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Kurdish activist talks human rights at FSU

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By Robin Fazio

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Imagine not being able to fly your flag or speak your native language without fear of imprisonment.

Imagine watching your village turn into rubble from bombs or learning that a friend or family member had been jailed and tortured. Unbeknownst to most Americans, this is the situation for millions of Kurdish people living in the Middle East.

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Students at Florida State University had the opportunity last week to learn first-hand about the Kurds through a visit with a Kurdish human-rights activist. Kani Xulam, a refugee from Turkish Kurdistan, shared his experiences with a group of students Jan. 22 on the FSU campus. Xulam is the founder and director of the nonprofit organization AKIN, the American Kurdish Information Network.

Many Americans are familiar with the Kurds of Iraq, who were brought into the media spotlight by siding with the U.S. in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Most, however, do not know that Kurdish Iraq is only a part of Kurdistan, the Kurds' ancestral homeland, which also makes up large parts of present-day Iran, Syria and Turkey.

The 35 million Kurds who live in these nations are suffering a "cultural genocide," where they are denied even the most basic human rights. Their suffering continues in silence, however, as very little international attention is focused on their plight.

Since 1993, Xulam has lobbied Congress and sought to educate the American public of the human-rights abuses endured by the Kurds as they try to assert their rights and establish their homeland. Xulam's presentation, sponsored by FSU's Center for Participant Education, focused specifically upon the Kurds in Turkey, the reasons for the Turkish government's continued persecution of the Kurds and what Americans could do to help.

For more information, contact Kani Xulam at www.kurdistan.org, or FSU's Center for Participant Education at www.yourfreeuniversity.org.



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