

2012

The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan

Interim Report on Views Expressed on the Press and its Environment (2009-2011): Presentation of feedback and dialogue

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This document presents feedback from the presentation of our Interim Report on Views Expressed on the Press and its Environment (2009-2011), which was originally broadcast from the following links:

https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=explorer&chrome=true&srcid=0B_zP3I6J0nREMTUzYzMzYWMtMTMzOS00Y2QxLWFjY2MtMTA1MjNmMTg5OTI1&hl=en_GB (English language version) and https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=explorer&chrome=true&srcid=0B2aS7COqiXBgM2NjZjBIMmYtNzA4Ny00MDIkLWEwMjEtMmYzYzhkNDdIODk0&hl=en_US (Kurdish language version).

This document reproduces the original introduction explaining the research project and set of propositions which have been articulated by respondents regarding the press environment in the KRG controlled areas of Iraqi Kurdistan.

This paper presents comments from respondents to our call for dialogue. The responses to the propositions are clearly highlighted and serve as a basis for ongoing dialogue.

Please note that in order to uphold our responsibility to avoid reproducing defamation and in keeping with our aim of protecting the identity of contributors, we have sought to impose anonymity as much as possible and have continued with our primary task, the facilitation of dialogue and debate.

We continue to receive comments and feedback, are very thankful to those who have presented to us their understandings and welcome further communications.

We would be most grateful if further comments can be sent through to us by Monday, February 20, 2012.

Please send all comments to Dr John Hogan at the following address: jhogan@law.harvard.edu



The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan

Interim Report on Views Expressed on the Press and its Environment (2009-2011)

John Hogan and John Trumbour

When we announced our research project on “The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan” in the summer of 2009, we expressed the commitment to maximising dialogue and drawing upon the broadest range of perspectives possible. It is in this spirit that we have produced the following document, to act as an interim report on the major themes and contending perspectives on the state of the press and its environment in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan.

As reported elsewhere, it is thought that there are over 400 newspapers and magazines in publication in Iraqi Kurdistan (See, for example: http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf). Newspapers are produced by all of the main political parties, many NGOs and also by privately funded publishing houses. With the saturation of the market, doubts exist about the capacity of newspapers to survive from sales and advertising revenue alone. Newspaper journalism in Kurdistan has a long tradition, stretching as far back as 1898, when exiled Prince Miqdad Badrkhan established the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*. However, recently there has been an explosion of interest in the industry and an influx of many new contributors. There is some way to go in the development of professionalism and proper training. Political factionalism is never far from view and the task of gaining a good overview of what is going on in Iraqi Kurdistan requires a concerned reader to access several newspapers and to constantly be aware of potential bias in reportage.

In developing a clearer understanding of what is going on, the research team has mounted several research trips to Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus far, over 200 hours of interviews have been recorded. In addition, telephone and internet based exchanges add further to the rich archive of data. At the outset, we have sought the collaboration of journalists and newspaper editors. Over 80 journalists and newspaper editors have generously given up their time in face to face interviews.

In addition, we have sought the insights of academics and scholars from within and outside of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as from representatives and experts in the field of journalism and professional standards and training. In attempting to ensure an inclusive approach, the research team has conducted interviews and monitored the press in all three governorates of the region: Duhok, Erbil and Suleimania. In addition, we have observed and continue to monitor the interface between the press environment in Iraqi Kurdistan and the global media of the internet, foreign press coverage, opinion pieces and reports.

We realise that there are journalists and representatives of a number of press outlets who we have yet to have the pleasure of meeting. The next phase of the research project shall be concentrating upon gaining the views of politicians, law makers, lawyers and faith leaders. Nevertheless, we remain open to dialogue with anyone from the press, regardless of whether we have met previously or not. The aim is to make a number of field trips to Iraqi Kurdistan over the next few months and to present our final findings in early 2012.

The context within which this research project has been pursued has been extremely rich, dynamic and dramatic, to say the least. There is continued uncertainty about the future of a region which continues to develop rapidly but which faces immense problems and pressures both from within and externally, all in a context of unrealised national aspirations. Complaints of harassment and violence directed at journalists, the questioning of professional standards, electoral competition, the formation of new political blocs, litigation, legal and governmental reform and demonstrations have all featured largely in the presentation of the press environment. In addition, perhaps at a deeper level, challenges and retrenchment in the field of gender relations, consideration of the basic character and dynamics of politics, economy and society, deep seated concern about the legacy of internal conflict and genocide, the spaces for individual expression, the state of basic services, and the prospects for the future of all sections of society, in particular the younger generations, are all debates and discussions inescapable for those who are concerned to help the press realise its promise.

That promise is to overcome the dangers inherent in a degraded media environment. As we have pointed out elsewhere the task is, to use the language of the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas, to create a mature “public sphere”, a zone for “discourse” in which ideas are explored and a “public view” can be expressed. Or, to put it in the terms expressed by Roberto Michels, the challenge is to overcome the impoverishment of the masses in the field of communications and build access to information and knowledge, so that people may avert popular subordination to oligarchy, the rule of the few over the many.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, there is very little disagreement that the current state of affairs in the press is chaotic. Likewise, there is no doubt that the press has a vital role in generating a deliberative form of democratic citizenship. We have found widespread

agreement that newspaper journalism and the conditions under which it operates require reform. However, thus far there is an absence of consensus in the specification of the causes of the problems faced and in the definition of what is to be done. The media critics Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols have suggested that “a healthy journalism” should seek to achieve the following goals:

1. *It must provide a rigorous account of people who are in power and people who wish to be in power, in the government, corporate and nonprofit sectors.*
2. *It must regard the information needs of all citizens as legitimate.*
3. *It must have a plausible method to separate truth from lies, or at least to prevent liars from being unaccountable and leading nations into catastrophes – particularly wars, economic crises and communal discord.*
4. *It must produce a wide range of informed opinions on the most important issues of our times – not only the transitory concerns of the moment, but also challenges that loom on the horizon. These issues cannot be determined primarily by what people in power are talking about. Journalists must provide the nation’s early warning system, so problems can be anticipated, studied, debated and addressed before they grow to crisis proportions.*

(Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), pp. 163-164.)

By many measures, media institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan could do better in attaining these ideals. Below, we present propositions derived from our readings, interviews and correspondence. **We do not necessarily agree with these views** but we present them here for debate and to shed light on the kind of issues that are being discussed in relation to the press in Kurdistan. The views expressed are markedly different, at times in contradiction with one another. The reason we present these ideas is to stimulate a dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of the press environment and to explore the possibilities and perils for reform. It is the ideas expressed which matter. While we do not wish to align with any particular perspective, we consider the points to be worthy of consideration and possible comment, no matter how critical. With the aim of depersonalising the debate and out of respect for the sensitivities surrounding the debate over the future of the press environment, we have sought to protect the identity of contributors as much as possible. It is the ideas expressed that matter at this stage, and it is the reception and consideration of these ideas which we are most interested in hearing.

