The mission of the Centre for Kurdish Progress (Kurdish Progress) is to provide an open forum for the discussion of political, economic and social developments among Kurdish people in the UK and the wider Kurdistan region.

There are around 250,000 Kurds living in the UK and around 40 million around the world. Kurdish Progress aims to raise the profile of Kurdish people within British society, as well as to establish a solid platform to better debate the interconnected issues of all four parts of Greater Kurdistan and their significance to UK and world politics. Above all, this organisation aspires to improve the position of Kurdish people in the UK and offer a neutral forum for discussion of the Kurdish issue.

Objectives

- Improve the standing of Kurdish People in the UK
- Introduce the Kurdish Question to the general public
- Make the debate accessible to laypeople
- Provide a space for debate and the pursuit of solutions
- Discuss and develop the debate on divisions within Kurdistan
- To host forums and panel discussions dealing with topics related to the analysis of the Kurdish question and the wider Kurdistan region (Bakur/North, Bashur/South, Rojhelat/East, Rojava/West).
- To act as a non-party political and non-governmental institution with the aim of providing expert opinion, advice, debate and discussion on Kurdistan, Kurdish People and the Kurdish Question.

Volunteering and Internships

Would you like to join our team?

Our organisation is able to function thanks to the support of volunteers and interns as we do not receive any funding from any governmental body or private organisations. We offer our interns and volunteers an opportunity to gain practical experience in Kurdish political affairs. Internships are offered in the areas of communications, events organisation, press relations, fundraising and research.

Internships are for periods of a minimum of three months. The duration and schedule of internships are arranged according to the availability and skills of candidates. If you are unable to commit to three months, you may like to volunteer for us. Do email us to find out more about volunteering with us.

Please send your CV and a brief cover letter to kurdishprogress2014@gmail.com

All are welcome to apply. All candidates must be aged 18 or over and eligible to work in the United Kingdom. Internships are unpaid.

Donation

Current events across the Middle East, the crises in Syria and Iraq and the threat of Islamic State (IS) have brought ever-greater significance to the Kurdish issue. Understanding the Kurdish issue is now more important than ever for observers, commentators and analysts of the region.

We would like to organise more public forums and bring Kurds from all four parts of Kurdistan together to widen public knowledge of the issues they face. We would like to draw more attention to the ongoing political, economic and cultural developments within these communities. At present, Kurdish-led movements are pushing for social democratic values, gender equality and pluralism in the Middle East. The Centre for Kurdish Progress aims to raise awareness of these significant efforts.

Mission

Kurdish Progress is an independent and non-partisan organisation. It was inaugurated in June of 2014.

The organisation provides the general public with access to expert opinions and debates, focusing on the issue of Kurdistan and Kurdish people in the UK as well as internationally.

As a policy forum Kurdish Progress organises speaker series, panel discussions and social events, in order to improve the standing of Kurdish people in the UK and to offer a space within which to discuss Kurdistan’s position in the world. Our work is driven by enjoyable co-operation with the British Parliament, local and international think tanks and academic institutions.

Our mission is very simple: We want to increase international awareness of the Kurdish question, and the situation in the region and the Diaspora. The current issues are at the heart of a historic and intriguing debate. We want future Kurdish generations to grow up in a world where they are aware of their heritage and can learn the Kurdish language.

Please support us by making a donation. No amount is too small and will be appreciated greatly.

We need your support to achieve our goals.

Please visit www.kurdishprogress.org to make a donation.

For more information, please email us at kurdishprogress2014@gmail.com
“I am delighted to present to you, on behalf of the staff and volunteers of the Centre for Kurdish Progress, our new report covering the centre’s work since its inauguration in 2014.

The struggles faced by the Kurdish people across the Middle East highlights the ever increasing importance of the work of the Centre for Kurdish Progress.

In spite of their troubles, the Kurds are an optimistic people. Every year, Kurds celebrate Newroz which symbolises the coming of Spring. It is a celebration common to many cultures. It is a celebration of hope and happiness.

Each year, the Centre for Kurdish Progress celebrates with a Newroz reception in the British Parliament. This reception, like all the work of Kurdish Progress is for Kurds from any and all countries, to have a voice and a platform. It is also to help non-Kurdish people and the British public at large to better understand Kurds and Kurdish issues, and to allow friendships to form between communities.

Kurds right now once again find themselves in a difficult period. They remain a people without a homeland, a people abandoned by history.

Kurds are facing oppression by threatening forces in practically every country where they exist in large numbers. We are not seen as equals in so many countries where we have a large presence, even in Iraq where Kurds have autonomy.

In Turkey, millions of citizens have been neglected by the state. The Turkish state needs to take responsibility for the people under its rule. It cannot continue to subject people to such extreme deprivations of rights. I encourage you all to read the recent UN report on the conflict in Turkey.

We at Kurdish Progress are here to make the voice of the Kurds heard. We want to bring together Kurds from all different backgrounds. Through our events and seminars we want to help Kurds create new friendships and partnerships. We also want to explain the situation of the Kurds. And encourage more people to call for rights for Kurds.

We celebrate the fact that here in London and the UK we can live how we want. We can celebrate our holidays. We can speak our language. We can meet, we can organise, we can live. This is a great thing and I am grateful to this country for this. But this should not be a luxury. This should be the situation for Kurds and for all people all across the world.

I hope that together we can strive for greater equality, peace and democracy for Kurds and for all people everywhere.”

Raife Aytek
Director of the Centre for Kurdish Progress
“The New Year gives an opportunity to reflect on the past year, and to look ahead at the year to come. I think I speak for all of us when I say I hope the next twelve months are better than the last.

Over the last year we have seen disappointments and reversals, tragedy and bloodshed. Many of us were disappointed with the outcome of the referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union (EU). We wanted Britain to stay strong in a reformed EU. But we accept that we are leaving. We respect our democracy.

The question now is how will we safeguard our prosperity? How will our businesses continue to trade internationally? And how will we curb assaults on our immigrant communities, and protect BME communities from violence?

Never forget that this year saw the murder of a British Member of Parliament in her constituency, by a right-wing nationalist terrorist.

So we have to work hard to ensure that Brexit makes us bigger as a nation, more open-hearted, more welcoming to the world, not diminished, closed and small-minded.

And for the Kurdish people, throughout Kurdistan, and in the Diaspora, the past year has been filled with anguish.

Kurdish fighters in Syria and Iraq fill our hearts with pride. We stand with these brave men and women. They are in the front-line against an enemy as barbaric as any seen in human history.

An enemy which routinely uses rape and torture, uses beheadings and burns people alive. Which uses little children as human bombs. It is Kurdish fighters who have been fighting ISIS, often with little or no support from the Western Allies.

It is a tragedy that the complexities and rivalries between armed groups have led in recent days to fighting between Kurdish groups in Sinjar. Sinjar was the scene of a brutal massacre in 2014, when 5000 Yazidis were murdered by ISIS.

It was liberated in December, when the Peshmerga seized the town and the mountains surrounding it. Now, we hear reports that the liberators are fighting amongst themselves. If the history of the Kurdish people tells us anything, it is that we must stay united. I believe we all should join the call for hostilities to cease, and for the battle to be directed at the real enemy ISIS.

And what about the role of the Turkish Government over the past year? The Turkish Government has refused to work alongside Kurdish efforts to defeat ISIS, repeatedly made threats against Kurdish groups, denounced them as ‘terrorists’, and threatened the whole success of the Raqqa Offensive against ISIS. Turkish-backed forces have shelled Kurdish villages in Syria.

This violence must stop. Turkey must recognise the legitimate demands of the Kurdish people if it wants to be accepted at the top table of nations.

Let us hope the year ahead is the year when ISIS is defeated, and the peoples of Iraq and Syria can begin a new era of prosperity.

Let us hope that the Kurdish people can be part of this peaceful settlement, that our communities can live freely, that our children can become doctors, teachers and business leaders.

The Kurdish community in the UK has made great progress. Today we celebrate the most successful Kurds in Britain, across so many sectors, trades and professions.

We are proud to be Kurdish, proud to be British. I want us to use the year ahead to build our links with more British politicians and ministers. To urge them to help the Kurdish cause in practical ways. Here, the remarkable success of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, and the Good Friday Agreement, serves as a beacon of hope.

I want us to build our links with civil society, with schools, on campus, with trade unions, with business groups. I want Britain to use its links with Turkey to press for greater human rights, democracy and protection of the Kurdish minority and other minority groups.

As Kurds, we know we have friends in every political party. I want that number of friends to increase in the coming year. I want more British politicians to be made aware of our history and our realities. That means more fundraising, more outreach work, more meetings. A year ahead of activities and hard work.

Finally let me thank the staff and volunteers of the Centre for Kurdish Progress which does such a fantastic job. This is such an important year ahead. I look forward to working with you all, in the name of progress, in the name of peace.”

Ibrahim Dogus
Founder
I send my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating the festival of Nowruz in Britain, Iran and around the world.

At this time of year families and friends will be gathering to celebrate the New Year and mark the start of Spring.

To everyone celebrating Nowruz in the UK — I wish you a happy, healthy and peaceful new year.

_Har ruzetan Nowruz, Nowruzetan piruz._
“May I commend the work of the Centre for Kurdish Progress and its contributions to the achievements of the Kurdish Community in the UK. The centre has long offered a space for discussing the Kurdish situation in the world. I am proud to serve a constituency which has a strong and vibrant Kurdish community.

Across the world, for many years the Kurdish people have been under sustained attack. The conflict in Syria has been a trigger for the onslaught against the Kurdish people, who are defending their right to self-determination and dignity. As a matter of urgency the Turkish government must restart the peace process and respect the rights of the Kurdish people.

We call for an end to repression and for justice for the Kurdish people throughout the Middle East. I will continue to support efforts to ensure peace, social justice and the recognition of Kurdish human rights in the region. I wish you all a successful and happy Newroz.”
“Since its establishment in 2014, the Centre for Kurdish Progress has achieved much for which it should be proud. The Centre’s work in protecting the interests of Kurdish people and groups has done a lot to raise the public profile and discussion of Kurdish issues.

This is a stark contrast from the not so distant past when the world’s 40 Million Kurds were forgotten, ignored by national boundaries, and their cultural aspirations suppressed by numerous governments.

Today, though the Middle East looks bleak, the Kurds have taken control of their own futures and remain at the forefront of the struggle with Daesh in Syria and Iraq, setting an example to all their neighbours.

These developments have defied all expectations, including my own as someone whose family fled from Iraq in the 1970s during the ascendancy of Saddam Hussein’s brutal regime.

The Centre for Kurdish Progress has done wonderful work in showing these achievements to British officials and the general public.”
“I commend the work of the Centre for Kurdish Progress. The centre plays an integral role as an independent, non-profit organisation, focusing on and bringing to light issues affecting Kurdistan and Kurdish people in the UK and abroad.

The Centre for Kurdish Progress brings together Kurds from all regions of Kurdistan, encouraging dialogue and doing great work for the community. Organising events such as the ‘Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards’, the centre helps recognise and draw greater attention to the achievements and positive contributions of Kurds in Britain.

London is home to many people from around the world and members of the Kurdish community have managed to settle in our city and thrive, contributing greatly to London’s cultural and economic growth and success.”
"The Kurdish community in Britain has made many social, economic and cultural contributions, with Kurdish professionals, entrepreneurs, artists and many in other fields continuing to benefit and enrich our society. With the serious challenges facing Kurdish communities across the world, it is vital that we continue to defend and support the common values of democracy, human rights and equality that we share with the Kurdish community."

Tom Watson
Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and MP for West Bromwich East

"The Centre for Kurdish Progress has done a great job since their inauguration in 2014. I welcome the centre’s efforts in raising awareness of Kurdish community in Britain and highlighting the political developments in the Kurdish region. Promotion of our values of democracy, justice and human rights within the context of Kurdish cause is a fantastic step towards solutions for the challenges the Kurdish people face. I wish you all the success at the Newroz Reception 2016."

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt
Conservative MP for South West Surrey Secretary of State for Health

"May I commend the work of the Centre for Kurdish Progress in recognising the achievements of Kurds in the United Kingdom. As your 2015 awards ceremony showed, Kurds have significantly contributed to both British and Kurdish communities - as successful entrepreneurs, students, artists and more. I am pleased to see that my colleague, Nadhim Zahawi MP is to co-host the awards ceremony. I am sad to say that I will be unable to attend this year’s event due to pre-existing diary commitments. However, I wish you the very best with the evening and I hope it provides again to be a success."

Rt Hon Justine Greening
Conservative MP for Putney and Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities

"In my time both as Shadow Home Secretary and the MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, it is with immense pride that I have witnessed the great achievements of, and served Britain’s Kurdish population. Having seen the successes of Kurdish businesses that contribute to our local and national economies, alongside the accomplishments of British Kurds in fields such as journalism, politics and many others, I believe firmly that the UK Kurdish community has changed British society for the better in numerous ways. Such efforts and strides are something that we can be thankful for and inspired by. I am delighted to lend my support to the members of this wonderful community once again, and wish them, all their friends and families, the very best for the future."

Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP
MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and Former Shadow Home Secretary

"I am an independent non-party member of the British Parliament, who has been a friend of the Kurds since 1987. I deeply regret that elected members of the Turkish Parliament and mayors are among those imprisoned or facing trial for political offences. Elsewhere, the right of the Kurds to self-determination is only partially respected. Despite these serious problems, I wish a happy and more peaceful New Year to the Kurdish people as a whole, and in particular to readers of this magazine."

Lord Hylton
Cross Bench member of the House of Lords

"It is my great pleasure to add my good wishes for the future success of the Centre for Kurdish Progress and in particular my good wishes for the Kurdish New Year. I welcome this independent, non-profit organisation, focussing on Kurdistan and Kurdish people in the UK and abroad. At a time of political uncertainty in the region it is very important that people of open mind and good intentions work together to promote social democratic values, equality and pluralism in the Middle East."

Sir David Amess
Conservative MP for South End West

This message was received in 2016 in support of the Centre for Kurdish Progress
"As a member of the Advisory Board, I support the Centre for Kurdish Progress with immense pride. The Centre for Kurdish Progress offers a neutral and independent platform through which Kurdish affairs and issues in Britain and Kurdistan can be discussed, analysed and debated. I value this great service provided by the Centre and look forward to continuing to work with them in future.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament and now as Shadow Secretary for International Development, I have seen the outstanding contribution of many Kurdish constituents in Enfield North, I wish a very happy and peaceful Newroz to Kurds and their families both at home and abroad. The Newroz festival is a fantastic showcase for the immense contribution the Kurdish people make to our society and way of life.

