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**Presidential Speech
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In the year 1639, Kurdistan was divided for the first time between the warring empires of the Ottoman Turks and Iranian Safavis as a result of the Chalderan War, which lasted more than a hundred years from 1514 until 1639. That first division was a symbolic political event. It did not severely change the way Kurdish people lived their lives. However, the division did affect the Kurds, for it transformed them into citizens of the two warring empires. This means the Kurdish people were induced to make their primary political identity as either Ottoman or Iranian.

The most drastic and painful change in the life of the Kurds occurred after the WWI, when the Western powers partitioned our beautiful Kurdistan among Iran, Turkey, and two new states created out of nothing--- Iraq and Syria. This division affected every aspect of Kurdish life. This time four countries took ownership of Kurdistan. This time, three cultures were imposed upon us and our people were compelled to carry four different passports. This time our indigenous Kurdish culture became forbidden.

So, how have the Kurds fared under the heel of each of these regimes? Here, I want to do a brief review and then ask ourselves how we should react as a nation. I begin with,

Kurdistan-under-Iran:- The apparent quintessence of Iran's socio-political culture has been based on a bogus and illusory equality between the Persians and other non-Persian ethnic groups such as Arabs Azeries, Baluchis and the Kurds. Ostensibly, they are all Iranians and there is no difference between Persians and non-Persians. However, in every veritable and practical sense, the Persian culture has been given superior status over other cultures and languages. Persian is the only language of instruction in Iran. Using other languages is taboo in any formal setting. This has been a common practice throughout the history of successive Iranian regimes.

After World War I in 1919, our people reignited their aspiration for self-rule. Simko Khani Shkak started his struggles against the Iranian forces and demanded that Kurdish national rights be recognized. After years of struggle, the Iranian regime used a ploy to offer negotiation with Simko. On June 12, 1930 Simko Khan went to Shno to negotiate with the Iranian authorities. He was attacked upon his arrival and murdered. Later his corpse was transferred to Uremia and hanged for public display for three days.

After World War II, in 1946, the Kurds under the leadership of Peshawa Qazi Muhammad declared the Republic of Kurdistan. The Republic lasted only eleven months. After this brief experiment in self rule, Iran regained total military control over Kurdistan. On March 31, 1947 Peshawa, Saif and Sadri Qazi were hanged. Thereafter the Kurds continued to live under tyranny and oppression. Kurdish activists were either imprisoned or had to leave the country.

After the collapse of the tyrannical regime of the Shah, our people sought the opportunity to proclaim their just national and democratic rights. The Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Dr. Abdulramani Qasmlu entered a new phase of struggle. The struggle was armed but the leadership sought ways to enter into negotiations to resolve the Kurdish issue through political dialog. But, the Iranian theocratic regime of Khomeini soon declared the KDPI as a 'dissolved' organization and authorized a "holy war" in Kurdistan. The theocrats in their so-called 'holy war' did not even spare pregnant women. They killed babies while they were asleep in their cradles.

The Iranian theocrats, like the Shah's regime, maintained the policy of persecuting Kurdish human rights advocates and freedom seekers. Once again in 1989, the regime used the familiar and diabolical tactic of offering to negotiate while using it as a pretext to assassinate Kurdish leaders. Dr. Abdurrahman Qasmlu and two KDPI team members were murdered in Vienna while they were negotiating terms for a peaceful solution for Kurdish national demands. This pattern of murder was repeated in 1992 in Berlin when Qasmlu's successor, Dr. Sadeq Sharafandi and his supporters were murdered upon their return from a 'peace' conference. Dozens of other Kurdish democratic and human rights activists who had fled to Kurdistan-Iraq were followed and executed by Iranian co-conspirators and agents.

Iran used the tactic of labeling opposition groups by using epithets such as 'anti-Islam' or 'seditious on earth' or 'endangering the national security' to liquidate them. This is indeed ironic since the Iranian regime has itself become the extremist through its murder of children and public stoning of women. According to Amnesty International's recent 2008 report, Iran is the only country in the world that still executes children. Today, Iran remains as one of the last executioner of children and women among developing nations in the modern world.

Kurdistan-under-Turkey:- As we all know, the 1923 Lausanne Treaty was the moment of western hypocrisy in which ownership of North of Kurdistan was handed over to a new Turkish state, which was created a year later. Ever since then, Kurdish identity was suppressed. The words "Kurdistan" and "Kurd" became taboo in public places. One after another, Kurdish uprisings were brutally suppressed including: Mela Sleim's in 1923, Sêx Se'îdî Pîran's in 1925, and Îhsan Nûrî Pasha's in 1937. After this suppression, successive Turkish governments have ruled Kurdistan with a brutal military fist.

The new Turkish Republic, like its predecessor, has been a multi-ethnic state. Despite this reality, the new Turkish state adopted a racist Constitution founded on the idea of a mono-ethnic identity. Chapter Four of the Constitution states, "Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk." This provision became a legal justification for the suppression of every other ethnic group. Therefore Kurdish people in

official settings have been called ‘mountain Turks.’ This has been the policy until recent years where we can see some signs of reform. However this reform is riddled with hypocrisy. A Turkish state sponsored TV station may broadcast state approved programming in Kurdish, but when a prominent Kurdish figure, Mr. Ahmed Turk, spoke Kurdish in Turkey’s parliament the Turkish TV station stopped broadcasting, and stated that the Turkish language was the only language to be used in the Parliament.

