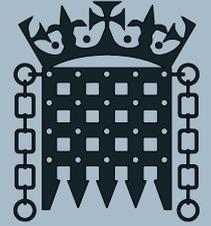


report



Achievements and challenges in the Kurdistan Region and the need for increased British engagement

REPORT OF THE VISIT OF THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
ON THE KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ TO THE REGION IN APRIL 2009





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Contents

Remit of the APPG on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq	2
Summary of key recommendations by the APPG delegation	2
Introduction	4
Untapped potential	5
Agriculture	6
Tourism	7
Education	8
Sports and youth	9
Labour rights	9
External and internal security	10
Turkey	11
The shadow of the past	11
External assistance and scrutiny	13
Minorities	14
Problems	14
Corruption	15
Women's rights	15
Media freedom	16
Amnesty International	17
Political disaffection	17
Relations with the federal government in Baghdad	18
The role of the UK government, trade and investment	20
Visas	21
The British Council and Iraq	21
Conclusions	22
Appendix 1	23
Appendix 2	24



Remit of the APPG on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq

The official remit, within UK Parliamentary rules, of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is “to promote friendship and understanding between the people of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and Great Britain and to

encourage the development of democratic institutions in the Kurdistan Region as part of the democratic and federal process in the wider Iraq.”

Summary of key recommendations by the APPG delegation

Economic development and UK-Kurdistan Region trade relations

- A much increased British involvement in the oil and gas sectors.
- Concerted action to encourage people to learn farming skills, establish an agricultural bank, border tariffs on foreign food imports and allow Peshmerga members to use their fortnight of down-time to set up farms and benefit from agricultural loans.
- An exchange programme with agricultural colleges in the UK and elsewhere. We suggest that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) contacts the National Farmers' Union and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra, (particularly over research) for their advice.
- Support the idea of linking chambers of commerce in Kurdistan and the UK.
- UK businesses should capitalise on the clear opportunities for trade and investment in the safest part of Iraq whose stability has already done much and could do much more to help create a viable, pluralist and federal system in Iraq.
- Deeply disappointed that there was minimal representation of the KRG at the recent Iraqi Investment conference in London and will seek a meeting with Ministers to discuss this and how to more fully include the Region in the future.
- Urge the Business Secretary to organise a trade mission to the region in the future in a similar way to the one he recently organised to Baghdad and Basra. And to support the KRG's trade and investment conference in London in September.

- Strong case for the KRG to revive ‘The Other Iraq’ campaign, which was run successfully in the USA to alert public opinion to the opportunities for investment in the Region.

Travel

- Direct flights to Kurdistan from London are essential to the development of tourism and other trade. A British carrier should urgently examine the possibilities of a direct route between London and Erbil and Suleimaniah.
- Appeal to UK businesses and others to consider investing in a new airport at Dohuk.
- Strong case for extending the visa regime, particularly for students and business visitors, to facilitate travel between the Region and Britain without compromising UK border security.

The Anfal genocide

- Anfal should be seen as one of the many crimes committed by the Ba'athist regime rather than by the Arabs of Iraq. There should be a special focus on the 25th anniversary of the Anfal in 2013.
- Encourage a delegation of UK, European and American parliamentarians to visit the Region to discuss how best to mark the Anfal and offer them assurances that this will never be repeated.
- Seek partners in organisations which have experience of marking other genocides. Relevant UK charities and groups could include Anfal in their work including raising awareness of Anfal in academic courses.



- Mobilise scientific help to exhume the mass graves that are still being uncovered and identify the victims.
- The Iraqi government should set aside a special budget for the work of the Anfal Ministry.
- Table a cross-party motion in the Commons and hold a suitable annual ceremony in Parliament with the co-operation of the KRG.

Democratic development and good governance

- Commend the Region's leaders for showing great willingness to open their region to external influence and inspection and are encouraged by the decision of the KRG to bring in PricewaterhouseCoopers to shine a light on and counter incompetent and corrupt practices that deter investment.
- Urge the KRG to commission an external valuation of the problem and to remain committed to its pledge to stamp out corruption.
- Acknowledge the desire of the KRG to counter deeply-seated cultural practices through new legislation and support for women's rights.
- The British Council could offer support and training to help tackle violence against women.
- The Region needs an independent media that respects privacy and avoids libel combined with a government that keeps comprehensive social and economic data.
- External professional training is vital to encouraging the best possible combination of accountability and transparency plus a code of ethics, a media commission that would handle training and complaints on both sides and more trained press officers in government ministries.
- We will seek a meeting with Amnesty International and visit one or more prisons of our own choice on future visits.
- The overall impression is that, with heavy support from the President, the KRG is genuine in seeking to protect the rights of minorities which we will monitor and seek meetings with Turkomen representatives in London and on future visits.
- Political leaders would benefit from political training and exchanges with bodies such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the John Smith Memorial Trust, the Young Foundation and others.
- The need for Iraq as a whole to scrap Ba'athist laws, ignored in the Region, that ban public sector trade unions and to introduce a more liberal Labour code in line with International Labour Organisation standards.

Relations with Baghdad and neighbouring countries

- Accept that settlement of issue of disputed territories is difficult but do not accept the argument that the constitutional agreement can be trumped by recent antagonism in some quarters of Arab Iraq towards its implementation.
- The UK government should recognise that the KRG deserves to be treated more fairly in its own right, rather than being seen as merely equivalent to UK regions.
- Urge the UK to play a bigger role in helping ease tensions between the Region and the federal government in Baghdad over issues such as disputed territories and the hydrocarbon law.
- Turkey should grant social and cultural rights to Kurds in Turkey and the same applies to Kurds in Iran and Syria.