Kurds have in recent times shown exceptional bravery in Syria, Turkey and Iraq, demonstrating that they too share the values of democracy, human rights and equality, and I commend the Centre for Kurdish Progress for having helped bring these efforts into the public eye.

I will continue to give my support to their cause with the hope of bringing a lasting peace to the region and recognition of the rights of Kurdish peoples."

RT Hon Joan Ryan
Labour MP for Enfield North

"The centre for Kurdish progress is a fantastic job increasing awareness of the Kurdish Region and supporting our very important Kurdish community here in the United Kingdom. I wish everyone all the best for Newroz and offer my sincere congratulations to the winners in the Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards. These awards highlight the significant impact the Kurdish community makes in the United Kingdom from business, to arts, to education and politics."

Stephen Hammond
Conservative MP for Wimbledon

"I wish the Centre for Kurdish Progress all the success at the Newroz Reception 2016, for the Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards. The Kurdish community made huge contribution to life in Britain and I am delighted that this award will underline that."

Andrew Mitchell
Conservative MP for Sutton Coldfield

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Kate Osamor
Labour MP for Edmonton and Shadow Secretary of State for International Development

"Newroz Tan Piroz Bet! Happy Kurdish New Year to everyone celebrating this evening in Parliament. Congratulations to all those who have been nominated for awards. Kurdish success in the world of business, arts, education and entrepreneurship are celebrated this evening and all Kurdish people living in Britain can be proud of these achievements across so many walks of life.

Thank you to the Centre for Kurdish Progress for organising today’s and for its work to behalf of Kurdish people in the UK."

Alok Sharma
MP for Reading West and Minister of State for Communities and Local Government

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"The centre for Kurdish progress is a very inspirational body, it fills us with hope for the future of mankind on a very idealistic level but on a practical level it engages both Turks & Kurds and the wider community and I have the great privilege of being involved in that wider community so I wish the centre well and hope that it goes from strength to strength in the future."

Angus Brendan MacNeil
Scottish National Party MP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar and Shadow SNP Spokesperson (Immigration, Asylum and Border Control)
“Happy Newroz.

Congratulations to all the staff and volunteers at the Centre for Kurdish Progress for all their work over the last 12 months in providing a strong voice for Kurdish communities, both here in Britain and around the world. Your work is helping to improve the lives of the Kurdish population, and moves us ever closer to the day when they will finally be able to live in peace.

I was delighted to have been invited to attend this year’s event. I wish you every success, not just for this year’s reception but in the years to come too.”

Martyn Day
Scottish National Party MP for Linlithgow and East Falkirk

“I am delighted to again support the work of the Centre for Kurdish Progress who have done so much to raise awareness about the Kurds both in the UK and internationally.

The Kurdish community have made a welcome and important contribution to the multicultural and economic identity of the UK - especially in Scotland - and the Centre does a great deal to showcase this annually.

By establishing a solid forum for open discussion and debate over the current affairs of the Middle East, Kurdish Progress allows us to dig beyond the surface on many issues, providing nuance and access to information which is unavailable elsewhere.

I am proud to lend my support and assistance to the Centre to progress their aims as well as those of Kurds across the region who have done so much to promote democracy, gender equality as well as free cultural and linguistic expression.”

Natalie McGarry

“I’d like to wish everyone a Happy Newroz. As the old year ends and a new one begins, I’d like to pay tribute to how much Kurdish communities contribute to British society, as well as express my hope that the year ahead is marked by peace and an end to the suffering so many endure today. I’d also like recognise and applaud the work and achievements of the Centre for Kurdish Progress.”

Caroline Lucas
Co-Leader of the Green Party and MP for Brighton, Pavilion

“Having visited the Kurdistan Region three times between 2006 and 2013, I know that its people and government are capable of major and positive change.

I also know that the past three years have reversed many gains due to the rise of the so-called Islamic State and its genocide against the Yezidis and its attacks on Kurdistan.

That nightmare is beginning to end thanks to the tremendous sacrifice of the brave Peshmerga and I pay tribute to the efforts of the KRG and its people in looking after so many of those who fled for their lives to seek sanctuary in Kurdistan. I have been privileged to have given solidarity to unions and others in Kurdistan and such partnership will become more and more vital in the coming months.”

Dave Anderson
Labour MP for Blaydon (2015-2017) and Former Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland

“The sterling contribution of the Kurdistan Regional Government and its brave Peshmerga to resisting and defeating the Daesh death cult has won it many new friends globally. Solidarity from old and new friends remains vital as Kurds and their neighbours recover from the nightmare of nihilism. The APPG and organisations such as the Centre for Kurdish Progress will have their work cut out for them. Let this Newroz signal the beginning of a global and bigger British effort to help the Kurds help themselves through economic and political reform as well as physical and psychological reconstruction. Their success is our success and a major bonus for civilisation everywhere.”

Gary Kent
Director, All Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq

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Dave Anderson
Labour MP for Blaydon (2015-2017) and Former Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland
Nawroz (New Year) event for Kurds is a special moment, it is a mixture of joy and mourns for the people of Kurdistan Region, in which it reflects on the past and emphasis on future, the future that we are all contribute to build. Centre for Kurdish Progress with its approach has a significant role in that, reinforced its strong reputation though its valuable work in providing a forum for the elaboration and discussion of the most significant developments relating to the Kurdish communities around the world. Kurdish Progress has an excellent record of producing stimulating events and attracting government, the private sector, civil society and its members. They are a great asset for building bridges between the Kurdish community and the United Kingdom, they are also plays an integral role in supporting the Kurdistan Regions Representation’s diplomatic mission in the United Kingdom. We commend the team’s professionalism and dedication into taking the Centre to the next stage of its development. I take this opportunity to extend my very best wishes to the Kurdish people around the world, in particular those lives in the UK and all those who celebrate Nawroz a very Happy Nawroz (Kurdish New Year)”

“ arbitrarily:

“arbitrarily:

“The death of the esteemed Judge Essa Moosa—the former lawyer for Nelson Mandela and subsequently Judge on the South African High Court for the Western Cape—on February 26, 2017 reminds us of how many great persons over the years have supported the Kurdish struggle for justice and how it has attracted the support of so many other suppressed peoples worldwide. As a scholar of Kurdish studies for more than 30 years, I have been privileged to meet and work with Judge Moussa and many other great Kurdish and other people in a quest to achieve justice and a better life for all people. I know that the Centre for Kurdish Progress supports these goals, so I am honored to be associated with such an organization and look forward to its continuing success.”

Karwan Jamal Tahir
High Representative to the UK of the Kurdistan Regional Government

Professor Michael M. Gunter
Tennessee Technological University, USA and Secretary-General of the European Union Turkish Civic Commission (EUTCC)
On the evening of the 15th of March, the Centre for Kurdish Progress hosted its annual Newroz (Kurdish New Year) Reception at Portcullis House Westminster at the Houses of Parliament. The event was hosted by the Shadow Home Secretary the Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP and the Scottish National Party MP Angus Brendan MacNeil, both of whom attended the event.

The event was presented by Taban Kamal Mohammed who won the Best Student (Female) Most Successful Kurds in Britain Award in 2016, she is presently a Human Rights Master’s Student at UCL and PA at the Home Office.

Approximately 200 people were in attendance including numerous British Politicians who provided the event and the organisation with cross-party support, including the Leader of Labour Party the Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP, Labour MPs David Lammy, Dawn Butler, Rob Marris and Mary Glindon, Conservative MPs Andrea Jenkyns and Jack Lopresti, Scottish National Party MPs Chris Stephenson and Tommy Sheppard, the Independent MP Natalie McGarry, and Labour Peers Lord Michael Cashman, Baroness Jan Royall, Lord Pendry, Baroness Whitaker and Lord Dave Watts.

Falah Mustafa Bakir the Head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq was also in attendance, so was Karwan Jamal Tahir, the High Representative to the UK of the KRG, both gave speeches.

Speeches were also made by Raife Aytek, Director of the Centre for Kurdish Progress, Ibrahim Dogus, the Founder of the Centre for Kurdish Progress and Jeremy Corbyn MP Leader of the Opposition and the Labour Party. Key quotes from these speeches include:

“Tonight’s event like all the work of Kurdish Progress is for Kurds from any and all countries, to give them a voice and a platform. It is also to help non-Kurdish British people better understand Kurds and Kurdish issues, and to allow friendships to form between communities.” - Raife Aytek

“This is such an important year ahead. I look forward to working with you all, in the name of progress, in the name of peace.” - Ibrahim Dogus

“You have to respect people’s history, culture and values and work with them … Diversity is a strength not a weakness” - The Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP

Attendees with origins from all four parts of Kurdistan, many of whom wore traditional Kurdish clothes enjoyed a drinks reception and there was also a musical performance by Hadis Ayoubi, who has released her new single “BARAN”.

John Lubbock, a representative from a
NEWROZ Reception 2017

Wikimedia project intended to recruit Kurdish-language Wikipedia page editors with the aim of spreading this network to Kurdistan in order to extend greater access to information there were also present.

Several supporters were presented with Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause Awards.

The recipients of these prizes included:

Baroness Jan Royall, a British Labour politician. Baroness Royall was awarded for making many efforts to raise awareness of the Kurdish struggle including visiting Diyarbakır in February 2016 and meeting with representatives of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and writing extensively about the curfews implemented in Kurdish-majority cities in Turkey. Her efforts in securing a 90 minute debate in parliament to discuss the human rights and political situation in Turkey, and vocalising her concerns for the HDP representatives who have been dismissed, arrested or imprisoned and stressed the serious violations of freedom in Kurdish-populated areas.

Simon Dubbins, the Head of International at UNITE. Mr Dubbins was awarded for helping to bring Kurdish affairs to the foreground among Trade Unions in Britain and elsewhere in Europe and for leading a campaign and petitioned the Foreign Secretary to help secure the release from prison of pro-Kurdish politicians in Turkey. Thanks to his efforts, Unite are working to show solidarity with Kurdish people suffering in the Middle East.

Jack Lopresti, a Conservative MP. Mr Lopresti was awarded for having joined MPs of all parties on a visit to the frontlines against Daesh in Kirkuk and making efforts to support the important role played by Kurdish fighters in the struggle thereafter. These include his backing a proposal for the treatment of wounded Kurdish soldiers at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and for visiting wounded Peshmerga to thank them for their work on the frontline.

Stephen Smellie, branch Secretary and Deputy Convenor of the public services trade union UNISON in Scotland. He has been awarded for his supporting role as a founding member of “Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan” with which he helped launch a campaign of solidarity with imprisoned Kurdish women this year and also for his work as secretary to the newly established Cross Party Group on Kurdistan in the Scottish Parliament.

Richard Wilding, a London based photographer and designer working internationally with museums, charities and governments on cultural exhibitions, websites and printed publications. Richard was awarded for his work as the Creative Director of Gulan, a UK registered charity which promotes Kurdish culture. He was also awarded for his efforts in designing the Kurdistan Regional Government national badge for the remembrance of the victims of the Kurdish Genocide in collaboration with Gulan’s Artistic Director Della Murad. The badge was first used on 16th March 2013 at the 25th anniversary commemorations of the chemical weapons attack on Halabja.

After the extraordinary contribution awards, two additional Press and Publication Awards were presented to Dr Ipek Demir, a Sociology Associate Professor at Leicester University and Ata Mufty, a writer, activist, publisher and former organiser of the London Kurdish Film Festival.

The event also included the Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards, which recognise and highlight the great successes of contributions made by Kurds to their communities, the UK and to Kurdistan. The Awards Judging Panel included representatives of the Kurdish Community in Britain. The judges are Founder and Executive Director of Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation (IKWRO), Diana Nammi; Writer and Journalist Goran Baba Ali; Service Manager at Renaisi, Chinar Mohammad Diman; Gorran Movement UK Representative, Foad Jamal Salam; Poet and Writer Shie Rauf, Mayor of Harringey Ali Gul Ozbek and Director of the Centre for Kurdish Progress Raife Aytek.
Winners of the 3rd Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards

Businesswoman of the Year
Aysel Enguzekli
director of ADA ASSOCIATES UK LIMITED
an accountancy firm based in Edmonton.

Businessman of the Year
Sarbaz Barznji
a Civil Structural Engineer who has established
two construction companies.

Role Model Award of the Year (Female)
Cllr Makbule Gunes
a Labour Councillor for Tottenham.

Role Model Award of the Year (Male)
Professor Deiary Fraidoon Kader
a Consultant Orthopaedic surgeon and
visiting professor at Northumbria University.

Student of the Year (Female)
Nadia Mardan
is a current postgraduate student
who has achieved a First in her law degree
and a Distinction for her LPC.

Student of the Year (Male)
Ahmed Saleh
a current PHD student with a law degree
and Master’s degree in International
Relations and Global Security.

Social Responsibility Award
Dr Mohammad Tammo
co-founder, Treasurer and Head of Public Advocacy
t of the non-profit Kurds House since 2014.

Art Award (Female)
Della Murad
an image consultant and
fashion designer in the UK.

Art Award (Male)
Hussein Zahawy
an experienced and renowned musician who has
performed and produced Kurdish music worldwide.

Young Entrepreneur of the Year (Female)
Zaynab Alikamal
pharmaceutical businesswoman and owner of
Kings Medical Centre on Edgware Road London.

Young Entrepreneur of the Year (Male)
Dlair Kadhem
technological innovation specialist and
businessman with clientele including
the BBC, NHS, Ericsson and PwC.
The Centre for Kurdish Progress 2016 Newroz Reception welcomed many Kurds from all regions of Kurdistan. British parliamentarians and Kurdish representatives spoke in support of the Kurds. The winners of the second annual Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards were announced as part of the Newroz celebrations.

Co-hosted by Conservative MP Nadhim Zahawi and Labour MP for Kate Osamor, the reception received cross-party support. Over 80 parliamentarians including Leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn, Jason McCartney, Caroline Flint Labour MP, Stella Creasy Labour MP, Meg Hillier Labour MP, Alison Thewlis SNP MP, Natalie McGarry Independent MP, and Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Wallace attended the reception and presented awards to winners of the evening. Deputy Mayor of London Roger Evans and many London Councillors kindly joined the Kurds in their celebration of the new year.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) High Representative to the UK, Karwan Jamal Tahir and People’s Democratic Party (HDP) Deputy Chair from Turkey Hisyar Ozsoy and representatives of Kurds from Syria and Iran honoured the centre with their attendance at the reception. The Centre for Kurdish Progress was pleased to have successfully brought together Kurds from different regions.

