

Speech of Hemin Hawrami, Kurdistan Democratic Party, Iraq
Before the Members of the Socialist International

12 December 2014
Geneva, Switzerland

Your Excellencies, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to discuss the security situation in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. On behalf of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), I am honored to come before you. His Excellency, President Masoud Barzani sends his best regards and greetings to SI members and all the participants. Unfortunately, President Barzani could not leave the region and take part in this meeting due to the current situation that we are facing. President Barzani is the only leader who is personally at the forefront in the war against ISIS.

For those of you, that are not aware of KDP, I would like to briefly present to you our party and our objectives. Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iraq was established in 1946 as a national freedom movement and since then it has acted as a key player in the region to liberate the people and guide the Kurdish nations towards democracy and self-rule. Today, under the banners of co-existence, justice and renewal, KDP is pleased in cooperation with other political parties in the region to lead Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Kurdistan Region has flourished since the 1990's, developing its economy, building and strengthening its relations with the neighboring countries as well as the international community, and most importantly developing the region to meet international standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I can stand here and discuss the developments of the Kurdistan Region, but today, we meet for a different purpose, to discuss a crucial topic, one which requires great attention. *ISIS and its threat to the Kurdistan Region and the broader international community.*

We meet at a time of great concern for the security of our people, the Middle East and the broader international community. Furthermore, we meet at a time of great challenge and consequence to international peace and security. The horrific images of innocent victims - Kurds, Ezidi Kurds, Muslims, Christians, locals and foreigners - massacred and ruthlessly beheaded in Iraq and in Syria shocked the international community. Over a short period of time, and uncalculated steps, a terrorist group emerged known as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), shocking the world with their cruel acts.

What we have today is a large enemy; armed with very advanced weapons and growing very rapidly. ISIS is a regional and international threat, which needs international response.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Kurdistan Region can be counted on to play our part; to stand against the ideologies of these extremist groups. As I said before, the threat of this group is not only in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, or Syria; but also, this is a threat to every freedom loving nation.

As we speak, the Kurdish military forces, known as the Peshmerga, are the only forces combating ISIS on the ground in Iraq and they are on the offensive against ISIS. We, as the Kurds from Kobani in Syria to Dyala province in Iraq, have a frontline battlefield of approximately 1,500 kilometers against ISIS.

The Peshmerga are fighting in this great battle on behalf of the world and sadly to say, they are limited in heavy weapons to outgun ISIS. ISIS has, at its disposal, very advanced weapons which they seized from both the Iraqi Army and the Syrian Army. They defeated two armies; the Iraqi and Syrian Army and took their weapons, but Peshmerga managed to stop them and roll them back. We are now on the offensive side of the battle, protecting all components of our society, not just Kurds, but also Christians, Arabs, Turkmen and other components of the Iraqi society. We have lost more than 200 Peshmerga in protecting Christian areas in Iraq.

Today, we in the Kurdistan Region are not only fighting for our existence as we have done throughout the 20th century, but on behalf of the free world, we are fighting this barbaric, terrorist organization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me the opportunity to further enlighten you about the crucial developments that took place this past summer.

The rise of ISIS is due to the failed attempt of enforcing a unified Iraq upon the region, a failure in Maliki's governance, lack of trust and cooperation between the different groups in Iraq, disenfranchisement of the Sunnies, ignoring the constitution, and the overall failing governance in Baghdad. The Kurdistan Region or Iraq itself would not be in the current situation had the government in Baghdad listened to the warnings given to them. Instead, we are now in battle and in a crisis.

Before the fall of Mosul to ISIS, we alerted the Iraqi Federal Government in December 2013 about an imminent threat from ISIS against the city and we offered our support to send our Peshmerga to defend the area. Unfortunately, our warnings fell on deaf ears.

In the ensuing hours following the Mosul attack by ISIS, five Iraqi Military Divisions and one Federal Police Division completely melted away and tens of thousands of troops abandoned their posts and heavy weapons to ISIS. In a matter of hours, ISIS evolved from a ruthless terrorist organization to an unprecedented terrorist state.

