

**Presentations from members of the Australian Kurdish Community at
Parliament House Canberra on 21 November 2024
hosted by Senator Paul Scarr and the Hon Mr Graham Perrett**



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Why Kurdistan issues are International Issues

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Why Are Kurds Stateless?

Kurdish Issues are international in nature, consequence and solution. Kurds are an indigenous people in a region that was a birthplace for agriculture, writing, towns and monotheism, and a major crossroad of civilizations. For millennia Kurdistan's emirates formed a buffer between rival empires. It was only until after World War I, that an international decision rendered Kurds stateless.

The League of Nations made a tentative offer of a small territory in Turkey. Kurds rejected this. Their leaders were tricked by Mustafah Kemal Ataturk promising them autonomy in a bi-nation state, and the British promising the same for Iraqi Kurds. These promises were quickly forgotten after Kurdistan was sliced between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

Naturally Kurds rebelled. Each state's response? Bomb, poison, massacre, imprison, torture, forcibly displace, replace, destroy, ban the Kurdish language, dress, dance, music and literature. More rebellions, more persecutions. The cycle turned all four countries into militarised authoritarian states.

In the 21st century Kurds continue to be canaries in the coal mine highlighting the lack of avenues for non-state actors to achieve justice, which includes the politics of who is and who is not classified a terrorist.

This international decision that denied Kurds a state, that transformed the states that were created has had grave consequences, among them five major wars in the last forty years, Australia being directly involved in four of them! And it will require an international solution for 60 million Kurds to gain some form of self-rule. This can be in the form of a nation state or a series of autonomous regions. The latter is currently being tested.

Two Kurd-led Regional Administrations in the last 20 years

All those uprisings meant Kurds were sufficiently organised to take advantage of international crises. And they did. With support from powerful allies, Kurds have created two Kurd-led administrations in the last 20 years: A constitutionally enshrined, semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq and an unrecognised but internationally important Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, which I'll call Rojava.

Each region has its own parliament or council, public service, police, security forces, courts and prisons. Like the West, these administrations value the separation of powers and have laws and services to protect women and diversity. Most importantly they have proved strong allies of UN and US-led coalition forces.

But these statelets are being undermined. They are a threat to the status quo and are at the heart of a new 'Great Game', one made more complicated by the rise of militant Sunni and Shia Islam, as promoted by long-time rivals Turkey and Iran.

Now there's no doubt these statelets are works in progress. Isn't every democracy?

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Let's burrow down. This is a map of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In terms of peace and prosperity, by 2014, this region easily outstripped the rest of Iraq.

What did Baghdad do?

- In 2014 Baghdad cut all revenue and salaries to Iraqi Kurdistan, and refused to arm or pay Peshmerga fighting ISIS;
- In 2017, a month after ISIS was defeated in Iraq, Iranian QUD's General Qassem Soleimani led Iraqi and Iranian forces in US Abrams tanks, to attack and occupy oil rich Kirkuk and other disputed territories. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds were displaced. The elected Kurdish governor was replaced by a Baghdad appointee who immediately started re-Arabisng - bringing 600,000 Arabs to Kirkuk and giving Arabs government positions, houses and farms.
- In 2019, Baghdad slashed Kurdistan's share of the national revenue from 17 to 12 percent. And this is regularly withheld.

The biggest failure of the US-led coalition was not ensuring Baghdad implemented the 2005 constitution. One critical outcome is that Iraq has no independent federal supreme court to resolve disputes. The court is a rubber stamp of Shia Coalition rule.

- Since March 2023, after the Kurdistan Regional Government spent years investing and becoming indebted to oil companies to exploit new oil and gas fields, a dispute between Turkey and Baghdad shut down Kurdistan's fuel exports. The pipes remain shut. In 2024 Baghdad is demanding the Kurdistan Region hand over all oil and non-oil revenue.

Turkey conducts near daily military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan and the disputed territories claiming it is going after the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK, who escaped to the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s. Turkey's air and ground attacks kill and displace civilians, cause the evacuation of hundreds of villages and burn large areas of forest and farmland. Turkey builds military bases and then sets up checkpoints around a large buffer area to block entry of all residents, peshmerga and government officials.

