Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1150 (1991)[1]

Situation of the Iraqi Kurdish population and other persecuted minorities

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly notes that, after the provisional ceasefire which brought the hostilities between Iraq and the allied forces to an end at the beginning of March 1991, large-scale armed insurrection broke out in the country.

2. The Assembly further notes that the Iraqi army launched a brutal, deadly campaign to crush the insurgents, especially in the Kurdish provinces of northern Iraq.

3. The Assembly associates itself with the unequivocal condemnations by the international community, including those issued on 9 April 1991 by its President and by the Committee of Ministers, of the brutal repression, of genocidal proportions, carried out by the regime of Saddam Hussein against civilian populations and in particular some two million Iraqi Kurds. It is shocked by hundreds of deaths daily, especially among children, in the precarious conditions in the mountains of northern Iraq and in makeshift refugee camps established in the frontier regions of Iran and Turkey. Despite the praiseworthy efforts of these two countries and the international assistance received, the situation remains critical.

4. In view of the utmost urgency of bringing relief to these populations, it warmly welcomes the proposals before the United Nations Security Council, supported by an extraordinary summit of European Community leaders in Luxembourg on 8 April 1991, for the creation, as a temporary measure, in northern Iraq of safe havens (protected zones) for Kurds, under United Nations supervision. In this connection, the Assembly calls for the speedy deployment of adequate United Nations forces. It notes reports that Iraq is now co-operating with international forces in setting up the first of such havens in the Iraqi town of Zakho, near the frontier with Turkey, and trusts that such reports will prove well-founded.

5. The Assembly welcomes in this connection the departure from international doctrine on non-interference in a country's internal affairs and approves the establishment of the right of interference, as implied in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 and in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (of 9 December 1948), ratified by Iraq in 1959. It welcomes the adoption, on 6 April 1991, of that resolution which demands that Iraq immediately end repression and expresses the hope for ‘‘an open dialogue to ensure that the human and political rights of all Iraqi citizens are respected", so as to bring about conditions enabling the refugees to return to their homes. It strongly urges the Iraqi authorities to comply scrupulously with the fundamental humanitarian principles set out in the 4th Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War, which also apply in the event of a domestic conflict.

6. It considers that the terrible suffering of the Iraqi Kurdish population must prompt urgent decisions on new formulas, with appropriate guarantees, whether international or from the United Nations, for the defence and maintenance of their identity as well as that of other persecuted minorities, since the current tragedy provides further proof that the Kurdish problem has a political as well as humanitarian dimension.

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1. Assembly debate on 24 April 1991 (4th and 5th Sittings) (see Doc. 6422, report of the Political Affairs Committee, Rapporteur : Mr Soares Costa ; and Doc. 6421, opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, Rapporteur : Mr Cucó). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 April 1991 (5th Sitting).

7. The Assembly considers that the scale of the humanitarian problems posed by the exodus of the Kurdish population makes them a matter not only for Turkey and Iran but for the entire international community.

8. The Assembly considers that the Council of Europe, as such, must give concrete expression to its solidarity with the Kurdish refugees.

9. The Assembly therefore calls upon the Committee of Ministers, at its 88th meeting in Strasbourg on 25 April 1991, to seize the opportunity to take action on both its political and humanitarian responsibilities, in accordance with the principles laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights.

10. In this connection the Committee of Ministers should, in particular :

10.1. state the Council of Europe's commitment to the dignity of all human beings and to human rights by helping to finance a reception centre for Kurdish refugees and for other minorities ;

10.2. take steps to ensure that the international humanitarian organisations most closely concerned, and in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), are allowed free access to the areas in which the refugees are located in order to ensure their survival, and that Turkey, as a member state, may benefit immediately from the concrete support of the Council of Europe's financial instrument, originally created for just such emergencies, the Social Development (former Resettlement) Fund ;

10.3. invite the Council of Europe member states to grant emergency aid to international governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organisations to enable them to provide relief and protection for the refugees and further call upon the United Nations to give urgent consideration to the establishment of a capacity to provide a swift and adequate response to large-scale tragedies whether they are caused by political events or natural disasters ;

10.4. give its backing to a conference on peace and security in the area in order to provide international guarantees for the protection of minorities, in which the two superpowers and Europe must be involved.