

## **Kurds Hold Out on Key Demands**

**Author:** [Mariwan Hama-Saeed](#)

Politicians in Kurdistan say there are certain issues they won't compromise on as the deadline fast approaches.

Less than a week before Iraq's constitutional deadline, Kurdish leaders are warning that a string of unresolved issues threaten the process.

The Iraqi Kurdistan regional parliament held an emergency session on August 6 to discuss the new constitution – in particular, the list of specific Kurdish concerns including the status of the Kurdish peshmerga or militia, the future status of the city of Kirkuk, and the distribution of natural resources.

In Baghdad, representatives of various political blocs from around Iraq are now locked in non-stop talks as they attempt to reach an agreement before the August 15 deadline for finishing work on the constitution.

Kurdish regional president Massoud Barzani was due to travel from Erbil to attend the talks, which began on August 8 and are expected to conclude on August 12, but sandstorms in the capital prevented him from making the journey.

The Kurds want to keep their peshmerga, while other Iraqi groups have called for the disbanding of all militias.

They also want provisions of the Transitional Administrative Law – the current interim constitution – to be fully implemented so that people are able to resettle in Kirkuk and other towns from which Kurds were ousted by Saddam Hussein. Some ultimately want to see borders redrawn so that oil-rich Kirkuk is incorporated into an autonomous Kurdish entity, and they would like to see the constitution contain some wording on the city's future status.

"There are other unresolved issues to do with human rights and women's rights, and all these issues impinge on the Iraqi people," Barzani told assembly members.

One of the biggest obstacles to agreement is the issue of federalism, which the Kurds and some Shia politicians want.

Sunnis strongly oppose the idea, saying it will divide Iraq.

"We should block the federalist system for another four or five years, or else until it can be dealt with by a new National Assembly elected at the end of 2005," said Ayad al-Samarai, who is a member of the Iraqi Islamic Party, one of the main Sunni political groups, and sits on the parliamentary committee charged with drafting the constitution.

Adnan al-Janabi, a constitution committee member representing the Iraqi List, said federalism could cause more problems for the country.

"If we are going to establish federal regions, then it will be on an ethnic and sectarian basis, which we fear will cause divisions in Iraq," he said.

But a federal arrangement is central to the demands made by Kurds, who say it must be included in the constitution.

"The Kurdish leadership demands a democratic and federal Iraq where citizens have social, political and economic freedom," said Mahmood Osman, a senior Kurdish Alliance representative in the Iraqi National Assembly.

Some Shia are also pushing for a federal set-up in hope that it would create more autonomous governance for southern parts of Iraq, where they form the majority.

"Federalism is a right that the Iraqi people support," said Saad Jawad Qandil, a member of the political bureau of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, one of the main Shia parties.

The Kurds have accused the United Iraqi Alliance, UIA, the mainly Shia bloc that won the January parliamentary election, of retreating from promises they made when they forged a coalition with the second-placed Kurdish Alliance. They say they secured UIA support on issues such as Kirkuk, federalism and the role that Islam should play in the state, but this is no longer forthcoming.

"The Kurdish people have lost hope in the central government," said Nuri Talabani, a member of the

Kurdistan assembly. “Progress in this situation will be up to them, as the Kurdish demands are clear.”

Kurds want the constitution to say that Islam is one of the sources of legislation, whereas some religious Shia are pushing for stronger wording to the effect that the faith is the “main source” of laws.

“We respect all religions, especially Islam given that it is the religion of the majority,” said President Barzani. “But we won’t accept an Islamic identity being imposed on Iraqi identity.”

Many Kurds say that when it comes to the national referendum to approve the constitution in October, they will not vote for it if it does not meet their demands.

For the constitution to be rejected, the majority in three out of Iraq’s 18 provinces have to vote against it – and Kurdistan comprises three provinces.

“If the constitution goes against the interest of the Kurds, I won’t vote for it,” said Herem Yassin Rashid, a policeman.

Mariwan Hama-Saeed and Dhiya Risan are IWPR trainees in Iraq.

**Location:** Iraqi Kurdistan  
Iraq

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kurds-hold-out-key-demands>