These actions are causing a severe loss of trust in the Kurdistan Regional Government, which lacks the means to overcome the aggression of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Under so much pressure, a new generation of Iraqi Kurdish leaders are unwilling to resolve their disputes in person, Parliament, via transaction or arbitration.

Yet, despite these problems, Iraqi Kurdistan remains a haven for displaced people in all four countries. If this region's autonomy is dismantled, not only will the US-led coalition lose a foothold in and lever on Iraq, the Kurd-led statelet next door will not survive.

Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

The Semalka border crossing is a pontoon bridge over the Tigris River. It's the only route for people, international aid, trade and US military convoys into and out of Rojava that does not go through Turkey or Assad-controlled Syria. Facilities certainly need an upgrade. Perhaps Australia could help.

In the sixties and seventies Arabs were moved into northern Syria, while 300,000 Syrian Kurds were made non-citizens. Syrian Kurds helped Iraqi Kurds fight Saddam Hussein in the 1960s and 70s. In the

1980s and 90s, Syrian Kurds helped PKK fight Turkey. This means Syrian Kurds are as politically divided as Iraqi Kurds, despite all Kurds sharing one dream.

Syria and Iran label Kurds 'separatists' because Kurds want autonomy within a federal system.

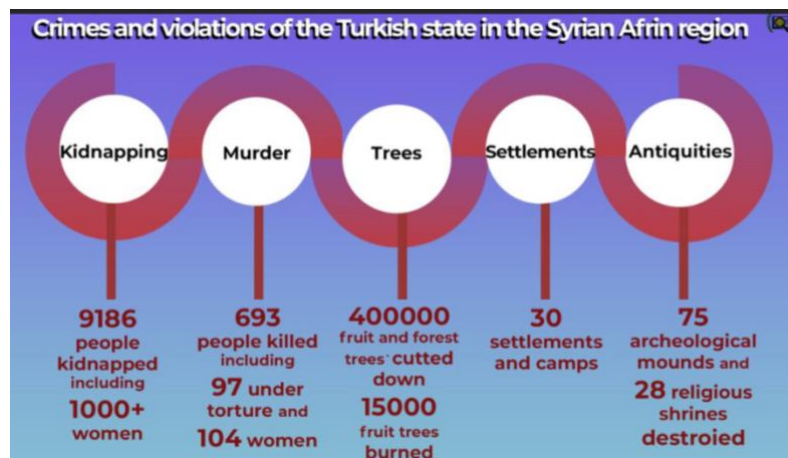
Turkey labels those who want autonomy in Turkey and Syria 'PKK terrorists'. Yes, some Syrian Kurds joined PKK, and yes, the current administration is attempting to implement a PKK-inspired grass roots democracy. But calling Syrian Kurds 'PKK', is like calling Australia 'America'. Syrian Kurds are focused on Rojava. They want peace with Turkey, and, having to put ideas into practice, and convince all ethnicities including conservative Arabs of their merit, is making them more pragmatic than PKK ideologues.

Despite overseeing a third of Syria's territory, despite their security forces working closely with the US-led coalition to fight ISIS, Turkey has successfully blocked their representation in all international negotiations on Syria.

In fact, in preferring to neutralise Kurds rather than ISIS, Turkey has launched three invasions:

- In 2016, Turkey invaded and occupied the Azaz-Jarablus-Al-Bab triangle.
- Two years later, Turkey invaded and occupied the Kurd-majority, ISIS-free Afrin. This displaced hundreds of thousands of Kurds and destroyed 4,000-year-old archaeological sites. Peace was replaced by destruction and anarchy, Turkification and Islamisation. Turkey has built 30 treeless Afrin 'villages', financed by Gulf States, to settle displaced Arabs.

These are the statistics of destruction for Afrin alone.



- In 2019, US President Trump cleared the way for Turkey to invade east of the Euphrates. The world watched on as Turkey's armed forces and Syrian proxies used phosphorus and other terror.

