

Turkomen Hope for Election Gains

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Community leaders confident that they can build on their current political success on a local and national level.

Representatives of Iraq's Turkoman community - which already has eight members in the current national assembly - are hoping to win even more seats in this month's elections.

Ryad Sari Kahya, head of the Turkoman Eali party, one of four parties in a Turkoman political grouping, told IWPR, "This is not merely achievable. I really believe that we could take 30 seats in the elections."

Removing any doubts over the community's participation in the forthcoming local and national vote, Sari Kahya told IWPR that the Turkomen parties consider the election process the first step to democracy and an important element in building a new Iraq.

"The drafting of the new Iraqi constitution will depend on the success of the election," he said.

As far as the municipal poll is concerned, the situation will vary from one province to another, but Sari Kahya said he wasn't ruling out an alliance with a Kurdish party in the local elections, which will be held in Erbil.

"The majority of the Turkoman parties have formed electoral alliances. In Kirkuk province, for example, all the Turkoman parties will form one list, while in the national assembly elections, they will join the Shiite list," he said.

"But what I would really welcome would be a common list in Kirkuk including all the different parties."

Referring to November's Dukan conference where some Iraqi parties called for the Kirkuk elections to be postponed until the situation in the country stabilises, Sary Kahya said there had been an overall lack of agreement on that front.

"From my point of view, the situation here is secure and we are ready for elections. There is no reason to postpone," he said. "Taking up the Dukan decision would have been very negative for the situation in Kirkuk."

"We're against postponing the elections as a rule but, in special circumstances where everyone was in agreement, we might go for a short postponement."

Turkoman parties are hopeful they will win the majority of seats in Kirkuk's local elections, but concede that the ballot alone will not mark the end of a more peaceful era for Iraq.

"Elections are not enough to calm the current situation," Sary Kahya said. "For that, we will need dialogue between all of the Kurdish, Turkoman and Arab groups. Once you have agreement between these three sides, and a federalised Iraq, a shared administration in Kirkuk would be a possibility."

In a traditionally male-dominated society, there is now another challenge facing Turkoman political groups – the need to field female candidates.

Tahseen Kahya, who heads Kirkuk’s provincial council and the political office of the Islamic Union for Iraqi Turkomen, recognises this is a problem.

“We have a real lack of female candidates, which is a significant issue given that 25 per cent of seats are assigned to women under electoral law,” he said. “We are finding it hard to nominate qualified female candidates with the relevant political and law-making experience.”

But Jelen Karim Muhammad, one of the rare female Turkoman representatives on Kirkuk’s provincial council, believes that finding qualified Iraqi women to participate in the newly democratised political process should not be an issue, even if they do lack experience.

“Turkoman women in particular are well educated and, because of their ethnicity, are used to dealing with complex political situations,” she said.

“If Turkoman women are elected to the national assembly, they would represent all of Kirkuk’s inhabitants, not just those of [their own ethnic group].”

Soran Dawde is a journalist in Kirkuk.

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