Mr. Turk was threatened with legal action for speaking Kurdish in the Parliament. Turkish authorities still consider the use of Kurdish language as an insult to the “Turkishness.”

Kurdistan-under-Syria:- In the newly established state of Syria, life, at first, for the Kurds was not so difficult. In fact, two of the early presidents of Syria, Hosni Za’im and Adeb Shishakly were Kurds. However, between 1954 and 1958, as a result of the rise of Arab chauvinism, most of the Kurdish military officers were discharged from the military. At the same time, the treaty between Egypt and Syria in 1958, intensified the mono-Arab political culture in the Republic. This resulted in the state revoking Syrian citizenship of more than 90 percent of the Kurds and labeled them as “unwanted guests.” Those who were able to obtain Syrian citizenship, had to relinquish their Kurdish identity and register as Arabs. The Arabization of the Syrian government continued to grow and they began to take measures to Arabize Kurdistan under the guise of creating a borderland area they called the “Arab belt” as means to make life harder for the Kurds. Kurdish political movements were suppressed, Kurdish activists were put in jail, and the notion of Kurdish culture was eradicated. People were encouraged to wear Arab uniform.

In recent years the measure of oppression against the Kurds has been intensified. Kurdish intellectuals have been murdered or jailed. The rise of Kurdish aspirations in the region have made the Syrian authorities fearful and they have therefore taken brutal measures to suppress Kurdish activists such as Sheikh Ghaznwi who was abducted and later found dead. Under this regime there is very little hope for democracy or acknowledgement of non-Arab ethnic groups in Syria.

Kurdistan-under-Iraq:- The oppression of the people of Kurdistan started right at the inception of Iraq in 1927. The dominant socio-political culture was Arab. It left no room for the Kurdish culture to develop or for Kurds to take part in political life under the Kurdish identity. A series of uprisings from 1919 to 1939, including Sheikh Mahmood’s were followed by the Barzan revolution in 1945. All were suppressed and the oppression of our people continued. In 1958, the Republic of Iraq which was perceived to bring new hope to the Iraqi multi-ethnic society was soon dominated by Arab chauvinism. Ethnic tensions between the Kurds and Iraqi government were renewed. Arabization in Kurdistan escalated and the brutality intensified. All successive Iraqi regimes had the same goal in common. This was to diminish the capacity of the Kurds in Iraq. This included the most forceful and brutal measures to suppress and assimilate the Kurds. Even during the Aylool revolution under General Barzani the Kurdish demand for self rule within Iraqi borders, the Arab regimes never took any measure to understand the reality of Kurdish history and existence in the region and rather sought to trivialize the Kurdish national demands and used sobriquets such as calling Kurds “foreign agents” or “saboteurs” only to legitimize their immoral measures against our people. The

elimination of Kurdistan by the destruction of more 4,000 villages during the infamous Anfal operations and the policy of Arabization to wipe out the Kurds were products of Arab chauvinism.

Therefore, in the post-Saddam Iraq (you know, I don't believe the term 'new Iraq.' There is no such a thing as new Iraq), while the Kurdish leadership asks for first class citizenship, they must not compromise the blood of our martyrs, the struggle of our brave heroes, and the spirit of our just cause for national aspiration while negotiating with Arabs in Baghdad. We cannot ask for first class citizenship of an Arab country or any other occupying country and yet remain effective in demanding national and democratic rights for our people in the divided Kurdistan. The first class citizenship must equate with the recognition of the national rights of the people of Kurdistan by each of the central governments.

Ladies and gentlemen, this brief review of our unfortunate life under these unfriendly nations reminds us why it is so important for us to think like a nation. We must remain vigilant and not let the division of Kurdistan weaken our national psychology, because weakness in our national psyche facilitates the process of becoming assimilated in the national "melting pots" of the occupiers of Kurdistan.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the reality is that the plight of one part of Kurdistan is tied to other parts of Kurdistan. Sadly, this reality is more recognized by the occupying countries than by us. It is mirrored in the brutal measures taken by these central governments. They demonstrate that regardless of their differences, they are united in suppressing our identity. Therefore, as long as we in each part of Kurdistan remain adhered to the capital of the respective country we will never be able to have a true Kurdish voice.

We need to revive the Kurdish aspiration as a nation instead of each part thinking separately. For as long as we think separately, we will be treated separately. As long as we are treated separately, we remain ineffective.

We realize that the division of Kurdistan is what makes our situation unique unlike any other national group that has sought recognition of its national rights. Nevertheless, this must not discourage us from dreaming our sacred dream of independence. This means the Kurdish political parties in all parts of Kurdistan must stop bickering and come terms with each other and together strengthen Kurdish unity. We must do this to promote our common interests on the diplomatic front. This not only will help to minimize opposing views against the struggle of our people, but also maximizes the effectiveness of our moral claim in international policy forums.

So while we can continue to press our claims for our rights as an autonomous people within the nations to which we have been consigned, we must see this as only an interim step toward a final goal of a free and united Kurdistan.