Feedback

We would be very grateful for consideration of the points made. Feedback will be invaluable assistance in our own voyage of discovery. But, more importantly, we hope that the points raised will assist in the development of more fruitful debate,

deeper understanding and provide the basis of recommendations for reform to produce better outcomes. We have sought out and received much commentary about the news and political journalism delivered by media institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan., But we also recognize that many readers seek newspapers for the coverage of business, sport, entertainment, and cultural issues, as well as to learn about breakthroughs in fields such as science, technology, and medicine. While we will remain focused on the press's contribution to democracy and ongoing political debate, we welcome reflections on media performance in many other arenas of activity.

If readers can examine the propositions below and provide responses or even suggest additional or alternative lines of interpretation, the research team would be most grateful. Please send all comments to Dr John Hogan at the following address: jhogan@law.harvard.edu

Propositions on the Press Environment (compiled from interviews and commentary from Iraqi Kurdistan)

Proposition 1

What worries many Kurds is the language that is being used is very provocative. It reminds those who witnessed it before of the language used in the press in the build up to and during the course of the fratricidal war. Violent and abusive language produces effects. It is essential that everyone remembers the mistakes of the past and avoids repeating those mistakes.

Responses to Proposition 1:

A:

It is right to warn against the problem of confrontational language. It is important that Kurdistan remains united and that this unity is created through dialogue. It has been disappointing that your call for dialogue has not been widely broadcast in the Kurdish media. If people are interested in building a future based on dialogue I would have expected them to seize the opportunity to broaden the discussion out to as many people as possible. We need a consensus where we can all win. Kak Nechervan Barzani, who has returned to the post of Premier, has pointed the way forward. On January 23 his Facebook message to the people (see: http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=197131133718773&id=108672275897993) was widely broadcast in other media, including newspapers (see for example: <http://www.awene.com/Direje.aspx?Babet=Hewal&jimare=16924>). He emphasises the importance of the strategic alliance between his party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), celebrates the

work of the outgoing PM and calls for maximum consensus and unity with all the major political forces in Kurdistan. He acknowledges shortcomings and calls for a constructive approach towards strengthening the nation and improving the situation in Kurdistan. Creating a media sphere which is committed to better outcomes requires dialogue about the best way forward. In future, it is hoped the call for dialogue is taken seriously.

B:

It is true that there is a culture of violent language, but the law does not punish journalists attached to the two main parties. They are not blamed for their provocative language, whereas those who are writing critically about the authorities stand condemned. The culture of violent language started with the newspapers of the two main parties and there is a culture of using violent language, which is held on to because if you do not use violent language people will not listen to you.

C:

The issue of violence is very important to explore in detail and in particular its relationship to the political culture of Kurdistan. The idea that differences can and should be resolved through the threat or exercise of violence is very limited. Open displays of violence are signs of weakness. Power is best exercised through the art of persuasion and by the demonstration of virtue. The ability to convince through records of achievements, by demonstrating reliability over time and by communicating good deeds is the best route to leading the nation. Brute force, whether in word or deed, is always more brittle and less effective than the "soft power" of persuasion.

Proposition 2

The use of language has become increasingly emotional. Emotions are raw and passionate, but not compassionate. The language that is used is too often violent, with no sign of a wish to engage in dialogue, to make things better. To be opponents does not necessitate being enemies. Kurdistan needs dialogue. The war of words does not help to promote the rule of law or respect for the institutions of governance which are still in their infancy. The use of street language inflames tensions and often deflects attention from addressing pressing challenges for society.

Responses to Proposition 2:

A:

This emotional use of language is true. It is dangerous. It seems that people have

not understood how to conduct politics and how to govern. They are only interested in things that represent their own interest and in that way it leads them to be against reform and democracy.

B:

'Infancy' is a term which the KRG and the ruling parties frequently use as an excuse for all the shortcomings. This is when the government is 19 years old. I don't think the use of this word is appropriate at all.

C:

Alarmist headlines are used to attract attention, increase sales, but also scare people. The question is, to what extent do the headlines used reflect reality? What is the evidence, how is the data arrived upon and is it the case that authoritative research sources are used to support claims made? There are doubts about the extent to which some journalists have the appropriate training and education to evaluate data and to present credible, scientific research to support the claims that they present to the public.

Proposition 3

It is important that politicians and officials take time to answer questions. It is a good idea and reasonable to ask that journalists provide written questions prior to interview. It is also a good idea if interviews are recorded. There is a tendency to feel compelled to answer questions immediately and to provide the impression that officials should be able to answer any question that may be posed. This is a mistake. There is no shame in admitting that an answer may not be available immediately. It is better to give and to get a considered answer rather than one forced out under pressure or because vanity insists that one is always in a position to deliver judgment. If journalists are really concerned about uncovering the truth they will understand that the best answer may take a little time.

Responses to Proposition 3:

A:

Journalists spring questions to embarrass politicians, to give them an examination. In Kurdish culture, those in authority must know all the answers. Politicians don't have time and are busy. But they also lack professionalism. There is the tradition of political power being exercised through word of mouth, for understandable reasons. Many politicians take their authority from having been good fighters and

commanders and journalists sometimes seek to demonstrate what they see as their own educational superiority by trying to humiliate those in authority.

B:

It is the case that some politicians boycott journalists who work with opposition, opponent and independent media groups, because they are critical and do not hesitate to expose the failure of such politicians- not always in a professional way though. Traditionally, politicians in Kurdistan do not like to be criticised and exposed to the public eye- they are used to being praised and held up to the position of heroes from the time when they were Peshmergas. They get nervous and refuse to answer questions and when an opportunity occurs, journalists want to know all, asking all kinds of questions and report them subjectively rather than objectively.

Proposition 4

The government need to reinvent themselves. They need to be confronted with the truth rather than flattery. When the press raises legitimate concerns they can help the government and society to reach better outcomes. *Awene*, for example, had such an effect, when the paper published concerns regarding an electricity project.

"I would like to send you the details of an electricity project published in Awene, based on documents from the KRG.

The first story was published on Awene's front page (printed edition) on May 5th 2009. You can see that on this link: <http://www.awene.com/Rojname/171/1711.pdf>

One day later (i.e. on May 6th), the same story was published on the Awene web page with a scanned document. You can see it on this link: <http://www.awene.com/Direje.aspx?Cor=1&Babet=Hewal&Jimare=3614>

After that, the Attorney General in Sulaimaniyah started an investigation. Finally, the Court in Sulaimaniyah forced the people involved in the project to return 18 million 750 thousand dollars to the KRG. You can see this story in the printed edition on March 23rd 2010 (again based on Courts documents), please visit this link: <http://www.awene.com/Rojname/216/2161.pdf>"

Responses to Proposition 4:

A:

You have mentioned *Awene's* report about 18 million USD as a possible point for KRG. It is true that the money came back to Government's pocket, but the high official who has stole the money is still free, refuses to go to the court and no one is and/or can do anything to him. While there is a clear judge decision to bring him to court.

B:

Hawlati, Lvin and *Awene* suffer from poor sales. There are many articles on Kurdistan.net regarding the “liberal press”, with the claim that they “sleep in the bull’s ear”, meaning that they concentrate on local issues and ignore or miss out on the wider picture. The papers are not liberal, not independent and are told what to write by political power. There are many articles that discuss the falling sales of the papers.