Turkey's armed and intermittently paid proxy security forces, include former Islamic State and al-Qaida fighters. When not killing each other, Turkey's proxies murder, rape, torture and kidnap people, confiscating properties, businesses and farm produce. They used to fight Assad. Now they fight Kurds. If Erdogan betrays them, they could well threaten Europe.

Outside Turkey’s three mini-Islamic States of Syria, Turkey and its Syrian proxies wage war on Rojava repeatedly bombing Syrian Democratic Forces, government officials and negotiators, as well as water pumping stations, power stations, hospitals, ambulances, schools, wheat silos, bakeries, roads, oil wells, refineries, and pipelines all servicing more than four million people. Turkey even bombs ISIS prisons to enable mass breakouts.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards and their proxies are also attacking Kurdish and US forces in Syria.

These are the flags of all those waging war on the Kurds of Syria while the international community remains largely silent.



Enemies of Syrian Kurds

TURKEY

This brings us to Turkey: a country sandwiched between Europe and the Middle East; a transit for oil and gas pipelines to Europe; a builder of dams that have flooded 14,000-year-old temples and towns, and control the flow of rivers into Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Thus, Turkey’s geopolitical importance has only grown. The State of Turkey has always been ultra-nationalist, but until 2002, it was secular. Under Erdogan, Turkey has become an Islamist, militarised empire-builder.

Among the four occupiers of Greater Kurdistan, Turkey is the worst for criminalising all things Kurdish, giving rise to the PKK’s armed struggle in the 1980s. However, between 2011 and 2015, Erdogan tried a new strategy: cultural recognition, the first bilateral ceasefire with PKK, and secret negotiations. This was to gain Kurds’ political support and smooth Turkey’s entry into the EU.

In June 2015 Turkey held national and presidential elections. A pro-Kurdish party’s unprecedented electoral success prevented Erdogan’s AKP from winning a parliamentary majority. Suddenly political solutions were off the table. Erdogan declared an end to the peace process and ceasefire, and announced a state of emergency, and a military offensive. Thousands of troops, tanks and heavy

artillery, along with F16s, helicopters and drones were deployed to 10 Kurdish cities and 39 districts. Round-the-clock curfews lasted 169 days. If a person - even a child - dared go outside to buy bread, they were shot dead. Turkey was starving people and destroying historic town centres. Two thousand civilians were killed. Half a million displaced.

By the end of 2016, Turkey had imprisoned 12 elected Kurdish parliamentarians, including Selahattin Demirtas, and 85 elected municipal mayors, along with thousands of council staff, journalists, lawyers, Kurdish language teachers, academics, writers and musicians. Many were given multiple life sentences for advocating peace. Elected Kurdish mayors were replaced by government trustees. Cultural and charity centres were closed. To this day, Kurdish mayors are being replaced by government appointees and people are arrested for singing Kurdish songs, playing Kurdish music and dancing in the street or at private weddings. Apparently, these activities 'spread terrorist propaganda'.

Since 2015, in the lead up to every national and municipal election in Turkey, pro-Kurdish parties are threatened with being outlawed; members are harassed, [arrested](#), or killed for being "members of an illegal organization" or "spreading terrorist propaganda"; and on election day, large numbers of soldiers and police are trucked into Kurd-majority towns to vote and intimidate.

PKK's armed struggle against the state of Turkey

Turkey's oft repeated arbitrary statistic that 40,000 people have been killed in PKK's armed struggle has not changed in three decades. More than half of that statistic are civilians killed by the state, while if you believe Turkey's statistics on how many PKK are being killed, each PKK fighter is a cat with nine lives. Belgium courts are the only recognised courts to have tested evidence that PKK is a terrorist organisation. They concluded that PKK and the state of Turkey are fighting a civil war.

Turkey's presence in Australia

In Australia, Europe, and the USA, Turkey's intelligence operatives spy on Kurds. In each country Turkey pays all Turkish Imams that preach. Even their sermons are written by Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs.

The speakers after me will talk about Iran. All of what they say applies to Turkey. The West attempts to hold Iran accountable, but is in denial about the state of Turkey.

