

## Review: Major NGOs Attitude towards Kurdistan's Intra-Federal Position

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### A. Background:

NGOs, local and international ones, especially those working on both sides of frontlines with various belligerents with a long-term activity perspective, should preserve their neutrality and impartiality in written statements and in verbal approaches. Words matter, as they also allocate responsibilities amongst various actors in the humanitarian and political scenes.

In the subtle path to find in conflict and post-conflict zones, where impartiality and neutrality are essential factors for acceptance, cohesion, peace-building, tolerance, integration, pacification and security, 2 aspects of written and verbal approaches are to be cautiously handled :

- ✓ Terms & Definitions
- ✓ Tone & Formulation – judgmental approach, reprehensive, reconciling

#### 1. Terms & Definitions

Kurdistan's delicate, hybrid and hopefully transitional situation, incoherent somehow between the *De Jure* and the *De Facto*, has various wording and terminology to define it and to be addressed at. NGOs sometime fall in the semantic trap: either inadvertently, either on purpose.

It has to be clear that responsibilities, of all kinds, should be fulfilled by sovereigns; especially towards beneficiaries and values – the core concern of NGOs and major issues to tackle on our road to independence. Logically and theoretically, the degree of the fulfillment depends on the degree of sovereignty. The sovereigns are asked to be accountable for accordingly. Terminology and definitions have judicial power and define the degree of accountability.

In general, and also in the NGO glossary, there are various ways to describe Kurdistan, in an ascending degree of sovereignty and responsibility:

1. Being ignored completely and replacing it by the name “Iraq”;
2. A less adamant though continuous emphasis on its being an Iraqi province by naming it “Iraqi Kurdistan”.
3. Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)
4. Referring to it as an equal political entity in the region or in the world: “Kurdistan”, with no *prefix* or *suffix*. Just as “France”, “Israel”, “Turkey”.

##### **1.1. A tricky, ambivalent appellation ikjs #2: “Iraqi Kurdistan”:**

Either it insinuates subjugation of Kurdistan to Iraq (pro-Iraqi), or it might be perceived as neutral: to discern it from other territories being part of Great Kurdistan (outside Iraq and disputed territories), or this term may be considered as an honorable distinction for its unique status within the Federation; after all, nobody calls Nineweh, for instance – “Iraqi Nineweh”.

The undersigned has opted to the more severe, judgmental approach towards the term “Iraqi Kurdistan”, qualifying it as pro-Iraqi, rather than neutral or respectful towards the current *De Facto* degree of autonomy. That is the reason why the rate of its bias is 2, which is not adhering to the Kurdish cause.

2. **Tone & formulation:** The degree of them being reprehensive and condemning, judgmental and critical, reconciling and constructive.

**11 NGOs and NGOs Movements (groups of NFO), including the ICRC (which is not qualified as an NGO) have been viewed, 1 of them is local-Iraqi one. In the ICRC rubric you might also find an inside information.**

## B. Conclusions, observations, findings:

**C.1.** Naturally, NGOs are not asked to promote our national cause. At most, they will show some understanding, if not neutrality. However, ignoring our national cause, up to the extent of referring in written all allegations, recommendations and advocative pleas to the Federal Authorities, might be responded by referring the concerned NGO to queue for some answers in Baghdad, even if their concern is in regards to what takes place in Kurdistan.

**C.2.** We do not expect NGOs to come up with solutions, nor to set an office in Anbar and try to have the same level of criticism whilst trying to remain alive at the end of the very same day (compare NGOs freedom of speech and its survival chances: Anbar vs. Kurdistan). No one even asks them to manage a country like ours.

However, that lack of obligation in their mandate to do and experience as above, and their moral, ethical and professional duties to shed light over alleged abuses and advocate for corrective measures – all are also creating a latent but firm obligation, which an NGO must undertake in 2 ways:

C.2.1. Being **modest** while linking the allegations to the context, its constraints, obstacles, alleviating factors

C.2.2. Being **honest**, by bringing to the surface the **entire** set of facts [1], all parties' versions [2] and assessing the credibility of their sources [3], and if possible – to reveal them, with all guarantees to the sources security being given by the KRG

**C.3.** The most significant evolution has been noted in PU-AMI. Otherwise: either no coherence between various texts and authors (ACTED) or no change (stagnant coherence, therefore: a tendency, an ideological perception of Kurdistan in a certain status, a certain mold, frame, and no other one)

S/N	NGO	Rate (1☹ - 4 ☺)	Points of Concern
1.	ICRC (not an NGO though)	1	Kurdistan is a region in Iraq, just as Nineweh. No special elevation compared to other regions. In every article title and within its text, the sense of subjugation to Iraq is omnipresent: Iraqi Kurdistan. Inside info: The ICRC databases (HR, Assignments, Operational objectives, Donors' reports, internal and external messaging systems) do not include once any notion of Kurd/ish/istan. Erbil, Suleimanyi – are parts of Iraq, being in northern Iraq
2.	RNVDO (local)	1	They mention in their identification (verbal and written proposals for donors) : Ainkawa, Erbil, Iraq. Official correspondence is in Arabic, preferably. Reluctant to disclose their Authorization of Operation from the KRG. Verbally relate to the Peshmerga as an armed element as any other in Iraq, not necessarily representative of the KRG, and their role in liberating Mosul and other territories is omitted in their publication, replaced by the US-led Coalition. Not a single mention of Kurd/ish/istan.
3.	Premiere-Urgence – Aide Medicale International (PU-AMI)	4	Evolution from 2016 to 2020 from rate 2 to rate 4 ("Kurdistan", even though "KRI" is also present)

