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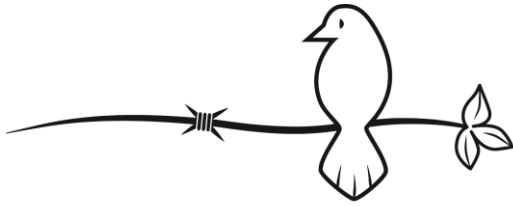


Fingers should be used for voting, not shooting

***The Iraqi Parliamentary and Kurdistan Provincial Councils' Elections of
30 April 2014 in Iraqi Kurdistan
– seen through the eyes of five International Observers***

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an international non-governmental organization, has worked in Iraqi Kurdistan since 2006 with the goal to *build partnerships to transform violence and oppression*. CPT members in the region advocate for human rights and accompany civil society organizations and activists as they strive to achieve rights for vulnerable persons and communities. The CPT headquarters are in Chicago, USA. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the organization's main office is in Sulaimani city.

At the end of the recent campaign for Iraqi Parliamentary and Kurdistan Provincial Councils' elections, CPT members carried the hope for a fair and peaceful election that would allow for free participation in the democratic process. We agreed to contribute to the presence of international observers to support the process. Moreover we hoped that those responsible for the electoral process, especially the leaders and staffs of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), would act and work independently.



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As members of CPT, we are grateful for having the opportunity to work as a team of international observers for the elections that took place on 30 April 2014. The following report is a summary of what our team of five volunteers observed on elections day and during the vote recount and data entry process. We present our observations with our comments for the review of the citizens of the Kurdistan Region, the rest of Iraq as well as other members of the international community. Our five observers operated in the city of Sulaimani and in the vicinity of two other towns in the Sulaimani Province. We have not published names of the places or the voting centers/schools in order to protect the safety of the people involved.

Observation of Election Day 30 April 2014

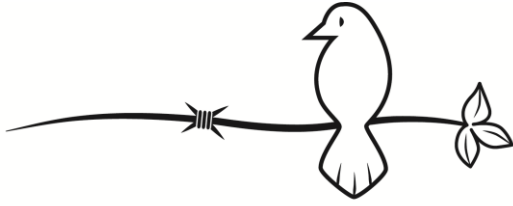
I. Presence and activities of the Asaish Security forces and police

Iraqi election law grants the authority to enter and protect the voting centers to the police only. However we saw armed Asaish forces outside the centers, as well as inside. Some wore military uniforms; some were in plain clothes. The IHEC workers and police shared with us that some of the troops attempted to enter the buildings but were prevented in some cases by police and center managers.

After having lived and worked in Iraqi Kurdistan for many years, we understand and appreciate the role of the Asaish and other security forces in protecting the Kurdistan Region's citizens and foreign residents, including us. However, the presence of security men armed with various kinds of guns and making violent attempts to enter the buildings, which in some instances included shooting, raise our concerns and worries. This atmosphere is not in keeping with the key principle of democratic elections – the liberty to choose and vote on candidates based on one's own free will. On the contrary, many people, especially those waiting to enter the poll centers and the staff of the centers appeared to be anxious, intimidated and even terrified.

In one voting location, shots had been fired by Asaish security forces after police stopped them from entering a voting center. The center staff showed the observers a collection of bullet casings following the altercation. The center staff and police requested that our team stay with them after the center closed at 6 p.m. They believed that the international observers' presence could protect them from the security forces by preventing them from entering the building and threatening the vote count.

In another voting center, we witnessed two Asaish officers arresting one of the IHEC workers. They took him away saying that he used his mobile phone to take a photo with intentions of using it for political motives. The worker told us later that he took a photo to document the Asaish forces'



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attempt to enter into the voting center. He wanted to have evidence to show why the staff closed down the center. Later, we learned that after taking him away from the center the Asaish released him. According to the IHEC worker, our presence helped his case.

As we observed a group of Asaish officers outside another school and an Asaish officer inside, we asked the center manager whether he would like us to stay longer. He thanked us and said that it was not necessary because he worried that our presence could escalate the situation with the security forces and the voting center might need to close down. If that happened, all the ballots would be burned. His main concern was to protect the voting process from stopping, which he believed was the security forces' intention.

In one of the voting centers we saw a man without an observer badge who remained in the voting center including during the ballot count. When we approached to remind him that observers without the IHEC authorized badge cannot stay in a voting center after 6 p.m., he told us that he was there as a citizen. After we informed the representative of IHEC, she requested that he depart, but he refused.

2. A Disorganized Process

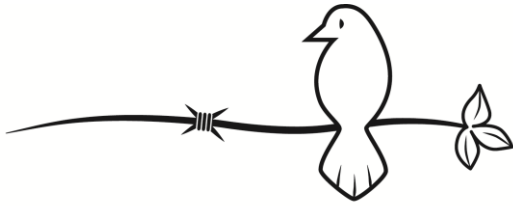
One of our observers witnessed rooms filled with voters and police who were persuading them to vote for one of the political parties. After the IHEC representative learned that an international observer had arrived, he stopped the process, restored order and restarted the process according to IHEC rules. The same observer witnessed representatives of the political parties very near the voting centers, distributing their cards and encouraging voters to vote for them, which is also against IHEC rules.

