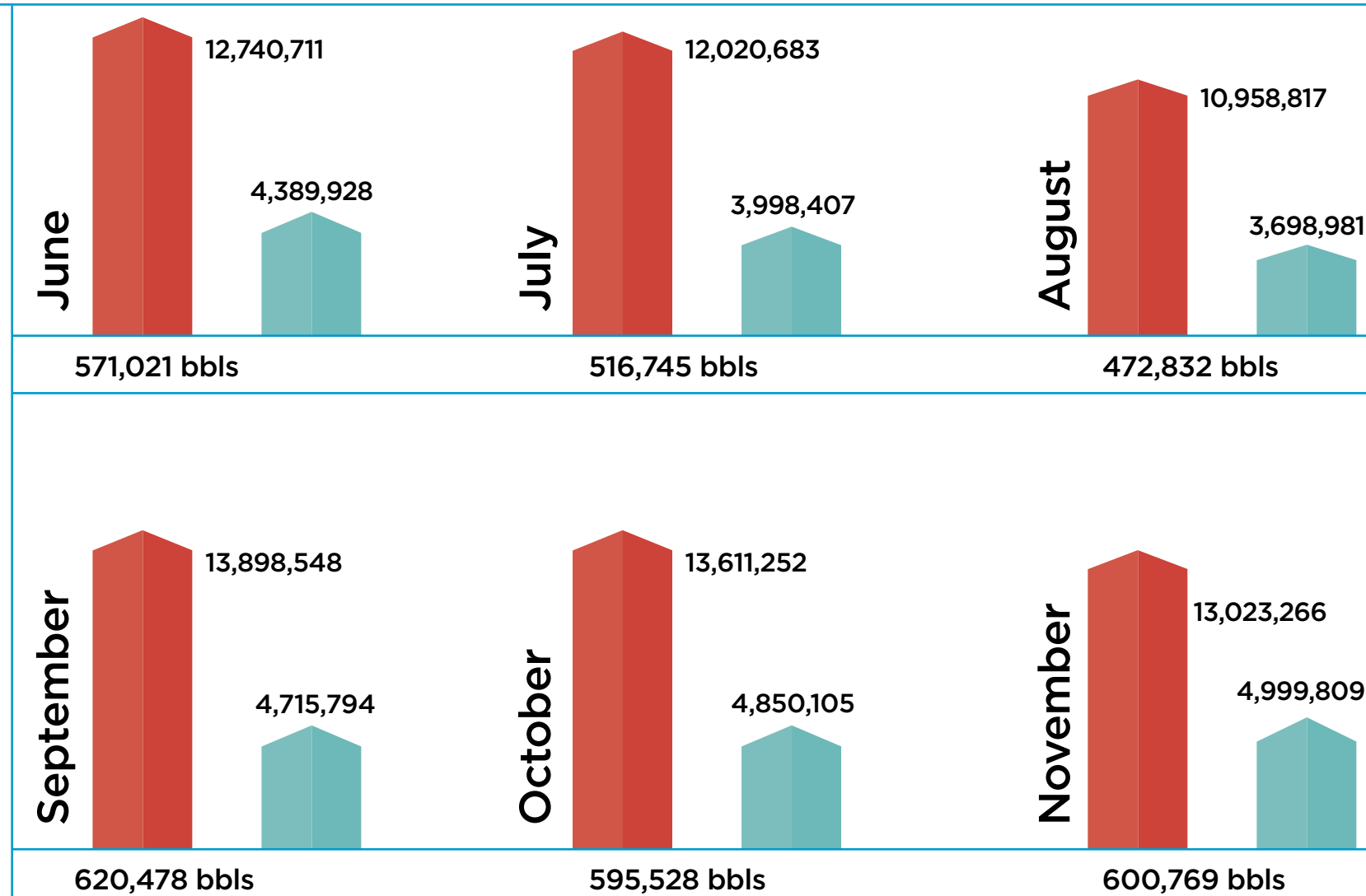
### MONTHLY OIL EXPORTS 2015

#### BBLs

Exported from KRG Operated Fields

Exported from NOC Operated Fields

AVERAGE DAILY EXPORTED TO CEYHAN



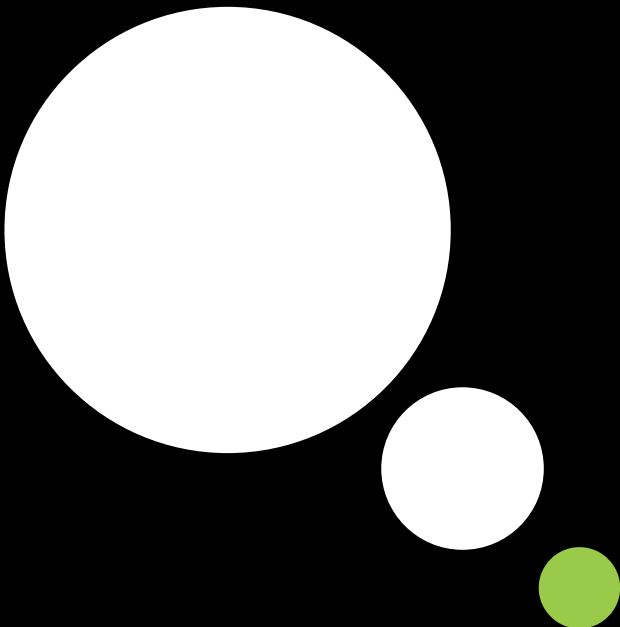
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# Taxation in the Kurdistan Region

## DOING BUSINESS

As a semi-autonomous Region, the Kurdistan Region has introduced certain tax laws and practices that diverge from the position in Federal Iraq. This section discusses corporate income tax; including issues such as compliance, income tax rate, and loss carry forwards.

Transfer pricing, capital gains, withholding tax, employment tax, social security contributions, VAT/sales tax and import, export and customs duties are also discussed.

### Corporate tax

1

#### 1.1 Compliance

- Entities are required to register with the Income Tax Directorate (ITD) in Kurdistan Region for corporate income taxes.
- The Income Tax Directorate (ITD) typically requires Kurdistan entities to complete the tax registration by way of their first corporate tax filing.
- Registered companies and branches of foreign entities are required to make annual corporate tax filings with the ITD, and make payment of corporation tax, by 30th of June following year-end (Note: the statutory filing deadline is 31 May, but a 1 month extension is in practice applied by the tax authority to all businesses).
- The penalty for late filing is currently 10% of the tax due, capped at IQD 75,000 per year.

#### 1.2 Corporate income tax rate

- The current corporate income tax rate for all industries is a flat rate of 15%.
- According to the tax law, if supporting books and records are maintained, corporate income tax should be calculated based on the net accounting profits per audited financial statements.

- In the absence of audited financial statements and supporting documentation, it is not uncommon for the ITD to assess corporate income taxes based on pre-determined industry sector deemed profit schedules.

#### 1.3 Loss carry forwards

- Kurdistan Income Tax Law No. 26 of 2007 and its subsequent amendment Law No. 20 of 2011 are both silent about loss carry forwards, but in accordance with Iraqi Income Tax Law No. 113 of 1982 as amended in 2003:
- Losses incurred during the year may be carried forward for a maximum of five consecutive years, to be offset against profits generated from the same source as the original loss.
  - Up to 50% of the taxable income in a year may be sheltered by brought forward tax losses.
  - To the extent that an entity is loss making, the tax authority may seek to assess the entity on a deemed profits basis, which would effectively disregard any losses incurred in the current year and deny the entity of tax relief for carried forward losses in future periods.

