

Date: February 25, 2019

Request to Raise the Flag of Kurdistan on the Courtesy Flag Pole at Toronto City Hall

Summary of the Request

- Councillor Jim Karygiannis received a request from Sartip Kakaee, Chairman of Kurdish House Toronto, to raise the Kurdish flag at City Hall to mark the 31st anniversary of the Halabja chemical attack.
- Councillor Karygiannis sent the request on to the Strategic Protocol and External Relations office for follow up.

Response

- The request does not meet the stated City of Toronto criteria for a flag raising on the courtesy flag pole.
- The flag identified is an official symbol of the sub-national Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and is therefore not a flag of a nation recognized by Global Affairs Canada.
- Council may choose to bring awareness to violent world events through a member announcement or a proclamation.
- The City has other programs and services that enable groups to commemorate and raise awareness for events of importance.

Global Affairs Canada perspective

- The Government of Canada is committed to the unity and diversity of the Republic of Iraq and it supports Iraq's territorial integrity. This position is well known to the Government's Iraqi interlocutors, including in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.
- Canada has a constructive partnership with the federal government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The Government of Canada favours a peaceful dialogue in good faith, so as to resolve their differences through continued negotiations.
- The Government of Canada respects that the Kurdistan Regional Government already enjoys certain decision making powers for itself within the Iraqi federal system.

Background

- On March 16, 1988, a chemical attack was unleashed on the Iraqi city of Halabja, after its fall to Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq war.
- It is estimated that the attack killed between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injured 7,000 to 10,000 more, most of them civilians.
- The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is an autonomous sub-national region located in northern Iraq, bordering Turkey and Iran.
- The flag of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq includes red, white and green stripes with a sun emblem in the centre.

- The Canadian House of Commons recognized the event in 2010 through a private members' motion. The motion read as follows:

"By unanimous consent, it was resolved, — That the House acknowledge the actions of Saddam Hussein against the Kurdish people in Iraq, including the poison gas attack against Halabja on March 16, 1988, the destruction of Iraqi Kurdish villages and the systematic persecution of Kurds in Iraq, and condemn these acts as crimes against humanity. (Private Members' Business M-505)"

Previous Request

- In 2012, the City of Toronto's Protocol Office received a similar request from the same community leader, and then-Member of Parliament Jim Karygiannis.
- The request for the flag raising was declined, as it did not meet the City's flag raising criteria.

Council Approved Flag Raising Policy

The current [Council-approved flag raising policy](#) states the following criteria:

- the existing courtesy flag poles will fly the flag of nations recognized by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, on its national day or the anniversary of a special occasion for up to two weeks, upon written request
- the flag of a non-profit or charitable organization will be flown on a courtesy flagpole for up to two weeks upon the written request of the group or organization.

Drafted by

City Clerk's Office - Strategic Protocol & External Relations