INTERNATIONAL SOLUTIONS

The two Kurd-led statelets are vulnerable without international support, which has been significant. This international support, in which Australia has played a part, includes:

- A no-fly zone in Iraq,
- Overthrowing Saddam and supporting a federal constitution
- Bombing ISIS when ISIS threatened Erbil and Kobani long before helping Iraq fight ISIS;
- And paying, training and arming Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria to fight ISIS;
- In 2017, the US stopped Qassem Soleimani from invading Iraqi Kurdistan in 2017;
- And continues to pressure Baghdad to implement the constitution,
- while also devoting resources to building relations between the two Kurd-led administrations.

After all, it is the alliance with Kurds and their allies that curb the expansion of ISIS, Russia, Turkey and its Sunni proxies, Iran and its Shia proxies, and likewise, Iraq and Syria.

What international effort has failed to do is stop military attacks on Kurds, and embark on inclusive, monitored political negotiations, despite Kurds comprising 10 to 25 percent of each country's population, with Turkey having the largest proportion of Kurds.

I put to you, if these two statelets are destroyed, if Kurds in Turkey and Iran are given no cultural and political rights, people in all four countries will find themselves in an even worse hell, one similar to what Afghan women experience under Taliban 2.0.

To survive, Kurds need help to overcome military aggression and political divisions. Military support could include no fly zones, buffer zones and peacemaking missions, and/or providing suitable training and the means for self-defence. Kurds also need political support to develop independent arbitration and judicial systems, and actionable constitutions that can be implemented rather than wish lists. And Kurds need help to develop healthy private and civil sectors that have grass roots benefits.

The plight of Kurds highlights that the scaffolding of the post-World War II "global order" is no longer fit for purpose. The world needs international institutions with teeth that, when necessary, can bite, and when necessary, can be challenged by an independent judiciary.

WHAT AUSTRALIA CAN DO

While we wait for or play a part in building these institutions to mediate, arbitrate and hold state and non-state actors to account, Australia could implement effective policies at little cost.

1. Related to diplomatic representation
 - DFAT desks run by experts who have lived in the region they monitor, and who are not moved on every six to eighteen months.
 - DFAT Desks regularly meeting to discuss cross border issues such as Kurdish issues.
 - The relevant embassies and consulates considering in-country non-state actors, and likewise meeting to discuss cross border issues.

But there's more. ... Hang on, why should Australia care about Kurds? Well, Kurds have made Australia home since the 1970s. Australia has trade and other relations with Iraq, Iran and Turkey and Australian taxpayers have spent billions funding Australia's military and humanitarian operations in the Middle East. So Kurdish issues are Australian issues ... as they are American, European and Middle Eastern.

2. Using the internet or otherwise, Australia – alone, or with allies - could work with interested stakeholders to:
 - Build mechanisms for arbitration, good governance, impartial justice, innovation and international standards; and
 - Negotiate agreements between divided populations, as Kurdish Lobby Australia did this year with Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish administration officials and academics. KLA's report is presently contributing to a renewed effort of reconciliation.

- Provide a forum for Iran's diverse ethnic communities to discuss a pathway to a secular federal republic before monarchists hijack the debate.
- 3. Australia could collaborate with like-minded nations to develop effective carrot and stick approaches for the release of Selahattin Demirtas and push Turkey to embark on internationally supported peace negotiations with diverse Kurdish stakeholders, not only PKK ...
- 4. Lastly, interested Parliamentarians could form an informal parliamentary friendship group with Australian – Kurds to support peace and justice in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

I end by asking you this: Would our ANZACs who died in or survived Gallipoli prioritise an annual pilgrimage to remember them, or Australia helping a strong ally overcome tyranny?

**The Islamic Republic of Iran's Strategic Footprint: The IRGC, Quds forces,
Revolutionary Courts, and Regional Turmoil**

Presented by Baba Rezayi, Australian Kurdish social and political activist

It is a profound honour to be here today at this presentation. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have worked diligently to organize this important event.

