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The Transformation of Iraq

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On behalf of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani I am very pleased to be with you today to participate in these very engaging discussions. I thank the sponsor, the Bertelsmann Foundation, for their initiatives and very attentive efforts in making these talks pleasantly possible.

My fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen

Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq, looks forward to becoming a full-fledged, integral, and equal part of a new, better Iraq - an Iraq where personal security, the rule of law, and genuine freedom prevail and will be sustained. Within itself and with our neighbors, we look forward to a new, better Iraq where all our societies will progress and prosper, together, in realizing their peaceful dreams.

Twice as a result of world shaking events we as a nation were brought to junction points where we were offered critical choices. There were the events emanating from the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, notably the Gulf War and its aftermath. Then, in late 1991 the regime liberated the Region by withdrawing its administration. They separated us from the rest of the country by establishing a militarized line. They abandoned us. An administrative and legislative vacuum was created.

It is the norm of human beings to organize themselves to secure the rule of law so as to protect lives, property, liberty, rights, and dignity of citizens. The democratic principle has been shown to have universal validity. We chose to hold elections (in May 1992), and to establish a parliament and regional government.

We did not choose to separate then. We do not choose to separate now. We struggled to function under the same structure and according to (most of) the same laws that prevailed throughout the rest of the country. Though we have occasionally faltered, we have been successful. This success was achieved without the fear, the repression, the oppression, and the cruelty and brutality the regime took to the heights of infamy. During the past dozen years the Kurdistan Region has had a different, separate, positive, governing experience. Freedom without fear became well established. Personal security and political stability became norms.

It wasn't always this way. And it didn't happen by itself. We did it, with the protection, help, and support of the international community, especially the U.S. and the U.K. We are indeed grateful. The relatively better lives of the nearly 4 million Iraqis in the Region are to your credit.

This year, 2003, is the other junction point, a much more promising one. We are again faced with critical choices. But we face the choices with hope, a hope that was unimaginable while the regime was in power. We thank the United States and the United Kingdom for their concerted, decisive action that brought all Iraqis to this junction point.

We support their efforts - their daily, life-threatened endeavors – in contributing to the creation of a new, better Iraq. We are deeply saddened by the ultimate sacrifices they have made, and that continue to be made. As the discussion paper suggests, we welcome U.S. forces staying in Iraq for a number of years in order to establish an inclusive and accountable political system.

At this junction point, we face the challenges of sustaining our gains, securing our fair share of the country's public resources, growing farther and faster economically, and contributing to the generation of a new, better Iraq. With hope, much hope. We must proceed carefully, quickly, and deliberately.

First and foremost, we have a history that cannot and should not be forgotten or ignored. We are constantly guided by it. This history must be recalled so that it is never ever repeated in any form and to any degree again, for any Iraqi, anywhere. I will not go into well-documented details of that history in this venue. Since the regime's fall, however, along with more mass graves, more details of the regime's genocidal behavior are being revealed almost daily.

As a country, transformation of Iraq begins and ends with the transformation of Iraqis as a people. Transformation cannot and will not occur unless and until the current, persistent state of denial is transcended. We are not a matter of oil and markets. We are matter of people, all the people of Iraq, including the people of the Kurdistan Region.

We will do our part and go more than half way. In moving toward a better future for all Iraqis, the Region looks forward to integrating with the rest of the country without losing the progressive momentum that has developed especially within the past five years.

We began a dozen years ago with the transformation of the political system. Since 1991, we have been reconstructing damaged communities, infrastructure, and the economy. We aim to continue, within a sovereign and independent Iraq that maintains its territorial integrity. Our *peshmerga* forces are dedicated to maintaining that sovereignty, that independence, that territorial integrity.

A new, better Iraq will not, and cannot, occur unless the interests of each and every area of the country are given full consideration. As I understand it, this is what representative democracy is all about. I've spent all my life in Iraq, much of it in Baghdad. My personal experience with democracy is based on one year studying outside the country. Basra is as important as Baghdad as is Erbil or Duhok or Suleimaniyah, as is every place and person around the borders and within.