Political and cultural relations with the UK

- Advocate much deeper and broader political, diplomatic and commercial relations between the UK and the Kurdistan Region. The success of the Region will bolster Iraq and that this is in the interests of UK foreign policy and peace and security in the Middle East.
- Encourage top music performers to play in the Region, the publication of detailed travel guides and suggest that the KRG commissions an independent guide.
- Will seek to discuss its work in the Region with the British Council.
- Regular delegations and the participation of an increasing number of parliamentarians, together with other cultural, business and social trips, will overcome outdated perceptions of the security risk.
- Strongly urge the British government and others to make maximum use of the healthy regard for Britain and to build links of friendship based on altruism as well as commercial imperatives.
- Suggest that a group of serving and former British parliamentarians together with policy-makers, on a cross-party basis, put together a visit and discussion seminars in the Kurdistan Parliament.
- Fear that opportunities for trade, investment and a host of political, cultural and educational exchanges are not being pursued as vigorously as they should for the mutual benefit of the UK and the Kurdistan Region as part of a wider Iraq.



Introduction

In our second delegation to the Kurdistan Region in two years we found evidence of continuing and considerable economic and social progress combined with growing political problems.

There are clear signs of increased economic activity with many major infrastructure projects either funded by the state or by private enterprise, with assistance from the regional government, such as the vast new Avro City residential scheme we saw in Dohuk.

However, many ministers and President Masoud Barzani mentioned the notable deterioration in relations between the Region and Baghdad, as well as a major improvement in relations with its neighbour and increasingly important trading partner, Turkey. This is a case of two steps forward, one step back for the Kurdistan Region.

The leaders and people of the beautiful, hospitable and resource-rich region of Iraqi Kurdistan have achieved much since their uprising in 1991 and especially since the shadow of Saddam Hussein was finally lifted in 2003.

There is a clear determination to drive regeneration by creating a vibrant market system with social protections and by creating a transparent model of governance.

Although the global credit-crunch and the reduction in the price of oil have adversely affected it, the long-term future is bright for the Kurdistan Region. It has considerable potential thanks to its oil and gas reserves as well as possibly plentiful agricultural resources and tourism in bustling cities with improving tourist facilities as well as

rugged mountains and verdant and unspoilt plains. We felt completely safe in the Region.

Our central conclusion is that the UK, and wider the international community, should play a bigger role in assisting the Region, along with the rest of Iraq, to tap its potential in all these areas. The Kurdistan Region is vital to the success of Iraq and to British foreign policy objectives.

The cross-party group visited the three main cities and met senior political leaders including President Masoud Barzani and the Deputy Prime Minister Imad Ahmad, two of the three Governors, the editor of an independent newspaper, trade union and women's rights activists, university and business leaders and the Christian Bishop of Erbil as well as visits to two major religious minorities.

The delegation consisted of Labour MP Derek Wyatt; Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood (both for the first half of the week); Liberal Democrat Peer, (Lord) Tim Clement Jones; Mark Phillips, Chief of Staff to Baroness Neville-Jones, Shadow Security Minister; and Gary Kent, Administrator of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and Director of Labour Friends of Iraq. The delegation was also accompanied by Ms Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the UK High Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The visit was from 13th to 19th April 2009.

The KRG kindly hosted the trip and made every effort to facilitate our requests for meetings. Those we met were gracious with their time and commendably open, even when we raised contentious and controversial concerns with them.

Although we spent a week in the Region, we are also aware that we were unable, in that time and with a great deal of travelling, to include meetings with some groups and to discuss some key issues in detail. We will seek to do this in future trips and in other regular contacts with key figures in the Region.

The APPG seeks to be a parliamentary bridge of friendship between the UK and the Region but has few resources. We say this so that people are aware of our limitations and understand that we can only take on so much work.





Untapped potential

The Region is a potentially rich part of Iraq with major untapped resources, chiefly oil, gas and other minerals (including possibly Uranium) as well as agriculture and tourism, judged by the largely unspoilt and increasingly verdant and arable plains and rugged mountains and waterfalls we saw as we criss-crossed the Region.

The Region's efforts to exploit its hydrocarbon resources are being pursued with vigour but are being held back by the continuing lack of agreement with the federal government over how to tap and market these resources, with some foreign firms that invest in the Region having to make a choice between dealing with the Region or with Baghdad.

We urge the parties to conclude a lasting settlement within the framework of the Iraqi Constitution which will allow the Region's oil and gas revenues to start flowing to the benefit of the people of Iraq as a whole.

We were told of the need for an extension from the Region to the current pipeline through Iraq to Turkey and that oil and gas was confined to the domestic market. We are, therefore, very pleased that an agreement has since been reached and that from 1st June oil from Iraqi Kurdistan is now being exported and that Kurdish gas may be supplied via the Nabucco pipeline project linking Turkey to Central Europe.

The Minister for Planning outlined infrastructure priorities: new roads, schools, hospitals, water and electricity. The Korean Development Institute, Harvard University and Dubai are helping the Planning Ministry look at long-term infrastructure requirements.

The Erbil Stock Market will be launched this year. The banking sector still needs to regain trust following Saddam's closure of the central bank after his withdrawal from the Region in 1991. This meant that most of the population lost their savings and it took ten years to reimburse them.

The KRG's foreign investment law is very favourable – it gives land ownership rights and treats foreign investors as citizens although there are tensions with Baghdad over the law. The aim is for the Region to be a gateway to the rest of Iraq. Britain is making a small investment in the oil sector in the Region. We urge a much increased British involvement in the oil and gas sectors.