2

### Transfer pricing

- There are no formal transfer pricing rules in Kurdistan Region.
- The tax authority, however, reserves the right to adjust transactions, for tax purposes, which they consider not to be at arm's length.

3

### Capital gains

- There is no separate capital gains tax regime in Kurdistan Region.
- Gains and losses realized by a Kurdistan entity on disposal of non-current assets is classified as ordinary income and is subject to corporate income tax at the applicable corporate income tax rate.
- The tax law does not specifically provide for a tax on gains realized by a non-resident. However, there are provisions included within the tax law which the tax authority could use to seek to assess tax on a gain realized from the disposal by a non-resident of Kurdistan assets.

Employees working in the Kurdistan Region are subject to personal income tax at a rate of 5% on their income in excess of IQD 1,000,000 per month.





#### Withholding tax

4

- In practice, there is no withholding tax on dividends.
- A tax of 15% should apply to payments of interest to non-residents but this is not always consistently applied.
- The Kurdistan Region does not currently impose withholding taxes on service payments.

#### Employment tax

5

- Entities registered in Kurdistan Region must register with the ITD for employment taxes with respect to their employees working in Kurdistan.
- Employment tax filings are due annually by 30th of June following year-end.
- Employees working in the Kurdistan Region are subject to personal income tax at a rate of 5% on their income in excess of IQD 1,000,000 per month.
- Social security contributions withheld from the employee are deductible when calculating taxable income.
- Both foreign and local Iraqi national employees are assessed tax on the same basis.

#### Social Security contributions

6

- All employers operating in the Kurdistan Region are required to remit Social Security and Pensions Contributions (SSPC) for their employees in the Kurdistan Region.
- There are two components to the SSPC: Employees are required to contribute 5% of their monthly salary. The employer deducts at source this amount from the employee's salary.
- Employers are required to pay 12% of the salary in respect of their employees working in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
- Exemptions are available to foreign nationals working in the Kurdistan Region if covered in their home country and proof of coverage is documented with the social security office.
- Such proof must be authenticated by the Iraqi embassy in the country where the foreign employee resides.

