

Kurdish Human Rights Project

Displacement in the Kurdish Regions
- Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, & the Caucasuses

Seminar at the European Parliament, 15 September 2010

Problems in the region

- **Iran** - IDPs (due to military clearance of Kordestan region) & forced migration (due to Iran-Iraq war, current bombardments into Iraq, & political persecution of human rights defenders in Kurdish region)
- **Turkey** - Largest IDP population (numerically & by percentage) in the Council of Europe from forced migration (due to bombardments into Iraq), military operations & people trafficking
- **Syria** - forced migration (result of 1962 survey which stripped many Kurds of their citizenship & people fleeing Iraq)
- **Iraq** - large numbers of IDPs & displaced persons (due to bombardments by Iran & Turkey, people fleeing conflict in other parts of the country, displaced persons from Iran from Iran-Iraq war & displaced persons from conflict on border with Turkey)
- **Armenia & Azerbaijan** - displacement due to ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

Iran

- **The 1980s clearance of 2000km² of land in Kordestan led to tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees. There remains 3 main UNHCR refugee camps in Kurdistan, Iraq**
- **In an ostensible fight against terrorism, weekly/bi-weekly security/military operations are commonplace** in Kordestan; people are forced from their homes on the borders at a moment's notice & are prevented from access to their pastoral & agricultural livelihoods
- **Coordinated bombardments of Iraqi territory with the Turkish military & incursion into/ongoing occupation of Iraqi territory** have forced people from their homes indefinitely on both sides of the border
- **The political climate for minorities & HRDs leads to forced migration into Turkey & Iraq**

Recommendations to the EU

Cross-border bombardments/incursions

- Fulfil their obligations to support Iraq's territorial integrity, to protect human rights & to ensure that civilians are protected by pressuring Turkey & Iran to cease cross-border operations
- Utilise existing relations with the Iranian government to work towards an end to cross-border operations, stressing the detrimental effect these campaigns have on the peace & stability of Kurdistan & the region
- Work to ensure the safety & security of civilians living in the border regions of Kurdistan & provide assistance, with the help of international NGOs & the UNHCR, to those who have suffered losses due to the cross-border operations
- Seek to support efforts of international organisations/media in gaining access to affected areas in order to assess how best to help

Recommendations to the EU cont.

Treatment of minorities

- Encourage Iran to respect the cultural & religious diversity of its populace through adherence to international norms
- Ensure that EU dialogue about Iran notes its diversity

Treatment of refugees from Iran-Iraq war

- Support international agencies such as UNHCR, ICRC & others working with these vulnerable groups to support them & adequately assess their situations

Turkey

- **Estimated 3-3.5 million IDPs from the height of ongoing armed conflict in the Kurdish region of Turkey**
 - Often slum dwellers in the urban areas of Van, Diyarbakir & Istanbul
 - Mostly unable to return to their homes because of ongoing armed conflict & specific policies preventing their return (e.g. Village Guard System & lack of infrastructural support that could enable a return)
 - Women & children make up majority of IDPs in Turkey. There has been little attempt to redress the past reasons for forced migration & the losses incurred
 - *There is a specific role for the EU in re-vitalising the Turkish general public's interest in the accession process in supporting a comprehensive programme to address the IDP issue*

Turkey cont.

- **Ongoing aerial bombardments of Iraq by Turkey in co-ordination with the Iranian military, with whom it has shared security protocols, is causing new displacement in the Kurdistan region of Iraq; over 1000 families have been displaced in 2010 alone, although more have been either indefinitely or intermittently displaced since bombardments began in full force in 2007**
- **Turkey receives a large number of forcibly displaced persons from Syria & Iraq, but especially Iran; Kurdish refugees are not treated the same by the Turkish government as economic refugees from Africa or elsewhere**
- **Planned infrastructure projects such as the 'damned to fail' Ilisu Dam, threatens further displacement of up to 55,000 people**

Recommendations to the EU

Refugee Policy in Turkey

- Encourage Turkey to drop its geographic limitation
- Support the creation of cross-regional panel to investigate problems of refugees from ongoing bombardments & policies directed against regional minorities

Internal Displacement

- Encourage Turkish government to dismantle Village Guard programme, as it has repeatedly claimed it intends to do, but has thus far not acted
- Recognise that Law on Compensation in Turkey, Law 5233 has only addressed handful of people displaced by the conflict, & was only intended to deal with compensation, not redress wider problems created by vast number of IDPs
- Encourage the Turkish government both through financial support & expertise to develop & IMPLEMENT a comprehensive plan

Recommendations to the EU Cont.

Cross Border bombardments

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- Work to ensure the safety & security of civilians living in the border regions of Kurdistan & provide assistance, with the help of International NGOs & the UNHCR, to those who have suffered losses due to the cross-border operations
- Support efforts by all parties to the conflict to end armed activity by helping to create a platform discussion of 'the tough issues' in the public sphere

Infrastructure projects

- Use its considerable weight with the Turkish government in ensuring that all planned infrastructure projects are compliant with international human rights norms, which includes transparency, consultation & adequate compensation as relevant

Syria

- **Syria's decision to strip 120,000 Kurdish people of their citizenship in 1962, has today led to an estimated 300,000 individuals living as stateless people within its borders**
- **Syria's economic underdevelopment is particularly acute in the Kurdish region**
- **The current 'anti-Kurd' climate in Syria has led to forced migration for Kurds from Syria, largely into Iraq**
- **People who fled post-invasion violence in Iraq are on the border areas in UNHCR camps, in the Kurdish region of Syria**

Recommendations to the EU

- Urge Syria to address the situation of the 300,000 stateless Kurds
- Continue & increase support to the UNHCR in addressing problems with refugees from Iraq
- Link economic/trade deals to human rights/security situation

Iraq

- **More than 1.5 million people have been displaced post-2006**
- **International Organisation for Migration estimates there are 2.7 million IDPs in the country**
- **Iraq hosts refugees from Iran & Syria, largely in the Kurdish region**
- **Aerial & land bombardments by Turkey & Iran are resulting in increasing numbers of IDPs & forcibly displaced persons in Kurdistan, Iraq. Over 1000 families have been displaced by the bombardments**

Recommendations to the EU

Cross-Border bombardments/incursions

- Support the Iraqi government & the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in protecting its territorial integrity & facilitating safety for its citizens
- Provide financial assistance & support to the UNHCR as well as international NGOs who are aiding victims of displacement

Refugee policy

- Provide technical expertise & support to the Iraqi government & the KRG in addressing historic as well as ongoing, refugee problems

Integration of returnees/displaced

- Provide technical expertise/training to help the government to devise a cohesive policy & programme of support

What can the EU do?

- Send field missions to Iraq/Iran border to investigate serious problems faced by people living there
- Condemn the Turkish & Iranian Government's bombardment & link the condemnation to tangible action
- Support the governments financially & with expertise in addressing their problems with both IDPs & Refugees
- Look to support a cross-regional plan, possibly a task force, with UNHCR & the regional governments that deals with the specific problems of displacement in the Kurdish regions; including but not limited to developing a streamlined & fair practice that allows for resettlement &/or monitored & safe return within the Kurdish region. This would also go a long way to dealing with problems of trafficking & forced marriage
- Ensure EU Framework for Accession & any trade agreements are directly linked to how Turkey, Iraq, Syria & Iran deal with displaced persons