RIGHT: THE AVRO CITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME IN DOHUK IS ONE OF THE SIGNS OF INCREASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: THE APPG DELEGATION AT ERBIL INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT WITH BAYAN SAMI ABDUL RAHMAN, THE KRG'S REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UK



Agriculture

In what has been officially designated as Year of Agriculture, the Region's political leaders are keen to end their dependence on cheap foreign food imports, become self-sufficient in five years and possibly export food surpluses.

The priorities in the plan are proteins and carbohydrates as are encouraging refrigerated storage to lengthen life of harvests, identifying export markets and the infrastructure to service them as well as attracting private investment. There is also a proposal for a free trade zone at Zakho on the border with Turkey and in Suleimaniah on the border with Iran.

The five year plan has been drawn up by the Ministries of Agriculture, Planning, Industry, Water and Trade but it is not clear that all these ministries are fully signed up to the priorities in the plan.

The renewal of agriculture is an enormous task because it was the deliberate policy of the former Ba'athist regime to liquidate the agricultural resources of the Iraqi Kurds. Over a period of decades Kurds were forcibly removed from the land, water wells were concreted over, trees were felled first by Saddam and then by Kurds for fuel and 4,500 villages were razed to the ground – to the last brick. In addition, chemical weapons polluted the land and destroyed the trees which are being replanted.

The UN oil-for-food programme further disincentivised farmers from working the land because they had to use imported rather than locally grown foods.

Most villages – the historical basic unit of life in the Region – have been rebuilt, albeit to a basic standard but a new frame of mind has developed among working people in the Region. Security and status are seen as synonymous with city jobs, preferably for the state. Two-thirds of the workforce was once engaged in agriculture but this has fallen to just one in ten.

The Governor of Suleimaniah province said “three generations of people have lost interest in agriculture and those who finish agricultural college have no land. And many villages have no roads or irrigation.”

We believe that concerted action is necessary to encourage people to learn farming skills in small private farms and co-operatives as well as encouraging agribusiness, juicing and canning factories, refrigerated warehouses, greenhouses and supermarkets, fuelled by foreign investment.

We support the need for an agricultural bank and also think that, given the systematic destruction of valuable agricultural resources, it would be an understandable departure from its generally pro-market stance for the KRG to erect border tariffs on foreign imports whilst it rebuilds its own capacity.

We were told of one idea whereby some or maybe many of the 200,000 strong Peshmerga – the Region's section of the Iraqi Army – and many of whom live in villages, could be encouraged to use their fortnight of down-time to set up farms and benefit from agricultural loans.

We commend this idea for the consideration of the government in the belief that such a disciplined agricultural vanguard could kick-start a drive towards agricultural awareness and productivity.

We further recommend an exchange programme with agricultural colleges in the UK and elsewhere. We also suggest that the KRG contacts the National Farmers' Union and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra, (particularly over research) for their advice.



Tourism

As for tourism, the main barrier to its expansion is the term “Iraq” which continues, wrongly in the case of the Region and to an increasing degree in the rest of Iraq, to be an impediment based on widespread and outdated perceptions of the security risk.

That perception of insecurity will change in time and we hope that the APPG, with its regular delegations and the participation of an increasing number of parliamentarians, together with other cultural, business and social trips will overcome these impressions.

The Region has a great deal to offer tourists who want to see sites of archaeological and cultural interest. Many would be captivated by the Citadel in Erbil, which is a contender as the world’s oldest site of continuous human

habitation, and which is being restored with UNESCO support and dedicated experts from the Czech Republic.

We were lucky enough to visit Dohuk, for the first time. If Erbil is the political capital and Suleimaniah is the cultural capital then Dohuk has a chance of becoming the tourist capital. It’s a smart, sleek and spacious city with wondrous views of plains, mountains, springs, lakes and dams. Although it is just a few miles from Mosul, the most violent part of Iraq, Dohuk province is its most peaceful one.

We would like to encourage one or more top music performers to play in the Region. We are hopeful that a major and popular television programme will record a programme from Erbil. We also encourage the publica-



ABOVE: RESTORATION OF ERBIL'S ANCIENT CITADEL WITH UNESCO SUPPORT AND CZECH EXPERTISE



tion of detailed travel guides and suggest that the KRG commissions an independent guide. All this could help to convey the reality of life in Kurdistan and begin to make it a more attractive place for tourists.

Direct flights to Kurdistan from London are also essential to the development of tourism and other trade. The reinstatement of the London-Vienna-Erbil flight by Austrian Airlines is most welcome and means that the UK traveller can reach the Region fairly easily. However, a British carrier should urgently examine the possibilities of a direct

route between London and Erbil and Suleimaniah, once Iraq passes the necessary aviation security checks.

Infrastructure is the key to widening the tourist market beyond niche adventure and heritage holidays. The Governor of Dohuk told us that they wished to build an airport but require 150 million US dollars, which could be implemented through a private-public partnership. We appeal to UK businesses and others to consider investing in this.

Education

Education is a key priority for the KRG. In 1991 there was only one university in the Region and there are now nine, including the private American University of Iraq in Suleimaniah, which we visited on our first trip and which aims to train the leaders of the new Iraq, and the publicly funded University of Kurdistan-Hawler, which is based on the British system and all subjects are taught in English.

We met the President and many of his leading department heads and managers at the University of Dohuk in the president's office which used to be the office of the Ba'ath Party leader in the city. Other Ba'athist offices have been given new roles – the torture centre is now the Law Faculty.

The University of Dohuk has a partnership with Nottingham University and wants to develop partnerships with Buckingham and Warwick.