#### VAT/Sales tax

7

- There is currently no VAT or sales tax levied on goods or services in the Kurdistan Region.

#### Import, export and custom duties

8

- Under Iraq domestic legislation, customs duty on goods brought into Iraq is generally 5% of the CIF value of the goods imported.
- Customs duty exemptions may be available for goods and equipment imported in connection with upstream oil and gas activity, or goods imported on a temporary basis.

The current income tax rate for all industries is a flat 15% calculated based on the net accounting profits per audited financial statements; however, it is not uncommon for the ITD to assess corporate income taxes based on pre-determined industry sector deemed profit schedules.

## PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES IN THE KURDISTAN REGION

### LEGAL VIEWPOINT



Alain Hannouche  
Hannouche Associates

“

Under the PSC, a management committee shall be established within thirty days following the effective date of the contract and shall consist of two representatives of the IOC along with two representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The Production Sharing Contracts (PSC) signed between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the International Oil Companies (IOC) regulate almost all aspects of the companies' operations in Kurdistan.

Under the PSC, a management committee shall be established within thirty days following the effective date of the contract and shall consist of two representatives of the IOC along with two representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). The committee is chaired by one of the two MNR representatives, who will practically have the final decision in all matters where a unanimous vote of the committee is not required as set forth in the PSC.

Subsequently, the IOC must submit its suggested procedures for procurement of equipment, materials or services, for the management committee's comments and reviews. The procedures are considered final following a unanimous vote by the committee or in case no amendments were requested within thirty (30) days of submittal.

Furthermore, the IOC shall present a yearly work program and budget to the management committee, based on which all costs are approved, with only a small amount of not budgeted expenditures (usually 10% of the initial budget) allowed, above

which the unanimous approval of the management committee will be needed for any additional costs.

The abovementioned requirements are stipulated for in each PSC but the MNR has in practice managed to relatively unify the procurement procedures for all IOCs, which can be summarized as follows:

- A threshold generally ranging between \$100,000 and \$500,000 is agreed upon with each IOC. Any contract with a supplier surpassing the set amount needs to be tendered out. All direct contracts, with a value below the threshold, need to be notified to the management committee with a justification for the choice of supplier and a proof of the supplier's registration at the MNR's as an approved vendor.

- The procurement department at the IOC submits an official request to the MNR whenever a contract needs to be put out to tender. The request must detail the scope of work of the contract and its budget, along with other details, and would ask the MNR to provide the procurement department with a list of approved vendors for the related scope of work.

- Consequently, the IOC can choose to send out the tender documents to some or all of the approved vendors. The list of vendors receiving the tender documents must be presented

to the MNR. In some cases where a prequalification is conducted by the company, the list of approved vendors that successfully prequalified must be submitted to the MNR before releasing the tender documents.

- Following the timely receipt of the participants' bids, the management committee shall meet to open all the received submissions. After this meeting, the IOC can then proceed to a thorough examination of the technical and commercial components of every bid in order to reach a decision regarding the order of preference of all bids. Usually the assessment process follows a points system used to be able to eventually provide the management committee with a ranked list of bidders along with the justification and explanation of the provided order of preference.

- Afterwards, the management committee deliberates about the tender and the ranked list provided by the IOC in order to choose the winning bidder, which is the sole right of the management committee regardless of the IOC's order of preference. Nevertheless, considering each of the four members of the committee holds only one vote, and, the chairman entitled to the tie-breaking vote, the IOC representatives in the committee practically have an advisory role only, where their opinions and votes can only influence but not decide the choice of the winning bidder. ☎



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HOSPITALITY



Emre Altunal  
General Manager, Divan Erbil

## SETTING THE BAR HIGH

**IIG talks to Emre Altunal, General Manager of Divan Erbil, on the hospitality industry in the Kurdistan Region.**

**How would you define the hospitality industry in the Kurdistan Region, and Divan Erbil's added value to the market?**

Despite the KRG's current difficulties, the outside world has increasingly been acknowledging the appeal of the region's diversity of peoples, landscapes and traditions. I believe it is time the word went out again that the KRG is a great place to see. The region was recognized as one of the "41 Places to Go in 2011" by The New York Times. National Geographic similarly named the region as of the "20 Best Trips of 2011". Aside from its natural beauty, the approximately 3,500 historical sites spread across the three governorates make the region a key destination for foreign visitors.