4.	OXFAM-GB - Movement <sup>1</sup>	2	"Kurdistan region of Irbil, northern Iraq", quite an original formulation
5.	Goal	2	KRI
6.	ACTED	2-3	Iraqi Kurdistan, KRI
7.	Action Contre La Faim – Action Against Hunger (ACF)	1-2	<p>In two major publications, Kurds are described only as an ethnic group, a minority like many others that populates a region in Iraq, counting amongst the IDPs. In one of the two, Kurd <i>is just a language</i> within a troubled Iraq, in this article Kurdistan has no mention – not even in the titles. There is a disparity between the contents of the first, major article (rate 1) and the main &amp; secondary titles (identical to other ACF publications' titles), that describe Kurdistan as a semi-autonomous region (rate 2).</p> <p>In other articles, numerous times is Kurdistan mentioned as an Iraqi region (Iraqi Kurdistan) (rate 2).</p> <p>In 2 cases, whilst relating to the disputed territories, Sinjar's affiliation remains unclear. However, only once, much after the restitution of Mosul to the ISF, even the Mosul (and Tel-Kaif) region is mentioned as an Iraqi Kurdistan (rate 2); Syrian Kurdistan is also a term.</p> <p>Twice Kurdistan, presented as a fully sovereign <i>term</i> with no affiliation to Iraq (rate 4), is commended for the refuge it has offered to refugees.</p> <p>As an NGO who has advocacy activities, 2 matters are troubling with their absence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The beneficiaries are righteously described as civilian victims of persecution. Without taking sides, there is still need to say that the persecution had an ethnic and religious background, against specific segments of populations. Not necessarily because the population was civilian and defenseless – was it targeted. Indeed, it made the targeting easier, but that was not the reason for targeting it. Nor was a forbidden cigarette brand discovered in an ISIS checkpoint the reason of a persecution. It goes much beyond that.</li> <li>2. The return conditions are desperately missing the main reason: lack of security and continuous crimes against the IHL and the IL. Much more than "just" the level of destruction and the lack of services. It should be mentioned still without taking sides</li> </ol>
8.	HRW	1	<p>Indeed, KRI/G are terms that are consistently used, a phenomenon that is better than other NGOs. However, the accountability is sometimes addressed to the Federal Authorities, whereas the approach to the KRG is condemning, accusative, one-sided and incriminating. Most of the points are "old inheritance" from the past, ruminated to the present and seeming to lack a comprehensive description of each incidents, putting the blame and therefore the responsibility on one side only.</p> <p>It is recommended that HRW reviews its definition of the term "Forced Disappearance". It is a bit surprising to ask that from an NGO specialized in Int'l law.</p> <p>The law might defend a minor, but the result, as former French president Sarkozy once said (2007) – is the same: An 11 years old kid killed a man (and often more than one); an 18 years old killed another man. The result is the same – the lives are lost by a knife or a bullet.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Texts are shared by various sections of the OXFAM movement, representing their views, even if some of the sections are not operational but only admin/fundraising

			And the HRW activist would not like to have his kid going to the same class with the assassin, unless the assassin is reformed.  <b>A reformatory centre is not a kindergarten. Until the reform process is accomplished and sanctioned by successful indicator, it should have tall fences, to protect both sides: public and perpetrators (from revenge).</b>
9.	Amnesty Int'l	1	Some articles are copied from HRW or vice versa. The only supposition that the copying is done by Amnesty is done by the fact that HRW is insistent and lengthy in its bias in regards to the KRG, ruminating past incidents, more than Amnesty.
10.	Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) - Movement <sup>2</sup>	2-3	Title: Kurdistan (rate 4); Iraqi-Syrian Kurdistan (rate 2). Text: distinction between Kurdish forces to Iraqi forces in the skirmishes between them (rate 4); Kurdish refugees (showing the persecution is ethnic; rate 4) Erbil region or Northern Iraq (rate 1)
11.	Medecins du Monde (MdM) - Movement <sup>3</sup>	2	North-West Iraq (rate 1), Kurdistan and the neighbouring regions (I would not qualify the 'Kurdistan' stand-alone wording here as deserving rate 4, since it is only a geographical focus, putting Kurdistan on the same level as surrounding regions); distinction between Kurds and Yezidis; Iraqi Kurdistan (rate 2)
12.	Green Desert (local)	3-4	Mostly 'KRI' (rate 3) and sometimes a distinct 'Kurdistan' (rate 4)
13.	Terre des Hommes (TdH)	2	"Iraqi kurdistan" (the small caps on 'Kurdistan' appellation is a constant, contrary to "Iraq", which is correctly spelled. Therefore, in the sole time when "Kurdistan" as a distinct appellation is mentioned, it is also in small caps, which does not put it in the appropriate focus.
14.	GIZ	3	A distinct chapter of activities is dedicated to the KRI and in other titles: "autonomous region Kurdistan in Iraq". In the clip, Shingal is mentioned in this name. KRG is presented in a positive manner as a supportive actor. Some of its Kurdish personnel wear in the video their traditional clothes. It is specified that the KRI is home for numerous origins emitting IDPs and Refugees, all mentioned: Mosul, Shingal, Syria.
15.	Malteser International	3	Cooperating with the former. Kurdistan is mentioned as a single appellation, however, mentioned as another region – "Central Iraq" – as one of Iraq's regions.

<sup>2</sup> Texts are shared by various sections of the MSF movement, representing their views, even if some of the sections are not operational but only admin/fundraising

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