They acknowledge the difficulty in getting the English language ability of Iraqi students up to required standards to send to UK institutions or on exchanges. The British

Council is not yet teaching English and has been offered accommodation by the university. The British Council has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the KRG's Higher Education Ministry but we heard complaints that so far it had delivered little. We urge the British Council to provide English-language teaching which will not only benefit Kurdish students in-country, but also bring them up to a standard of English that they can then go on to study in British universities, which rely on foreign students to some extent.

The University also recognises that their Quality Assurance is weak and that they have no experience of independent, external assessment in many subjects. The poor quality of secondary education also needs to be looked at.

The President criticised the lack of autonomy for universities – everything has to go through the Ministry of Higher Education, even curricula. This may be a way of maintaining a unified standard across the Region but clearly it was not considered welcome by this university.



Sports and youth

The Minister for Sports and Youth outlined the KRG's Youth Plan, which seeks to address five problems (unemployment and youth poverty, shortcomings in the education system, shortcomings in democratic participation, housing and migration).

As a result of the Youth Plan, the following has been set up: a regional board for youth; an ombudsman for youth; a confederation for youth and sport; and an advisory body. The Ministry has trained 230 young sports leaders. The Ministry is trying to implement the idea of an annual sports day.

The Ministry is trying to create interest in volunteering activities. This is difficult because it needs a change of mindset and attitudes which would be easier if volunteering resulted in the award of qualifications. In 2009 the US has provided 20 million US dollars to the KRG for sports infrastructure. In some areas, before land can be used for sport, it must be de-mined.

BELOW: SMALL ASTRO-TURF SPORTS PITCHES HAVE BEEN BUILT IN NEIGHBOURHOODS, HERE USED FOR FOOTBALL KURDISTAN'S FAVOURITE SPORT.



The KRG wants to integrate the sexes in and through sport, adopting a more western model. We suggest that there is a role for the British Council to support the Ministry for Sports and Youth through the "Dreams and Teams" programme and twinning of schools.

The Ministry is trying to organise a Youth Parliament and would like to draw on the experience of the UK Youth Parliament. However, restrictive visa policies hinder Kurdistan's participation in international sporting events and international tours etc.

Labour rights

We met the leaders of the now unified Kurdistan TUC in both Erbil and Suleimaniah. They are social partners with the KRG but have their own concerns. Many women activists were present and vocal at the meeting in Suleimaniah which indicates the priority given by the trade unions in the Region and in the rest of Iraq to encourage women's participation.

The first is the need for Iraq as a whole to scrap Ba'athist laws, ignored in the Region, that ban public sector trade unions and to introduce a more liberal Labour code in line with International Labour Organisation standards.

The second is the use of foreign labour. The unions told us that the 28 floor Beautiful City property development in Suleimaniah was being constructed entirely by foreign

labour and with foreign materials. It is estimated that 20 percent of the workforce is foreign. This is partly because local workers feel that it is demeaning to be doing street cleaning and similar jobs. It is also partly because foreign workers are considerably cheaper. The unions support the need for a requirement for foreign companies to train some of the local population.

They are also keen to build better relations with UK unions, especially for training. We note that several Iraqi union leaders have been unable to secure visas for travelling to the UK to attend union conferences. This is a source of great regret and disrupts efforts to build fraternal relations between British and Iraqi unions.



External and internal security

The Minister of the Interior told us that the police service had to be built from scratch after the 1991 uprising when Saddam withdrew all equipment and administration and that it took three years to win the confidence of the public. The police had been a tool of the dictatorship in enforcing control through terror tactics under Saddam.

He said that the main security threats come from Mosul: Al Qaeda and the Salafi movement. Others highlighted the perfidious role of Iran.

The Minister regretted the lack of co-operation with Baghdad. There are no regular meetings with the ministries of defence or the interior in Baghdad. The central government does not accept or recognise the KRG visa regime for travel elsewhere in Iraq.

The Minister of the Interior appealed for British assistance with forensic science and welcomed the offer in

March 2009 by Jack Straw to help train the judiciary - in response to President Barzani's request.

The Minister proudly pointed out that the police service enjoys high public confidence, thanks to its successful thwarting of terrorist attacks and a very low level of crime – “the police would be in trouble if more than one car was stolen in two months.”

It would be very unwise to be complacent about the much higher level of security in the Region because extremists, aided by forces in neighbouring countries, are seeking to wreak havoc but the security forces of the Region have done a very good job in stopping them. There have been just eight terrorist attacks in the Region in the past six years in which up to 150 people have, very sadly, been murdered. There has been no incident since 2007. It is a record that the Region should be proud of.



ABOVE: SULEIMANIAH'S BUSTLING BAZAAR SHOWS THE SECURITY AND NORMALITY OF DAILY LIFE IN IRAQI KURDISTAN



Turkey

Turkey is Kurdistan Region's biggest trade partner with 7 billion dollars of trade a year and many Turkish contractors on key projects. For instance, the huge new airport at Erbil is being built by Turkish contractors to a British design. Avro City is led by a Turkish company.

This is a welcome contrast to recent times when relations with Turkey were at their lowest, with Turkey sending a reported 100,000 troops to the border.

The President urged non-military solutions to tackle the PKK and is planning a conference in Erbil of Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria to discuss a peaceful way forward. Turkey has indicated that this is a positive development.

The Interior Minister outlined how the KRG has denied PKK fighters access to hospitals, media and airports in the Region.

President Barzani rightly says that Turkey should grant social and cultural rights to Kurds in Turkey. We believe that the same applies to Kurds in Iran and Syria.