As a towering addition to Divan Group's collection of fine 5 star hotels, Divan Erbil brought an innovative style and state-of-the-art luxury to the heart of the world's longest-inhabited city,

Erbil, Iraq. As the most visually striking modern structure in Erbil, and a local landmark, Divan Erbil incorporates the latest in leisure and business technology, luxury accommodation and amenities, redefining the concept of the business hotel from the ground up. We, at Divan Erbil, as people, a brand and a property always aim to provide the highest-end hospitality experience to our guests by making them feel fully at home.

**What is it that makes Divan Erbil different from the other hotels in the Kurdistan Region?**

There are many areas in which I believe we excel, however above everything I would simply say that it is "people". From our security to the doorman, from reception to housekeeping, food and beverage, kitchen staff, engineering, sales, finance; in short the entire team puts all their effort into making our guests feel that they are in safe hands.

This is something that they do with great passion.

On top of our passion for service, we have an unbeatable location and lay out, top-level security measures, a variety of well-equipped guest rooms starting from 45 square meters up to 300 square meter suites, different kinds of cuisine, including 'local tastes', international flavors, Turkish cuisine and far-east cuisine. Our Sushi bar on the top floor is a unique place not only for its delicious rolls but thanks to its view and atmosphere. Moreover, we have a variety of hi-tech meeting rooms, we have the biggest ballroom in the region with a 1000pax capacity, a fully-fledged spa with an in-door heated pool, a Turkish bath, massage rooms, a steam and sauna, and gym facilities.

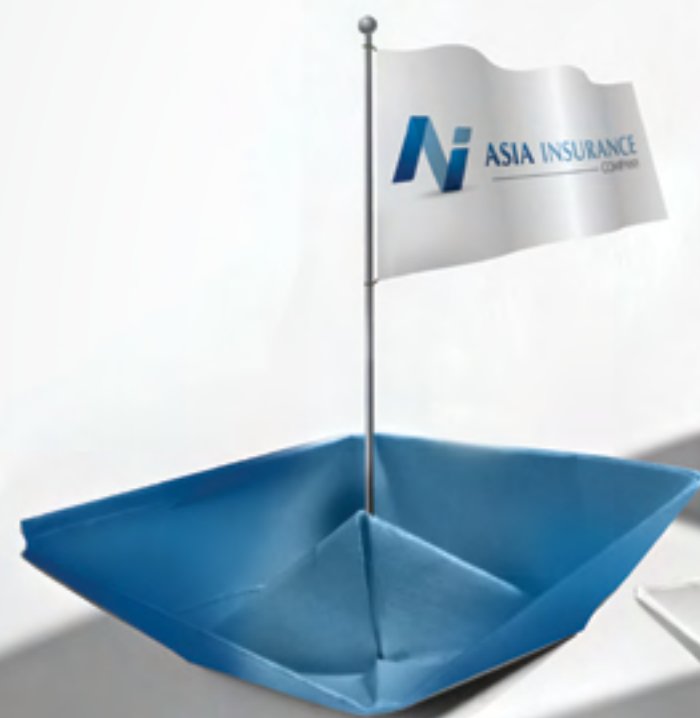
All of the above-mentioned features are what make Divan Erbil "unique" in the region. These make it an ideal choice for clients and travelers from all different backgrounds. ☺

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As the most visually striking modern structure in Erbil, and a local landmark, Divan Erbil incorporates the latest in leisure and business technology, luxury accommodation and amenities, redefining the concept of the business hotel from the ground up.



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## SHIFTING TRENDS OF THE KURDISTAN JOB MARKET

HUMAN CAPITAL



Allegra E. Klein,  
Chief Operating Officer,  
MSELECT

The Kurdistan region has experienced a series of economic blows in the past 18 months, the effects of which have been profoundly felt in the job market, particularly in the private sector. With the advent of the Islamic State (ISIS), drastically reduced oil prices, and a freeze on funds from the central government of Iraq, the region is struggling to maintain financial stability.

This triple threat has led to two key developments directly affecting the workforce in the region:

- A scaling down of the Oil & Gas industry's activities
- An influx of refugees from Syria and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other parts of Iraq who are fleeing ISIS.

The first development has resulted in the downsizing and, in some cases, loss of jobs in the Oil and Gas sector, whereas the second has occasioned an increase in employment opportunities with international non-government organizations (INGOs) and aid agencies such as the United Nations, who are working to assist the newly displaced populations in the region.

So what does this mean for the local workforce?

Just last year, it was a job-seekers market, with not enough qualified candidates to fill the vast number of vacancies available. Now, however, we have shifted to an employers market, with a sharp increase in workers laid off from their jobs in the O&G sector, joined by a glut of fresh graduates from petroleum and engineering programs.

Furthermore, these newly unemployed are oftentimes applying for INGO vacancies that don't match their qualifications

– square pegs trying to fit into round holes. Add to that the influx of jobless refugees and IDPs all competing for a dwindling number of available jobs, and you have a radical shift in the employment scene in Kurdistan.