Kurdish business people including the directors of the Association of the Kurdish Employers in Europe (AKEE) Suleyman Cagin and Kemal Has, as well as Kurds of all walks of life living in Britain were present.

The awards ceremony was presented by Hilat Ozcan and Melissa Zerrin.
Winners of the Second Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards

Most Successful Businessman
Harem Kamishi

Most Successful Businesswoman
Jino Murad

Most Successful Female/Male Role Models
Meryem Kaya, Gala Rian and Pashang Abdulhannan

Art Award Female
Mizgin Mujde Arslan

Art Award Male
Mariwan Jalal, Kae Bahar

Press & Publication Award
Jiyar Gol

Most Successful Student
Taban Kamal, Raz Jabary

Most Successful Young Entrepreneur
Ersin Bedir

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Lord Avebury

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Lord Hylton

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Jean Lambert MP

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Lord Rea

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Jason McCartney MP

Extraordinary Contribution to the Kurdish Cause
Sarah Panizzo (Founder and Trustee)
18 March 2015

The London based Centre for Kurdish Progress organised a Newroz Celebration in Portcullis House. Stephen Twigg MP for Liverpool West Derby and Sadiq Khan MP for Tooting kindly hosted the event in the Attlee Suite.

The organisation that was launched in June 2014 welcomed over 200 people to celebrate the Kurdish New Year. Several parliamentarians including Eric Ollerenshaw MP, Nadhim Zahawi MP, Keith Vaz MP, Mike Gapes MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Lord Hylton and Baroness Hussein-Ece, London Councillors, representatives of communities and academics attended the celebration.

Former Iraqi Minister of Water Resources and Chief Adviser to the President of Iraq, Mr Abdul Latif Rashid, Bahra Sargalu of Kurdistan’s Gorran Movement, Khasro Ajgayi on behalf of Kurdish Regional Government, Kemal Amedi of Kurdistan Democratic Party, Dr Alan Semo and Mr Ata Mufty were among the presenters of the awards.

As part of the Newroz Celebration, in order to embellish UK’s Kurdish community’s achievements, the Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards were held. From business to arts, politics to education ten Kurdish people were awarded.

Ann Clwyd MP, Nadhim Zahawi MP, Estella Schmid and Gary Kent were granted Centre for Kurdish Progress Special Award for their extraordinary contribution to Kurdish Cause.
2015 Most Successful Kurds in Britain Awards Full List of Winners

Most Successful Businessman
Savas & Bayram Yuksel

Most Successful Businesswoman
Isil Guler

Most Successful Role Model
Shayan Muftuzadeh

Social Responsibility
Karam Kurda

Art Award Female
Tara Jaff

Art Award Male
Jasim Ghafur

Press & Publication Award
Alaettin Sinayic

Most Successful Student Society Award
SOAS Kurdish Society

Most Successful Student
Shaswar Baban

Most Successful Young Entrepreneur
Sahin Anush

Most Successful Politician Award
Nadhim Zahawi MP

Extraordinary Contribution
to Kurdish Cause
Ann Clwyd MP

Extraordinary Contribution
to Kurdish Cause
Estella Schmid

Extraordinary Contribution
to Kurdish Cause
Gary Kent

Extraordinary Contribution
to Kurdish Cause
Suleyman Cagin
Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) dominate the political and military landscape in Rojava, or as Syrian Kurds have started calling it, the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria. Controlling this region allows the Kurdish-led administrations to push through the implementation of their political programme, which also appeals to non-Kurdish constituencies such as Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmens, Armenians and others.

Apart from cooperation in the day-to-day running of the Federal System, the cooperation between different ethnic and religious groups in Rojava finds expression in the form of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This is an armed group, containing approximately 50,000 fighters, drawn from Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians and Armenians.

The Kurdish-led SDF has proven itself again and again as the most effective force on the ground in the combat against Daesh.

The gains made by Kurds in Syria on military, political and social levels were initially regarded as fragile and temporary. However, the last five years have demonstrated that the Rojava project could endure many challenging tests such as confronting the full might of Daesh and surviving shifting political balances in the region. Today the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria is composed of four self-governing cantons: Jazira, Kobani, Afrin, and Shahba region which includes Manbij.

The first significant victory of 2016 came in February when the Kurds, with the help of their Arab allies, captured the strategic Arab majority city of Shaddadi from Daesh. Another very significant victory was the capture of the city of Manbij to the south-west of Kobani in August. These two successes were also significant tests for the viability of the Kurdish-led SDF alliance. It was these victories that made it possible for the SDF to consider a strategic offensive into Raqqa, the main Daesh stronghold in Syria. Today the offensive against Raqqa is moving at a very high speed, gaining more territory back from Daesh than any other anti-Daesh operation.

The Syrian Kurds have distinguished themselves from other Syrian opposition groups through the clarity of their political project, the dedication of their fighters, and the organisational and tactical skills of their commanders. The YPG’s commanders, who learnt on the ground, have proven to be superior to the experienced commanders of Daesh.

With the support of American airpower, the Kurds captured Manbij quicker than the Turkish army and the pro-Turkish Free
Syrian Army units were able to capture al-Bab, much smaller than Manbij.

The backing of the US has been very important for the Kurds for political, not just military reasons. That partnership between the US and the YPG has made the Kurdish-led political project and the SDF alliance more appealing to Arabs and other groups. It has also provided political protection against hostile regional forces such as Turkey, the Syrian regime and Iran.

In August 2016, YPG forces clashed with Syrian government troops along with fighters from Hezbollah and Iranian Basij militia in Hasakah. Unable to hold against the YPG on the ground, the Syrian government forces resorted to a two-day long aerial bombardment of Kurdish positions. The fighting stopped only as the US weighed in.

Thus, for Kurds, one of the most anticipated events of 2016 was the US elections and subsequent policy manoeuvres by the new US administration. President Donald Trump, who proclaimed himself to be “a big fan of the Kurds” while on the campaign trail, nominated to the post of Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, who described the Syrian Kurds as the US’ “greatest allies” and said that the US must “recommit to the Syrian Kurds.” At the moment, the US has at least four military bases across Kurdish and SDF controlled northern Syria.

One of the most significant imminent threats to the SDF is a large-scale attack by the Turkish army on Manbij. However, in the face of the SDF’s reinforcements in the city, the presence of US special forces in Manbij and the indication that the Syrian army would also be against such an offensive, the Turkish government’s threats do not appear so feasible.

The Turkish government has also been trying to force the US to choose between Turkey or the Syrian Kurds. However, Washington should see that this is a false dichotomy and that it would be possible for the US to continue working with both Ankara and the Kurds.

**TURKEY**
The Kurdish political landscape in Turkey, or as the Kurds call it Bakur (the North), is dominated by the Syrian Kurdish PYD’s close ally, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The Kurdish movement in Turkey suffered a political setback after the pro-Kurdish left-wing Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) lost influence as the peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK collapsed in the summer of 2015.

Despite gaining popularity among Kurds as well as Turkish left-wingers and liberals, the HDP was unable to deal with violent attacks even during the peace process. In the run up to the June 2015 elections, hundreds of HDP offices were attacked and activists were targeted by Turkish nationalist mobs, but the HDP failed to create a resistance movement.

The years 2015 and 2016 were also the first time when the PKK attempted to conduct urban warfare against Turkish security forces. For the first time in the history of the Kurdish armed conflict in Turkey, around half of all combat action took place in urban centres. The urban fighting was initially conducted by the armed pro-PKK youth, who had very little training in armed combat. The fighting then drew some professional PKK fighters in, but the proportion of the PKK deployment to urban areas was nowhere near the proportion of the Turkish security deployment to confront them. As a result of the fighting, several towns and cities were almost completely wiped out by heavy bombardment and subsequent demolitions. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds lost their homes and were internally displaced. The casualty figures are highly contested but at least over a thousand civilians have died along with hundreds of pro-PKK youth and the members of Turkish police and gendarmerie special forces. Around three thousand members of the Turkish security forces have been wounded during the clashes.

The PKK’s military strategy remained focused on rural centres, and the fighting between PKK fighters and the Turkish army shifted to mountainous regions. In military terms, the PKK does not regard the conflict from 2015 to 2016 as a defeat and points to the relatively low number of casualties among its armed cadres and the Turkish army’s failure to dislocate PKK units from its traditional strongholds. On a political level, however, the Kurdish political movement found itself increasingly cornered.

The peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK provided a very fertile ground for peaceful pro-Kurdish politics in Turkey. But the cultural counter-hegemony established by the HDP could not be translated into concrete gains. As a result, there has been a low level of resistance from the Kurdish public against the imprisonment of popular HDP MP’s. According to the HDP, some 3,000 members of the party remain behind bars awaiting trials, and a total of 9,000 HDP activists were detained over the last two years. More significantly, 74 mayors of the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), the HDP’s sister party, have been imprisoned, while public servants have been appointed as trustees to run 61 of the party’s local administrations.

The prospects for a return to peace talks between the Turkish government and the PKK remain very weak. President Recep
Tayyip Erdogan has been increasingly relying on his nationalist allies within the security bureaucracy and plans to appeal to nationalists to push through his planned regime change towards a Presidential system via a referendum in mid-April.

Any return to the negotiating table will require both sides to realise once again that war is costlier than peace.

**IRAQ**

Unlike the Kurdish political landscape in Syria and Turkey, there is no one single political movement that dominates politics in Iraqi Kurdistan. The threat of Daesh has ironically resulted in more fragmentation in Iraqi Kurdistan, instead of pushing the main political powers, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Gorran movement to formulate a common stance.

A big recent game changer in Iraqi Kurdistan politics was the alliance signed by the Gorran movement and the PUK in May 2016. As a result, the Gorran-PUK alliance became the largest block in the Iraqi Kurdish parliament overtaking the KDP. Under this alliance, the PUK and Gorran will run in the 2017 parliamentary elections on the same ballot, which could also disturb the decade-old alliance between the PUK and the KDP.

The KDP has been the main benefactor of the breakdown in the region’s relations with the central government in Baghdad. By making oil deals with Turkey, the KDP, which controls all the influential offices of the KRG, was able to increase its political and economic influence while making the KRG more dependent on Turkey. The PUK and Gorran, on the other hand, started engaging more with the Baghdad government and Iran to counterbalance the KDP’s influence. These external actors are ready to exploit these rivalries further and draw the different Kurdish political parties further away from each other.

A significant development to watch in 2017 will be the debate over secession from Iraq. While the PUK officially supports holding an independence referendum, the KDP is the strongest driver of the independence agenda as it believes it can maintain its influence in an independent Kurdistan more easily than in a Kurdistan which is part of Iraq. Major regional and global powers including the US and Iran remain opposed to the idea of independence.

Another important development to watch is potential tensions between pro-PKK groups, especially in the Yazidi populated Sinjar (Shingal) area and the KDP Peshmerga. Having had extensive talks with the Turkish officials on multiple occasions, President Barzani has been pushed to move against the PKK in Sinjar and other areas. Such a military confrontation risks further destabilising the Kurdish region which already faces diverse security and economic challenges.

Unless pressure, similar to that applied by former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright in 1998, is applied by the US to bring the rival Kurdish factions together, the prospects of a unified political stance in the KRG to deal with the significant challenges faced by the region such as the fight against Daesh and meddling by other countries in the region, remain very weak.

**IRAN**

Iranian Kurdish politics have been less eventful in the past year, but Iranian Kurds are not indifferent to the developments in Syria, Iraq and Turkey. Iranian Kurdish groups are fighting against Daesh in Syria and Iraq alongside their fellow Kurds. The year 2016 also saw the first wave of armed clashes between the fighters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party–Iran (KDP-I or HDKA) and the Iranian security services. The PDKI renounced its 20 year-long ceasefire with Tehran in March of 2016.

While the fighting did not pose a significant challenge to the Iranian state, it demonstrated that the discontent of the Kurdish population in Iran can turn to violence more easily than the Iranian government might have assumed.

Exploiting the challenge posed to the Kurds in Iraq and Syria by Daesh and the collapse of the peace process between Turkey and the PKK, the Iranian regime managed to keep the various Kurdish movements’ attention away from Iran. However, the regime has executed dozens of Kurdish political prisoners in the last six months following, what is described by human rights organisations, as unfair trials. Kurds are also reportedly subjected to more severe physical punishments or torture than other prisoners, regardless of the type of crime of which they are accused. Iranian Kurds also form the largest group of political prisoners despite making up only 10 to 13 percent of the country’s population.

Like Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran is gearing up for a major poll in May of this year as well. The elections might slightly improve the Iranian government’s stance towards the Kurds as President Hassan Rouhani will need the support of voters in Kurdish regions of the country to secure a second term in office.

Thus, 2016 has been an evenful year for the Kurds across the Middle East, with crucial successes and disappointments.

Developments in 2017 will push the Kurdish parties towards finding common ground with each other. There is no reason to doubt that Kurdish political parties would prefer negotiation and cooperation rather than enmity, but if they fail to unite, then much of the troubled history of the Kurds might repeat itself again.
modern history. This includes the Faili Kurds or Lurds, who historically lived around the border between today’s Iraq and Iran, and who have been subjected to systematic discrimination, torture and mass expulsions since the 1930s. This continued under Saddam Hussein’s regime, whom Mr. Al-Abdalla referred to as “the worst of his kind”, with the targeting and destruction of many Kurdish villages, leaving 150,000 Failis disposed in Iraq and abandoned on the Iran-Iraq border.

Mr Al-Abdalla opened the event by setting the historical background to the contemporary issues in the Kurdistan region and beyond. He emphasised how Iraq has been repeating the same mistakes over the last century; discriminating against ethnic and religious groups such as Christians, Jews and Kurds who have all been part of Iraq’s

Saddam’s brutality against Iraqis and the Kurds in particular

27 June 2017
Unite the Union
Chair: Raife Aytek,
Director of the Centre for Kurdish Progress

Keynote speakers:
Nadeem Al-Abdalla, Manager of the London-based Anglo-Iraqi Studies Centre (AISC), Maher Soltan, Journalist and International Media Advisor to the Imam Hussain Holy Shrine

The speakers elaborated on divergent aspects of the brutalities committed by Saddam Hussein’s regime against the Kurdish population in Iraq by putting them in a historical context. The forum focused on the socio-political, economic and humanitarian implications of the geopolitical vacuum caused by the fall of the Ottoman Empire vis-à-vis the Kurdish population, particularly the myriad of issues arising from the reallocation and the redistribution of peoples following the Sykes-Picot agreement.

