

# Yedidut

**News and Views of  
the Israeli Kurdish  
Friendship League**

Spring, 1996

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## News & League Information

Welcome to the first edition of *Yedidut*, the journal of the ISRAELI KURDISH FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE. By way of introduction, let us share with you a little of our history, vision and purpose.

The ISRAELI KURDISH FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE and THE KURDISH CULTURAL CENTER were founded at the close of 1993 in response to a long-felt need to coordinate Kurdish cultural and scholarly activities in Israel, a heretofore utterly neglected field of study.

With a Kurdish-Jewish population of at least 100,000, Jerusalem boasts the largest Kurdistan immigrant community in Israel. In Israel there are about 150,000 Jews of Kurdish origin. Many members of this ethnic community have expressed the need to explore the rich and varied cultural activities inherent in the diverse elements of the Kurdish community. The Sahraneh festival, held just after Sukkot in the autumn, is but one example of the rich culture of the Kurdish-Jewish people. The KURDISH CULTURAL CENTER was established to respond to the need for cultural, folkloric and scholarly activities. The Center will encourage research and publication of works which will deal with matters of Kurdish interest in a responsible and well-organized manner.

### GOALS OF THE LEAGUE AND CULTURAL CENTER

1. Our primary aim is to foster bonds of friendship, as well as cultural and scholarly ties, between Israelis and Jews on the one hand, and Kurds of all denominations (Sunni, Sh'i, Yezidi, etc.) on the other. This includes establishing relationships between cultural and research institutions in Israel and the Jewish world, and their Kurdish equivalents worldwide.
2. The league will support the establishment and maintenance of the KURDISH CULTURAL CENTER in Jerusalem..
3. The league will encourage research projects dealing with Kurdistan and Kurdish-Jewish culture, history, language and folklore through the establishment of a research institution, the hold-

ing of conferences, scholar and student exchanges, and the publication of books, pamphlets, and articles.

4. The KURDISH CULTURAL CENTER in Jerusalem will serve as a forum for scholarly and cultural exchange between Kurds and Jews/Israelis and among Kurdologists (scholars who study the Kurds) and students of Kurdology, both in Israel and abroad. Moreover, it will serve as a forum for publishing research and holding conferences on topics of scientific, cultural, folkloric, and social interest.

### **IKFL Chairman Addresses Parliamentary Group on Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia**

JERUSALEM (Israel Parliament Press Release, December 13th, 1994)

MK (Member of Kenesset) Ovadia Eli called upon the Israeli government to break its silence regarding the Kurdish problem, and help the Kurds in their struggle for independence. "Ignoring the Kurdish problem is a clear example of the application of double standards and is a stain on country's reputation," he said. MK Ovadia Eli and other parlia-

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ment members, said that the State of Israel and Jewish people, who have known persecution in the past, should raise the banner on behalf of the Kurds. These statements were made during a meeting of the Parliamentary Group on Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia, which MK Ovadia Eli chairs.

The group heard reviews by experts on the Kurdish issue: Mr Moti Zaken of the Hebrew University, the journalist Ron Ben-Yishai and Mrs. Ofra Banjo. The discussion focused on attempts to exterminate the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, as in the "Al-Anfal" operation in which more than 100,000 Kurds were murdered and over 3,000 Kurdish villages destroyed. During the course of discussion, a review was also presented on human rights violations in Iraq and Turkey.

The group announced its decision that "the persecution of Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Turkey should awaken the sympathy of the Israeli people and prompt their action on behalf of Kurds. We the Jews, who suffered persecution and the Holocaust, should be the first to act against the genocide of the Kurds."

The group called upon the Israeli government to do all in its power in the field of information level to help the Kurdish people.

This statement was approved by all the participants in the discussion. It was also mentioned that millions of words had been poured out - justly - regarding the destruction of a small number of Arab villages in Palestine at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel, but not one Arab leader or intellectual had said a word about the destruction of 3,000 Kurdish villages and the killing of hundreds of thousands of Kurds by the Iraqis.

## Jewish Kurds Killed in Jerusalem Bus Bombing

JERUSALEM

The Kurdish community of Jerusalem suffered badly in the first suicidal attack on bus number 18 in the heart of Jerusalem. Bus number 18 usually serves the neighborhood of "Katamonim," in the south of the city, which is the residence of most Kurdish Jews in the city. About 30 to 40 thousands members of the Kurdish community of Jerusalem live there. Six people out of the 25 murdered in this terrorist attack were sons and daughters of the Kurdish community of Jerusalem.

Katamonim is a typical immigrant neighborhood, occupied mostly by Jews from various Arab countries who came to Israel during the early 1950's. The neighborhood is also the home of many recent immigrants from Russia. Most of the victims were young soldiers and new immigrants.