As a result, we are finding that a whole new and different set of skills and expertise are needed in order to fill the available vacancies. For example, qualified social workers are now in great demand, while engineers and drilling experts much less so. People with previous NGO experience are now more highly valued than those with a corporate background.

However, it is still possible for job-seekers to make the transition, especially if they have experience with skills such as accounting, administration/logistics and human resources (HR), which are also needed for INGOs. And if they have previously worked with international companies, that's an added bonus since most development work entails interaction in a multicultural setting.

Another effect of the changed job market has been on the training and capacity building sector. As workforce development needs have changed, we have seen a rise in demand from job-seekers for basic business skill sets such as HR, Project Management, and Finance.

Additionally, we are seeing a new need for vocational training for INGO beneficiaries. Among the most requested "hot" topics are Administrative Skills, Customer Service, Retail Sales, Hospitality, and Basic Security Guard, in addition to the more traditional English Language and Computer Software skills. And INGOs are also looking for professional

training for their internal staff in subjects like Communication Skills, Supervisory Skills and Team-Building.

At MSELECT, we have seen a dramatic increase in requests from all kinds of international organizations in the region, both for recruitment and training services. In 2015, we conducted a 6-month capacity building project for USAID which involved opening six centers throughout Iraq (three in Kurdistan) to train job-seekers – including large numbers of IDPs – in employment and vocational skills. More than 11,000 trainees participated in this project. Since then, several other major INGOs have sought our assistance with similar activities.

So what does the future hold for the job market in Kurdistan?

As long as conflict persists in the region, international aid organizations will maintain a presence and continue to have a profound effect on the local workforce. Sectors supporting these institutions, such as hospitality, retail, and real estate, will also be active, as will companies that provide training and capacity building services.

Meanwhile, other sectors are on the rise, including new entrants in technology such as IT and networking companies, and construction is making a comeback as more and more international agencies establish a presence in the region.

Until the O&G sector returns to full capacity, government funds are replenished, and ISIS is pushed out, the key to surviving in this new economic environment – for both employers and job-seekers – will be the ability to adapt. ☯

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As workforce development needs have changed, we have seen a rise in demand from job-seekers for basic business skill sets such as HR, Project Management, and Finance.



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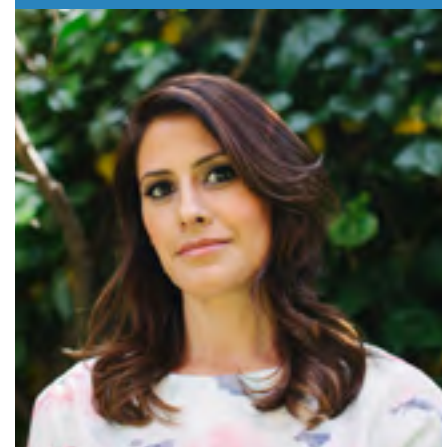
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## THE IMPACT OF THE HUMANITARIAN CRISES ON HUMAN SECURITY

### HUMAN SECURITY



Christina Bache Fidan  
University of Warwick, UK

The on-going structural conflict in Iraq coupled with the advance of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq has severely compromised human security in the Kurdistan Region. In particular, the impact of the humanitarian crisis has had negative repercussions on the economic security of the region. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is in a financial squeeze and is finding it difficult to guarantee access to quality education, electricity, food, health, water and sanitation and other basic services to not only internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other governorates in Iraq and Syrian refugees, but to citizens of the Kurdistan Region as well.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) of the more than 3.1 million Iraqi IDPs, 1.7 million have sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region. The majority of Iraqi IDPs living in the Kurdistan Region are originally from three Iraqi governorates: Anbar (1.33 million displaced); Niniwa (1.01 million people displaced); and Salahaddin (0.41 million people displaced). The Kurdistan Region is also host to approximately 250,000 Syrian refugees, who mostly live in camps. The Kurdistan Region has experienced a 28% to 30% increase in the population due to the combined IDP and refugee communities.

In the governorates of Slemani and Erbil, around 82%

of the IDPs live in rented houses, followed by vulnerable locations (7%), IDP camps (6%) and host families (4%). Approximately 60% of the total refugee and IDP population reside in Duhok governorate where the situation is more precarious with 35% of the displaced people living in IDP camps, 29% in vulnerable locations, 29% in rented accommodations and 8% in host families. The KRG has built 26 camps for IDPs and has committed to funding three out of the 26 camps.

Many IDPs and refugees did not expect to remain displaced for so long and have exhausted their personal reserves (of financial, human and social capital). They have gradually become fully dependent on assistance from the KRG and international donor community. Therefore, it is crucial that the KRG, in partnership with the international humanitarian community, adopt and implement a long-term approach to administering services such as access to quality education, health, housing, and basic services particularly since many IDPs and refugees will not return to the governorates they fled from in the near future and some may remain displaced indefinitely.