Following Mr. Al-Abdalla’s comprehensive historical background, Mr Soltan, a Faili Kurd himself, further elaborated on the atrocities against Faili Kurds over the years. He explained the socio-political issues facing Faili Kurds, with the fear of expulsion making them reluctant to openly participate in society. Mr Soltan stressed that their reluctance to self-identify presents a great barrier to determining the actual demographics of Failis across the region. He concluded by saying that to this day, Faili Kurds are still systematically underprivileged as it is not possible for a Faili to become an MP; depriving them of their right to political representation. This is due to the fact that in Iraq it is essential to hold a nationality certificate in order to access work, education and other basic rights and opportunities.

Without a nationality certificate, many Faili Kurds have been denied access to basic services and rights for at least three decades, Mr Soltan explained. Both speakers concluded by expressing their hopes that Failis will see their rights reinstated eventually, however, they added that the tumultuous nature of the region and the clashing interests of the neighbouring countries will prove to be a challenge.
“ABDULLAH OCALAN: MANIFESTO FOR A DEMOCRATIC CIVILIZATION, VOLUME II CAPITALISM – THE AGE OF UNMASKED GODS AND NAKED KINGS”

19 June 2017
Unite the Union

Chair:
Simon Dubbins,
International Director of Unite

Keynote speakers:
Dr Radha D’Souza, Reader in Law specialising in International Law & Development, Law in Third World societies and Resource Conflicts in the Third World

Dilar Dirik,
Activist of the Kurdish women’s movement

Centre for Kurdish Progress in partnership with Freedom for Ocalan Campaign and Peace in Kurdistan organisations held a book launch event on 19 June 2017.

The talk began with a short introduction by Simon Dubbins who reconfirmed his union’s support for democratic movements across the region.

Dilar Dirik then started by putting Ocalan’s thought, which can be read as both a political and philosophical text, she argued, in the wider context of the Kurdish movements struggle for radical change in the Middle East. Ms Dirik said that Ocalan’s work had thus changed with the Kurdish movement itself and was now being applied concretely in Rojava. She explained that, for Ocalan, the origins of oppression can be traced back to the very beginning of society’s development and the emergence of the first city states 5000 years ago. However, this history has always been balanced by the communities of the oppressed, be they women, the working class or indigenous people. Ms Dirik argued that, in Kurdistan, Ocalan saw the concentration of these problems, making his thought a manifesto for change that was universal to all peoples.

Following Ms Dirik, Dr Radha D’Souza emphasised Ocalan as one of the most important thinkers of our times, particularly of the so called third world. She said that Ocalan’s thought was complex and multifaceted, and that hers was only one interpretation as a South Asian woman. Dr D’Souza argued that this volume underpinned much of the rest of Ocalan’s work, answering questions about how a national liberation movement can be combined with anarchist ideals. She discussed the fact that, in many countries, after freeing themselves from imperialism, people find themselves facing the same oppression from their new state. She therefore argued that Ocalan’s ideas are vitally important in that, rather than focusing on capturing power, they seek to ferment resistance among the common people, regardless of who is in control.
“PEACE DELEGATION CALLS FOR RETURN TO THE PEACE PROCESS”

22 February 2017
House of Commons

Host: Natalie McGarry MP
Chair: Bert Showenburg of GMB

Keynote speakers:
Dr Federico Venturini, visiting researcher at Leeds University.
Fr. Joe Ryan, Chair of the Westminster Justice and Peace Commission
Jonathan Steele, Veteran Foreign Reporter
Julie Ward MEP
Simon Dubbins, Director of International Relations at UNITE

The Centre for Kurdish Progress and Peace in Kurdistan Campaign jointly organised a Public Forum with members of an international delegation organised by the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) who visited Turkey with the aim of promoting the Peace Process and a democratic political solution to the Kurdish question.

Ms Natalie McGarry MP began the event by discussing the current situation in Turkey in relation to the violence between Kurdish militants and the Turkish State alongside the arrest of HDP parliamentarians.

Mr Bert Showenburg the International Officer of the GMB Union chaired the event and began by discussing the importance of international delegations visiting Turkey to witness the ongoing events in Turkey.

Dr Federico Venturini began by discussing the aims of the EU-Turkey Civic Commission delegation which visited Diyarbakir and Istanbul. He stated that the delegation had intended to but was not able to meet with the Turkish Justice Minister. He also discussed current events including the closing down of many Kurdish media outlets and the arrests of HDP MPs and Mayors from the Kurdish Region, as well as the dismissal of pro-peace process academics and arrests of journalists and trade unionists. Dr Venturini also discussed the poor prison conditions presently endured by those held. He concluded by stating that Turkey is in an increasing cycle of violence and that a resumption of the peace process was critical.

Fr. Joe Ryan began by stating he had noticed increases in clamp downs on opposition and Kurdish groups in Turkey since his second visit to the country. He added that the lawyers of the leader of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan had not been able to visit him for six years and commented on the difficulties that this had created for the peace process. He concluded by echoing Dr Venturi’s sentiments that a peace process needed to be resumed and argued that freeing Abdullah Ocalan would be an important part of this.

Jonathan Steele, began his speech by stating that the violence he had witnessed in Turkey was shocking, and condemned the arrests of numerous HDP MPs and the discrimination against this party. He also stated that the number of journalists who had been arrested in Turkey was extraordinary. Mr Steele also added that the number of internally displaced people in Turkey was at least 400,000 and that this was striking given Turkey’s role in providing support for Syrian refugees. He said that there was a possibility that the peace process could be resumed if President Erdogan wins the executive Presidency in the upcoming referendum, but that international pressure would be necessary for this to happen.

Julie Ward MEP began by commenting on her experiences in visiting Turkey previously and noted that she had been detained at Ataturk Airport after saying that she was flying to Diyarbakir. She also stated that Yazidi refugees were not being adequately supported and were reliant only on the Diyarbakir municipality without funding from Ankara. She also commented on the traumatic experiences of the people of Diyarbakir who have been experiencing escalating violence. Commenting on her most recent visit with the delegation, she stated that the Kurdish population was losing hope for peace, but that many women were remaining strong. She also expressed concern about the future of artists in Turkey after the country having withdrawn from the creative Europe programme.

Mr Simon Dubbins said that the situation is deteriorating rapidly and blamed this partly on President Erdogan’s referendum campaign. He expressed his pleasure over the fact that Kurdish issues are attracting greater interest among unions internationally, and that UNITE now updates its reports on these regularly. He also argued that the violence in Turkey’s Kurdish region was illustrative of how the Syrian civil war has spilled over into Turkey. He concluded by expressing the importance of raising awareness of the issues in Turkey by visiting the Kurdish region and to show solidarity with those who live within it and the progressive movements in which many of these people participate.
Dr Salih Husain Ali began his speech by discussing the Mosul campaign and mentioning that Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi had stated that the liberation of Mosul was in its closing phases as Iraqi troops, Peshmerga and others are closing in on the Western side of the city. He mentioned that there had been thousands of Iraqi casualties between 2014 and 2016, and that many old churches, mosques and shrines had been destroyed, and that mines and IEDs left by fleeing Daesh forces have meant that it will be unlikely that residents will be able to return to their homes quickly.

He also added however that around 95% of internally displaced Iraqis had been returned to their homes as of Spring 2016 in Tikrit, and that by the end of 2016 300,000 people had returned to Anbar. He added that positive steps taken towards reconciliation already taken around the country can provide helpful examples that will assist redevelopment in Mosul, and added that new committees had been established to oversee this process. He also noted that in the liberated of the Eastern area of Mosul up to 70 schools will be re-opened in the next few weeks.

He also discussed the role of the international coalition in the supporting Iraq’s redevelopment and defeat of Daesh. Dr Ali also stated that beyond a military solution, there were opportunities for British companies to do business in a re-built Iraq. He added that Iraqi-British co-operation would support regional stability in the Middle East.

He also continued, stating that Iraq had re-built and re-stabilised before in 2006-2011 with the rise of Al-Qaeda and that after Daesh, the main aim would be to prevent such groups emerging again.
Mr Farhad Zangawi began his speech by discussing how oil can serve as a hindrance to democratic development in the Middle East and praised the democracy of the Western world. He first discussed the historical significance of oil-rich Kirkuk. He pointed out that oil was one of the leading reasons behind the British and French occupation of the Ottoman Middle East. He concluded that oil had been harmful to the Kurds, as had the Sykes-Picot agreement.

Zangawi discussed Saddam Hussein’s nationalisation of Iraqi oil which resulted in the arming of a vast swathe of the Iraqi population. He noted that this led to the militarisation of society and to the Kurdish armed resistance to the Baghdad government. The use of oil revenues under Saddam’s regime to bribe officials and others, Zangawi claimed, restricted democratic development in Iraq including the KRI. He added that Saudi Arabia would not have been able to spread its extremist ideology without oil-wealth, comparing this with Jordan which although a monarchy, lacking in vast oil reserves had not developed similar systems and ideologies in the region. Zangawi stated that the use of oil revenues in the KRI undermines democratic structures.
Mr Karwan Jamal Tahir discussed the peshmerga and noted that they were in a position where they could consider the liberation of Mosul. He spoke of the new challenges for Mosul and its residents, following two years of ISIS’ ideology, such as adjusting back into the Iraqi central government rule. Tahir said that the international community should remain involved diplomatically and militarily as a guarantor of this process.

Dr Renad Mansour presented an analysis of the situation in Mosul. Firstly, Dr Mansour said, there has been a shift in the power dynamics and relationships between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq over the last five years. Secondly, the Kurds have allowed their historically successful united front to fall apart amid internal divisions. Thirdly, the stability of the area could be upset in the future by poor relations between Sunni tribes. Dr Mansour concluded on a positive note, pointing out that the KRG is now working with the central government.
Mr Saleh Muslim discussed the democratic origins of the conflict in Syria, as an uprising to oust the Assad dictatorship, and described how international players intervened in the conflict. Muslim noted that some countries wanted to support a moderate Islamic movement, while others such as Saudi Arabia and Iran had different intentions. He concluded by stating that the people of Syria have little hope at present for peace and cited the suspension of the recent Geneva talks as an example of this. He also called for greater international political support for the Rojava cause.

Mr Simon Dubbins stated that the struggle for Kurdish rights is inseparable from the development of secular democracy and women’s rights in the region. He also commented on his involvement in the campaign to release the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan, and commented on the shifting discourse of this organisation, away from secession and toward calls for democratic confederalism. He concluded by calling for international solidarity for this movement and for the Turkish government to return to negotiations with the PKK to find a political solution to the conflict within Turkey.

Brendan O’Hara MP, defence spokesman for the Scottish National Party (SNP), argued that the Kurdish cause has never had such a high public profile as now. He also called for more pressure to be placed on the UK government to act on this issue.

Lord Hylton discussed his visits to Damascus, Aleppo and also the Jazira canton in Northern Syria last year and stated that he was very much aware of the high level of interference by regional powers in the conflict and its detrimental role. He concluded by calling for dialogue as soon as the fighting stops.

Nia Griffith MP also made a call for those with knowledge and awareness of these issues to provide as much reliable information to the government as possible so as to better direct the actions of the international community in relation to the Syria crisis.

Natalie McGarry MP concluded the event by referring to the Rojava social contract and expressing that both Kurdish movements in Rojava and social activist campaigners in the UK have a great deal in common in terms of the values they share.
Dr Adel Bakawan’s speech focused on the current, third generation of jihadists in the Kurdish region in Iraq. He explained how the emergence of jihadists in Afghanistan in the 1980s gave Kurdish Islamists a model to follow. He stated that Kurdish Islamists use this model as a tool to achieve Kurdish nationalist aims.

He provided a profile of a typical member of this third generation of jihadists. The vast majority were male and he noted that only a very small proportion of these jihadists were imams or clerics, whereas around a third were workers, around a fifth were students and a tenth were housewives.

He concluded firstly that many of these fighters came from a marginalised and deprived generation chiefly from Sulaymaniyah. He blamed their marginalisation partly on the large wealth gap between the highest and lowest echelons of society found in Sulaymaniyah. He added that many of these jihadists probably have no confidence in any of the mainstream political parties, and are seeking some form of meaning in their lives.
7 November 2016
House of Commons

Host: Joan Ryan MP for Enfield North

Chair: Raife Aytek, Director of the Centre for Kurdish Progress

Keynote speakers:
Maryam Namazie, Co-Spokesperson for One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain
Dr Savin Bapir-Tardy, Lecturer in Psychology at the University of West London
Houzan Mahmoud, Co-Founder of Culture Project
Yasmin Rehman, human rights activist and researcher
Gina Khan, human rights activist and researcher
Pragna Patel, founding member of the Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism
Gita Sahgal, Founder and Director of Centre for Secular Space

Joan Ryan MP opened the event by condemning the arrest and detention of the two co-chairs of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party in Turkey along with a number of their parliamentary colleagues. On the topic of Sharia law in Britain, she discussed the work of a parliamentary commission in Britain in researching the activities of Sharia councils in the country, and commented that women can at times face discrimination in battles over custody and divorce settlements in these courts. Maryam Namazie began her speech by stating her disappointment that Sharia councils exist in Britain as she had fled such institutions in Iran; these councils can restrict the rights of women in various ways. For example, the value of their testimony appears less than that of men and men have the right to divorce unilaterally. Namazie continued by arguing that Islamists in Britain are gradually attempting to implement their interpretation of Sharia concepts for family law, and hope ultimately to introduce Sharia criminal law to an Islamist polity. She added that these approaches have led to endorsements of and support for marital rape and domestic violence which Islamists disguise with semantics. She called for the abolition of Sharia courts in Britain as a means of promoting legal equality for all citizens, and especially ethnic minority women.

Dr Savin Bapir-Tardy discussed the psychological willingness of vulnerable Muslim women in Britain to attend Sharia courts because of the pressure on them to obey authority figures, especially religious ones. She stated that the majority of her patients are vulnerable women who
have shown evidence of post-traumatic stress (PTS) while going through divorces arbitrated by Sharia courts, and that they have often suffered from low confidence, female genital mutilation and domestic violence. She stated that these women need a platform of support to be made aware of their legal rights as guaranteed by the British Government.