BELOW: ERBIL'S NEW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT OPENING BY 2010 WAS DESIGNED BY BRITISH FIRM SCOTT WILSON AND BUILT BY TURKISH CONTRACTORS. TURKEY IS THE BIGGEST TRADE PARTNER.



The APPG warmly welcomes the improvement in relations which is important for the two countries as well as the Middle East as a whole.

The shadow of the past

The past is ever-present in the Region. Given decades of hostility from its neighbours and the genocidal actions of the previous Iraq regime, during which 182,000 people were murdered and whose mass graves are still being uncovered, it is perfectly legitimate for the Iraqi Kurds to urge the international community to mark the Anfal genocide.

We are very pleased that the Iraqi Parliament has passed a resolution condemning the genocide and were deeply struck by the passionate insistence of Miss Chnar Saad, the Minister for Anfal and Martyrs' Affairs that that KRG efforts to mark the Anfal were, in her words: "not to the exclusion of others – our brothers, the Shias and Turkomen, also suffered."

The Anfal should be seen as one of the many crimes committed by the Ba'athist regime rather than the Arabs of Iraq.

These included systematic discrimination against and massacres of Shias and Marsh Arabs in the South as well as a reign of murder and terror against parties such as the now ruling Islamic Dawa Party of Nouri Al-Maliki in which 250,000 party members and relatives to the third degree of relations were murdered.

We agreed with the Minister that there should be a special focus on the 25th anniversary of the Anfal in 2013, which is also the tenth anniversary of what is widely hailed as liberation.



We will encourage a delegation of UK, European and American parliamentarians to visit the Region to discuss how best to mark the Anfal and offer them assurances that this will never be repeated.

We will also seek partners in organisations which have experience of marking other genocides. UK charities and groups in relevant fields could include the Anfal campaign in their work including raising awareness of Anfal in academic courses.

The President told us that the Anfal campaign needs to be documented internationally as a genocide and that companies which supplied chemical weapons should be identified and pay compensation.

We aim to mobilise scientific help to exhume the mass graves that are still being uncovered and identify the victims.

Many people require specialist treatment for the continuing effects of chemical weapons. The Region has no specialist facilities for victims of chemical weapons and, while some victims have been able to make use of specialist facilities in Iran on a one-off basis, their problems are life-long.

We are aware that the minister has met with UK-based organisations that work on the medical, forensic, academic and public-awareness aspects of genocide and we will endeavour to support those links.

We also suggest that the central government sets aside a special budget for the work of the Ministry.

To start the process, we will table a cross-party motion in the Commons and hold a suitable annual ceremony in Parliament with the co-operation of the KRG.



ABOVE: WOMEN TRAINING IN RUG WEAVING TO PRESERVE THE CRAFT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



External assistance and scrutiny

However, we do not want to give the impression that the political leadership and the people of the Region are backward-looking. They have shown, since their uprising in 1991, tremendous verve in rebuilding their economy and institutions under dreadful pressure from Saddam and his exploitation of the UN sanctions programme to further punish the Region.

We wholeheartedly commend the Region's leaders for showing great willingness to open their region to external influence and inspection. They have agreed to finance a programme of work, for instance, with the National School of Government in the UK (the former Civil Service College at Sunningdale) to put their civil service leaders and governors through rigorous and externally verified training.

The National School of Government provides a programme of training and assessment, equivalent to the UK Government Internal Audit Standard, for over 30 Director Generals for Quality Assurance from the KRG. It covers current international good practice and is tailored to the specific needs and working environment in Kurdistan.

We are also encouraged by the decision of the KRG to bring in PricewaterhouseCoopers to shine a light on and counter incompetent and corrupt practices that deter investment.

We reiterate the point made in our first report that there is a high and, from the UK's point of view, healthy regard for Britain and its institutions not least because medicine and education follow the British model, English is the second language and also because so many political and other leaders have spent much time in the UK as exiles.

We strongly urge the British government and others to make maximum use of this regard and to build links of friendship based on altruism as well as commercial imperatives.

After all, the success of the Region is vital for Iraq and this in turn is vital to the interests of the UK which has expended much blood and treasure in that country over the last six years.



ABOVE: THE YEZIDI TEMPLE AT LALISH



Minorities



ABOVE: ST MATTHEWS MONASTERY

Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG's High Representative to the UK, says: "Our history and practice of tolerance has encouraged thousands of Christian and Arab families to seek shelter in our cities."

Adnan Mufti, the Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament, insists that there is no discrimination against minorities because "we were second class citizens before and we don't want to do this to minorities in the Region." He also said that minorities are represented in the Parliament and Government and have the right to autonomy within the Region.

We had a long discussion with the Chaldean Bishop of Erbil and visited the Christian Assyrian Monastery of St Matthew as well as the Yezidi temple known as Lalish.

Our overall impression is that, with heavy support from the President, the KRG is genuine in seeking to protect the rights of all minorities in the Region. We will monitor this and seek meetings with Turkomen representatives in London and on future visits.

Problems

Our watchword, however, is to examine the Region "warts and all." The KRG would concede from the outset that the problems we identified in our previous visit are still current, despite some improvements. We raised the three main issues of corruption, women's rights and media freedoms in our 2008 visit.

We returned to these issues as well as a recent Amnesty International Report on torture and illegal detention.

We also recognise that there is growing disaffection with the political system which reflects a region in transition from fighting an oppressive regime to now running its own affairs fairly autonomously.



Corruption

It is impossible to quantify its scale absolutely and relative to similar countries. It is, however, widely acknowledged to exist in various forms and to be a barrier to opening up the economy to domestic and international entrepreneurs. We believe that increased training and stricter methods of

auditing can undermine such practices. We also urge the KRG to commission an external valuation of the problem and to remain committed to its pledge to stamp out corruption.