Today, I would like to discuss the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, hereon called the IRGC, their actions against Kurds in Iran, the role of their Quds Force, one of five branches of the IRGC specializing in unconventional warfare and military intelligence and their interference in neighbouring countries, including Syria, all of which have broader implications for the region and beyond.

Before I begin, allow me to quote from the 800-year-old Charter known as the Magna Carta:

"No free man shall be seized, imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed, exiled or ruined in any way, nor in any way proceeded against, except by the lawful judgement of his peers and the law of the land. To no-one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay right or justice."

This quote resonates profoundly when we consider the Islamic Republic's violations against its own people and neighbouring countries.

A month after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, ordered the formation of the IRGC, saying, "A country with 20 million young people should have 20 million riflemen." This directive reflects the current state-of-affairs, where the regime relies on brutal force to maintain control, even as internal dissatisfaction and external pressures mount.

When we discuss the IRGC, we are talking about a military structure that implements the ideologies and directives of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It is notorious for its brutal suppression of dissent, targeting scholars, university students, journalists, and civil rights advocates. The 2022 "Women, Life, Freedom" movement underscores the stark contradictions between the ideals professed by Iran's leaders and the harsh realities experienced by the people.

August 17, 1979, is a sombre date for Kurds. On this day, Khomeini declared a jihad, or holy war, against the Kurds of Iran, simply because they sought self-determination. This fatwa directed the Iranian army and the IRGC to launch a large-scale military campaign in the Kurdistan region. According to Amnesty International, "Most of the Kurdish villages and towns were destroyed, and around 10,000 Kurds were killed. Thousands were sentenced to death after summary trials." These trials were held in Islamic Revolutionary Courts, each consisting of one judge, and no defence lawyer, the judge's conviction based on the defendant's confession gained under torture. Some prisoners did not even get a trial. They were simply lined up and shot inside the prison.

To this day, no independent investigation has been conducted into the massacres that followed Khomeini's fatwa. It is crucial to establish an international investigation, ensuring justice for victims. Regrettably, the response from Western leaders is often one of appeasement, despite the Islamic Republic not only suppressing its own people but seeking to export its revolutionary ideology to neighbouring countries and ultimately create an International Islamic Civilization. Appeasement raises important questions about accountability in foreign policy and international relations.

From Kabul to Caracas, IRGC interventions have been destructive. The IRGC has formed local militias in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria, joined by Shia recruits from Afghanistan and Pakistan, creating a network of paramilitary groups loyal to Tehran.

In the Syrian Civil War, the IRGC has contributed to 618,000 deaths, and the displacement of fifty percent of the population. Iran is using ongoing conflict to establish a long-term military and strategic presence in Syria, constructing military bases and storing weapons. The Western response has been the introduction of ineffective sanctions and a small US-led coalition presence in the north-east. Appeasement has enabled Iran to create a crucial land corridor from Tehran to the Mediterranean, with direct access to Lebanon and Hezbollah on the border with Israel.

Since Israel launched its operations in Gaza in response to Hamas attacks on October 7, Hezbollah has launched over 19,000 rockets into Israel, prompting Israel to target Hassan Nasrallah and his commanders. The current multi-front war illustrates Iran's manipulation of crises to extract concessions like conducting a 'prisoner' swap, or a reduction in sanctions, with Western nations, including Australia.

Like many totalitarian governments, Khamenei's regime uses external conflicts to divert attention from domestic unrest, shape public perceptions, justify internal policies of terror and repression, and consolidate power – in and outside Iran.

Integral to this agenda is the Islamic Republic's history of extrajudicial killings and assassinations outside Iran that have murdered over 160 Iranian intellectuals and political leaders. These assassinations are typically carried out by IRGC agents to suppress opposition and silence critics. A notable case is the Mykonos restaurant attack in Berlin in 1992, where Iranian agents assassinated Dr. Sadeq Sharafkandi, leader of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), and three colleagues.

The attack is a vivid example of how the Islamic Republic uses its diplomatic networks to facilitate acts of terrorism, while the ongoing legal efforts to hold high-ranking Iranian officials to account underscores the complexities of prosecuting state-sponsored terrorism. The decision by German courts to convict the killers highlights a commitment to justice and sent a powerful message that state-sponsored terrorism will not be tolerated.