Coupled with the humanitarian emergency and the current economic crisis, the KRG is under pressure to ensure that its economy does not collapse. Since early 2014, the Iraqi central government has withheld

the portion of the federal budget allocated to the KRG, due to a political stalemate between Baghdad and Erbil. This withholding of funds has severely paralyzed the public sector. The KRG is overburdened and unable to pay salaries on a consistent basis. The Ministry of Natural Resources borrowed approximately \$1.5 billion from the domestic private sector and another \$1.5 billion from international companies and suppliers by selling its future oil output to keep the economy afloat and to pay the salaries of civil servants. In 2014, the poverty rate more than doubled and unemployment, especially among IDPs and refugees living off-camp, as well as young Kurds, increased significantly.

In an environment of constrained resources due to the current economic and humanitarian crisis, the international private sector has a moral obligation to ensure economic security is not severely threatened. Now more than ever, it is crucial that the international private sector provide quality jobs with fair wages, create opportunities for employees to gain further professional development, offer internships and assistantships for students in the KRG. Empowering individuals and households, social integration and economic independence of family units will contribute to the resilience of the KRG society in times of peace and war. ☐

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The Kurdistan Region has experienced a 28% to 30% increase in the population due to the combined IDP and refugee communities.



## RWANGA FOUNDATION

### HUMAN CAPITAL



Abdul Salam Medeni  
CEO, Rwanga Foundation

### IIG talks to Abdul Salam Medeni on the Rwanga Foundation's current and future projects.

Rwanga Foundation conducts various relief and development projects in the sectors of education, minorities, women, environment, and sports in the Kurdistan Region. How many projects has Rwanga Foundation implemented in the last two years?

From September 2013 to December 2015 Rwanga Foundation implemented 78 projects in Kurdistan through which 858,600 beneficiaries were directly supported by Rwanga Foundation in the sectors of Education, Health, Women, Unsupported Minors, Vulnerable Families, Environment, Sports and Scholarships.

Could you brief our readers more on Rwanga Foundation's current strategic projects? What are the key areas that the Foundation will focus on in 2016?

Rwanga Foundation's vision is a world where quality education is accessible for all. Our strategic aims are: providing services, building capacity and designing policies. Inspired by these goals, Rwanga Foundation is working on enhancing the abilities of social researchers in Kurdistan high schools to enhance a positive and productive learning environment. A pilot version of the project is being conducted in Erbil governorate in



coordination with the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. We also are working to promote a culture of volunteerism and a culture of physical education in Kurdistan high schools. For university students we have an intensive program to help them enhance their professional skills. For university graduate students

and youth in general we are running the Rwanga Foras web site (which previously was USAID FORAS) in partnership with Silatech organization (silatech.org). The website is the biggest platform in Kurdistan bringing together job seekers and job providers, and also providing e-learning options for job seekers and more features. We are



also raising funds to establish a school that can be a model for modern learning which we believe will be unique and prepare students from Kurdistan to compete on an international level.

**Kurdistan hosts over 2 million refugees and IDPs. How is Rwanga adapting its programs and approach to account for this?**

I want to emphasize that all Rwanga projects and activities, from those targeting high school students (such as helping students think about how to prepare for exams) to projects in which we establish a camp for IDPs, all support our main purpose: to provide people with an environment in which learning processes can be productive. Within this framework and in light of the emergency situation in Iraq and Syria following the

attacks by terrorist groups at the beginning of June 2014, Rwanga Foundation was one of the first humanitarian organizations present on the ground. One of the biggest projects implemented by Rwanga Foundation was to establish 'Rwanga Community' in Duhok province which is a camp of 3,000 cabins (containers) to accommodate 24,000 IDPs and it includes all the necessary public services and learning facilities such as a school, a library, a computer lab, and an art and music room). In addition, 292,380 Syrian, Yazidi, Christian, Arab and Turkmen refugees as well as Kurdish displaced people were provided with emergency relief food and non-food items including hot meals, bread, water, juice, canned fish, canned beans, baby milk, baby diapers, women's sanitary napkins, blankets, mattresses, cooking sets, clothes,

and shoes. Rwanga Foundation further conducted various successful joint projects with the governments of Germany and the Netherlands, Samaritan's Purse International Relief, the Italian NGO Music for Peace, Khalifa Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan Foundation as well as UAE Red Crescent to provide further aid to Iraqi displaced people who had fled to Kurdistan seeking protection and assistance. All these were done with the aim of resettling these families and to help provide a good learning environment for students.