C:

The fact of the matter is that not one single senior politician has been tried and convicted for corruption in Kurdistan. When that day comes then the public would see fairness and justice and have restored faith and trust in their leaders.

Proposition 5

There are some people who think it is profitable to feed pictures and stories to give the impression that Kurdistan is a repressive, brutal place. International NGOs are courted and fed. Little attention is given to the fact that Kurdistan Region remains part of Iraq, is enclosed on all sides by hostile states, yet displays far greater levels of press freedom, significantly lower levels of violence and is relatively speaking a space of peaceful coexistence for different religious and ethnic communities. These are great achievements. Yet, Iraqi Kurdistan region seems to be targeted for special negative attention. Why?

Responses to Proposition 5:

A:

This seems to make an excuse for KRG. After all the recent attacks on journalists, writers, activists it is misleading to say that Kurdistan is not a violent place full of terror.

B:

According to a report by Metro Centre, which was reported on in *Awene* on November 1st, the year 2011 was unprecedented in the history of the Kurdistan region for the "violation of human rights of journalists"....the violations include arrest, threats, kidnapping, burning down TV headquarters, these are all violating the Media Law.!.. the report gives some examples of these violations.

Proposition 6

The Human Rights Watch report produced in May 2011 raised a number of important points (See <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/24>). However, the claim that the KRG is no better than the Baathists was a disaster for all concerned to promote civil liberties and human rights. The highly respected scholar Professor David Romano explored the absurdity of such a claim in an article for *Rudaw* (see: <http://rudaw.net/kurdish/index.php/opinion/6615.html> or <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/columnists/3737.html>). HRW has lost credibility. Kurdistan needs assistance. Expertise is to be welcomed. But, if expert opinion is exposed as biased and wildly wrong, then any forces which prefer to disregard human rights will have more space to operate and less reason to fear condemnation. With HRW (and this also applies to some other international NGOs), when they lose credibility the force of their work is lost. They now have considerable difficulty in advocating for human rights. International NGOs need to do their job properly and for everyone in Kurdistan to help them do their job properly.

Responses to Proposition 6:

This is a fair and good point.

The comparison between Kurdish authorities with the Ba'ath regime is not fair, especially by an international NGO official. However, one should say that some people in Kurdistan are so unhappy that they do not hesitate to articulate this statement. The question to ask is, why and what has gone so wrong that such inappropriate terms are used to describe the situation in Kurdistan? The answers to these questions require reflection and deep analysis.

Proposition 7

To characterise Iraqi Kurdistan as totalitarian is a school-boy error. A totalitarian state is one which has mastery over all of its territory, conducts extensive surveillance, permits only one reading of reality and banishes opposition, whether that be in the form of competing political parties or through freedom of expression. Kurdistan has problems, no doubt, but totalitarian it is not. In fact, to claim that totalitarianism is a suitable concept for understanding the reality of Kurdistan is an obvious performative contradiction: if someone truly believes that they live in a totalitarian society then they need to explain how it is possible for them to express dissent. What is more, as a starting point for analysis the concept of totalitarianism is

frequently used to deny the possibility for reform and therefore dialogue. Kurdistan has problems that need to be addressed, but these problems need to be approached with properly thought out concepts which reflect reality rather than the fantasy or cheap propaganda of self-appointed intellectuals.

Responses to Proposition 7:

A:

This is true but the authorities only consider its members and supporters and these monopolise all the commanding heights of society.

B:

This is rather misleading when the KRG uses the independent press and the opposition merely as a cosmetic thing to look good. None of the opposition's demands and suggestions have been accepted in government or parliament and since they are a minority none of their projects are pushed forward making them powerless and redundant. As Nawshirwan once said: What is happening now is an unannounced civil war when many members of Change have been made redundant, their centres have been attacked and masked men attack media channels (TV, radio, newspaper) and individuals.

Proposition 8

To understand what is happening in Kurdistan, it is important to recognise that, for many, journalistic practice is a way to find self-expression. In Kurdistan the individual is subordinated to the collective. The older generation live with the collective memory of the Iraqi dictatorship and how that necessitated silence. Today, the space is open and journalism is a mode of self-expression. The quality might be poor but it is a source of joy that so many people have the opportunity and feel free to speak.

Response to Proposition 8:

We have had a period of free expression, but today the media environment and the situation of journalists has deteriorated.

Proposition 9

Some “journalists” deliberately write provocative and controversial articles, or make up stories about being harassed or beaten. It is all too easy to fabricate acts of cyber-abuse or threats from “unknown” mobile phone numbers. To broadcast tales of abuse improves chances when wanting to gain visas, or migrate and claim asylum in Europe or America. Professionally, to be on the receiving end of repression can also be used to construct images of martyrdom, to draw attention and to inflate importance in the eyes of the crowd.

Politically, to be able to identify abuse and threats with one political party has obvious advantages for their opponents. False claims about brutalisation divert attention away from real acts of violence and intimidation. When arbitrary detention, physical abuse and threats occur, it is right and proper for these to be reported. The exercise of extra-judicial violence weakens Kurdistan and is destined to fail. Consent cannot be manufactured out of intimidation. But, to make false claims or to exaggerate makes the abuse of power harder to confront.

Response to Proposition 9:

It is absurd to deny all the abuse and torture that has been going on over the last few months.... To present this view and say that such things are fabricated and people do it because they want to obtain visa or become martyrs in society is simply unjust and untrue. I am surprised as to see none of the victims presenting their point of view. It would be interesting to find out if any of the victims have sought asylum or become a hero on ‘false claims.’

Proposition 10

Making sure that journalists can conduct their work free from harassment must be a priority for the authorities. Attacks upon journalists do nothing but degrade the media environment and presents a very bad image of Kurdistan. A number of international NGOs, newspapers and journalist organisations have claimed that the rights of journalists have been violated in Kurdistan and that the situation of journalists has deteriorated in Kurdistan since February 17, 2011, the date when demonstrations began in Suleimania and ended in violence. The finger of blame is pointed at the authorities, who amongst other things are accused of failing to pursue investigations and bring to justice those responsible for attacks upon journalists.

Response to Proposition 10:

Words such as ‘claim’ and ‘accused of’ defend the ruling parties and present facts as if they are points of view which need to be proved. There is no doubt about the

ruling parties being responsible for the violence and murder and for not bringing perpetrators to justice.

Proposition 11

The physical attack upon Asos Hardi (director of the *Awene* Press and Publishing Company, which publishes *Awene* in Iraqi Kurdistan and a member of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa advisory committee) on August 29, 2011 was a disgrace. As Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said: "Kurdish authorities should act decisively to bring whoever is behind this attack to justice." The President of Kurdistan intervened to condemn the attack as did PM Baham Salah. Asos Hardi is a very well respected player in the newspaper industry. Anyone who knows him knows that he will not give in to intimidation. He and his family are very well connected to all the main parties in Kurdistan, at the highest level. The attack upon him is a force for destabilisation. It increases tension. Thankfully, the authorities have acted swiftly and an alleged assailant has been arrested. Asos Hardi's newspaper acted responsibly too, when the story of the arrest broke on Tuesday, September 6, 2011. *Awene* indicated that it had information that a member of the PUK politbureau was involved in organising the attack. The paper refused to implicate the party as a whole, stating that the crime was an individual act, and also declined to name the individual concerned so as not to pervert the course of justice.

