

KURDISH CONFERENCE RE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

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A Canadian cabinet minister, two MPs, a Toronto councilor, a former judge, a newly-elected Kurdish MP from Bingöl, Turkey, an evangelist preacher, the European representative of the 'Kurdish Rojave Cantons Regional Government' in Syria, and Syrian-Kurdish spokesman took part in the Canadian Conference on the Kurdish Humanitarian Crisis on June 21 in Toronto.

While the gathering's name focused on the Kurdish tragedy, the speakers also addressed the plight of the other Syrian and Iraqi minorities victimized by the so-called Islamic State and other terrorists. About 250 people attended the conference.

According to conference organizers the Syrian Civil War has resulted in one of the largest refugee crisis in the 21st century with an estimated 12 to 14 million people who have been internally and externally displaced.

"In the Kurdish regions, about two-and-half million Kurdish people and Christian minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Yezidis are in urgent need of humanitarian aid," according to conference organizers. "Sunni and Shia Arabs, and Turkmens too are arriving to the Kurdish regions for safety and well-being," reported a flyer promoting the gathering.

Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the Syrian Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) addressed the crowd via skype and said Kurdish fighters were standing fast in the positions they have taken from the Islamic State. He also underlined the humanitarian crisis in the Kurdish areas of Syria.

Prof. Hisyar Ozcoy, recently elected to the Turkish parliament (HDP-Bingöl), said that Erdogan's folly led to the defeat of the party. "He became overly ambitious in his dreams to run Turkey the way he wanted," said Ozcoy. Until recently a professor in Michigan, Ozcoy moved to Turkey to run in the elections.

Keynote speaker Senam Mohammadi, European representative of 'Rojave Cantons Regional Government', described in fluent English the calamity and the Kurdish resolve to defeat the extremists.

Former MP and now Toronto councilor Jim Karygiannis began his speech by saying: "You all know who the elephant in the room is. It's Turkey." The Toronto politician accused Turkey of being behind the Civil War in Syria and in Iraq. He also called on the Canadian government and its allies to expose Turkey for instigating and fueling the crisis.

"It is time we engaged all sides on the issue regarding ISIS. All sides need bear responsibility. Canadian federal politicians should stop pandering to the communities of the region for votes and stand with them shoulder-to-shoulder in order to defeat ISIS. Many words have been spoken about how they (the federal politicians) and their parties are assisting. However, they have and will

continue to fail if they do not engage and hold Turkey also responsible," said Karygiannis.

While Turkey speaks about engaging and helping with the fight against ISIS it still continues to persecute its minorities and deprive them of their rights, added the Toronto politician.

"There have been reports by community members in Canada that Turkey not only does not engage with the fight against ISIS but is assisting them by staying neutral. There is a genocide which is going on right now by ISIS against other religious and ethnic minorities. The first genocide of the 21st century was perpetrated against the Pontian Greeks and then against the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire--today's Turkey," said Karygiannis.

The Canadian politician stressed that Turkey continues its aggression by the invasion and occupation of the northern part of Cyprus and added: "Turkey is doing nothing to assist against the fights with ISIS except pay lip service. It is time to stop today's genocide."



Aris Babikian, Armenian community activist, said: "I am here in solidarity with you and with the other persecuted minorities in the Middle East. As a representative of a nation which was the target of the same ideology currently sweeping in the region, I know what it means to be victimized by a policy bent on eliminating anyone who does not share that racist and vile ideology."

Babikian said that the racist ideology is bent on eradicating not only people and religions but also thousands of years of civilizations.

"After 100 years of what the Armenians endured at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, today the world is witnessing the same barbaric acts being implemented in the same Middle East," said Babikian and added: "The neo-Ottomans in Turkey are once again the core enablers of the atrocities committed

against the Kurds, the Alawites, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, the Druz, the Yezidis and other minorities."

He also thanked Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister Jason Kenney for their "principled stand and moral fortitude." In addition to taking part in the attacks on ISIS, per capita Canada is the largest provider of safe haven to Syrian refugees in Canada (over 10,000 in two years). Babikian said he wanted to see other countries act as compassionately and generously.

"We are grateful for Canada's leadership. We urge the government to go a step farther and use its global stature to pressure the Turkish government to stop training and arming extremists and helping them infiltrate Syria and Iraq," said Babikian and added Canada's allies should stop Turkey from acting as a middle man which "facilitates the financing of the fanatics by purchasing the looted Syrian and Iraqi oil and historic treasure and to export them to world markets."

Hon. John Duncan, minister of state and government whip; MP Bernard Trottier, parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs and for La Francophonie, and MP Mark Adler also addressed the conference. Rev. Majed el-Shafei, founder and president of One Free World International, gave a rousing speech. El-Shafei visited Iraq, Armenia and Turkey last year.

In the second part of the conference, a panel discussion was held titled "Kurdish Struggle: What's in the future and global issues". The panelists were Hadi Elis, sociologist and independent researcher; Andrew Marjoran, general manager of the MacKenzie Institute of Toronto; and Prof. Ofra Bengio of Tel-Aviv University.