**You organized the second Rwanga Annual Awards in Slemani on December 3rd, what is the main purpose of the Rwanga Awards, and in which categories did Rwanga give awards to talented Kurdish youth?**

Rwanga Awards is an annual

project, which started in 2014, with this being its second year. The main purposes of the Rwanga Awards were to:

- Explore, discover and identify talented youth in Kurdistan;
- Encourage and support these youth to further improve their skills, ideas, and projects;
- Encourage an atmosphere of professional competition among young people;
- Promote a sense of belongingness and ownership among the youth in Kurdistan;
- Prevent young people from becoming involved in negative activities such as abusing alcohol, drugs, or being involved in activities related to ideological extremism;

The main categories of the Rwanga Awards are: Photography, Short Film, Short Story, Scientific Innovation, Solo Musician, Entrepreneurship and Recycling Arts. ☺

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Rwanga Foundation's vision is a world where quality education is accessible for all. Our strategic aims are: providing services, building capacity and designing policies.



## EDUCATIONAL REFORM & CAPACITY BUILDING

### HUMAN CAPITAL

Jacob Shapiro  
Rwanga Foundation

**A**t the Rwanga Foundation we believe that education is an investment in future. Education is not only a few lessons in a classroom, or some information transferred from a speaker to a listener but an integral in the creation of a human being, thereby drawing the alignments of a society and reserving an identity for a nation. With a shift in focus towards educational reform, the Rwanga Foundation is now entering a new phase in which it tackles the obstacles faced by the growing number of refugees as well as the local population. After successful implementation of world class logistical performance in aid distribution to the refugees and IDPs throughout the region through local and international partnerships, a new spotlight has been employed. Through the education of all ages in the region, the Rwanga Foundation is building the future one step at a time.

In cooperation with the KRG's Ministry of Education we are now engaging in a number of projects to build capacities and change mentalities through education centered projects to build the future of the Region and to be recognized as an intellectual hub of the Middle East as well as in the world. Through a comprehensive agenda to implement world class standards on an institutional and governmental level, Rwanga has engaged in a wide variety of projects with other organizations to explore the various strengths each can offer and create a lasting synergy through the integration of various aspects of education.

Recently, a training course initiated, funded, and directed by the

Kurdistan Regional Government was organized and led by the Rwanga Foundation and UNICEF to discuss the leading techniques and cutting edge methods of altering human behavior with a focus on water conservation in line with Rwanga's focus on educational reform, not only on school curriculum but on the various other elements of education relating to social, economic, and environmental awareness. The Chief Executive Director of the Rwanga Foundation, Abdul Salam Medeni, acted as the head trainer to the attendees of the various sessions, spreading his experience to those who joined. By changing mentalities across all levels of society, you create the capacities to innovate, build, and develop the future of Kurdistan while simultaneously creating increased opportunities within the region and subsequently reducing the need for human displacement towards other parts of the world. In essence, by creating a better Kurdistan, you ultimately build a better and brighter future for all.

Additionally, to create better educational opportunities by helping students to develop their capabilities of learning in the digital age, Rwanga Foundation was called in to join the project for developing and improving education in Kurdistan by empowering social researcher roles in the education sector and resolving issues faced by students in schools. The project was funded by UNICEF, designed by Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in association with Rwanga Foundation. The introductory meeting attended

by the student representatives, parents, social workers, and training center Directors to discuss the challenges and needs of the students. With the pledge to train 100 social workers through skill based improvement and to find a reasonable solution to the problems faced by the students with their schools or families, the project made meaningful reform on a social and governmental level to not only draw attention to the ongoing issues but to begin an active improvement process through the aforementioned departments.

Such projects are the initial steps that the foundation has taken to build the future of Kurdistan for generations to come. In line with our vision of enabling access to a quality education for all, the reform across all levels of society needs to take hold so that we can all work together towards regional development and future success. By changing the mentalities and bringing in alternate viewpoints on the various issues affecting society we help developments towards a more competitive market for education and labor force. In line with the KRG's aim towards a diversified economic and social market we strive to educate those in need and help them enter the competitive job environment in both the public and private sector.

In conclusion, the initial steps are in process with much more to come. By cooperating with other organizations and helping those in need to access a quality education the future of Kurdistan is improving continuously. ☺

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### HUMAN CAPITAL



David Pardoe  
Director, British Council –  
Kurdistan Region

“We will be launching a global publication based on research in Kurdistan “English medium instruction in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq” perspectives from lecturers in Kurdistan universities.

## BRITISH COUNCIL IN KURDISTAN

### IIG talks to David Pardoe on the British Council's current and future activities in the Kurdistan Region.

**Could you brief our readers regarding the British Council's activities in the Kurdistan Region?**

The British Council is the United Kingdom's official cultural organization. Our purpose is to create international opportunities for the peoples of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq we have been working for many years and opened an office in Erbil in 2009. Our main areas of work are in English language teaching, Education and the Arts.