Response to Proposition 11:

To end the proposition where you have ended seems to suggest that the problem has been solved. Yes, the president condemned the attack but after it became obvious that{name supplied but omitted in the cause of avoiding the charge of defamation} was behind the attack the president took him along to the UN meeting soon after. He was sitting behind Talabani in the session, although he has no role to play there. It was an obvious sign that he protects him..... On the other hand{name supplied but omitted in the cause of avoiding the charge of defamation} who ordered the attack, was released on bail. The driver who first confessed to{name supplied but omitted in the cause of avoiding the charge of defamation} involvement later claimed that he had been forced to confess by beating. *Awene* published an article [Shwan Mhamad's] and stated that they would drop charges against the person behind the attack if only he confesses to the truth. This was an attempt at truth and reconciliation which I personally believe is in vain. [name supplied but omitted in the cause of avoiding the charge of defamation] has now filed a lawsuit against Shwan for implicating him, even though Hawlati had named him and Shwan had not.

Proposition 12

Iraqi Kurdistan is under immense pressure at the moment and there are a number of forces who are actively seeking to destabilise the region. There are disputes with Turkey and Iran. The PKK and PJAK are being urged to take the road of peace. There is pressure from the south and there is always the spectre of militant Islam. With such forces for instability at play, the authorities need to be on heightened alert. The targeting of prominent and outspoken journalists destabilises a nation that needs to remain unified in the face of adversity. Perhaps it is time for the authorities to consider providing personal 24 hour security for prominent newspaper editors and journalists, so that the irresponsible or possible agent provocateurs can be held at bay?

Responses to Proposition 12:

A:

This is a fair and good point.

B:

The KRG need to strengthen the people and provide them with a dignified life through dignified politics. This is the only way to face outside threats. People need to feel that they belong, that Kurdistan is their home. The people are the only bastion against outside threats. Careless politics creates a careless and indifferent people, making the nation weak.

Proposition 13

No one should and can deny the force of the cleric, party leader, journalist or even street protester. But the question that arises is, how far if at all can power be legitimately exercised in the face of parliamentary and governmental authority, which after all derives legitimacy from popular mandates endorsed by a multitude of international electoral monitoring groups? It is obvious that an official who misuses political connections to secure material advantage is acting outside the law and is thereby undermining the authority of the law and the institutions which validate those codes. But it is also the case that clerics who act outside of the law with proclamations and judgements which run against statute are infringing upon the proper working of the democratic process. Likewise, those who use and promote violence in pursuit of street protests have difficulty in maintaining democratic credentials and pretensions. It is the responsibility of all to consider rationally the limits and possibilities for

the exercise of extra parliamentary power. The institutions of Kurdistan are new. There is a great deal of inexperience when it comes to building a democratic society. Careful consideration is required.

Responses to Proposition 13:

A:

It is not only the institutions, but also the politicians who show their inexperience and inability to show concern and build democracy.

B:

I believe that if senior politicians respect the rule of law, people will follow their example; they can be used as role models and good examples. If they are seen violating the law they undermine the notion of justice and their status as well as power in the public perception. Also, when the law is not followed, it is not difficult to see how Clerics and even the public will feel free to reproduce such a mentality and practice.

Proposition 14

The protests which started in February 2011 began peacefully and expressed legitimate demands for reform. But, when a minority of demonstrators were led on a provocative and violent attack upon KDP offices in Suleimania a series of further violent confrontations were sparked and raised tension considerably across the region and in Suleimania in particular. The attack on the KDP offices raised the nightmare of the fratricidal war. As Ata Qaradaghi pointed out, it is no secret that the KDP is marginalised in the city. The administration of the city lies in PUK hands. If the violence was rage against symbols of authority or the mismanagement of the city, then it was misplaced. The KDP cannot be regarded as primarily responsible for how Suleimania is governed. Yet it was the KDP which came under attack. How could this possibly be justified? It is evident that despite the strategic alliance between the KDP and PUK, there remain unresolved grievances and bitterness which live on after the horror of the fratricidal war. With such a history and potential for an explosion of anger, it is clear that security forces require training in crowd control and that protests are managed properly, with stewards and organisers taking their share of responsibility for orderly conduct.

Responses to Proposition 14:

The feeling is that the KDP is the true power and people do not forget the blockade on Sulymanya imposed from 1995-97 during the fratricidal war, which caused great poverty in the city.

Proposition 15

There are genuine concerns regarding corruption and nepotism, ones shared by many across the country. It is good that the President announced that it was not enough to talk about tackling corruption. Instead, action needed to be taken and seen to be taken. The KRG has taken steps, but these have not been highlighted or sufficiently well broadcast. Now is the time for action. But there are many other important issues which cannot be ignored. The situation in Kirkuk, where Arab chauvinists have been active, has dictated the need for the deployment of more Peshmerga forces. This is all the more pressing, as Iraq and political factions and sections of society prepare for the withdrawal of US forces. It should also be noted that protests, while legitimate in so far as violence is avoided, have been seized upon by forces both within Kurdistan and outside, for their own narrow anti-patriotic ends.

Responses to Proposition 15:

A:

All the committees that were convened to tackle corruption have been dismantled or handicapped... Rafiq Sabir who was head of Lijney Nezaha (Integrity committee) resigned and stated that the committee didn't even start its work; it was redundant from the beginning. When such committees, such as Chawderi Darayee, have produced reports and submitted them to the parliament nothing has been done about it.

B:

Recently another such committee which named[names supplied but omitted in the cause of avoiding the charge of defamation] for investigation was dismantled by the minister of justice (and this article was the reason why Asos Hardi was assaulted).

C:

It is comic to say steps have been taken by the government but they have not been well broadcast. The government, both KDP and PUK, have the largest media machines at their disposal. They can well advertise anything they want. It is also comic to use Kirkuk as an excuse when KDP and PUK are responsible for its loss to the Arabs. They acted irresponsibly after 2003, still fighting for influence against each other, never presenting a unified front and being too meek when it came to the implementation of the article 140, etc. Also, Kurdistan's internal problems cannot be put on hold forever because of Kirkuk. It is just an excuse.

Proposition 16

The protest movement was presented in Kurdistan and amongst their supporters further afield as the expression of human dignity and freedom. But let us consider the following. When Sherko Bekas called for religious tolerance during a talk to protesters in Suleimania he was greeted with criticism. When it came to the commemoration of Anfal, people started to shout at speakers who questioned the supposed solidarity of Saudi Arabia towards the Kurds and pointed out that the bearers of conservative Islam were silent when the Kurds faced genocide during the Anfal. Tolerance and dialogue were also absent in the treatment of Farhad Pirbal. He went to Suleimania to engage in dialogue with the protesters but was excluded. Some Kurdish Mullahs even called the protests a jihad. These incidents would seem to indicate that a significant section of the movement has a weak attachment to human rights or tolerance. It is perhaps no surprise that the use of Islamic rhetoric alienated some of the protesters and resulted in dwindling support. If the press is to promote human rights then it is necessary for journalists to debate honestly what they understand by the term and not hide behind the rhetoric of liberalism in order to promote narrow political agendas.