In a matter of days, hundreds of thousands of families fled to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, creating a humanitarian crisis and a burden because of limited resources. We are providing refuge to more than 1.5 million refugees and IDPs, which are now 20% of our population. Dear delegates, imagine an increase of 20% in your population in a manner of few months, how would you handle this?

Furthermore, with advanced capabilities gained from the attack on Mosul, ISIS attacked the town of Sinjar on the 3rd of August 2014 and sadly to say, they managed to take the town and commit terrifying atrocities. In the meantime, we called on our friends and allies for military assistance. We are grateful to the United States and members of the international coalition, and European

countries for heeding our desperate call to provide critical air support, **but, ladies and gentlemen, more must be done.**

The costs of the ongoing war, coupled with the 1.5 million refugees and IDPs - including Christians, Ezidis, Kurds and Arabs - is having dire consequence on our ability to care for these people. Our hospitality is provided without any significant financial or in-kind support from the Iraqi Federal Government.

More importantly, the Iraqi Federal Government continues to pressure Western countries that are sending us humanitarian aid, ammunition and light-to-medium arms to go through Baghdad for inspections and therefore delaying the shipments. These delays are costing lives on the frontline and endangering those in need of food, water and shelter.

Since the attack, we have re-organized and taken back much of our territory from ISIS but the war against terrorism will never be over. We will stay on the offensive against them until the battle is won. But, ladies and gentlemen, ISIS is a regional and international threat, and it needs an international response.

But it's not just the military capabilities of ISIS that should concern the world and this esteemed body. It's the unparalleled financial revenues funding terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world.

To put this in broad terms:

- ISIS generates anything between \$3 to \$6 million per day by selling oil on the black market; Iraqi and Syrian artifacts and wheat;
- It receives money from donations, ransoms and taxes;
- It controls an area larger than Jordan;
- It possess advanced weapons and is fighting on several fronts;
- And thousands of foreign fighters from across the world, including many from European countries, are flocking to the Middle East to join ISIS

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let's keep in mind that this is a shared enemy and a shared responsibility. Threats by this group require an international response. This is a serious threat and we need serious players to counterattack this group and diminish their foundation as well as destroy this group. They cannot be reasoned with nor negotiated with - they do not understand or recognize peace, co-existence, democracy or the other values we all share.

It is our belief that global support will play a key role in destroying this group and keeping our people as well as the international community safe. In spite of being the only players to advance on the ground against ISIS, the Peshmerga are still not being provided with needed heavy arms from Baghdad or from allies in the international coalition against ISIS. As of three days ago, we have lost 725 Peshmerga and more than 3,600 are wounded as a result of this war against ISIS.

Furthermore, I urge every one of you to engage in discussions with your government officials in providing military assistance to our heroic Peshmerga and if not military assistance then perhaps

provide advanced weapons to fight this deadly group. We do not need boots on the ground from any country. In other words, we need the international community to provide us with the equipment we need to defeat ISIS and protect our people.

Our Peshmerga are fighting a war that cannot be won with AK47s and RPGs. Clearly, they are outgunned; they do not have the right tools to protect themselves against IEDs, mines and suicide bombers. 72% of our Peshmerga casualties are because of IEDs. Throughout our past, we have been told that heavy artillery and advanced weapons cannot be given to the Kurdistan Region because of Baghdad. This policy is wrong and must be revisited.

Our policy is that we support who ever stands against ISIS, and welcome support from any one who stands against ISIS.

International terrorism requires an international response, and the Kurdistan Region is on the frontline of fighting *the war on terror*.

Our immediate duty is clear; to protect the Kurdistan Region's democracy and defend its vibrant communities, but the international community must stand with us and provide meaningful support to our courageous Peshmerga and people.

Our experience is founded on the principles of co-existence and respect for human rights; we are not a threat to peace in the Middle East, in fact we are an oasis of peace and stability in a region amidst chaos and uncertainty.

Thank you very much for your attention. I am available for questions, comments; either now (if time permits) or during breaks.