Had Austria effectively prosecuted the killers of Dr. Ghassemlou, the previous leader of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, three years earlier, future acts may have been deterred. By allowing Ghassemlou's killers to escape justice, Austrian authorities fostered a climate of impunity, emboldening Iran to continue its extraterritorial operations. This poses implications for European security and rule of law.

But Iran adapts, and since the Belgian court conviction of Iranian diplomat Asadullah Assadi for plotting to bomb an Iranian opposition rally in France, Iran has shifted tactics. The regime increasingly relies on criminal gangs whose links to the regime are hard to trace. For instance, evidence suggests that Iranian officials have contact with Kinahan, one of the largest criminal cartels in the world. Such connections illustrate organized crime's reach and potential alliances, enabling the IRGC to more easily eliminate dissidents with impunity and significantly impacts regional security and international relations.

The Iranian regime also persistently ignores international law regarding hostage-taking. Recently, Iran has been accused of detaining dual nationals and foreign citizens on dubious charges, using them as bargaining chips in negotiations with Western governments, including prisoner swaps. This practice ignores human rights and undermines diplomatic relations and the rule of law.

Many analysts conclude that Iran's growing assertiveness across the Middle East is due to a lack of international measures to curb its behaviour. How much more evidence is needed for Australia to re-

examine the way it proscribes terrorist organisations, and for the IRGC to be the first state actor to be listed?

Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to assure you that Kurds will be reliable allies in any overthrow of the Islamic Republic, and the formation of a democratic secular government, ideally with a federal structure. The Kurds of Iraq and Syria have demonstrated this. Their regions are more stable than surrounding regions, and the people welcome Western inputs. Their commitment to a secular democracy makes these regions and people unique strategic partners.

To conclude, the path forward requires a clear recognition of the challenges posed by the Iranian regime and a commitment to supporting those who stand against tyranny. We hope Australia will commit to this stand to create a peaceful world administered by governments that do not discriminate between men and women, ethnicities or religions. In the Middle East, Kurds will be there to help.

Thank you for your attention.

Jin, Jiyan, Azadi – Women, Life, Freedom
Presented by Roonak Nederi Rad, Perth Kurdish Youth Society

Many of you may already be aware of the strict limitations placed on women in Iran, where choices around what we wear, say, work, or do are not choices that we can make for ourselves, but the Islamic republic makes for us. As for women in minority groups, these restrictions are much more severe. As Kurdish women we carry a double burden, persecuted not only for our gender but also for our ethnicity.

Our struggle is embodied in the powerful slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" which translates to Woman, Life, Freedom. born from Kurdish resistance and becoming a rallying cry during the Jina Amini protests in Iran in 2022, uniting people against the oppression of clerical rule.

Jina Amini, who you may know as Mahsa Amini, was killed by the Iranian morality police for supposedly not wearing her hijab "properly." But even in Jina's name, there is a story of resistance and by that I mean her parents called her Jina, meaning "life" in Kurdish but the Islamic Republic does not permit the registration of Kurdish names. Instead, she was forced to adopt 'Mahsa' for all official documents hence why we Kurds call her Jina as this is just one of many ways the Kurdish people are denied their identity.

Women in Iran face societal restrictions limiting their public participation, education, and freedom of expression. Cultural norms and legal barriers suppress their involvement in politics, sports, and certain academic fields, while activists and journalists risk harassment and imprisonment for advocating equality. Traditional Kurdish practices, including clothing, language, music, and dance, are also targeted, as the regime seeks to erase this heritage. Imagine, then, the risk involved in the simple act of teaching the Kurdish language. Zahra Mohammadi, a Kurdish woman and teacher from Sanandaj, boldly chose to educate children in her community in their mother tongue—a decision that led to a brutal 10-year prison sentence or;

- **Pakhshan Azizi**, sentenced to death, her primary "offense" was assisting women targeted by ISIS in Syrian Kurdistan during the crisis. Her efforts were focused on humanitarian aid and women's rights advocacy, which Iranian authorities construed as subversive actions.
- **Zhina Modarres Gorji**, a Kurdish journalist and activist, was handed a 21-year prison sentence for advocating for women's rights, participating in international workshops, and exposing societal injustices through media and protests.