Response to Proposition 16:

It is true that Islamic rhetoric alienated some of the protesters and resulted in dwindling support. It is the role of the leadership in Kurdistan to educate people about human rights, to respect difference and tolerance. People have been infantilised for so many years and they behave in an immature way. Part of the process of educating the public must involve acknowledgement of how past conflicts and confrontation between the two main parties contributed to the space that opened up for political Islam.

Proposition 17

Following the death of Jawhar Namiq Salem, who had just died in hospital in Sweden where he had been receiving treatment for cancer, *Hawlati* newspaper carried a story on March 23, 2011 claiming that the former speaker of Parliament had been poisoned. Even though no verifiable evidence was produced to support the story, and as family members disputed the story and the fact that an assassination through the use of poison would have been easily uncovered by the Swedish medical authorities, the paper continued to promote their claims. This story was released during a very tense time in Kurdistan. It might easily be interpreted as a high profile attempt to stir up suspicion and conflict. If the story was true, then of course it deserved to be published. But with no evidence and the absence of credible circumstances, in particular the fact that Jawhar Namiq Salem died under the medical care of Swedish health professionals, then one is confronted by very curious editorial judgement. There are other examples of provocative and irresponsible journalism. There have been attempts to suggest that Arab troops were deployed in Suleimania and that protesters had been subjected to the same gas as used in Halabja. When false claims are made, the whole of society is undermined, left without reliable sources of information with which to make rational judgements.

Response to Proposition 17:

A:

The “independent” newspapers appeared at a time when there were only two discourses dominating the public arena: one by KDP and the other one by the PUK outlets. Papers like *Hawlati* and later *Awene* challenged the orthodoxy of official media. They have made mistakes, but their emergence has to be applauded. In the current situation, it seems that educating and training of journalists is an urgent matter in Kurdistan.

B:

There was an interview with Kemal Mirawdeli conducted by Ali Fatah which appeared in *Chatr* on November 30th 2011 (http://issuu.com/chatr/docs/chatr_82). In this interview Mirawdeli says that there are no “independent” newspapers in Kurdistan. He states that the “independent” papers publish useless articles and do not care about the everyday lives of the people. In reality, they act as the shadow

media for Goran. The Independents do not have much support. They are quieter than before. That is why the editors of the independent newspapers met Talabani, according to *Cawder* newspaper

(<http://www.cawder.org/yeke.php?besh=Nusraw&perrqe=nusraw&nujimore=21926>).

The papers do not have many readers. Unfortunately, while other Middle Eastern nations had uprisings for freedom, the opposition in Kurdistan used the demonstrations of people in Kurdistan in a bad way- they used the demonstrations to secure their budgets from the government, but by doing this they empowered corruption and made people servants of budgets and salaries. Mirawdeli says the opposition has made people slaves of salaries.

These views from Mirawdeli are not isolated. There are many articles about the independent media. All the papers have problems with their budgets and suffer due to declining sales. Many people are saying that the “independents” are shadow organs of Goran and people no longer trust the “independents”.

Proposition 18

If the Kurdish leadership has failed, then it needs to be specified from which point in time the problems of leadership first emerged. If an account of where Kurdistan stands now is to be produced which has any credibility, then certain figures in the opposition movement need to take responsibility. The fratricidal war was a disaster and the process of healing is not complete. Admittedly, writers, such as Bakhtiar Ali, have discussed the issue through fiction, but there is the absence of a detailed scholarly account. Responsibility has to be taken and measures need to be put in place to address the needs of survivors and for victims to find closure. The war happened. President Barzani and President of Iraq Jalal Talabani have both expressed their deep regret. The KDP and PUK have found a way to work together. Calm reflection upon history is an urgent task, if past errors are to be avoided. All leaders need to be accountable, and this includes Nawshirwan Mustafa who has played such a crucial role in shaping the terrain of political action and discourse in Kurdistan. It is quite correct for the press to explore the past and analyse its impact upon the present, but it is of vital importance that great sensitivity is displayed in the tone and language deployed.

Response to Proposition 18:

Addressing people’s suffering and pain caused by many wars and by the genocide of the Ba’th regime, should be the priority of the Kurdistan leadership. They need to address strategies to heal people’s deep wounds. Writers, scholars, educationalists, artists and broadcasters have a role, of course, in raising awareness and in engaging in creating a collective memory drawing on the lived experience of the people.

Proposition 19

It is important to understand that the discourse of the older generation is formed in the experiences of the military struggle, away in the mountains and where the enemy was clearly defined in the institutions and politics of the Baathist regime. Today, there is a generation of young people for whom these memories are not a lived experience. The KRG could do well to remind the nation of the history of the national liberation struggle and to connect that history with the present, to present the aim of freedom within a clear appreciation of the current constraints upon the freedom of the nation, both in the south and in the other territories of Kurdistan. As Chris Bowers, British Consul General in Erbil, has pointed out,

“The pre-1991 generation laid the foundation stones for Kurdish autonomy by fighting or reaching accords with the various rulers in Baghdad, but never losing sight of the cause and commitment to Kurdish nationalism despite years of persecution and hardship. ...freedom and the sudden prosperity has come at a huge cost. Freedom is never free, as the saying goes. It is the task of the pre-2003 generations to explain to younger generations how precious that freedom is, to know how it came about, to encourage them to exercise it and to treat it with respect.” (See: <http://rudaw.net/kurdish/index.php/opinion/7498.html> or <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/columnists/3861.html>).

This requires a dialogue and an appreciation of the specific requirements of youth, their needs for spaces of social interaction, access to opportunities for meaningful production, education and training, along with the prospects of a better life, such that they can embrace willingly the responsibilities that come with new found freedoms and opportunities. There needs to be a conversation between young and old. How this is done is important. It is important to listen. But it is also important to present suggestions of how things could be done differently, to be constructive, not to list failures and arrogantly assert an alternative agenda.

Response to Proposition 19:

In a Patriarchal society like Kurdistan the merits and role of youth are consistently undermined. Fathers and elderly male family members infantilize their children. It is time that this problem is seriously addressed through education and a democratic culture based of mutual respect rather than fear and control.

Proposition 20

The discussion and advocacy of human rights and freedom is positive. But there is far too little attention given to the dignity and rights of women. The concerns of women are marginalized in the mainstream press and it is left mainly to the specialized womens' press to take up the cause. The government would do well to direct more resources into helping women journalists and their papers. But it is also the case that the mainstream press

needs to address their own practice. Here, we note the contrast between the coordinated agitations organised by some papers, following the murder of the young man, Sardasht Osman, in May 2010, with the complete absence of activity around the forced suicide and murder of women. Saya Fatih died in June, 2010. She is alleged to have committed suicide but her ex-husband was arrested for allegedly causing her death. Newspapers which had mobilized so forcefully following the Osman murder were suddenly silent. When Begard Hussein, a journalist of long standing was murdered, there was no call for a mobilization or evidence of “freedom lovers” climbing local and international stages to call for justice. With the power to shape and lead debate comes responsibility. Advocating human rights and calling for transparency requires crucial questions to be answered. Is it the case that the daily abuse of women, including horrifying acts of murder, are not worthy of attention? Are women less valuable as human beings than a male journalist or male political leader?