Women's rights

The KRG is male dominated but with better representation of women in their top ranks and elsewhere than many others in the Middle East. 30 percent of seats in Kurdistan's Parliament are designated for women.

The Region is broadly secular. Islamists are not strong across the Region but do have more influence in small towns and villages. There is also a continuing problem with so-called honour killings, self-immolation and female genital mutilation.

Polygamy is also an issue. Lawmakers have decided that they cannot directly outlaw it because the Iraqi constitution contains a reference to recognising Islam. There are arguments about how polygamy can be squared with injunctions in the Koran for material and other equality between wives. Instead of an outright ban, the Kurdistan Parliament has plumped for attaching so many conditions to polygamy to squeeze it out of the system administratively.

We acknowledge the desire of the leadership of the KRG to counter such deeply-seated cultural practices through new legislation and support for women's rights activists. So-called honour killings were legal under Saddam and have now been made a criminal offence.

We again met Mrs Chilura Hardi, the Head of the Khatuzeen Women's Centre and NGO in Erbil, which

has moved from ramshackle premises to a bigger and government-funded building from which it runs a radio station devoted to assisting women.

She argued that the judiciary needs to contain more judges who take a progressive view of women's rights and on the need for more female judges – there is none in Erbil and only one each in the other two provinces. Mrs Chilura Hardi highlighted the need for female role models to overcome attitudes she often encountered in daughters who "see it as their job to listen to their father or brother."

We note that the government has established a special police directorate to tackle violence against women but also recognise that cultural change will take some time.

We were told that the Police are not reporting crimes against women accurately or publicly and that details of court cases should be published.

The British Council could offer support and training to help tackle violence against women.



ABOVE: KHATUZEEN WOMEN'S CENTRE AND RADIO STATION IN ERBIL

Media freedom

There is a wide variety of newspapers, television and radio channels in the Region that are either owned and operated by the political parties or by private individuals and companies.

The Region has brought in a new more liberal media law in the past year which prevents journalists being jailed or papers being closed down. We were told, however, by the Editor of the independent Hawlati newspaper that old Ba'athist laws are sometimes being used. There is still great mutual suspicion between the KRG and the independent media. In principle, the Region needs an

independent media that respects privacy and avoids libel combined with a government that keeps comprehensive social and economic data.

External professional training is vital to encouraging the best possible combination of accountability and transparency. We were also told of the need for a code of ethics, a media commission that would handle training and complaints on both sides and more trained press officers in government ministries.



Amnesty International

Whilst we were in the Region, Amnesty International issued a report, based on evidence gathered in 2008, on illegal detentions and torture which also acknowledged progress in tackling crimes against women.

We raised this report with the Deputy Prime Minister and were impressed by his directness. He told us that, like many current political leaders, he had himself been tortured. His fingernails were pulled out and his captors broke his left hand because he was a left-winger.

He told us that he opposed torture and totally denied the existence of any political prisoners. He promised to take

action against anyone found guilty of torture. We will seek a meeting with Amnesty International, visit one or more prisons of our own choice on future visits and monitor this issue.

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has also assured AI of his determination to ensure that the security agencies are made fully accountable under the law, to stamp out honour crimes. The Prime Minister's statement on this is Appendix 1 at the end of our report.

Political disaffection

It's not our business to choose between the political parties in the Region. We note, however, that there appears to be a simmering dissatisfaction with the two main established parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) between which there are few policy differences. A new party, based on a minority faction within the PUK, has formally emerged since our visit and is putting forward a Presidential candidate. It is difficult to know the level of the disaffection with the two main parties or the strength of support for the new faction. These are likely to become clearer in the parliamentary elections on July 25.

We met the Governor of the Suleimaniah Province who clearly shares criticisms of the workings of the current Kurdistan Parliament. He passionately advocated the need for more independent-minded parliamentarians who would fight their corner and help speed up the legislative process, in particular in relation to a beached law on private land ownership.

There is growing discussion about adopting open lists in elections which, as has been found in the rest of Iraq, can

increase the chances of individuals on party lists and independents who have shown their ability to do things and win popular support.

Along with the Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Communist Party, the KDP and PUK are in formal coalition and the two main parties will operate a joint list in forthcoming parliamentary elections.

This is understandable given the threat from their neighbours and the need to show a united front in dealings with Baghdad, as well as overcoming the bitterness of their past disputes which led to a civil war in the 90s between the KDP and the PUK in which some 3,000 people were killed.

The downside is that there is little or no structured opposition in Parliament. There are parallels with Northern Ireland where, thanks to its particular and troubled history, nearly all parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly are formally in government with very few acting as an opposition force.



In an ideal world perhaps, there would be clear choices between competing political forces and ideologies which allow minorities to become majorities and encourage an influx of new forces and fresh ideas. However, we understand that Kurdistan Region has emerged from decades of oppression, followed by a civil war that ended in 1998 and while committed to democracy, may face difficulties on the way.

We formed the impression that there is little strategic policy-making and implementation rather than a series of projects. This is not surprising given the relatively little time that the Region has been free from repression, sanctions and the threat of war, but we feel certain that increased and improved policy-making skills would be welcomed by the KRG.

Obviously, political cultures develop at their own speed and according to their own history and geography. We believe, however, that political leaders in the Region benefit from political training and exchanges with bodies such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the John Smith Memorial Trust, the Young Foundation and others. We urge the US State Department to include more Iraqis in its own International Visitor Programme.