"Inclusion" is a compelling watchword. But we as a nation cannot and will not accept token inclusion. We will not be marginalized. We will not be junior partners. The risks are too great. Our history tells us so. It's about security. We cannot rely on the international community to be our safeguard forever. We seek inclusion where we actually feel included, where we effectively contribute to national policies and strategies.

Regime change occurred only a very short three months ago. Rome was not built in a day and neither will Iraq be reconfigured in a year. Given experiences and impressions so far, however, it will take much longer than it needs to. Only Iraqis can make Iraq work for Iraqis. The US, UK, UN, EU, and others – can only help and support. Much of what we achieved occurred under very threatening circumstances. The Kurdistan Region is an excellent example of what Iraqis can do for themselves.

We invite you to visit us, see and talk around, and find out for yourselves. We are Iraq. Come. Get to know us. Start in Kurdistan to learn about Iraq, its friendliness and its substantial capabilities. Venture to Kirkuk and Mosul, less than one hour away. Baghdad is only a 4-hour drive to the south. Recently, U.S. forces transferred an Iraqi military airstrip to civilian control and we eagerly look forward to the establishment of international air service to facilitate your travels.

The Region's recent history, as many of you know, is about intense destruction, dislocation, disappearances, and disrupted lives. Since the 1960s, over 4,000 communities were destroyed - leveled! - including towns of 30,000 people and more. Recently discovered documents indicate the destruction had only just begun. The genocidal campaign would have gone much farther if it weren't for the events of 1990-1991.

The discussion paper speaks of an "oppressive and extremely violent record" and "a remarkable level of political violence." We look to a new, better Iraq that is transformed to a stage where such observations are inconceivable.

The Region looks toward pursuing the future of Iraq in close cooperation and collaboration with all Iraqi peoples everywhere in the country. The Region has a long way to go in reaching the aspirations of its people. Despite a good beginning, it still has only just begun.

Since 1991, over 3,000 of those destroyed communities have been reconstructed, and resettled by some 100,000 families. But another 100,000 internally displaced families and returning refugees continue to live in substandard conditions. Incomes remain so low that if free food distribution were stopped, 60% would not be able to feed themselves. We still have too much to do.

The centralization of attention and power that was the norm before April 9th - "4-9" - has been followed by another centralization of attention and power after the regime's fall. Today, as before, the focus on Iraq is all about Baghdad. Reconstruction efforts are excessively centralized in Baghdad. It would appear that the powers that be, including the UN, have decided that the rest of the country can wait, or is less consequential. Every Iraqi everywhere is a person of consequence. We Iraqis are a proud people. We do not accept being treated as lesser. We've waited long enough. Now, we need not wait any longer.

Last week's 105-page UN Humanitarian Appeal document is a striking example. It talks about Iraq as if the Kurdistan Region need not exist. There is almost no mention of the three northern governorates, a region the UN should know the most about because, there, ten UN agencies have been, for over six years, deeply involved in managing the largest humanitarian assistance program in the world.

Decisions on national policy and strategy are being made without considering the interests of Kurdistan, Basra, and other parts of the country. This is not inclusion. We look toward this state of affairs being corrected in the very near future.

It is not enough for Kurds and Arabs and Assyrians and Turcomans to claim, and say, they are Iraqis. We the people of the Kurdistan Region were not allowed to feel Iraqi on equal footing with others. We seek this transformation in the minds and hearts of our fellow countrymen, supported by the international community.

Recently, at the Global Summit of Women in Marrakech, the Iraqi delegation was requested to stand and be recognized. The audience acknowledged us enthusiastically. It

was very moving and I was very deeply touched. I felt Iraqi. These women of the world, from many countries, made me feel Iraqi.

I look forward to that same supportive feeling from my fellow countrymen. The transformation will not be easy. Again, there is a history, personal experience, long and deep feelings. It will take time before denial gives way to reconciliation, a process that has yet to be discussed, much less applied. But without it there will be no personal transformation. And without personal transformation there will be no inclusion. There will be no Iraq. It starts with us as a people, not with us as oil or as a market.