Responses to Proposition 20:

A:

Yes, it is right to point out the hypocrisy. If people go around talking about the need to promote gender equality and the importance of transparency, then perhaps they need to inspect their own practices before they start lecturing to everyone else.

B:

All media outlets show respect to traditional values derived from the dominant notion of honour among the Kurds. No media outlets have seriously challenged such values. There have been attempts by some papers such as *Rudaw*, *Awene* and *Hawlati*, to go beyond the norm, but they too are cautious not to undermine the public understanding of honour which is centered on the control of women’s bodies and sexuality. If progress is to be made, it is important for journalists and newspapers to avoid sensationalizing and descending into gossip to promote sales. Instead, the focus must be upon the human cost to Kurdish society and the search for strategies to remove this blight from our society.

Proposition 21

In Kurdistan there is a lot of talk about “red lines”, the idea that there are certain discussions which are unacceptable. There are a number of examples that could be cited. When it comes to the rights of women, there are certain challenges which are regarded as unacceptable in some quarters. In late

2010, when Mullah Ferman heaped opprobrium on women who dared to challenge male domination and violence, his incitement to violence indicated the high price that might be paid if writers cross the red lines defining the correct behavior for women. Even President Barzani has been pilloried publicly by clergy who oppose his support for the recent legislation presented to combat violence against women. There are in fact clerics who condemn honour killings, reject FGM (female genital mutilation), and call for women to be treated with greater dignity; but their voices are given little coverage compared to those shouting in determined defence of violent reprisals and repressive practices. The creation of taboos, the idea that certain discussions or proposals are beyond discussion, undermines the ability of Kurds to explore in full their own past and present. As such, the opportunity to engage in mature and reasoned debate is curtailed.

Response to Proposition 21:

Redlines are everywhere in Kurdistan, especially when it comes of the status as well as conduct of women. Politicians, instead of challenging such redlines have been reproducing them. Even male intellectuals in Kurdistan do not really believe in gender equality... they are verbally very liberal and democratic, but when it comes to practice, they can easily penalize their sisters and daughters for their breaching of such lines, especially when it comes of the issue of honour versus sexuality. The reality is that everyone in Kurdistan respect redlines in order to gain public esteem and respect. We should focus more on politicians, because they are leading the society and, through their acts and belief, should lead the collective towards a better state. They should preach and live in a more progressive way.

Proposition 22

When we think about “red lines”, we need to recognize that “new red lines” have been created. In some circles, it is regarded as unacceptable to have any dealings with the KRG. From this perspective, to work for or with the KRG is to invite dishonor and damage to personal and family reputation. To have any relationship with the KRG is therefore unacceptable. This is even the case when the KRG sponsors research. Academic research commissioned or supported by the KRG can be ignored or its integrity questioned, without there being any consideration of the content of the work produced. This ignores the fact that the KRG has sponsored scholars who have produced work which is of great benefit to Kurdistan, work that has raised difficult, uncomfortable and critical questions. Dr Choman Hardi in her book on the Anfal and the experience of survivors raises a whole series of

important issues. Dr Hardi makes no secret of the fact that the KRG sponsored her and she declares thanks openly for all to see in her book published in 2011. Likewise, we have the research project on honour based violence driven by Dr Nazand Begikhani and published in 2010. The report and its recommended action plan have been applauded internationally, in particular singled out for high praise by the UK Foreign Office. It forms the basis for further progress in promoting gender equality research and policy, which has been highlighted in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. The research posed difficult and challenging questions to the authorities and called upon them to overhaul their approach to honour based violence. Yet, it was the KRG which sponsored this major piece of research. Dr Hardi and Dr Begikhani did not submit to the regime of the “new red lines”. If they had, Kurdistan would be more impoverished. With reasoned, rigorous and scholarly research, the level of understanding and debate can be raised. But, with the production of “new red lines”, dialogue and reasoned debate are undermined.

Proposition 23

No account of the press environment in Kurdistan can be complete without a consideration of the importance invested in reputation and honour or the concept of ‘shame’ or *ayb*. The ability of individuals and by extension their wider families to command respect is founded upon their perceived virtue in the eyes of the collective. To be dishonored is to be socially destroyed and anyone who threatens to invite shame can quite easily face harsh penalties, including death. While women are the most visible victims, it is a problem that permeates all parts of society and structures the interactions between the press, society and political institutions. The enforcement of honour codes places such a high tariff on deviation that it acts to generate practices of deception. Society is so unforgiving that to admit to being different, to weakness or to having made mistakes can be suicidal. So, individuals feel compelled to conceal thoughts, desires and practices, to avoid ruination if they deviate from accepted standards. Behind pride, a climate of fear prevails, where potential threats to reputation preclude transparent, honest social interaction and erodes possibilities for trust.

Response to Proposition 23:

Men do not want to admit weakness. To admit weakness is to be without power, a failure of character and a loss of masculinity. This applies to journalists and newspaper editors as well as politicians. When a writer is identified as incompetent, he is shown to be weak intellectually and lacking in the strength necessary to command respect.

Proposition 24

Rumour and gossip are part of the dynamic of communication in Kurdistan. There is a very strong appetite for gossip and a widespread willingness to circulate rumours. This is a problem which affects all. As Kemal Rauf pointed out in *Hawlati*, on May 11, 2011, this culture of hearsay indicates a failure to create a healthier society based on a culture of reasoned debate. At the end of this very revealing editorial, he states

“Currently, all of us, including the opposition, independent media, authorities, people of all trends- secular and Islamic, left and progressive- even though we all call for change, freedom and the acceptance of each other, it doesn’t seem that we understand the meaning of our slogans and demands. Hence, we have transformed society into a big factory producing accusation and gossip.”

Proposition 25

By circulating accusations against an individual it is possible to destroy their reputation and honour in their community. The press, along with other forms of media, is used to target individuals. Some journalists and newspaper editors are provided with damaging stories about individuals by their enemies. One effect of this practice is to “provoke” violent retribution against journalists. It is important to recognise that violence directed at some journalists can be primarily caused by rage at having honour called into question. Likewise, to question the integrity of newspaper editors or journalists can provoke rage and retaliation in newsprint, adding further to the war of words. Therefore, when looking at the freedom of expression in Kurdistan it is necessary to recognise that what people write and say about each other can have a big impact upon reputations and that honour is something which is fiercely protected.

Proposition 26

The authorities fail to give the right information. The government is slow in providing information and the parties are secretive. The government does not invite privately owned newspaper journalists to press conferences and so they in turn feel excluded. All of this adds fuel to the suspicion that the government is hiding the facts from the press and the people.