## Do you have something to contribute?

The editors will happily consider contributions for publication. Content pertaining to Kurdish culture and history or to the Kurdish Jewish experience would be most appreciated. Opinion and dissent will likewise be reviewed. We assume no responsibility for manuscripts.

## Aid from Jerusalem Reaches Kurdish Refugees

MERSIN, Turkey

Over 400,000 Kurds live in the shanty town outskirts of Turkey's southern port city, Mersin. In response to the chronic public health problems of this refugee community, the ISRAELI KURDISH FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE offered to help establish a free clinic there.

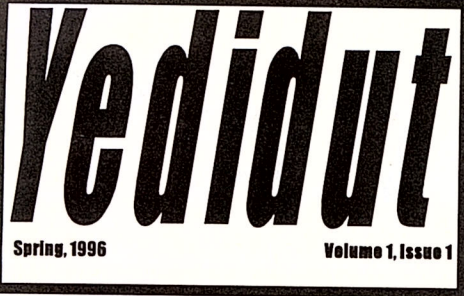
Beginning in January 1996, the IKFL will work with local Kurdish leaders to staff and supply the polyclinic, which will operate under the auspices of a newly formed autonomous Kurdish branch of the Educational and Social Foundation, a highly regarded non-profit organization in Turkey.

Responses to our request for funding, medical supplies and professional medical assistance are encouraging.

To give the clinic a good start., we held a special field treatment project from January 23 to February 3. This featured volunteer doctors using medicine and equipment donated from abroad.

The permanent clinic will be opened upon the completion of a government application process. Clinic directors plan to begin staffing the clinic and purchasing equipment by mid-summer.

In addition to the medical activities, foundation directors hope to develop a variety of relief programs for destitute Kurds. A high priority will be the provision of winter clothing for children and entrepreneurial assistance for displaced families. Many of the families come from agricultural backgrounds and have little hope for success in the city.



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On the other hand, the situation of the Kurds in Turkey has been getting progressively worse with the deepening of the military struggle and the constant political and cultural oppression of this minority, which numbers between 12 and 18 million souls in Turkey alone. Human rights abuses in Turkey have been the subject of a number of recent articles in the *New York Times*. The fate of the Kurds of Turkey has not been pleasant from the establishment of the Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923 until the present day. Over the past eleven years more than 14,000 people have been killed in the war being waged between the PKK and the Turkish army. Human rights organizations and independent journalists have continuously reported on the mysterious killings of Kurdish journalists and activists, a practice apparently sanctioned by the Turkish state. The destruction of hundreds of villages in the southeastern part of the country and other flagrant violations of such fundamental rights as the freedom of expression are also routine news items in the Turkish press. One of the most outstanding topics has been the case of the seven Kurdish members of parliament who were stripped of their diplomatic immunity, then imprisoned on charges of treason following a debate which took place on the floor of the Turkish parliament.

The situation is so bad that Abdullah Ocalan (Apo), the leader of the PKK, has called twice in the past year for a bilateral cease-fire. However, the Turkish government is following the lead of its hawkish chief of staff, who claims that "there is a military solution to the Kurdish question", and consequently a peaceful solution is far off.

For this reason it is particularly disquieting that Israel is taking part, albeit indirectly, in the spilling of Kurdish blood. This largely Muslim minority has seen in Israel an identity model, and has viewed the Jews as fellow victims of persecution. The PKK came out with a statement to this effect on the 50 year anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen Death Camp. PKK representatives with whom I met in London in September 1994 also expressed regret for PKK activities against

the Israeli army in the early eighties, at a time when they were supporting pro-Syrian forces inside Lebanon. They also said that they would be happy to see Israel use its influence over Turkey to pave the way toward a political solution to the Kurdish problem.

Killing cannot lead to a desirable solution. Turkey will ultimately learn this, but unfortunately only after Kurdistan has been made into a killing field will a political solution be reached.

(This article first appeared in *Ha'aretz*, March 26, 1995. English translation by Michael L. Chye.)

*Moti Zaken is the chairman of the ISRAELI KURDISH FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE. Mr Zaken teaches at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he continues to conduct research concerning Jews, Muslims and Christians in Kurdistan.*

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This REFAH does well. If Kurdish leaders can learn one thing from this election, it will be that talk is cheap and that actions speak louder than words.

For our part we will do all we can to sustain the life force of peace loving Kurds. They, including many within the PKK, look to the example of the Peace Process. They reason that if Arafat and Rabin can come to terms, surely they and the Turks can find a solution too. In our opinion, one key to keeping the hope for peace alive is a commitment to humanitarianism.

It is possible to practice positive politics that emphasize mercy over justice, focusing on what we can do and less on what others have done to us. We would be pleased for any Kurdish leaders to join us in this quest. More importantly, we are sure that the suffering Kurdish masses will be absolutely grateful.

*Matthew Hand is executive director of BIBLE LANDS ASSOCIATION, a non-profit organization working for the welfare of the Middle East through moral renewal.*