

Kirkuk Parties Upset at Kurdish Returnee Vote

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By Ommar Gharib in Kirkuk (ICR No. 99, 25-Jan-05)

The parties have written a letter to the election commission asking for a speedy response to their protest. During a meeting on January 21 at the office of the Turkoman Justice Party office, parties representing both Arabs and Turkoman said the decision to allow the Kurds to vote should not be put into practice because it would be unfair and would have a negative effect on the election results.

But Mufeed al-Jazairi, Iraq's culture minister and also a prominent candidate standing on the Iraqi Communist Party list, insisted that the Kurds had the right to vote in Kirkuk under the terms of Iraq's interim constitution. Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law states that all Iraqis displaced under Saddam's regime have the right to return to their homes.

As part of Saddam's policy of "Arabisation", Kurds living in northern Iraq were forcibly removed from their homes, while Arabs originally from southern regions were resettled in the Kirkuk area to change the ethnic balance. Since the end of Baathist rule, Kurds have been returning to their original areas.

The process has sparked tension and disputes over the ownership of homes and lands. The issue has a broader political significance since Kirkuk - which lies just outside the three provinces that make the Kurdish region - is something of a prize because of its oil resources. Both Kurds and Arabs would like to claim it as their own, while the Turkoman, a significant local minority, tries to secure their own position.

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