Response to proposition 26:

The sad fact is that the interest of the public in the service provided by the press is in decline. This is bad for the development of a vibrant democratic culture. There is a piece in Kurdistanet.org from Tuesday, 25 October 2011 which examines this problem. It says that electronic media is taking over. It also says that official media at the beginning and then independent press later on got involved in political

disputes and undermined their task to generate knowledge/information and this has led Kurdish readers to lose interest and stop buying newspapers. See: http://www.kurdistanet.org/2011/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5231:2011-10-25-07-23-31&catid=129:2009-01-12-14-16-04&Itemid=146

Proposition 27

In Iraqi Kurdistan a culture of secrecy has been inherited. In part, this is due to the burdens of living with very strict honour codes and the obsession with protecting reputation. But, it must also be remembered that carried also is the legacy of having lived under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Under the rule of the Baathists, it was a matter of life and death for all members of families to be ready to conceal the truth about the whereabouts or activities of themselves or other family members. To be completely open would be a recipe for disaster. Those who lived under Baathism were brought up from an early age to hide the truth. There was no other option. This legacy of the culture of secrecy continues. It is reinforced further by the constant and ever changing pressures created for the Kurdish leadership from multiple external forces, most notably the unstable regime in Baghdad and the aggression of Turkey and Iran. It makes many wary of embracing the call for transparency and unable to decide what should be open for public disclosure and what should remain confidential.

Proposition 28

One of the big problems facing the press and government is that there is an absence of proper record keeping and reliable data. Statistics are made available, but very often they are inaccurate and at times contradictory figures are produced. Kurdistan lacks a professional bureaucracy, trained properly to follow clear rules and procedures for the recording of decisions, the monitoring of policy implementation and the presentation of failures and success in meeting targets. Effective bureaucracy comes with a mature state apparatus and a society which has the educational facilities capable of producing competent experts. Iraqi Kurdistan does not yet meet these preconditions for effective accountability. Attention to the development of personnel and systems is essential. The KRG requires clear data for its own efficient operation and needs to help the press with reliable data to provide the public with a clear and true picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their government over time.

Proposition 29

If there is to be high quality and meaningful discussion, the government must address educational needs. The KRG has been weak and has given in to protests when it attempted to reform the examination system. But reform is essential. There are children who do not have schooling and many who spend too little time in the classroom. Schools are poorly equipped. Many good teachers have left. Teachers are under pressure, with children of the powerful provided with preferential treatment. The system is divided, with good facilities for those who can afford it and very poor provision for those who cannot. There are not enough schools and they are poorly regulated and inspected. If students are poorly educated, how can it be expected to build an economy and society which is sustainable? When people are poorly educated they can neither serve the community to the full nor are they able to critically examine the world around them and to make informed and independent judgments. Training is needed not just for journalists, officials and politicians, but also for the public, to be able to read with a questioning mind. If the government abdicates responsibility for education, the space is left open for Islamic extremists to fill the vacuum and it is already seen that there has been a rapid increase in the publication of texts which are poisoning the minds of the youth.

Responses to Proposition 29:

A:

In my view there is no extremist political Islam in Kurdistan. What does exist is the two Islamic political parties who are very concerned about education and schooling.

B:

The riots which started in Zahko in early December, which saw attacks upon liquor stores, massage parlours and hotels following agitation by Islamists demonstrate that we have problems which are in urgent need of attention.

There is a need to produce better strategies. Education is weak. Islamism is on the rise. We need a clear and new strategy, with a clear distinction being made, so that the affairs of politics and government are separated from religion.

None of the Islamists have distanced themselves from the attacks in Zahko. There is a pressing need for secularists to unite. It is worrying that some so-called intellectuals see fit to mobilise faith. It is terrifying that much of society accepts this violence. The speed and coordination of the rioting indicate that the action was planned and organised. To call the violence a spontaneous outburst of anger

against the authorities lacks credibility. The propaganda from Mullah Krekar, based in Norway, should be clear, where he states that the riots were a protest against the KDP selling Kurdish culture. But we need to be clear. In Kurdistan there are regional powers at play and it is no secret that Iran and Saudi Arabia are well practiced at funding and using their own particular brands of Islam to promote their own national interests and spread their influence beyond their own borders. It is time that Islamists are forced to declare their sources of foreign funding. We need to understand why so many mosques have been built in recent years. Clerics are a big force in defining the political agenda. But is this power really compatible with the task of building a pluralist and tolerant democratic society? Sectarian strife opens up the nation to foreign domination. When minorities are terrorised and forced to live in fear, the intolerance of some clerics must be seen as an attack upon the interests of the nation. We need a strategy to unite secularists. This is no time for the opportunist celebration of looting and burning. We need proper debate on how to maintain the stability necessary for the achievement of reform and progress.

Proposition 30

If the people of Kurdistan are to become effective as citizens and to participate fully in the governance of their society, attention to the structure of the economy is required. The demand for industrial and agricultural reform is difficult to detect. People ask for jobs and wages. The government is the main source of employment. Many of the jobs provided are ones which are "fictional", posts which carry a salary but which demand little or nothing from the employee. The government is not going to be able to provide an ever increasing number of job opportunities which are unproductive indefinitely: Kurdistan has a very young and fast growing population. There is a need to invest in training and education to prepare the younger generation for work and for investment in pension systems for public and private sector employees to safeguard them in their retirement years. Investment is also required in a range of different economic activities so that Kurdistan can have a diverse economy. Far too much is imported. Many of the things that are imported are of questionable quality. A strategic approach to economic development would emphasise the need to build a skills base and a work ethic which allows the people of Kurdistan to be less dependent on the outside world. A great deal of damage was done to Kurdish economy by the Baathist campaign of annihilation and then made worse by the double-embargo and the chronic dependency of living on the charity of international aid organizations. There is very little manufacturing and the agricultural sector is severely weakened. There are many complaints about lack of access to money but there is insufficient attention to the question of how it is that things are to be paid for. The demand for money, without the expectation of having to produce, is real corruption. Self-centered avarice destroys societies. Freedom necessitates taking responsibility. A people who are productive contribute to the building of society. They have a stake in the future. When people are earnestly involved in building a better life, a task that can only be executed collectively and understood as so, the choices they make for themselves and others are likely to be more considered.

Responses to Proposition 30:

A:

Yes of course people need to be productive and not just be 'fictional' government employees but it is the responsibility of the government to provide jobs by investing in the private sector and supporting home produce. At the moment Kurdistan is just a consumer society, nothing is produced... the few factories that there were: The 'Albisa' which sewed clothes, for example, could not compete and they were closed down. How are people to become productive and 'responsible' if there is no means of production and activity for them? One should not deflect attention away from what is the government's responsibility and blame the public. This culture of consumerism and phantom jobs and dependency on the government's hand-outs was created by the government.

B:

This is a good point. There is a lack of proper import controls, such that home producers cannot compete. Importers and traders are linked to political power, which allows them to control the market place. They have an interest in securing cheap imports and no interest in providing space for home grown production. Many local tailors, for example, have been driven out of business as a result of the importation of cheap low quality mass produced clothing.

The dependency culture was fostered after the civil war, with parties seeking to generate loyalty. After 2003, with the massive increase in money available, people were bought with salaries, without having to work.

C:

Why do international charity organisations fail to help people develop their own productive capacities? Are they seeking to enslave us through aid? The food for oil programme created a band of corrupters, from the senior echelons of the UN to local agencies responsible for the distribution of aid. Local producers were undermined, with food brought in that had expired and was of very poor quality. It was business for the UN.