Houzan Mahmoud opened her speech by expressing her surprise as a Kurdish woman at coming to the United Kingdom to discuss the practice of Sharia law in Britain. She expressed her support for Kurdish women in Rojava, whose fighters will play a part in the liberation of Raqqa from Islamic State. She criticised the role of Islamic organisations including schools and other institutions that receive public funding. She stated that a number of people she knew had been radicalised in mosques in the UK. She argued that the Burqa has become a focus for academics, journalists and leftists as a symbol of rights, agency and choice, and a rejection of Western consumerism which she considered a misrepresentation. She concluded by calling for a ban on all religious arbitration.

Yasmin Rehman began by calling for a discussion about marriage in Islam. She stated that getting and staying married is one of the biggest issues affecting Muslim diasporas. Rehman also commented on the problems faced by young women who have temporary marriages with men secretly in order to have sex but do not get a divorce. They are then faced with difficulties when they come to marry again, being left in limbo.

Gina Khan argued passionately that Imams and Mullahs who write Islamic marriage certificates without documentation or registry for men without asking any questions were contributing to the practice of polygamy and abuse towards women.

Pragna Patel began by denouncing the argument that those who are not of Islamic faith should not comment on problems faced by Muslim women. She explained that multiculturalism should not lead to moral blindness by the state, which has accepted parallel legal systems in the public sphere. She concluded by arguing that many parallel religious legal systems contravene women’s human rights by restricting their access to justice.

Gita Sahgal began her speech by stating that the fact that Sharia courts are inherently abusive and discriminatory to women and even some men is not receiving due attention. Sahgal also commented on events in Pakistan, which does have regulated official Sharia systems and has allowed Islamist groups to use their own parallel legal bodies by classifying them as local legal systems. She concluded by praising the present example of Kurdish secularism and before that Bangladeshis who established a secular constitution in the 1970s.
“REVOLUTION IN ROJAVA”
BOOK LAUNCH AND DISCUSSION WITH JANET BIEHL AND ERCAN AYBOGA

4 November, 2016
Senate House, SOAS

Chair: Professor Nadje Al-Ali of the Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS

Keynote Speakers:
Janel Biehl, writer, editor and translator
Ercan Ayboga, environmental engineer and activist

Professor Nadje Al-Ali was disappointed by the British Government’s silence on the arrests of Pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party MPs, and that other European governments were considering recalling ambassadors on the issue. She argued that having faced assimilation projects under Arab and Turkish governments, Kurds ultimately had turned against the idea of the state. She then elaborated on the notion of decentralisation and libertarianism from an American left wing perspective, and how this ultimately influenced Kurdish movements’ present goal of democratic confederalism, which seeks to establish community-led state-free autonomous governmental units such as the Rojava cantons in Syria. She argued that both gender oppression and inter-communal tension were often reinforced by the state which develops institutions ands require one dominant ethno-religious identity.

Ercan Ayboga began by discussing the role of Kurdish groups from Rojava in armed conflicts in Iraq and Turkey’s Kurdish regions in the 1980s. He added that many families are split by borders in this region. He stated that after 2011, the Rojava Kurds launched a revolution at a time when no one expected. He explained that the revolution came because the Kurdish population in this area was capable of organising effectively, which led to the creation of the organisations such as the Kurdish National Council in Syria.
“MASOUD BARZANI;
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE”

21 October 2016
Unite the Union

Chair: Dr M. Rodwan Abouharb, Associate Professor in International Relations and Director MSc International Public Policy Program of Department of Political Science, School of Public Policy at University College London

Keynote Speaker: Cllr Mohammed Bakhtiar of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Dr M. Rodwan Abouharb opened the event by discussing the right of national minorities to self-determination, as laid out by Woodrow Wilson in the early 20th Century and how this legitimised Kurdish claims. He argued that these claims should be negotiated through peaceful means and with respect for human rights and good government. Dr Abouharb added that outcomes from such a process could vary between protected status, autonomy, a federal solution, and full-fledged independence.

Cllr Mohammed Bakhtiar discussed the controversial nature of speaking about President of the Kurdistan Regional of Iraq (KRI), Masoud Barzani, and his career. He argued that Barzani inherited his father’s role as a leader after the crisis of September 1974. In addition, he mentioned Saddam Hussein’s violent campaign which specifically targeted the Barzani family, because of their resistance to the Iraqi regime. Cllr Bakhtiar continued by stating that Barzani had succeeded in preventing Iranian and Turkish influence from becoming too strong over the KRG since 1994. He also argued that the Barzani-led KDP government had been the most successful in providing a good environment for trade, business and public services even in difficult times. He concluded by calling for Kurdish unity to build an independent KRG under the leadership of Masoud Barzani, who would be able to make alliances, but also work with Iraq, Iran and Turkey.
“FUTURE OF KURDS IN TURKEY AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST: DEMOCRACY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS”

11 October 2016
House of Lords

Host: Baroness Harris of Richmond

Keynote Speakers:
Mr Berdan Ozturk, Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) MP for Agri (Turkey)
Mr Salar Mahmood, Kurdistan Regional Government MP and Head of Civil Society Affairs Committee

Mr Berdan Ozturk opened the event with an in-depth analysis of contemporary Turkish politics. He blamed the breakdown of the peace process that had endured until 2015 on two key factors: military developments in Rojava - Syrian Kurdistan - that threatened Turkey’s interest in the region, and the success of the HDP in the 2015 elections. Mr Ozturk concluded by criticising the authoritarian and censorship-ridden path he believes Turkey is following under President Erdogan, and presented the ‘only solution to crisis in Turkey right now’ as democratisation.

Mr Salar Mahmood focused his talk on criticisms of not only regional governments, but international powers - he cited Britain and America foremost amongst these - as responsible for upholding the geopolitical status quo, in spite of the success of the multicultural project of autonomy across Kurdistan that extends to Turkmen, Yazidis and other ethnic groups. He criticised the provocative actions of Turkey both in Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan. Nonetheless, Mr Mahmood affirmed his great hope in the ability of the Kurdish people to establish a working model of autonomy and later independence, both within Kurdistan and with the assistance of the Kurdish diaspora.
Ara Sarafian opened the event by describing his career in the field of intercultural dialogue. He began his career in the 1980s by addressing the complete silence surrounding the Armenian Genocide in Ankara. He concluded by emphasising his community’s spirit of empathy and desire to cooperate with the Kurdish population in the face of current government repression.

Huseyin Olan focused on the parallels between the historical Armenian and contemporary Kurdish experiences, seeing both populations as victims of systematic campaigns of repression organised by a ‘single-party state’.

Ozcan Birlik recounted how Turkey, once containing various different populations, has become the site of expulsions and assimilation. He expressed the view that Kurds hold a special sympathy for Armenians having seen the 1915 Genocide. He related his personal experiences of how past events are finding parallel today in the Turkish state’s employment of snipers in civilian areas and its replacement of democratically-elected mayors in Kurdish principalities with government ‘trustees’.

Dr Tunc Aybak mentioned that Turkey has been called a ‘republic of denial’ and that denial is not a condition but a process; the ‘final part of a genocidal act’ and an attempt to be ‘exempted from legal and moral responsibility’. He expressed concerns that even today the existence of Kurds and Armenians as distinct groups was being presented as a threat to the Turkish state’s sovereignty. He advocated being in touch with the past as a means of building bridges and increasing cultural cohesion, remarking that ‘memory is an important part of the reconciliation process’.
Altinors began by tracing the origins of the current Turkish regime to the 1980 putsch, which created a framework for authoritarian rule that has persisted to this day. The breakout of the Arab Spring, Altinors explained, provided an opportunity for Turkey to increase its international influence, which had been waning since the beginning of the AKP’s rule, especially with regard to the EU. Altinors went on to mention recent massacres such as Suruc. He touched on alleged assistance by Turkish security services to groups such as Islamic State which have attacked socialist pro-Kurdish elements within the country. The attacks, he said, were blamed on the PKK and were used to justify what he called Erdogan’s current genocidal bombing campaign against Kurdish cities in the southeast of the country.
Ms Ibrahim began by thanking the Centre for Kurdish Progress and the Kurdish community in London for giving her the opportunity to talk about the very important issue of the plight of Yazidi women in the last two years of conflict since the emergence of ISIS. Ibrahim noted the importance of the UK as an ally against ISIS, and emphasised the importance of international co-operation in the fight.

Ibrahim then turned the scope of the talk to Kurdistan as a whole, mentioning the multiple disasters that Southern Kurdistan, (Bashur) has seen at the hands of the Iraqi state. Ibrahim spoke of these not as unrelated events, but as an unbroken series of events from the brutal crackdown on the 1983 rebellion through the genocidal Al-Anfal Campaign up until the present day incursions, all of which have come at the hands of “Arab regimes”.

Ibrahim spoke of the important differences between general Arab Iraqi society and Kurdistan, like how mainstream Iraqi politics is dominated by the Sunni-Shi’a divide and the struggles for power that consequently ensue. Conversely, Kurdistan – especially some areas like Shingal (Sinjar) – feature large religious melting pots where Yazidis, Christians, Shi’as, and Sunnis all coexist. This was the case right up until ISIS swept into Kurdistan from Syria and Iraq over two years ago.

Ibrahim then went on to give specifics on the immensity of the problem facing the Yazidi Kurdish communities. She relayed to us stories that she had heard from escapees in refugee camps in Kurdistan of terrible massacres and acts of unfeeling brutality. She explained how, because of the Islamic law which ISIS nominally upholds, captives would have to be ‘married’ before being raped – but that there was no limit on the number of marriages which she could be subjected to. One woman, she said, was ‘married’ 23 times in one night.

While around 2800 Yazidi women are still understood to be in captivity, even the approximate 800 that have been liberated are not yet fully free. They suffer from terrible psychological trauma such as PTSD and severe depression. Suicide is a serious risk for many. Most of them have had their male relatives murdered and as such have nowhere to go and no-one to care for them, and with all of their property destroyed or taken by ISIS, this leaves them utterly destitute.

That meant that there were two key tasks:
- To secure the freedom of the women still enslaved by ISIS
- To ensure the psychological and physical welfare of the liberated women

Thankfully, said Ibrahim, Iraqi Kurdistan is currently increasing the strength of its international relationships and reaching out for foreign assistance to speed along both aims. She asserted that her colleagues in the Kurdish parliament were doing their absolute best to accomplish both aims and to save the Yazidi women from their terrible fate.
23 May 2016
Portcullis House

Host: Mary Glindon MP

Chair: Gary Kent of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Kurdistan (APPGK)
Karwan Jamal Tahir, High Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

Keynote Speakers:
Ms Evar Ibrahim Hussain Ababakr, Kurdistan Regional Government MP and Head of the Women’s Rights Committee
Miss Vian Abbas, Deputy Head of Women’s Rights Committee
Miss Hayat Majeed Parkhi, Commissioner of the Women’s Rights Committee

Miss Vian Abbas focussed chiefly on the issue of Kurdish Yazidi women who have escaped from IS as well as those who remain in captivity. On 3 August 2014 Sinjar and the surrounding area were captured by IS. Although these areas have been liberated, the population suffered greatly.

Miss Hayat Majeed Parkhi discussed the role of the KRG’s seven-member Women’s Rights committee (of which two members are male), and its efforts to put pressure on the KRG parliament to ensure the allocation of funds equaling around $100,000 to those afflicted by IS especially women and children. Miss Parkhi also explained that the committee had been able to reach an agreement with federal authorities in Baghdad to give a regular stipend to women who have lost husbands and male relatives to ensure that they do not go destitute; this stipend however has yet to be paid by the central government.

Miss Parkhi added that there was a private meeting in the KRG parliament to discuss how to assist IS victims and that the resulting resolutions were implemented. She added that the KRG committee has also engaged in efforts to provide opportunities for traumatised Yazidi women to have jobs, for instance through the creation of small businesses, that would not only help them to earn a livelihood, but also help to reintegrate them within mainstream society. Miss Parkhi also noted that the role and number women within the KRG parliament has increased greatly. She added that from 2013, while there have been fewer female MPs than the previous year, these women were very active in the politics of the region.
Sariyildiz said that the government had conspired to hide what had happened in Cizre. He said that they claimed that the curfew was lifted after 16 days, when in reality it lasted for almost 80. They tried to get rid of evidence by throwing bodies in the river. Only recently the Turkish Prime Minister claimed that there was peace and order in Cizre. There cannot be, Sariyildiz said, because in reality there is nothing left. Sariyildiz stressed that in every single way, millions of people have become silenced.

Kacan emphasised that in 2016 the EU used Turkey as a guard against refugees and sold the freedom and rights of many people. Kacan called for British MPs to raise their voices on this issue.
Dr Gunter opened by discussing how NATO countries have not taken responsibility for important issues. The US continues to support Turkey against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). They continue to maintain that a unified Iraq and Syria will lead to peace and stability, and the US and the EU keep the PKK on the terrorist list. Domestically, Dr Gunter said Turkey must continue to recognise and contend with the expanding Kurdish issue. Interventions by NATO countries have rarely gone smoothly, Dr Gunter noted. For example, the 2003 Iraq invasion shattered Iraq into sectarian and ethnic parts, and resulted in a country that now only exists in the minds of the US State Department.

Dr Miley spoke of the need to look closely at the foreign policies of many countries that continue to stir the chaos in the Middle East. In Turkey, Dr Miley said he sees what is a movement away from the peace process to a country on the verge of a devastating civil war. The revolutionaries in Rojava stay to fight, Dr Miley stressed, because they believe in the revolution, they fight for something that is worth fighting for.
Ryan explained that it is an extremely volatile time in Turkey, with the breakdown of the peace process in 2015 and subsequent violent clashes in the streets. The Kurds, she said, are on the forefront of history, against the backdrop of the world’s worst refugee crisis since the second World War.

Tom Brake spoke of his experiences working with various communities, those who were working to achieve autonomy or some degree of independence. He highlighted the responsibility of the opposition and the public to challenge the current government, who remain preoccupied with trade relations with Turkey. We should not, he argued, be allowed to ignore people’s fight for their human rights.

The Kurds, Mr Yuksek said, are the oldest settled people in the Middle East but have not gained the status that they deserve. The solution, Mr Yuksek claimed, is the democratic autonomy project. Mr Yuksek spoke of achieving autonomous rights within existing borders, retaining essential trade and communications as a way to resolve problems and for people to live without conflict. Mr Yuksek advocated for the development of diplomatic relations as a way to create good relations between neighbours. Now, he said, the international community is more aware of the Kurdish people, as one of the most prominent groups working to establish peace.