**What are your plans and objectives for 2016?**

In 2016 we have an exciting program of activities, including supporting the Ministry of Education to improve English Language teaching by providing training in “English for Teachers” as well as workshops in methodology, we will be launching a global publication based on research in Kurdistan, entitled “English medium instruction in Iraq Kurdistan”, presenting the perspectives of lecturers in

Kurdistan universities.

We have contracted a consultant on Refugee Education to advise us on how best we can support Kurdistan in building resilience through English teaching for IDPs and Syrian refugees in the region. In February another consultant will be advising MHE on an English preparatory year program at Charmo University. We have a program of work with schools called “Connecting Classrooms” and we will be launching a major EU project working with schools in Iraq, including in KRI. 2016 is the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth so we are running the “Shakespeare Lives” program, including a live theatre performance in Erbil in April, led by the world famous Globe Theatre from London among other activities.

**Are Kurdish students showing significant interest in studying in the UK? What are your plans to increase more awareness?**

Yes, Kurdish students greatly value studying in the UK and it is a popular choice for students

in Kurdistan. We will continue to support UK universities in their campaigns to promote their courses in the UK. We have an exams center in Erbil for the IELTS test which is a requirement for all students going to the UK to study.

**You have recently signed an agreement with Sulaimani Polytechnic University to deliver online English courses. Could you give us more information regarding this partnership, and also your cooperation with other Universities in the Kurdistan Region?**

We passionately believe that the future of learning in Higher Education is digital and we have offered to partner with all universities in the Kurdistan Region on our Learn English Connect courses. Learn English Connect is an exciting and innovative blended learning course which enables university students to study a British Council English course at their usual place of study. The Sulaimani Polytechnic University is the first in Kurdistan to sign this partnership with us. ☺

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## THE YEZIDI GENOCIDE

### HUMAN SECURITY



Tim Mewmaw

**Tim Mewmaw is currently writing a novel, titled: Wearing a Niqab, to memorialize the Yezidi's strength in the face of the Islamic State's onslaught over the past 14 months.**

Early on the morning of August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, the Islamic State began a coordinated assault on the Yezidi people of northern Iraq. Scores of villages on the west and north-west plains of Mosul were simultaneously attacked, leading to a unique humanitarian situation which briefly grabbed the attention of the world. However, while global news coverage quickly moved on to other issues and crises, the position of the Yezidi people remains precarious and their outlook dire.

Practicing an ancient monotheistic religion closely linked with Zoroastrianism, the Yezidi people are distinct from other groups in the region. Ethnically Kurds, they are religiously and politically disconnected from the larger Kurdish minority.

Setting the stage for the pre-planned attack, on August 2nd, the Islamic State captured a number of villages north of the isolated single ridge that makes up Sinjar Mountain, and more importantly, they also took control of the Syrian border town of Rabia. These moves effectively eliminated the only two escape options that were available to the Yezidi people of the northwest Mosul plain, and the next morning the assault began.

Within twelve hours of the

initial attack, tens of thousands had fled to the rugged and inhospitable slopes of the mountain until the capture of Sinjar town eliminated even this questionable refuge as a possibility. For those who had fled to the mountain, the nightmare was only beginning. They spent days climbing the mountain on foot in the burning August sun without food, water or shelter. Children were left in piles to die, babies were dropped from cliffs with some mothers following them down. International humanitarian aid was eventually air dropped to the starving people below, but only after four days of exposure and extreme deprivation.

While having dropped almost completely out of the international spotlight, the Yezidi people remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the world's greatest current area of instability. Despite their ancient heritage and pacific lifestyle, they are at the top of the Islamic State's terrorist and genocide hit list, and their lands remain divided by one of the principle battle lines with this seemingly indomitable force. Thousands of young Yezidi women continue to be traded in the Islamic State's sex markets while their remaining living relatives languish in

overcrowded refugee camps just behind the battle lines.

The international community should be doing more to assist this vulnerable community. However, with economies already over-stretched, and so many refugees pouring out of the broader region, it is difficult to mobilize further support. This being said, we as individuals can make a difference. Official decisions are often predicated on public outcry and support. If each of us will reach out to our foreign office or local government to notify them of this specific need, our united voices can make a difference.

Whether it be to support the ICC's recognition of the Islamic State's assault on the Yezidi people as genocide or to assist in providing material support to those who have lost everything at their hands, I hope you'll join me in raising awareness about these vulnerable people and in helping to thwart the Islamic State's plans for their future. ☺

#### About

Tim Mewmaw is a government and business professional who has lived and worked on projects in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for the past eight years.

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While having dropped almost completely out of the international spotlight, the Yezidi people remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the world's greatest current area of instability.

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