Proposition 31

Many people who go into journalism do so without proper training, a vital part of which is learning about ethics. There are people who have made a difference by providing professional training. Hiwa Osman, for instance, has contributed greatly with his work through the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. However, more needs to be done. Judit Neurink, who runs the Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan, published a very good piece which was published in both *Rudaw* and *Awene* that serves as a good reminder of the importance of proper training and ethical behaviour. The piece deserves to be read in its entirety (see: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/op-ed-contributors/3755.html>). Leaving aside some of the specific remarks on Livin, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, here are some of the main points she made:

“Many Kurdish colleagues still write stories based on one source who is often anonymous. A source that tells them something they like, which they write down without checking the information. This is not journalism, as it breaks the most important rules in journalistic ethics codes.

Let me remind you of the first three points in the International Federation of Journalists’ Code of Conduct:

- Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.*
- In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.*
- The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.*

Also look at this one:

The journalist shall regard as grave professional offenses the following: plagiarism; malicious misinterpretation; calumny; libel; slander; unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.

Regarding all this, journalists can almost never report on the information that they got from only one source. ‘Facts’, the code says. The chance that a source is using a journalist is too serious. The chance that what the journalist is reporting is slander becomes enormous.”

Neurink goes on to say, it is wrong

“to write stories based on a single unnamed source; that press freedom is absolute; and that journalists are under and above the law. If journalists believe this, it would be very bad for the future of journalism in Kurdistan, and for the Kurdish society.

Because the press should be a mirror of what occurs in a society, we should reflect what is happening to the people and politicians, so that both can function well in the democracy. We, journalists, are not part of the political system: we watch, report and

criticize; we hold individuals and institutions accountable by publishing facts, by checking information and by avoiding libel.”

Proposition 32

When newspapers libel individuals or organisations the best solution is to take them before the courts and allow the judges to decide as to guilt or innocence and to impose the appropriate sanctions allowed for by the law.

Response to Proposition 32:

Guilt and innocence could be determined by law if there is a neutral and functioning judicial system. This is not the case in Kurdistan where the judicial system is not independent, it is subject to interference by the political parties. This is just a cosmetic change for the government: instead of kidnapping, killing, torturing and beating journalists we take them to court and pretend to be fair when the law system will decide what we will. I am surprised not to read about the tens of law suits filed by the KDP and PUK against journalists (majority by KDP),and how after public and international pressure all of them were dropped.

Proposition 33

When discussing respect for the law, it must be acknowledged that there are concerns that judges in Kurdistan are not independent and are under the influence of the governing parties. If the law is to be the place where journalistic malpractice is to be examined and for judgements to be respected, then it is necessary to construct a truly independent judiciary. President Barzani has announced measures to increase the professionalism of the judiciary as part of his reform programme and it will be a matter of great interest to see the future impact upon the administration of justice.

Responses to Proposition 33:

A:

Following the violence in Suleimania in February this year, the Head of the KDP in Suleimania has been summoned to appear before the courts, but the KDP has stated that they will not hand him over until all those who stormed their offices are also brought to justice.

B:

It should be noted that in December 2011 the editor of *Hawlati*, Kemal Rauf was brought before the courts because of an article published in his paper back in May which accused the authorities in Zhako of corruption, but it was reported that the court decided that it was not the newspaper that should be examined but those who have been accused of corruption. This indicates that our judiciary is capable and willing to be independent or at least that political masters are willing to give direction to the courts to act upon evidenced based newspaper investigations of wrong-doing.

Proposition 34

Going through the courts is not always the best way to deal with defamation. Of course, legal action cannot always be avoided. But, some form of mediation is better, in the first instance at least. By taking a journalist or newspaper to court there is always the risk of creating martyrs or heroes out of journalists. There are some journalists and newspaper editors who crave public attention. They want to portray themselves as heroes, victimised for the exercise of free speech. There are few better ways of doing that than by getting into court battles and the easiest route to getting into court is by provoking litigation by making libellous accusations. In Kurdistan there have been far too many examples of politicians falling into this trap. Legal battles tend to increase tension within public debate and provide a bad impression, no matter how justified each case might be. The best solution is to have a Press Commission. It should be made up in part by experts and should not be dominated by newspapers or by politicians. It should be a safe space in which citizens and journalists can present complaints and concerns. It should be able to engage in careful evidence based analysis, reach judgements, defend journalists when appropriate and make recommendations for remedial action where necessary. If constructed properly it should be able to take the heat out of controversies and assist the press and journalism in Kurdistan to serve the interests of the nation. A Press Commission wouldn't completely end the need for the courts but at least it would provide a space for mediation and dialogue.

Responses to Proposition 34:

A:

The question is: Who will be in this Press Commission? What is the guarantee that it won't be the same as the judiciary system, completely under the control of the ruling parties?

B:

The idea of a media commission has dropped off the news agenda. There is doubt about the ability of Kurdistan to produce an independent Press Commission, because each party wants to dominate. This will to dominate can be seen in the case of the Teachers' Union, where party and male domination prevail.

Proposition 35

There is no denying that the press environment in Iraqi Kurdistan is currently very unhealthy. The violence has to stop. Physical violence, violent language and the violence that flows from the failure to follow ethical and professional guidelines must stop. Violence and intimidation are counter-productive. In the age of the internet and mobile telephony, it is practically impossible to prevent completely the expression and rapid dissemination of opposing views. Violence increases political tension and adds to perceptions of injustice. Injustice itself is corrosive of Kurdish unity. Kurdistan needs unity now more than ever. Military interventions, Turkey's long-standing and audacious claims on Mosul and Kirkuk, the very uncertain future for the Kurds of Syria, along with a whole host of problems in relation to Bagdad and the questions posed by US withdrawal from Iraq, place Kurdistan Region under immense pressure. In Iraqi Kurdistan rapid economic growth, population growth and movement, the increased exposure to outside cultural experiences, along with changes in faith practices, are some of the internal dynamics which pose significant challenges to traditional norms and practices, in particular in the field of gender relations. There is a need for a debate within society as to how best to manage these stormy waters and to build upon the historic opportunity presented to all Kurds by the establishment of the regional government. This requires well thought out, honest and calm reflection. Everyone needs to take responsibility.

Response to Proposition 35:

I agree that censorship is not possible, especially as we now have the internet and the world wide web. It is good that the truth is now harder to hide. But we need to be careful. Just because something is placed on the internet does not mean it is true. There have been a number of legal cases which have led to rulings that some Kurdish websites have been placing stories on the internet which are untrue. Kurdistanpost has been punished more than once for placing untrue stories on its website and has been successfully prosecuted in the UK and Swedish courts for publishing untrue statements (see: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=47067&c=1>).

KurdishMedia have also been brought before the courts in the UK after placing defamatory reports. (See:<http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=16413>). But very little has been reported about these cases inside Kurdistan. It is strange that advocates for freedom of expression should be so unwilling to let readers in Kurdistan know what is happening. There is a great need to be cautious when it comes to reading and accepting what is said either in the press or through the internet or other forms of social media. Readers in Kurdistan need to be treated with respect. If our newspapers are really interested in freedom and discussing the truth then they should be reporting on these cases, educating them not to accept everything on face value.