Kirkuk after Mosul was captured by Daesh. On the 100 year anniversary of the Sykes-Picot agreement, he spoke of his hope that the colours of the lines will change, and there will be an end to the persecution of Kurds in the Middle East. Mr Mahmud praised the remarkable ability of Kurds, despite the absence of a state, to keep their history, tradition, and culture alive. Despite their limited capabilities and supplies, Mr Mahmud spoke of the Peshmerga’s brave fight against ISIS. People from all parts of Kurdistan rose with the Peshmerga to the challenge of fighting the well-organised terrorist group, Daesh. This unity was a huge achievement. Mr Mahmud proposed “turning the table around” – when there is a war people use it for their own aims to create a state, so why not use democracy and peace to create a nation.
“DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND THE KURDISH CASE IN TURKEY”

18 April 2016
House of Commons

Host and chair: George Howarth, Labour MP for Knowsley

Keynote Speakers: Janet Biehl, author
Federico Venturini, Master’s Degree in Philosophy from the University of Trieste and a Master’s Degree in European Culture from the University of Udine (Italy)
Rahila Gupta, freelance journalist, activist, writer and a longstanding member of Southall Black Sisters

Biehl provided intriguing insight into the life and ideas of Murray Bookchin. Bookchin proposed that cities should be de-centralised into a human scaled society, which he termed ‘eco-communities’. He saw the nation-state as inherently oppressive, producing passive consumers and few active citizens. Power should be taken from elites in capital cities and the capitalist industry, and spread out amongst the de-centralised communities. Thus, when the democratic autonomy of Rojava was declared in 2011 it was essential that women were included, all ethnicities rather than rigid puritans were accepted, and historical mistakes corrected.

Dr Venturini gave an account of a 2014 peace delegation to Turkey in which he participated. Europe has turned a blind eye to the curfews, destruction and displacement within Turkey. Three hundred people died during curfews in Cizre, 10,000 houses were damaged and about 1,300 were destroyed. Quoting Nelson Mandela, only free people and free prisoners can negotiate, he said. Dr Venturini claimed that freeing Ocalan would play a big role in this process and that the wall of silence needs to be broken in Europe regarding what is happening in Turkey.

Rahila Gupta spoke of her recent visit to Rojava-Northern Syria, where she saw a struggle to bring to existence a new society, a new political system, and a revolution. She spoke of meeting a female guerrilla fighter, who gave up getting married and spent time in prison, for the revolution. The YPG has shown people the capabilities of women when they are given the opportunity. The most important thing to them, she said, is to kill the repressive ideology.
RALLY FOR HALABJA REMEMBRANCE

16 March 2016
Portcullis House

Host: Jason McCartney MP and Dave Anderson MP

Chair: Gary Kent, Director of the APPG for the Kurdistan Region

Keynote Speakers: Tobias Ellwood MP and FCO Minister for the Middle East
Nadhim Zahawi MP and Vice-Chair for the Kurdistan Region
Hillary Benn Labour MP
Aram Ahmed Mohamed, Representative of the Halabja Survivors

Nadhim Zahawi MP spoke of his shock upon first seeing images of the death and destruction at Halabja in 1988. At that time in the UK, he stated, people did not believe the extent of the devastation, or did not have time to listen to what had happened. This now has changed, he said, with the UK government recognising the sacrifices that the Kurdish people have made. Mr Zahawi commended the spirit of those in Halabja who refuse to allow themselves to be consumed by what happened on that day. Mr Zahawi also commended the courage of the Peshmerga, fighting on the front line for the whole world, and taking the fight to Daesh. Part of the process of remembrance, Mr Zawahri said, is to continue the determination to give the atrocities at Halabja recognised as a genocide internationally.

Tobias Ellwood MP, FCO Minister for the Middle East, stressed how important acts of remembrance are, in showing our determination to prevent a repetition of a dark past. Mr Ellwood condemned any use of chemical weapons, and stressed the need for accountability. We must continue to play our part in the global coalition, Mr Ellwood stressed, and to ensure that international institutions uphold international law.

Hilary Benn MP said that the fact that so many still feel the pain and suffering of Halabja reinforces our determination, and gives meaning to the phrase ‘never again’. As human beings, Mr Benn said, we should feel burning shame, and use this to ensure that we play our part in ensuring such a crime never happens again. With the efforts of the KRG, Peshmerga, and all of the allegiances against Daesh, so that the actions of today ensure that ‘never again’ becomes a reality.

Mr Aram Ahmed Mohamed as Representative of the Halabja Survivors spoke of the thriving society that existed in Halabja prior to the 1988 attack. It was a society in which women led the entire society, with educated, open-minded people. Without hope, Mr Mohamed expressed, one cannot survive, hope is needed to rebuild a city of peace and tolerance in Halabja.
ASSOCIATION OF KURDISH EMPLOYERS IN EUROPE (AKEE) NETWORKING MEETING

AKEE organised a business meeting where Kurdish business people discussed business opportunities in the UK and in Kurdistan. Representatives from various industries came together for discussions over joint business ventures in a North London venue.

AKEE is an alliance of Kurdish companies based in Europe. Kurdish companies are the positive fruits of more than 50-year history of immigration in Europe.

AKEE represents Kurdish business people in Europe. As a lobby organisation AKEE wants to be the contact organisation towards politics and society, when it comes to the interests of the Kurdish entrepreneurs.

AKEE has no political objectives and is politically neutral. AKEE conducts series of events on current economic issues, where they bring together Kurdish entrepreneurs in order to create a platform for entrepreneurs to get to know each other and to expand their network. AKEE will prepare and carry out trade missions. They will furthermore network with other Kurdish business associations and forge collaborations in other parts of the world.

ASSOCIATION OF KURDISH EMPLOYERS IN EUROPE (AKEE) RECEPTION WITH MR OSMAN BAYDEMIR

Association of Kurdish Employers In Europe (AKEE) organised a reception with guest speakers prominent Kurdish politician and lawyer Mr Osman Baydemir and Lord Bilimoria in March 2015.

In this reception, Mr Baydemir spoke on the Kurdish movement and peace talks in Turkey. He pledged support of Kurdish people, especially Kurdish business people, for Kurdish people Turkey and elsewhere.

Lord Bilimoria praised the important work done by the ethnic minorities in Britain and how these minorities embrace British values and integrate in the society via their entrepreneurships.
Kurdish? Got a business idea, or recently started a business?

Come and visit KHL and see if we can help.

Kurdish House London (KHL) is a community and work space supporting Kurdish start-ups and businesses. We are based right in the heart of London, in New Zealand House, 80 Haymarket SW1Y 4TE. Kurdistanhouse london.com

KHL is a social enterprise, set up to encourage the growth and impact of Kurdish start-ups. You can work alongside the hundred plus entrepreneurs at Impact Hub Westminster http://journeytoimpact.co.uk/ .

As soon as you enter the work space, the buzz is infectious. You have access to a friendly community with skills, experience and knowledge, both among the members of Kurdish House London and in the wider entrepreneurial community of the Hub.

And collaboration just happens. KHL members pursue their own business ideas, e.g. training, running food based start-ups, import/export and creative ventures, and they stimulate, support and encourage the work of others.

There is also the collaborative potential that comes through shared values and interest in Kurdish regions and business opportunities. This can all further increase the success rate of turning members’ ideas into actions and growth. It’s a win-win situation.

Ongoing support with business planning, perfecting business English, connections to relevant contacts are freely provided. Networking events are organised weekly to connect with other entrepreneurs. And many of the onsite training workshops are free; these are designed to help with personal and business development.

Here are just some of the benefits full members enjoy:
• A vibrant shared workspace for the hours per month that you choose; joining a community of more than a hundred entrepreneurs working near Trafalgar Square, networked with 13,000+ more online
• Support for your entrepreneurial endeavours
• The fastest internet in London (currently 1 Gbps)
• A prestigious business address: London SW1Y 4TE
• Security carded and flexible weekday access from 8am – 1pm (9pm on Fridays)
• An attractive central London space in which to meet with potential customers
• Teas and coffees freely available, plus an onsite café
• Onsite weekly networking and training opportunities
• Access to 80+ similar work spaces around the world, including in Istanbul and Dubai https://westminster.impacthub.net/ .

Next steps: Want to find out more for yourself, or to sponsor someone who has recently arrived from the Kurdish region and needs help to start over again in business?

Check out our website (with YouTube video) and then do one of the following: -Email contact@kurdishhouselondon.com; or -Sign up via kurdishhouselondon.com for a free tour any Tuesday or Friday and let us know you are coming; or -Sign up for a free whole day pass, mention KHL under the mission statement box and let us know you when you are coming: http:// westminster.impacthub.net/day-pass/

When you visit, don’t forget to bring your laptop along and work from here; experience the space for yourself.

Belinda Perriman

The driving force behind the venture is Belinda Perriman, an Energy and Environmental business consultant with years of international experience in business start-ups and a very down-to-earth desire to help Kurdish entrepreneurs—men and women—make a success of their ventures. She describes KHL as a house without walls, reflecting both the open and hospitable nature of Kurdish people and the dynamic cosmopolitanism of London. Now building a team of Kurdish start-up advisors, she offers her own experience and time to help get their projects off the ground.

“Since first travelling in eastern Turkey in 2009, and then living in the Middle East and travelling along the Syrian border and in the Kurdish regions of Iran and Iraq, I am passionate about the Kurdish story. I am moved by the broken promises of almost a hundred years ago and the continued and even increasing injustices that face Kurdish people. And now we have new people arriving from the region, some of whom have started businesses themselves, but who have lost everything fleeing the conflicts in the region.

While not a lawyer or a politician, I would like to offer skills that I have developed during an international career with Shell International in supporting Kurdish people to reach their full potential. Having been one of the few female leaders of major oil & gas deals and projects, I am especially interested in supporting women to develop businesses in every sector. I have had the opportunity to gain broad commercial experiences in new business development, start-ups and acquisitions, deal structuring and lending.

But Kurdish House London is a community of entrepreneurs, who can support and learn from each other, here in London and, increasingly, growing businesses connected to Kurdish regions. So we are building a team of Kurdish start-up advisors, a self-sustaining community—one that I am excited to have started and to remain part of as it grows.”
Mr Sadiq then turned to the multifaceted nature of the internal crisis in Kurdistan; the economic, social, and political factors which have contributed are interrelated, he said. Mr Sadiq emphasised the role of the economic crisis, in which there is a lack of infrastructure. There has been a policy focus on oil as the main source of income and sectors such as trade and agriculture have been neglected. This is related, he stressed to poor governance, and political corruption which has seen elites protecting their own economic interests through their power and political positions.

Mr Sadiq heavily stressed the role of the law and political reform when speaking of solutions to the internal crisis. Money given by the Iraqi government could have been spent in a way that benefited the people, he said, and there is a need for advancing the rule of law, introducing the right laws, and reducing the monopoly of control over the market. Kurdistan needs, Mr Sadiq stated, a parliament that represents the real interests of the people, a parliament that is the heart of democracy, coupled with legitimate institutions. Relating to the wider crisis in the Middle East, Mr Sadiq expressed that he sees that the international community have realised that you cannot build peace through security.

Additionally he thanked the resistance of the Kurdish people from every part of the country, and their contribution to the positive reputation of the Kurdish people: the Peshmerga, the women of the YPJ, and the families of the martyrs. Peace was a recurrent theme in Mr Sadiq’s speech, as he stressed that we can have a balanced relationship with everyone, through recognition of the role of others, positive dialogue, and legitimate institutions, if we want to see ‘a better day for our children, a new day for them’.
Discriminated on an everyday basis as well as deprived of basic political rights. There is not one Kurdish governor in any of the Kurdish provinces, nor is the Kurdish language taught in schools, despite its protection in the constitution.

Mr Loghman Ahmedi discussed that Iran’s tactic is to play a role in all external conflicts in the region, managing to shift the attention from its domestic affairs and that Iran’s regional policy is based on supporting, funding and activating different proxy groups which brings instability and conflict in different countries in the Middle East. Mr Ahmedi emphasised the need to counter Iran’s well-known strategy ‘divide and conquer’, by solving and cooperating with other minority groups, as well as with Kurdish political parties in neighbouring countries.

This point was further recalled during the debate, when many agreed that the only solution is for all Iranian Kurdish parties to work together and to leave their differences aside, for the common goals of democracy and respect for human rights.

Dr Seevan Saeed started by outlining the internal issues and the divide between North and East Kurdistan, which according to him partially explains the silence concerning Iranian Kurds. Dr Saeed argued that for a change to be possible, the mentality of all Kurdish political parties should shift towards nation-building instead of state-building. Furthermore, he stated that different parts of Kurdistan share certain similarities but solutions cannot be simply ‘copy pasted’, due to the communities’ different histories and of social structures.
The Centre for Kurdish progress held a roundtable titled “Syria and the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East.” Keynote speaker Journalist Cengiz Candar analysed the recent developments in the Middle East with a focus on the Kurdish Issue.

Mr Candar started his speech by stating that the developments in the Middle East, especially the Syrian conflict, concern not only the region but international politics. He argued that the involvement of the international actors into the regional system takes place through proxy wars where sectarian differences are highlighted. According to Mr Candar, the conflict between Shia countries like Iran or Sunni countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia has created a new dimension for the Kurdish Issue.

With regards to the Islamic State (IS) and Turkey, Mr Candar stated that as a NATO member, Turkey has a responsibility to minimise the terror on its borders. However, considering that Turkey’s threat conception is different from the other NATO countries, Turkey’s stance against IS has been different. He added, as IS is fighting against the Kurds, Turkey overlooks at the issue but the pressure from NATO pushes Turkey to respond to IS threat. He concluded that the atmosphere in Turkey and the Middle East is not peaceful anymore and the future is not certain.
“POST-ELECTION TURKEY: IS PEACE ACHIEVABLE?”