3. Identity of the Observers

One of our observers saw a local person come to a voting center claiming to be an international observer working for *Human Rights Watch*. After the CPT observer realized that that person's badge did not match the international observers' identifications and brought attention to this fact, the person left the center.

4. Limiting Freedom of Voters

In one voting station, a father came to vote together with his son. The father told the staff that his son can not read and write and therefore he needs to vote for him. One of the political parties' observers told the father: "He is my student and I am his teacher. He attends the 12th grade." But the father continued to insist that he needed to go and vote for his son. We also saw many cases in which men voted for their female relatives - wives, daughters, sisters.



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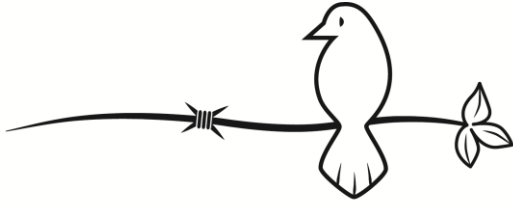
The mistrust of individual freedom to choose and vote for any political party or list reaches beyond the families to other levels of the society, including the government agencies and offices. For example, Asaish security forces received orders from their superiors to take photographs of their votes. They were told to use their phones on their special day of the elections.* According to IHEC rules, during elections, the usage of phones and cameras is not allowed in the voting centers, however allegedly on the special election day that permission has been given.

Observation of the vote recount in the data entry centers

In regards to the locations in Sulaimani city where the ballots boxes from all districts are delivered, processed and the ballots recounted:

1. We observed that some of the ballot boxes arrived very late. On the day following the elections, some boxes continued to arrive until late afternoon. However, even a slow truck drive from the most remote places in Sulaimani province would not take longer than 5 hours.
2. Some managers of the data entry centers practiced different rules. We were visiting the centers as a team of three but in one of the centers the manager said he would allow only one person to enter. After a discussion he allowed one foreign and one Kurdish member of the team to enter. In other centers, multiple observers were allowed to enter.
3. At the entrance to one of the centers, we observed a fiery argument among several party representatives and IHEC workers about a pile of ballot count forms. A group of people brought the forms claiming that they were real and that some IHEC workers forgot to put them in the ballot boxes following the election, although the sealed boxes had already arrived to the center without the forms. One of the political parties sent one of their leaders to discuss this issue and whether the forms should or should not be accepted. In the end, the argument was settled that the boxes and forms would be checked in the presence of the IHEC workers and all parties' representatives to determine whether they matched the original results tallied in the election center the previous evening.
4. In one of the centers, a young man approached our team. He claimed to work as an independent NGO observer (and he had the appropriate badge). Unfortunately, his behavior caused us to doubt him. He asked us about what we thought about the elections. We told him about our concerns based on what we observed. He took notes of our words. With each of our statements he appeared to be less and less content. Finally he asked: "but do you think that the process was successful?" Our negative answer seemed to upset and he resorted to a personal verbal attack regarding the shoes of one the team members and walked away.

* In Iraqi Kurdistan, the security forces, police, health care workers, patients, prisoners, etc. vote on a special election day, usually predating the general election day by two days.



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Conclusion

In summary, we were surprised and concerned by how many abuses of the election process and voter rights were witnessed by only five international observers. We are concerned that many more illegal voting activities may have taken place in the several thousands of voting centers throughout the province and the Kurdistan region as a whole. We question to what extent voting centers without international observers may have suffered similar activities and negatively influenced the overall election results. We are concerned that results of the elections will not reflect the free will of the people.

At the same time we feel encouraged by the people who voted for candidates who they truly wanted. We particularly commend the courageous center managers, staff and police whom protected the centers and the election process, despite threats, intimidation and at risk to their own safety and well-being.

Despite our concerns, we have hope that after the final results are published the political parties will peacefully implement the election decisions. We would like to encourage the parties and candidates who win to use their positions to serve and work for the benefit and well-being of the people of Kurdistan.

Recommendations for the international community and foreign consulates in Iraqi Kurdistan

We encourage and ask the representatives of the foreign consulates that have offices in Iraqi Kurdistan to create and provide opportunities for Kurdistan and Iraqi citizens to:

1. Exchange and document experiences and observations of the election process and,
2. Learn from other countries' experiences and gain knowledge of the various practices and technologies used for safe and reliable election processes.

We encourage other international bodies to contribute to the international observation process in future elections in this region. It is obvious from this report that the presence of election observers helps to keep IHEC rules a part of the process, protects voting center staff and police from unnecessary violence, and provides valuable international recognition to a country coming to terms with the democratic voting process.

We believe that the Kurdish and Iraqi people should have the opportunities for election observation internationals have in Iraq.

Suleimani, Iraqi Kurdistan • cptiraq@cpt.org • www.facebook.com/cpt.ik • www.cpt.org
Tel: +964 770 762 0641 (English) • 0770 291 6487 كوردی