



Submission No 54

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

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Dear Dr.Carter

On behalf of Kurdistan Regional Government office in Australia, we would like to provide a submission to the Committee's review of Australia's overseas representation inquiry.

The Head of the Mission for Kurdistan Regional Government in Australia, Mr Haval Syan, proposes that Australia consider opening a diplomatic mission in the Kurdistan Region, because of the potential benefits for trade and business as a result. There have been numerous developments which reflect the unprecedented level of security and prosperity in the region.

At present, there are 25 Consulates and foreign offices operating in the capital of the Region, Erbil. These include the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which are both Australian consular partner countries. The international community has recognised the economic potential of the region and it is highly recommended that Australia follow in these positive steps. As an emerging market with abundant untapped resources, a rapidly growing economy and strong government support for foreign relations and trade, there is a need for expanding Australia's diplomatic activity into the region.

There is also the need for a review of the Australian travel advice. The current travel advice does not sufficiently differentiate between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq. Even the comments specifically addressing the Kurdistan Region are misrepresentative of the conditions in the Kurdistan Region for the following reasons:

1. There has not been a single coalition or Western fatality due to combat or terrorism from the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq to now.
2. Thousands of foreign companies, businessmen and citizens are now living and working in the Kurdistan Region, and they are nearly unanimous in their praise for the security and overall stability of the Region.
3. There are now 25 Consulates and foreign offices operating in the capital of the Region, Erbil.

Australia should consider the recent developments of the United Kingdom, who have now expressly differentiated the region in their travel advice, The UK's travel advice to Iraq now reads: "we advise against all but essential travel to the whole of Iraq, with the exception of the Kurdistan region, where there are no travel restrictions in place in our travel advice."

The United States of America has also established an office for Consulate General of the United States of America in Erbil. Furthermore, the National Geographic and the New York Times listed the Kurdistan Region on their lists of top places to visit in 2011. It is evident that numerous nations have recognised the distinct and unique situation of the Kurdistan region and have consequently established relations that reflect its security and prosperity. These particular developments evince the level of risk in the area and substantiate the basis for a review of the advice and the need for Australian representation in the region.

There are consequences resulting from the lack of Australian representation in the region. Australian Universities are not benefiting to their full potential from the \$100 million dollar international scholarship program provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Due to

the lack of Australian presence in the region, there are difficulties in the processing of student visas and a clear absence of promotion for Australian universities.

The region is rapidly developing and there are many opportunities that would greatly benefit the Australian economy, as is clearly the case for many other nations around the world. Mr Syan strongly recommends that Australia take advantage of the vast opportunities for trade and business links in the region.

With the recent reports of the Lowy Institute calling for an expansion of Australia's diplomatic footprint and recommending the opening of 20 new international missions over the next decade, it is time for Australia to benefit from the Kurdistan region's unique economic growth and take the opportunity to develop a strong economic, diplomatic and political relationship.

Regards,

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