Public Forum in partnership with Refugee Workers Cultural Association (RWCA) and the Centre for Turkey Studies (CEFTUS)

30 November 2015
House of Commons

Hosted by Seema Malhotra MP for Feltham and Heston

Speaker: Figen Yuksekdag, Co-Chair of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP)

Chair: Lord William Wallace and Joan Ryan Labour MP for Enfield North

Mrs Figen Yuksekdag opened stating that she had come from an increasingly unstable Turkey with a heated atmosphere. She stated that Turkish President Erdogan had stoked up tension in Turkey following the electoral results in June, and that he created an atmosphere of fear that encouraged people to back AKP in November. She added that many felt obliged to vote AKP to provide the stability necessary to end the violence, but following the first of November this was not forthcoming, and that moreover the instability has increased, with a high number of civilian casualties during attacks and massacres in Ankara and the Kurdish region following curfews.

She went on to state that the HDP’s election results in November were a great success given the difficulties faced by the party at this time. She continued that worst of all, the AKP’s policies of violence and repression were maintained in spite of the electoral victory. She added that in so doing, the AKP has not acted like a victorious party, and has opted for these policies to enforce stability, instead of reaching out and attempting to create unity in the country. She also stated that these actions, alongside the murder of attorney and Kurdish rights activist Tahir Elci who was under state protection at the time of his death, show that the AKP has no interest in dialogue with moderate figures. She concluded that with its policies the government wants polarisation and not unity. She also accused the AKP of wanting to destroy the HDP’s electoral successes and energy. She added that despite the government’s scaring some HDP supporters away from the polls, these supporters still believe in the party’s struggle for democratisation. She called for the government to resume its peace talks with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) leader Abdullah Ocalan, and expressed that the HDP is trying to act as an opposition to government actions vis-a-vis Syria and the position of Syrian Kurdish forces such as the PYD (Democratic Union Party), and added that the HDP is advocating an alliance between the Turkish government and this movement. She stated that this was crucial for the Middle East, as Turkey is situated right in the midst of this crisis, and did not have the luxury of being able to look on from afar like Western countries. She concluded stating her belief that a peaceful and democratic Middle East and Mesopotamia in which all peoples are recognised was possible, as the previous status quo of oil, the dollar and bloodshed had been overturned.
“KURDISTAN’S ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE OUTSIDE WORLD”

26 November 2015
House of Commons

Hosted by Joan Ryan Labour MP for Enfield North

Speakers: Mr Karwan Jamal Tahir, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) High Representative to the United Kingdom
Mr Bill Park of King’s College
Mr Michael Stephens of the Royal United Services Institute

Chair: Mr Gary Kent, Administrator of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The focus of this debate was on Syria. In this debate our keynote speakers discussed the impact of ISIS, also known as Daesh, in the region and globally and the role of the Kurds in the fight against ISIS.

Mr Karwan Jamal Tahir referring to the economic crisis due to a dispute between the national government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq over the latter’s foreign oil sales and 1.8 million who have been internally displaced because of the conflict with ISIS, said: “We don’t think the major threat is Daesh, the major threat is an economic threat, and also a political threat.” Mr Tahir emphasised the critical nature of the dispute with Baghdad, but he stated that KRG’s priority is defeating ISIS. Therefore, he added that although the decision on airstrikes in Syria was a matter for Britain, they would prove successful and would help the local forces’ efforts against ISIS.

Our second speaker Michael Stephens said that a problem with the international response to Syria was that key regional players Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Hezbollah had different priorities for intervening. Another issue is how various countries enacted different rules of engagement, with Britain refusing to bomb ISIS convoys with civilians present, while the United States had suggested a more flexible approach, at the cost of ‘collateral damage’. He said that half of the arms being used by ISIS had been stolen from the Iraqi army, including 1,000 all-terrain, four-wheel-drive vehicles, with others taken from al-Assad’s forces originally supplied by Russia, such as T55 tanks. Mr Stephens also questioned an assertion by the Prime Minister that there are 70,000 moderate rebels fighting in Syria, unallied to either ISIS or al-Assad, and that he had asked for clarification on the source of this figure. Disrupting ISIS’s oil trade may have reduced its daily earnings to $600,000, Mr Stephens said, but that breaking local smuggling lines had cost young Syrians their only jobs amid the conflict, resulting in their options being to head for Europe, or take the $65 dollars a day and more offered by ISIS to new recruits.

Our final speaker Bill Park said: “The Peshmerga [KRG military] have won the battle against ISIS, they’ve got most of the territory back that was lost. But ISIS doesn’t really know what defeat is, they have snipers everywhere, and they never quite go away, they just go down the road.” Mr Park warned of ISIS sleeper agents within the KRG, and that from now on the situation will likely go downhill, with international sympathy for the Kurds in their struggle potentially turning out to be transient and limited. Mr Park said that despite the United States professing that the Peshmerga was a key ally in the ground war against ISIS, American policy remained unchanged in that it continued to arm the KRG only through Iraq’s national government in Baghdad, which was refusing to provide heavy weapons to the Peshmerga, in what he described as ‘a big mistake’.
Dr Cengiz Gunes, stated that with the Syrian conflict, the development of a pan-Kurdish politics has occurred, with Turkish Kurds going to join YPG fighters in Syria. He noted that violence has also spilled over the Turkish border, as shown by the attacks of IS on various Kurdish movements within Turkey in Suruc, Diyarbakir and Ankara. He also noted that the Turkish government has declared that it will not tolerate Kurdish gains in Syria, seeing PYD relations with the PKK as a threat to its own security, given that the Turkish state and this insurgent movement are currently at war. He further expressed doubt about a peace-process between the PKK and Turkey being successful, given that the current state of the Middle East would mean it is unlikely that the PKK would disarm, one of Turkey's main conditions for peace. He continued, stating that with attacks by IS on Yazidi Kurds, KRG forces and the YPG had worked together in this conflict, somewhat improving relations between these two groups, which have generally been sour, given the KRG’s strategic and economic reliance on Turkey.

Mr David Hartwell began by stating that Turkish foreign policy relating to the Syrian conflict has been incoherent and inconsistent. He argued that Turkish inexperience in these issues have damaged Turkey’s chances of ascending to be the leading power in the Middle East. He stated for instance, that Turkey’s focus on defeating Bashar al-Assad and preventing Kurdish autonomy and prioritising these goals rather than defeating IS have caused its aims to diverge from those of Western countries. Mr Hartwell continued stating his belief that it is unlikely that Assad will fall given the role of Russian intervention, which has stunted Turkey’s aims. This according to Mr Hartwell has ultimately left the Turkish government reliant on the actions of other agents within the region, rather than being a decisive player, which is now incapable of imposing its diplomatic aims for a post-conflict Syria, having failed to develop a preferred vision.
“KURDISH PROGRESS WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS RECEPTION”

3 November 2015
House of Commons

Hosted by Joan Ryan MP for Enfield North

The Centre for Kurdish Progress held its first Women’s Rights and Achievements Reception on 3 November 2015 in the Jubilee Room of the House of Commons. With the attendance of many women and men from the Kurdish community, Members of Parliament including Joan Ryan MP, Baroness Jan Royall, Kate Osamor MP and Siobhain McDonagh MP and London Councillors, the reception celebrated Kurdish women’s achievements.

Host MP of the reception, Joan Ryan Labour MP for Enfield made an opening speech. She emphasised the role of Kurdish women in British society and their role in their countries of origin where, she said, the women took part in defence of their children, freedoms and democracy. She stated that their courage needs recognition especially with regards to fight against ISIS. She added “we need to be the voice of these Kurdish women here in the UK as they are noble fighters against slavery and barbarism”.

Baroness Jan Royall, Kate Osamor MP for Edmonton and Siobhain McDonagh MP for Mitcham and Morden congratulated the Kurdish Progress for organising such an important event and praised Kurdish women for their contributions to British society and their bravery in Rojava, in Kurdistan Regional Government, in Turkey, in Iran and elsewhere.

Following the speeches, a selection of awards were presented to Kurdish women for their achievements. Media Zahawi, Serpil Ersan, Makkule Gunes, Diana Nammi, Bahra Mahmud and Hatice Guden received the first Kurdish Women’s Rights and Achievements awards.
Mr Friedman opened his speech stating that Turkey is fighting three wars in the south. A hot war against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and its affiliates, a proxy war against the Assad regime in Syria and what could be called a “phony” war against Islamic State (ISIS), alongside other wars at home between the government and groups such as the Fetullah Gulen movement. He stated that the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) has been seen by the Development and Justice Party (AKP) as a powerful threat to its aims to maintain a one party government, and for this reason, the Turkish government has resumed its hot war with the PKK to discredit the HDP in the public eye. He added that Iran and Russia have out manoeuvred Turkey in the proxy war occurring during the Syrian conflict, having committed far more resources and military personnel, including ground troops in Iran’s case. He argued that despite Turkey’s viewing IS as an enemy, it is unlikely that Turkey would undertake any effective action against this movement, because of its role in keeping Kurdish militant forces pre-occupied, fighting IS rather than against the Turkish state. He argued that this policy has disadvantaged Turkey in that it opens the country to more attacks akin to those which occurred recently in Ankara and Suruc, making the country unstable, that it has pushed the US to support the PYD and other Kurdish movements and that it has made President Erdogan personally unpopular, given his being blamed for allowing these attacks to occur, especially in the Turkish capital.

Dr Quilliam spoke at length about the war in Syria against the Assad regime. He stated that Russia’s intervention in Syria has been a game changer, having strengthened the Assad regime and making it increasingly likely that he will be a part of the ultimate solution to the crisis. He stated that a “no-fly” zone with a UN resolution would not be possible because Russia would vote against it as part of the UN Security Council. Dr Quilliam continued, stating that US and Russian interests in Syria have meant that the US-backed Kurds are strong, that the Russian and Iranian-backed Assad regime is also looking stronger, but also that IS remains strong, and within this framework, Turkey’s ambitions to shape Syria both now and in the future are increasingly strained as a result.
“KURDISH QUESTION UNDER EUROPEAN UNION LAW”

21 September 2015
Unite the Union

Speakers: Barrister Professor Bill Bowring of Birkbeck College University of London
Mr Atilla Balikci of the Centre for Criminal Law and Criminology within Paris X Nanterre University
Margaret Owen, Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy and the Patron of Peace in Kurdistan, a UK barrister and an international women’s human rights activist.

Chair: Mr Les Levidow of CAMPACC (Campaign Against Criminalising Communities)

Professor Bill Bowring began his speech by discussing previous cases he had dealt with in Turkey that included village destruction and kidnappings by Turkish security forces, alongside his work in trying to ensure the protection of human rights in Turkey, and with the Progressive Lawyer’s Association (CHD) some of whom had been imprisoned. He argued that the Kurds were a people or nation in the same way as Scots in the UK or Corsicans in France, and therefore were entitled to the right to self-determination, but were impaired by the Treaty of Lausanne among others that divided up Kurdish-inhabited territories between five countries, including Iraq and Turkey. He noted that newspapers in Turkey that used words such as “Kurd” and “Kurdish” had been the targets of state repression, having been accused of being “terrorists” and continued, stating that Kurdish activists’ efforts to gain recognition as a distinct cultural group by the Turkish state had been the source of great tension in recent years, encompassing issues such as the teaching of Kurdish language in schools. He also noted that the PKK remained on the European Union’s list of terrorist organisations which has stunted progress despite efforts within the European Parliament to have it removed.

Mr Balikci opened stating that the Kurdish Issue was not exclusively a Turkish problem but also a European problem, given the role of European powers in dividing up former Ottoman territories after 1918 and creating mandates in Syria and Iraq, and therefore also in dividing Kurds across borders. He argued also that the Kurdish Issue was also a European issue in that around 3 Million Kurds are found living in Europe today. He added that the events of 9/11 2001 had changed the driving focus of legislation in Europe from freedom to security. In doing so, he argued that European countries and the US as well began to list their “enemies” namely Islamist groups and other organisations and individuals considered “terrorists”. With the PKK’s addition to these lists, Kurds in Europe, especially Germany and France were prosecuted for making pro-PKK t-shirts. He noted however that in the UK, Kurdish organisations such as the Kurdish community centre in London had not been closed down, but that in Paris had been. Mr Balikci stated that EU definitions of terrorist organisations, which include movements attempting to drastically change or “de-stabilise” the political situation or status-quo of a country, are problematic because this could outlaw other social movements such as Trade Unions, and perhaps even those who had participated in the Arab Spring in Middle Eastern and North African countries, campaigning for democracy.

Margaret Owen began her speech criticising British counter-terror laws for having resulted in the arrest and prosecution of a young Kurdish-origin woman, Silan Ozcelik, who had attempted to join Kurdish fighters against IS in Syria. She continued to discuss her time in Cizre, and that while there she had seen evidence that Turkish Gendarme and police forces had kept a brutal curfew on the city, using serious weaponry including rockets and bombs on its residents. She stated that firing had been indiscriminate and that even a nine-year-old girl had been killed. She continued to note that pro-Kurdish HDP (People’s Democratic Party) co-mayors were subject to arbitrary arrests and were dismissed from their duties, and that towns where HDP votes had been high in the June 2015 elections had been victims of severe violence from Turkish security forces.
Mr Hemen Hawrami said that ISIS is a symptom of the wider illness affecting the region and claimed that ISIS’ successes were due to Maliki’s failings to represent Iraq nationally and instead his representing only Shias.

Mr Hawrami claimed that Maliki refused to listen to the KDP through various channels including Iran. He added that there were calls from the White House for the Kurdistan Regional Government and Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi Central government to work together against ISIS but Maliki refused again. He said that the Peshmerga managed to protect areas in Northern Iraq such as Kirkuk from ISIS. ISIS attacked the Peshmerga, out-gunning them with weaponry from Syria including Russian made tanks from Syrian forces, as well as those seized from Iraqis. He stated that ISIS presented the Kurds with the longest ever front line, over 100,000 km long.

Mr Hawrami continued stating that recovering Mosul was massively important to defeating ISIS, but also that the Peshmerga forces will not take the lead, instead he said that the Iraqi Central government and Sunni Iraqis of Mosul must be willing to take the lead in this campaign. He noted, however, that presently the Sunnis are not organised enough and that the central government is unwilling to assist them. On KRG relations with Baghdad, Mr Hawrami said Iraq as a concept is gone. It is practically divided into three areas a Shia controlled region, an ISIS controlled region and a Kurdish one. He considered the impact of a federal solution to this problem and stated that this would have been preferable for the KRG, but according to Hawrami, Baghdad represents a threat to Kurdistan, and

On the issue of Turkey’s recent interventions in Syria and Iraq, he noted that the KRG is responsible for around 6 million people, and therefore, its dealings with Turkey rested on two variables, which are Turkey’s position towards KRG and Turkey’s position on other Kurdish questions. He stated that between 1991-2007/8 Turkey saw the KRG as a security threat, viewing it through a Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) lens. According to Hawrami, for the KRG however, Turkey is seen as Iraqi Kurdistan’s gateway to the wider world. He said he did not want to be subordinate to Turkey or anyone else but the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. He said that
Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir was appointed as the first Head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Department of Foreign Relations in September 2006, tasked with administering KRG foreign policy and bolstering the Region’s relations with the international community for the government’s fifth cabinet. He was reappointed as the Head of the Department in each successive cabinet, including most recently the eighth cabinet in June 2014. Minister Bakir’s vision, dedication, and passion to serve the people and the government of Kurdistan have paved the way for a successful Department and rapidly expanding relations between the KRG and foreign governments.