I too have been subjected to the abuse of the Iranian authorities in Iran. The last time I went back to Iran, I took my Australian friend with me. She wore her scarf, covering her hair as best she knew. We were walking down the street when the morality police stopped us. Five women in capes emerged from their vehicle, grabbed our arms, and tried to force us inside while yelling slanderous comments, questioning our attire. Imagine this — we were both covered head to toe, with scarves covering our heads, yet it was not enough.

My friend spoke in English, showed her passport, and stated she was from Australia, and we were tourists. I pretended the same until we eventually convinced them, promising we would go straight home. That was the scariest moment of my life. If we had been dragged into that car, there was no guarantee we would come out alive. And women, especially Kurdish women face this possibility every time they leave their house.

In Iran, women constantly have to look over their shoulders, but is it fair that we face the same fear here in Australia? The Islamic Republic of Iran deploys agents who infiltrate communities worldwide, including here in Australia, often disguising themselves as ordinary members of society. Their objective is to identify activists like me who expose the regime's injustices. Once identified, they locate our family members back home and leverage threats against them to coerce us into silence.

Here in Australia, I have been stalked, I have been followed and I have been threatened that it is why I stand here today to say: we fled oppression—my father was imprisoned and tortured, and my uncle was publicly hung at 21, their crime? Simply being Kurdish. I ask you now, do we deserve to be oppressed here by this regime as well?

Each of us carries a story of persecution this is not just a struggle for Kurdish women. Our journey was not just a migration; it was a fight for the freedom to exist as who we are this is what Jin Jiyan Azadi represents, women's rights Jin, a right to life Jiyan, a life of freedom Azadi.

Thank you.

Iran's Threats to Rojhelati Kurds Living in Australia
Presented by Member of Australian Kurdish Society

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for your time today.

When reading the agenda for this presentation you would have come across the word "Rojhelati" as in "Rojhelati Kurds". Let me explain. The word 'Rojhelat' is made of two words – 'Roj' which means 'Sun' and 'Helat' which means 'Rise'. Together they mean 'Sunrise' and refer to the Eastern Part of Greater Kurdistan, the part that is currently under Iranian occupation.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Iran is a terrorist state which is actively engaged in terrorist activities. To back up this blunt statement here are some facts:

As well as sponsoring terrorist organisations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Hashd-Al Shaabi in Iraq and Hamas in Gaza:

On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students stormed the US Embassy in Tehran, taking hostage 52 American diplomats and citizens. With Ayatollah Khomeini's blessing these hostages were held for 444 days. Forced to wear blind folds most of the time, they were not allowed any contact with their loved ones or US officials. They were kept in a state of total uncertainty. Iran's practice of taking hostages to force favourable diplomatic outcomes has only increased since then.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian agents of the state have been implicated in assassinations and extrajudicial killings, domestically and internationally. They have targeted dissidents, political opponents, and individuals from different ethnic and religious groups.

Prominent examples include:

The Assassination of Kurdish Leaders Dr Ghassemlou, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, in 1989, in Vienna, and Dr Sadegh Sharafkandi, his successor, killed in Berlin in 1992.

In the last 20 years, Iranian agents have killed more than 500 Rojhelati Kurds living in the Kurdistan regions of Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Journalists and Activists have faced threats, kidnappings and assassination. In 2019 Ruhollah Zam, a journalist who founded a Telegram group with 1.4 million followers was kidnapped in Iraq and handed over to the Iranian officials. An Islamic Revolutionary Court sentenced him to death, this penalty being executed in December, 2020.

In 2020, the IRGC kidnapped Habib Chaab in Turkey and accused him of being behind a deadly attack on a military parade and a founder of a separatist group calling for independence for ethnic Arabs in Iran's Khuzestan province. He was executed on May 6, 2023.