We note that there are some opportunities within the International Parliamentary Union for MPs to visit Britain and discuss the procedures of politics with parliamentarians. Our Chair, Meg Munn (who also represents Labour Friends of Iraq) recently took part in a discussion in the Commons with Tony Baldry MP of Conservative Friends of Iraq with several Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Committees in the Iraqi Parliament on the issue of oversight and opposition.

We commend such exercises. We also suggest that a group of serving and former British parliamentarians together with policy-makers, on a cross-party basis, work with the Speaker of the Parliament to put together a visit and discussion seminars in the Parliament, an idea we discussed with the Speaker and which found favour.

The KRG elections in July will be a major step in establishing a democratic tradition. We welcome the participation of international election observers, such as the UN, to monitor and, we hope, validate the results.

Relations with the federal government in Baghdad

We were several times reminded of the historic role played by the UK – “our old master,” as the Speaker put it - in denying an independent state to the Kurds who are now dispersed through Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria as well as a wider Diaspora. The plight of the Kurds in Iraq has not been a happy one, as we note in the section on the Anfal.

Iraqi Kurds have not abandoned their dream of an independent homeland but political leaders have long made it plain that they seek autonomy within a democratic Iraq. According to Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman: “The Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to Iraq as a multiethnic state where neither Kurd nor Arab can consider each other, or any minority, as second-class citizens.”

Since the overthrow of Saddam in 2003 the Kurds have, we suggest, played an overwhelmingly positive role in rebuilding Iraq with many of their most talented figures playing a prominent role in the federal government and other institutions.

However, tensions between the federal leadership and the Region has festered and multiplied in recent times.

There are differences on the revenue sharing agreement. It was agreed that the Region should receive 17 percent of the Iraqi budget, reflecting both its population (which a census later this year should quantify) as well as recognition of specific problems arising from their history and geography.



We were told, however, that the proportion of the budget given to the Region under this Barnett-type rule is actually much smaller and that there is agitation in Baghdad to formally reduce it.

The minister of finance and economy has said that the KRG share of the current 58.5 billion US dollar budget may only be 11 percent due to increases in presidential and sovereignty funding, in addition to Iraq's external debts.

The Deputy Prime Minister told us that Baghdad thought that there must be something awry with ministries which spent their allocations as opposed to those which were unable to do so and punished them. He added that there were technical as well as political reasons behind such actions.

President Barzani insisted that Iraqi Kurds "won't live with another dictatorship in Baghdad" and accused the Iraqi Prime Minister, for example, of bypassing and marginalising the agreed Iraqi constitution by creating new military divisions without parliamentary approval. He said that all possibilities are open for the future status

of the region if relations with Baghdad do not improve and the agreed constitution is bypassed.

The President supports a federal model for Iraq, including the Basra and Anbar regions. He is worried about a power-vacuum in Iraq after US forces pull-out in 2011.

The KRG is aggrieved that the provisions of the constitution, agreed by 80 percent of the Iraqi people, concerning the status of Kirkuk and other disputed territories has been put on the long finger and that two deadlines have been missed. The Speaker of Parliament estimates that 40 percent of Kurdish territory is outside the current borders of the Kurdistan Region which were unilaterally imposed by Saddam.

We accept that settlement of these issues is difficult but do not accept the argument that the constitutional agreement can be trumped by recent antagonism in some quarters of Arab Iraq towards its implementation.

We note that the United Nations has begun a process of reaching an accommodation in private conversations with Iraqi political leaders.



ABOVE: THE BUSTLING CITY OF SULEIMANIAH WHICH HAS GROWN RAPIDLY SINCE THE LATE 1990S.



The role of the UK government, trade and investment

A strong theme in our discussions with many people was that the UK government should do more to assist the KRG. We do not believe that the UK government should interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq and that Iraqi forces must themselves find sustainable solutions.

We do, however, suggest that the UK government should recognise that the KRG deserves to be treated more fairly in its own right, rather than being seen as merely equivalent to the regions of the UK, some of whose institutions have good and collaborative relations with the KRG.

We are deeply disappointed that there was minimal representation of the KRG at the recent Iraqi Investment conference in London organised by the Department for International Development. We will seek a meeting with Ministers to discuss this and how to more fully include the Region in the future.



ABOVE: OUR DELEGATION MET AND TALKED WITH PRESIDENT BARZANI. HE LAST VISITED THE UK IN MARCH 2009, HERE WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID MILIBAND

We fear that opportunities for trade, investment and a host of political, cultural and educational exchanges are not being pursued as vigorously as they should for the mutual benefit of the UK and the Kurdistan Region as part of a wider Iraq.

We urge the UK to play a bigger role in helping ease tensions between the Region and the federal government in Baghdad over issues such as disputed territories and the hydrocarbon law.

We advocate much deeper and broader political, diplomatic and commercial relations between the UK and the Kurdistan Region. We support the idea of linking chambers of commerce in Kurdistan and the UK. The Kurdish chambers have established a UK-Kurdistan Business Forum with the Middle East Association, the UK trade organisation which has sent four out of the five British trade missions to Kurdistan since 2006.

We believe that UK businesses should capitalise on the clear opportunities for trade and investment in the safest part of Iraq whose stability has already done much and could do much more to help create a viable, pluralist and federal system in Iraq.

We specifically urge the Business Secretary to organise a trade mission to the region in the future in a similar way to the one he recently organised to Baghdad and Basra. And to support the KRG's trade and investment conference in London in September.

We feel strongly that the success of the Region will bolster Iraq and that this is in the interests of UK foreign policy and peace and security in the Middle East.

There is a strong case for the KRG to revive 'The Other Iraq' campaign, which was run successfully in the USA to alert public opinion to the opportunities for investment in the Region.