This exclusive roundtable discussion was chaired by Mr Michael Stephens of Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Academics and diplomats were among the guests. The discussion was held under Chatham House rules.

Minister Bakir analysed the dynamics in the region and discussed Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) achievements, policies and future steps into stability in the region.

The Centre for Kurdish Progress held an exclusive roundtable discussion with Mr Aaron Stein, an Associate Fellow at RUSI. He is also the nonproliferation program manager at the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, where he works on security and proliferation issues in the Middle East.

He has written extensively on Turkish politics and regional proliferation, publishing in scholarly journals and print media, including Foreign Policy, The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the National Interest, and World Politics Review. The discussion was about Turkey, the role of the Kurds and prospects for peace as well as developments in Syria and Iraq. The participants were representatives of all Kurdish political parties and academics.
Keynote speaker Mr Muslim spoke first, and detailed the developments in Rojava over the recent years. Mr Muslim referring to Kurds’ long-haul struggle for freedom in Kurdistan stated that an opportunity for democracy and rights for the Kurds arose in 2011 when the Syrian uprising began. He indicated that the PYD used this opportunity to organise Kurds in Syria in order to survive the conflict and achieve democracy ideals and that they knew that the regime in Syria was not going to be ousted too quickly. Following to securing Kobane, Mr Muslim said that the PYD reached out to the other ethnic and religious groups including Arabs, Assyrians, and Muslims and Christians to form a committee. This committee, he said, was to establish a self-governing canton in which gender equality was a primary principle. Due to rise of Islamic State (ISIS) in the region, Mr Muslim stated that Kurds had to enter another war and fought not only for the Kurds, but also for the West, as he added, ISIS aims to attack universal freedoms and rights of all, not only Kurds’.

Hence, he suggested that Kurds are still fighting for democracy, freedom, gender equality against ISIS on the front lines. Reminding the attacks in Paris, he warned that the jihadists might commit further atrocities in the West as they want to destroy democracy not only in the region but also in the West.
The second speaker Mr Michael Stephens argued that the West having to been used to the nation-state ideals finds self-governance model in Rojava quite difficult to comprehend. Hence, he argued, the western countries seem to be slow in reacting to the developments in the region and their approach to the conflict in Syria lacks consistency as the PYD is the only group that fought and succeeded against ISIS, but is yet to receive support from the West.

Following Mr Stephens, Dr David Graeber praised the Rojava revolution as he said that the autonomous self-rule of Kurds in Syria has better democratic features than any other democracies he has seen. Dr Graeber blamed the West for only looking for ways to justify military interventions in the region and ignoring the emergence of Rojava system in which women hold half the authority and each ethnic and religious group has a representative in the committee to determine any decision affecting on their communities. He pointed out the irony in the West by reminding the audience that a British-Kurdish woman, Shilan Ozcelik, who fought for this democratic system in Kobane, have been charged with a terrorist offence and have been remanded in custody in Holloway Prison.

Dr Johanna Riha shared her observations in Rojava in her field trip. She indicated that humanitarian help is urgently required and that transportation of basic supplies through the borders of Northern Kurdistan and Turkey is the most difficult. Dr Riha said that the Rojava’s democratic system emerged as a grassroots movement, which could be a good model for the whole of the region.

The final speaker Dr David L. Philips having worked on Kurdish issues for over 25 years commented that Kurds finally united thanks to ISIS. Dr Philips said that the reason for why the US has not held talks with the PYD is Turkish government’s influence on the US administration. According to Dr. Philips, Turkey has managed to represent the PYD and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as a joint terrorist organisation in the eyes of the US. Dr Philips stated that their research in his institute found that Turkey helped ISIS financially and supplied arms to ISIS and that the role of Turkey in the conflict in Syria has to be re-assessed more objectively.
“KOBANE RESISTANCE AND THE FUTURE OF PEACE PROCESS IN TURKEY”

18 November 2014
Portcullis House

Hosted by Fabian Hamilton Labour MP for Leeds North East

Speaker: Ertugrul Kurkcu Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) MP

Chair: Wayne David Labour MP for Caerphill

Mr Ertugrul Kurkcu’s talk focused on recent developments and challenges in the Kurdish peace process, by presenting an outline of the actors involved in the negotiations. According to Mr Kurkcu’s characterisation of the events, there are three distinct elements representing the Kurdish side of the negotiations: Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned founder of the militant Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK); the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), a collection of political and armed groups supporting increased Kurdish autonomy; and Mr Kurkcu’s own Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). Mr Kurkcu reported that the negotiations between the Kurdish side, consisting of the groups mentioned previously, and the Turkish government had resumed on Monday 17 November 2014 after a month long hiatus. The Turkish groups had suspended the talks on 6 October 2014 and called for demonstrations against the Turkish government, in protest of the government’s inaction during the Siege of Kobane in Syria, in which Kurdish militants battled fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Those demonstrations, occurring across Turkey but primarily in Turkey’s Kurdish southeast and especially in the largely Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, left dozens of people dead and were the deadliest street protests in Turkey in many years.

Mr Kurkcu referring to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu’s remarks on relationship between the Kurdish peace process and the crisis in Kobane argued that the Kurds in Turkey cannot negotiate for peace whilst their fellows fight brutality of ISIS on the other side of the border.
“FROM GEZI TO KOBANE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TURKEY AND THE MEDIA”

Public Forum in partnership with Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre (DAYMER)

12 November 2014
Daymer

Speakers: Journalists Ahmet Sik and Ismail Saymaz

Experienced journalists Ahmet Sik and Ismail Saymaz analysed the unrest among people of Turkey from the nationwide Gezi protests through to the Kobane protests. They elaborated on the significance of Kobane for the Kurds as well as public opinion regarding the protests in Turkey. The city of Kobane on the border of Syria and Turkey passed from relative obscurity to being thrust into the spotlight of the world press as the ‘Kurdish Stalingrad’, thus described for its importance and resistance in the struggle against the Islamic State (IS). Despite having taken in a large number of refugees escaping from the war-ridden city, Turkey received a large amount of criticism from the international community because of its approach to the events surrounding Kobane. For many around the world, the sight of Turkey’s tanks immobile on the border with Syria was tantamount to supporting IS. On the other hand, the crisis in Kobane led to protests in southeastern cities of Turkey and major cities in the west including Istanbul. 6-7 October 2014 protests that left 40 deaths behind due to clashes with security forces and involvement of masked gunmen almost put the peace process on hold.

15 October 2014
Unite the Union

Speaker: Mr Rusen Cakir, Journalist and Author

Chair: Dr Katerina Dalacoura of the London School of Economics and Political Science

Mr Rusen Cakir stated that he had been following the Kurdish question since he was a young journalist and analysed the progress of the Kurdish question over the years. He compared the years when the violent clashes between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in the 1990s to the Kurdish Peace Process which was initiated by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2011.

He also analysed the public unrest since the Gezi Protests in 2013 and the rivalry between the AKP and the Gulen Movement and its effects on the Kurdish Peace Process.

“THE RESOLUTION PROCESS AND THE KURDISH ISSUE OF TURKEY”
Dr Liam Fox MP focused on the West’s response to the threat of jihadism and ISIS. Dr Fox highlighted that ISIS is a strong organisation with millions of dollars coming from the Gulf states and from selling oil on the black market. He called for Britain to cut off ISIS’s income stream and stop the countries and individuals from supporting them.

Lord Maurice Glasman was of a similar opinion, emphasising that ‘action’ was the key word. Jason McCartney MP said that the battle for Kurdistan starts now and he hoped that UK can support and help the Kurds in an effective way.

Dr Alan Semo said that the PYD had been protecting civilians and land, with limited resources and weapons, against one of the strongest Islamist groups in the region. He added that if people had heeded the PYD’s warnings, then ISIS could have been stopped before it acquired its current power. Dr Semo indicated that they were willing to cooperate with all countries that want to help us fight ISIS and that a joint Kurdish military group formed by YPG, the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) and the Iraqi Peshmerga, with political and financial support and weapons from the West, could defeat ISIS.

Lord Tim Clement Jones, said that focusing only on Baghdad would be a mistake as Iraq included several actors with different needs. He argued that Kurds were one of them and the fact that they were able to build a democratic state...
in the middle of an area beset by war and violence made them a key player in solving the current crisis.

Mr Bill Park asserted that the West should rethink relationships with the PKK, the PYD and even Syria’s Assad, and that a better understanding of the region and ISIS was necessary for finding an enduring.

Mr Patrick Cockburn referred to Turkey’s role in this crisis and argued for Turkey to close its borders to ISIS. While it was clear for a long time that the civil war in Syria has destabilised Iraq little has been done to counter this trend.

Mr Harvey Morris was pessimistic about the future of Iraq and strongly opposed cooperation with the Syrian regime. Morris also argued that the new government in Baghdad will fail to respect the rights of Kurds. As a result, he said, it was time to deal with KRG directly.

Mrs Sundus Saqi warned that it was not only the Kurds but also Turkmens who suffered from ISIS’s brutality. She added that IS is a problem for all minority groups in Iraq, regardless of their faith or ethnicity.

Keynote speakers spoke on the 25th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, KDPI’s Secretary General who was killed in 1989, Vienna, by Iranian envoys with whom he had met to negotiate a peaceful solution for the Kurdish question in Iran. Dr Ghassemlou had spent his entire life fighting not only for the freedom and national rights of his people, but also for the ideals of democracy, human rights and justice in general.
Gulan is a charity formed in 2008. It promotes what is best in the culture of the Kurdish people. Its objective is to help sustain the sense of Kurdish identity and to preserve the heritage of Kurdistan for the benefit of people of all cultures and identities. It respects all people, cultures and faiths.

Gulan has no political or religious agenda, and does not accept funds from sources which wish to advance a particular political or religious aim through their gift.

Gulan holds events, which are documented on its website, which also has an archive of photography, films, books and maps about the Kurds and the Kurdistan region, and a growing archive of Kurdish costume.

www.gulan.org.uk

www.facebook.com/gulancharity
twitter.com/GulanUK
Erbil citadel
Richard Wilding, 2013

Erbil citadel is dramatically situated on top of a mound of accumulated archaeological layers, visually dominating the modern city of Erbil below. Believed to have been in existence for at least 6,000 years, Erbil claims to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

Classroom in Mamilian IDP Camp, Akre
Richard Wilding, 2016

Since 2013, up to 2 million people have sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan from civil war in Syria and ISIS in Iraq.

Kurdish costume typical of Halabja, from the collection of Della Murad

Yezidi shrine of Sheikh Adi, Lalish
Richard Wilding, 2013

Lalish near Mosul is the Yezidis’ spiritual centre, and also a place of refuge during times of persecution.
Wikipedia turned 16 years old in 2017, and the English language Wikipedia alone now has over 5.3 million articles. Wikipedia and its sister sites like Wikimedia Commons receive almost 16 billion page views every month, yet most people who use Wikipedia never dive very deep into the huge complexity of the projects and the ways in which they are managed and improved.

They should. Editing Wikipedia pages is one of the best ways to get information to a huge audience. All you need to do is follow the rules and provide accurate, well referenced information, and that information could be seen by thousands of people. Here are the statistics for the Kurdistan Wikipedia page:

Unfortunately, most of the people who edit Wikipedia tend to be European or North American, and mostly men. The content on Wikipedia reflects the interests of the people who edit, so you get a lot of articles about wrestling and military history, but a lot less about women and the culture of non-European peoples.

Wikimedia UK is committed to changing that by increasing the diversity of the content and the contributors on Wikipedia. We are the UK chapter of the Wikimedia movement, a network of charities around the world which supports Wikipedia and the community which helps create it.

That’s why we’re trying to reach out to diaspora communities in the UK, to get people editing who wouldn’t normally think about clicking the Edit button on a Wikipedia page. We need you to help improve coverage of Kurdish culture and history on the English Wikipedia, and also to help improve Wikipedia in Kurdish.

There are two Kurdish Wikipedias, Kurmanji and Sorani, and they both have about 20,000 articles each. Compared to the 5.3 million pages on English Wikipedia, that’s nothing, but if we can improve it, it might become the most useful free knowledge base, library, data repository and media sharing platform in the Kurdish language. We could help to educate the next generation of Kurdish children for free, give them the opportunity to read and write in their mother tongue and help add to the largest encyclopaedia in Kurdish that has ever been written.

The Wikimedia Foundation has just expanded its Wikipedia Zero project to Iraq, where 12 million customers on Asiacell now have free access with no data charges to all of Wikipedia. Almost half of the world now has access to the internet, and billions more people will be connected to the internet in the next few decades. It is up to us to help improve Wikipedia in all the smaller languages like Kurdish so that we can achieve Wikipedia’s aim, to create “a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge”.

That’s why we have started working with the Kurdish diaspora community in the UK. It is a test case to see if we can have a significant impact on the size of a small language Wikipedia like Kurdish. We have started to hold training workshops to teach people how to edit Wikipedia properly. There are lots of rules and policies and if you don’t follow them, another editor could delete all your hard work.

We want to create a group of editors who can work together to teach others in their community how to edit and improve the Wikimedia websites, and we eventually would like to spread this knowledge to people in Kurdistan, so they can build a resource which will kickstart the growth of a world class education sector there. We have already held some workshops, but we need to get more people involved; especially young, IT literate people who will be able to learn quickly and teach others.

To do this, we need help. We are a small organisation with a small budget, but the Kurdish community in the UK is large and organised. We need people to help organise events and to make sure they are well attended. If you think you could help, please get in contact with us via the links below, and come to one of our events so that you can learn how to edit Wikipedia yourself. Creating a better future for Kurdistan is something every single person can contribute to, and one of the best ways to do that is to ensure that every Kurdish speaker has free access to the sum of all knowledge.

Wikimedia UK can be found at:
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