



Speaker Of Kurdish Parliament Advocates Federal Regions In Iraq

Posted GMT 6-14-2005 15:26:12

Adnan Mufti, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kurdistan (parliament), has expressed his belief that several federal regions will be established in Iraq soon and pointed out that serious discussions are under way to establish the southern federal region that will include Basra, Al-Amarah and Al-Nasiriyah, and the federal central region that will include Al-Najaf, Karbala and Al-Hillah.

Speaking in a telephone interview with Al-Sharq al-Awsat from his office in Arbil, Mufti - who was elected Speaker last week - said the federal system guaranteed the country's strength and unity at the economic, political and social levels. After pointing out that there were more than 80 federal states in the world, among them the United States, Germany and Canada, he ridiculed the suggestions about the Kurds' intentions to secede and said: "This is nonsense and it shows that those making these remarks do not know the nature of Iraq on one hand and are ignorant of the events happening in the world today." He added: "The federalism we want to apply is geo-political and not ethnic because the Kurds are present everywhere in Iraq, from north to south."

Mufti, a leading member of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK], said: "Iraq will be made up of several federations or geographic regions that cooperate on the basis of economic interests and geographic division. The important thing is to let freedom and democracy prevail all over the country." He called those talking about the partitioning of Iraq "ones who are clinging to the past" and added: "This is nonsense and those reiterating these remarks know nothing about the Iraqi situation and do not follow up the developments taking place in the world. More than 80 countries are applying the federal system and have not split. On the contrary, the federal systems helped strengthen these countries, most notably the United States that became united only through federalism. It is the same with Switzerland, Canada, Germany, India, Belgium and many others."

Mufti pointed out that the Kurdish parliament had been elected in 1992 after the 1991 uprising "and we decided that our relations with Baghdad should be based on the federal system". He asserted that this was not the first experiment in the world as there were central parliaments and regional ones in addition to regional governments and judicial authorities. He pointed out that the tasks of Iraq's Kurdish parliament were to legislate economic and political laws and decisions that concerned the region, and everything that concerned the lives of citizens living in Southern Kurdistan, whether they were Arabs, Assyrians, Turkomans or Kurds. He said: "The Kurdish parliament and the Iraqi National Assembly (the central Iraqi parliament) that include a substantial number of Kurds have many issues in common. Discussions of the Iraqi constitution are the most important thing which we are taking part in at present because it concerns us due to the fact that we are part of Iraq and it will at the same time have a bearing on the drafting of our own constitution that concerns our region."

The Kurdish parliament Speaker went on to say that the coordination would not just be between the regional and central parliaments, "but also between the region's government and the central one. A minister might be appointed in the government to look after the federal affairs in addition to the establishment of specialized committees for coordinating between the two governments because there is a single Iraqi economy, a single currency, a single foreign ministry and a single army." He added: "The National Assembly of Kurdistan is made up of 111 members, with 38 seats for the PUK, a similar number for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, nine for the Islamic Union, three for the Kurdish Communist Party, four for the Turkomans living in the region, five for the Chaldeans and Assyrians, two for the Socialist Party and one seat for the Toilers Party. There are two independents and other movements in parliament." He noted that the assembly did not include any Arabs because the number of Arabs in the region was very small and the elections "were held in areas where there were not many Arabs".

Mufti said: "The National Assembly's responsibility is confined within the boundaries of Southern Kurdistan. It is not our duty to interfere in the affairs of other countries where Kurds live. But we are morally interested in the condition of Kurds everywhere." He pointed out that it was every parliament's duty to denounce any attack on humanity anywhere and "we will stand within this framework with the Kurds everywhere as we stood with and continue to stand with Palestine, which is an Arab country."

The Kurdish Speaker stressed: "Iraq's structure is made up of several peoples and not just one and the other viewpoints should be respected and the others accepted." He noted that the federal system was acknowledged in the State Administration Law for the transitional stage "and we have been acting as a federal system for 13 years. I do not believe that the constitution being drafted now will refuse to grant the Kurdistan region the federal system. The Iraqis know that there has to be a democratic atmosphere in the new state that has numerous parties, communities and ethnic groups and that the Kurds should have their own status and obtain their national and

cultural rights."

Regarding the issue of annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan region, Mufti said: "We are complying with Article 58 of the State Administration Law that stipulates the need to normalize the situation there and then hold a referendum according to what the constitution says." He pointed out that Kirkuk "is an Iraqi city and any Iraqi has the right to choose where he lives. But the coercive policy imposed by the former regime to change the city's demography after displacing its indigenous population is illegal and therefore the laws for the return of those displaced forcibly from their houses and lands in Kirkuk will be applied and those who replaced them will be sent back after compensation. They will not be repatriated forcibly but in a humane way and all facilities will be made available to them."

Al-Sharq al-Awsat

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