The Kurdistan Prime Minister has also urged Kurdish experts and those with degrees and qualifications who reside in the million-strong Diaspora to return home and/or invest in the Region.



Visas

The APPG helped secure a change in the visa regime which brought the Region into line with the rest of Iraq. Before this change, which started on a trial basis in March, residents of the Region had to secure a visa to visit Amman where they had to wait for a visa from the UK Embassy before embarking on their journey to the UK. This was costly and full of uncertainty.

Far too many people who, on the face of it, should have received a visa have been refused to the detriment of building relationships.

KRG officials, students in receipt of a full scholarship from a recognised educational institution and those who

can make a claim on compassionate grounds are now able to secure visas from the British Embassy Office in Erbil.

There is a strong case for extending the visa regime, particularly for students and business visitors, to facilitate travel between the Region and Britain without compromising UK border security.

We understand that the UK needs to prevent illegal immigration but that a visa system can overcome most of this activity. We cannot say with certainty that an enhanced visa system would eliminate this but we argue that the opportunities for the UK outweigh the risks.

The British Council and Iraq

The federal government, the KRG and the British Council (BC) agreed in 2007 that the BC would open an office in Erbil, which they subsequently did. There was discussion between the ministry and BC on opening a language centre and we understand a memorandum of understanding was signed. The KRG would provide the building and some support, while the BC would provide teachers, books, and the training. The idea is for the BC to 'train the trainers', teach translation skills and help students prepare for scholarships in the UK by learning English through the ILT and TEFL programmes.

In September 2008, the BC was due to start English language courses in Kurdistan but nothing has come of this. The Higher Education Ministry believes this may be because there was a change of personnel at the BC.

University and political leaders are also keen that the British Council increases its profile in the region, not least to enable the teaching of university level English in the Region as a better basis for more students being able to pay to study at British universities and colleges. We will seek to discuss these issues with the British Council.



Conclusions

We feel that we have been able to increase our understanding of the key issues faced by the Region and ask that our independent report is circulated to all relevant policy-makers in the Region and in the UK. We would be grateful for responses to our report and findings.

This report was drafted by Gary Kent and agreed by the delegation. The APPG acknowledges with thanks that this independent report has been published by the KRG UK Representation.



ABOVE: LIKE KURDISTAN'S OTHER CITIES, ERBIL HAS GROWN RAPIDLY SINCE THE LATE 1990S.



Appendix 1

Kurdistan Region: Prime Minister makes encouraging promises to Amnesty International 23 April 2009

Amnesty International welcomes the strong commitment to human rights expressed by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in a meeting with the organization in Erbil today.

"The Prime Minister said he has personally read Amnesty International's report, published last week, and has instructed that its recommendations be circulated to the detention authorities and to government ministries," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Region and head of Amnesty International's delegation in the Kurdistan Region. "The Prime Minister assured us too of his determination to ensure that the Asayish and other security agencies, whose record we have criticized, are made fully accountable under the law."

At the meeting, Prime Minister Barzani told Amnesty International that a new law was being prepared to make the Asayish accountable to the Council of Ministers, though the timetable for this was still unclear.

The Prime Minister also assured Amnesty International that he and his government are committed to stamping

out so-called honour crimes and to ensure that women are afforded effective protection against violence, including within the family.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government has taken positive human rights steps in recent years," said Malcolm Smart. "In particular, it has put in place concrete measures to combat violence against women, and we are heartened by this. At the same time, we emphasized the need to ensure that women's human rights defenders are fully involved in all stages of developing and implementing policies to end violence, discrimination and to increase life opportunities for women and girls."

Amnesty International's visit to the Kurdistan Region follows the publication last week of its report, *Hope and Fear: Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*.

The report described recent improvements including the release of hundreds of long term political detainees in 2008 and legal reforms affecting the status of women and media freedom but expressed concern about serious violations by the Asayish and other security forces and called for them to be held fully to account.



Appendix 2

The delegation met the following individuals, often with several of their colleagues (listed in chronological order):

- The Bishop of Erbil
- Karim Sinjari, Minister of Interior
- Adnan Mufti, Speaker of the Kurdistan Parliament
- Othman Shwani, Minister of Planning
- Mr Taha Barwary, Minister of Sports and Youth
- Abdul Aziz Tayib, Minister of Agriculture
- Miss Chnar Saad, Minister for Anfal and Martyr Affairs
- Hangaw Abulla Khan, President of Kurdistan Workers Syndicate
- Piers Drysdale, head of Two Rivers Consultancy, Legal consultants
- Giles Lever, Acting British Consul
- Robin Brims, the then President of the University of Kurdistan – Hawler
- President Masoud Barzani
- Masrouf Barzani, Director of Security and Intelligence
- Nijyar Shemdin, CEO of Middle East Corporation for Reconstruction and Investment
- PUK Politburo member Mala Bakhtiar
- Governor of Suleimaniah Dana Ahmed
- Deputy Prime Minister Imad Ahmad
- Minister for Peshmerga Jafar Mustafa
- Mohamad Sardar, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Syndicate in Suleimaniah
- Kamal Rauf, Editor of Hawlati Newspaper
- Tamar Ramazan, Governor of Dohuk
- Dr Ismat Khaled, President of Dohuk University
- Mrs Chilura Hardi of the Khatuzeen Women's Centre and Radio Station

We were interviewed by Kurdistani Nwe Newspaper



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This report was drafted by Gary Kent, Administrator of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and Director of Labour Friends of Iraq, and agreed by the delegation. The APPG acknowledges with thanks that this independent report has been published by the KRG UK Representation.

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