In 2020, the IRGC kidnapped Jamshid Sharmad in Dubai. After being held in an Iranian prison for four years he was executed a few weeks ago.

You probably remember the case of Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert, an Australian - British academic who was detained by IRGC intelligence in September 2018 at Tehran Airport as she was leaving the country after attending an academic conference. She was subsequently convicted of espionage and sentenced to ten years in prison.

You may think that in Australia we are safe from the arms of Iran.
I am afraid this is not the case.

On 23 September 2023, 60 Minutes interviewed Tina Kordrostami, a young Kurdish woman in Sydney who had been harassed, stalked and threatened with kidnapping, death and being put in a body bag by Iranian agents. These threats were the result of her being active in protests during the 'Women – Life – Freedom' movement sparked by Jina Amini, a 22-year Kurdish woman who was killed by Iranian morality police on 16 Sep 2022. The program also interviewed Dr Kylie Moore Gilbert. Dr Kylie described the IRGC as having "no respect for human rights, no respect for the rule of Law or for democratic principles. They will kill, rape, pillage, and violate human rights to any extent they deem necessary to get what they want".

In the same program, Liberal Senator Claire Chandler confirmed that her Joint Standing Committee had received thousands of submissions from across Australia from individuals who claimed they had been followed on the streets or on social media and harassed by threats to their safety or the safety of their family back in Iran simply because they participate in peaceful demonstrations against the Iranian Government.

According to the same program, Ms Clare O'Neil, Minister for Home Affairs in 2022, had made a submission that this kind of foreign interference had become a bigger threat than terrorism.

Kurdish and non-Kurdish Iranians who attended peaceful protests during the 'Women – Life – Freedom' movement in Australia are now fearful of returning to Iran to visit their family because they could be arrested. They fear their assets in Iran could be confiscated and fear their loved ones in Iran could be harassed or threatened.

You may forget most of the details of what I have just said, but I ask you to take away one thing: Iran is a terrorist state which uses the IRGC to export its terror to every corner of the world.

So what can you do?

All of you, collectively and individually, as elected representatives of a democratic government have a professional, moral and ethical responsibility to discuss, decide and enact the most effective ways to curb IRGC's activities that go against all international laws and conventions. It's not good enough to say that Australia's criminal laws on terrorism only apply to non-state actors, that they don't apply to states. Both can be culpable of terrorism. It's time to change the system if it's no longer fit for purpose. Thank you.

Why an informal APFG with the Australian Kurdish community is beneficial

Presented by Zirian Fatah, Co-Chair, President Kurdish Lobby Australia

An informal APFG with the Australian Kurdish community could:

- Foster dialogue, understanding and cooperation through the dissemination of Issues concerning Australian Kurds, their life in Australia and how crises in their region-of-origin impact them and their communities in Australia;
- Foster appropriate government responses, programs and adjustments to current policies to benefit:
 - o Australian Kurds and other Australians
 - o Policies related to:
 - Immigration, e.g. identifying cohorts in need of special consideration such as Kurds from Iran living in Iraq; streamlining the processing of overseas spouse and other family reunions and holiday visas for family members);
 - Education, skills and professional development;
 - Social and cultural exchanges;
 - Australia's process in assessing an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation;
 - o Australian Kurds and other Australians
 - o International relations, tapping into Australia's diverse resources - human and non-human; and
 - o International institutions e.g. the UN.
- Support policy development in DFAT and relevant consulates and embassies to:
 - o Consider Kurdish/ethnic perspectives when dealing with Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey and in Australia's involvement in any UN or US-led coalitions;
 - o Identify and respond to the international nature and consequences of Kurdish issues;
 - o Hold regular joint meetings between relevant DFAT desks in Canberra and relevant ambassadors and consulate staff in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

Please note there are non-state (informal) APFs for Tibet, Palestine and Afghanis. Informal groups are less work than formal groups, in that informal groups are:

- o Not officially recognised or listed;
- o Flexible in structure with roles based on consensus;
- o Formed organically without official procedures; and have
- o Informal objectives focused on mutual interests; and
- o No formal rules, with operations based on mutual agreement.