

Mr. President, the Secretary General, distinguished members of the Council, Dear Friends

I am representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the major political party in Iraqi Kurdistan and one of the leading parties in Iraq, a party which, since its inception in 1946, has been in the forefront of the struggle for self-determination for the people of Kurdistan and fought dictatorship in Iraq. The KDP is currently the largest block in the Kurdistan Parliament with 38 seats and heading both the presidency and the premiership of the Kurdistan Region. KDP has been one of the main contributors to Iraqi politics and the establishment of the Federal institutions including the Constitution, the Government and the Parliament since 2003. The Party's role and in particular the role of our President Masoud Barzani in fighting for justice, tolerance and democracy is acknowledged in Kurdistan, Iraq and the rest of the World.

Honorable guests,

The Kurds in Iraq has been fighting for their national rights since the creation of the current Iraqi state in the aftermath of the First World War but their legitimate demands were always met with force and violence. This systematic prosecution and assimilation, as it is well known, reached genocide in the eighties of the last century during which more than 200,000 innocent people were buried alive and killed by chemical weapons. The uprising of 1991 and the introduction of the no fly zone coupled with the withdrawal of the Iraqi administration from most parts of Kurdistan provided an opportunity to the people of Kurdistan to replace the rule of tyranny and repression of Saddam Hussain with a democratically elected parliament and government. Despite all the security, political and economic challenges during the nineties of the last century, we managed to march forward and take an active part in liberating Kurdistan and Iraq during the liberation war of 2003. The people of Kurdistan and their political leaders joined the other Iraqi leaders, the UN and the Coalition partners to build a new Iraq and adopted a new constitution in 2005. A constitution which acknowledged the basic national rights of the people of Kurdistan and provided the bases for a peaceful coexistence between different components of the

Iraqi society. During the past 12 years the Kurdistan Regional Government and its president were actively engaged in building the kind of Iraq, which was envisioned by the constitution. An Iraq in which the people of Kurdistan would no longer be subject to repression and genocide. I have to admit with great regret that our expectations for creating such an Iraqi state proved unrealistic.

Distinguished SI council members,

The government of Iraq over the past twelve years did not live up to its initial commitments and the spirit of the constitution. They failed to implement the crucial articles of the constitution including article 140, supporting Peshmerga forces and revenue sharing arrangements. They have abandoned the principle of partnership and consensus in governing the state on which bases the constitution was written and ratified by the Kurdistan people. They tried unilaterally to impose their military power in the disputed territories. They put the last nail in the coffin when they cut the budget from Kurdistan Region in February 2014. When ISIS attacked our Region in August 2014 and our Peshmerga fought an atrocious war with the support of the international coalition, the Iraqi government did not make the smallest gesture to support the people of Kurdistan. While more than 1,800,000 refugees and IDPs took refuge in Kurdistan, they threatened the Region to cut the medical supplies, while our hospitals and health centers were receiving and treating thousands of refugees and IDPs. Our past bitter experience with the successive governments in Baghdad has put the people of Kurdistan at a crossroads: either to repeat the failed model of living under one roof with the other part of Iraq or to try a totally different model and practice the right of self-determination.

On 7th June, most of the political parties in Kurdistan representing all the ethnic and religious fabric of the Kurdistan society made a historical decision to hold referendum on the 25th of September. The Yes vote for independence in the referendum will give the political leadership a mandate to initiate a serious and peaceful negotiation with Baghdad over the timing and terms of the secession. While the Kurdistan Regional Government and its current President will pursue every justified

peaceful means to make the process amicable and avoid a unilateral declaration of Independence, they are determined that the will of the people, must be upheld and implemented. Our ultimate goal is to create a state which services its people and maintains good and constructive relations with Iraq and its other regional neighbors.

Dear and distinguished participants

The Kurdistan Regional Government since its formation in 1992 has been a reliable partner in keeping regional and international security. Our Peshmerga forces have made huge sacrifices to defeat terror and protect our people, despite all the security and economic challenges we have opened the doors and arms to more than 1,800,000 refugees and IDPs. We have been a factor of stability in the Region. The future state of Kurdistan will maintain this legacy and deepen this noble experience. The forced coexistence with our compatriots in Iraq over the past 100 years has resulted in wars, destruction and instability. An independent Kurdistan will close this sad chapter and open a chapter of development, respect for human rights and strengthened democracy.

We call upon all the peace loving people of the world and all the democratic and progressive forces to assist the people of Kurdistan to exercise their legitimate and internationally recognized right to self-determination. We do expect the esteemed organization of SI and its member parties to be in the forefront of adhering to their principles and to be supportive of the people of Kurdistan in this critical juncture of our history.