During the past twelve years, we in the Kurdistan Region have been transforming the living conditions of thousands of families who suffered under the regime. Thousands of houses, water systems, schools, health centers, and dozens of other projects pertaining to education, health, electricity, water, sanitation, agriculture, resettlement, demining (the Region has over 10 million landmines), and telecommunications. Though UN performance left much to be desired, the oil-for-food program was immensely helpful.

The march to war, however, curtailed the program. More than 500 million dollars worth of fully funded projects that were started all across the Kurdistan Region have been stopped and are not being completed. Another \$500+ million worth of approved and fully funded projects were not even started. We need the transformation of our economy the program was supporting. Iraq needs it.

We have always welcomed the involvement of the international community in the Region. The EU's ECHO, UN agencies, NGOs, ICRC, and bi-lateral assistance agencies (USAID-OFDA, ODA/DFID, SIDA, etc.), and numerous international NGOs have been extremely helpful and supportive. We are indeed grateful.

We need to move toward real resource accountability, and unambiguous transparency. Despite its positive impact, the oil-for-food program implemented by ten UN agencies in the Region was, regrettably, not up to acceptable standards. In this, the largest humanitarian program in the world, there were virtually no impact performance criteria being monitored, nor timeframes. The Security Council passed the resolutions, and then took an approach that served vested interests more, not the interests of Iraqis. UN performance needs to be reset to favor, first and last, the people of Iraq.

This is perhaps the only, certainly the largest, humanitarian program in the world supported by the beneficiaries. The international community via the UN holds our funds in trust and spends them on our behalf. To this day, we do not know accurately and completely the status of our money – how much exactly was earned and how much exactly was spent. There are questionable deductions for pipeline fees and oil spare parts. And there is the long outstanding matter of commercial bank interest on substantial unspent funds. How much is it? We have a right to clearly know where we stand.

The Marshall Plan provided \$13 billion, \$90 billion in today's dollars, to 17 countries. The oil-for-food program provided more than \$40 billion to one country. Despite the tremendous resources available, after more than six years, half the funds earned and earmarked for the Kurdistan Region remain unspent. Some \$4 billion worth of humanitarian goods and services have yet to be delivered. (One small example among many, and there are much larger ones: \$14 million allocated for medicines over five years ago remains unspent.)

We strive for a new, better Iraq. We also need a new, better UN. Our 12-year experience with the UN, especially the six plus years of the oil-for-food program, convinces and compels us to state that we cannot agree with the discussion paper's proposal that the EU advocate the supreme authority of the UN and the Security Council throughout the transition process.

Regarding federalism, our formal claim for a democratic, pluralistic, federal Iraq goes back a dozen years to October 1992, to one of the earliest sessions of the Kurdistan National Assembly, our parliament. Back then, the KNA declared the federal union of Iraqi Kurdistan with the rest of Iraq. We continue to stand by that declaration today. The communiqué of 4 October 1992 states:

Thus the parliament, in exercising its duties and its right to decide the destiny of Iraqi Kurdistan in accordance with international commitments and conventions, has agreed unanimously to specify the legal relationship with the central government of Iraq as one of federal union within a parliamentary, democratic Iraq based on a multi-party system and respect for human rights.

The parliament emphasized the legal principle of recognizing the right of the people of the Kurdistan Region to decide their own destiny and its mutual benefit to the Kurdish and Arab peoples. It also recognized the national, cultural, administrative, and constitutional rights of the Turcomans and Assyrians.

TRANSFORMATION OF IRAQ BEGINS AND ENDS WITH WE IRAQIS. AS IRAQIS WE MUST PURSUE THE FUTURE OF A NEW, BETTER IRAQ, AN IRAQ WHERE EVERYONE IS TRULY EQUAL, WHERE NO IRAQI ANYWHERE IS MORE EQUAL OR MORE IRAQI THAN ANY OTHER.

THANK YOU.