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UKH Alumni
Association

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NAMO ABDULLAH

Rudaw TV Host

Studying at UKH was undoubtedly one of the best decisions, if not the best decision, I've ever made in my life. Prior to coming to UKH, I was a student in the English Language department at Salahadin University. I had completed one year there but didn't feel that I was learning much. I decided to switch and study at UKH.



At UKH, I studied Political Science and International Relations, but more importantly, I became fluent in English due to their foundation programme, which helped us improve our language skills. After that, I began taking courses in Political Science and International Relations, which have been instrumental in my career as a political journalist.

I learned about political theories, different forms of government, party systems, and various types of democracies, including parliamentary and presidential systems. I also studied political ideologies and philosophies, which broadened my understanding of the world.

This education made me a better political journalist, as you need to understand different forms of governance to write well-informed stories. I had already been involved in journalism during my school years, contributing to student newspapers, and at UKH, I served as the editor-in-chief of the student magazine, The Window.

I have always loved journalism, and eventually, I freelanced for major publications such as The New York Times, Reuters, and Al Jazeera. In 2009, I founded the English-language version of Rudaw's news website. Then, in 2010, I applied for a master's programme at Columbia University and was fortunate enough to be accepted.

I earned my master's degree in Political Journalism from Columbia's Journalism School, and since then, I have predominantly worked for Rudaw as a television journalist, covering the United Nations, the White House, the Department of State, and the Pentagon, essentially all the major political institutions in the United States.

From 2020 to 2022, I worked for the Voice of America on their Extremism Watch Desk, covering extremism-related activities worldwide and press freedom. Now, I'm back at Rudaw, hosting a tech and science show called Next. I also co-host Americracy, a weekly programme covering the US election campaigns.

VIDA HANNA

Executive Director of University Strategy and Programme Management at the Catholic University in Erbil (CUE)

My name is Vida Hanna, and I am a proud graduate of the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) with a B.Sc. in Computer Engineering. My journey since UKH has been an exciting blend of technical and humanitarian pursuits. My undergraduate experience provided me with a solid technical foundation and analytical skills that have proven invaluable throughout my career.

Building on this background, I went on to earn a Master's in Peace and Justice Studies at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego in the United States, where I specialised in human rights, conflict resolution, and international justice. For my master's thesis, titled Cybercrime in Iraq: Current Trends and Potential Policy Remedies, I integrated the technical insights from my computer engineering studies with the peace and justice focus of my postgraduate work. This research enabled me to explore the unique intersection of technology, security, and policy, addressing critical cyber issues facing Iraq today.

Currently, I am honoured to serve as the Executive Director of University Strategy and Programme Management at the Catholic University in Erbil (CUE), where I secure and manage a range of grants from diverse donors, including the U.S. Department of State and USAID. These grants allow us to implement impactful projects that expand educational access, strengthen institutional capacity, promote women's leadership, and enhance e-learning. Each of these initiatives presents an opportunity to make a meaningful difference—whether by creating scholarships for women, broadening online resources, or fostering American-style higher education practices.

I owe much of my journey to the foundation and inspiration I received at UKH. UKH helped me understand how higher education can change lives and equipped me to assist others in reaching their potential. Thank you, UKH, for being the catalyst for all that has followed.





NEWS

UKH GRADUATION CEREMONY CLASS OF 2024

The UKH Graduation Ceremony took place on October 24, 2024 at the Erbil International Fair ground. This ceremony was the biggest one in UKH's history, with 389 future leaders graduating from Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes. The high-profile event was an inspiration to all of us in the UKH community that dedication, hard work, and resilience are the key for success.

H.E. Masrour Barzani, KRG Prime Minister attended the event and delivered inspirational words, underscoring UKH's mission as a successful and a unique one in the region. "I say to you all that the nation expect great things from you. To the class of 2024, go for it and prosper. Believe in yourself. Challenge the boundaries and bring to us big ideas" he said addressing our graduates.

The ceremony was special as UKH conferred an honorary Doctor of Philosophy (Honoris Causa) to US General Kenneth F. Mckenzie Jr., USMC (retired). While introducing the

degree conferral, Chair of UKH Board of Governors Marshall Billingslea delivered a short speech and mentioned the General's role as Commanding Leader of the US Central Command, he led the military coalition fighting alongside the Peshmerga to defeat Daesh. "You've all heard the saying no friends but the mountains. In truth, Kurdistan actually has a lot of additional friends, and General Mckenzie is one of them" said Billingslea. In a video speech delivered by General Mckenzie, he congratulated UKH graduates on their graduation. "I admire that one of the founding ideas behind UKH is to prepare students for civic service. Choosing to serve is an honourable path" he said.

The ceremony was also marked by awarding 14 of UKH faculty members for their Advance Higher Education (Advance HE) fellowship status, which comes as a part of UKH strategy to enhance teaching and learning status through international standards benchmarking.

SUPREME YOUTH COUNCIL: 1000 YOUTH TRAINING ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVE

In response to the urgent global call for climate action, the Supreme Youth Council from the Iraqi Prime Minister's office Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, launched Climate Change Training for 1000 Youth this initiative was launched to empower youths with knowledge, skills, and tools to combat climate change within their communities. This programme aimed to engage 1,000 motivated youth across the supreme youth council, empowering them as climate advocates capable of driving local environmental initiatives and promoting sustainable practices. This impactful training was hosted at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH), which played a pivotal role in fostering a learning environment that supports Iraq's vision of sustainability and innovation.

UKH provided both a world-class venue and academic leadership to the programme, reflecting its commitment to social and environmental responsibility with training sessions and workshops conducted on its campus. UKH's involvement in this national initiative underscores its commitment to social and environmental responsibility, providing a premier learning environment for participants from all over Iraq. By hosting this initiative, UKH provided young participants with access to its state-of-the-art facilities, reinforcing its standing as a center of academic excellence and community impact. UKH's dedication to sustainability and innovation was evident as it supported Iraq's youth in its mission to combat climate change.



GRAND OPENING CEREMONY OF THE AUSTRIA COMMUNITY CENTRE AT UKH



On Sunday, 13 October 2024, the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) hosted a grand opening ceremony for the Austria Community Centre on campus. The ceremony was attended by a distinguished array of diplomats, government officials, academics, and faculty members.

This centre represents a significant achievement, fostering closer ties between the Kurdistan Region and the Austrian community through mutual collaboration. It offers an excellent opportunity for academic exchange and cooperation with prestigious institutions. We have already established strong connections with the University of Leoben, one of the world's most renowned universities, and we are keen to expand these partnerships with other Austrian and European Union universities. Through this centre and our agreements, our students will have the chance to experience new cultures, not only in Austria but throughout the EU.



FAHIM DAVATOZZAKERIN

Founder and CEO of Popcorn Marketing

The title of being the first and only non-Kurdish, non-Iraqi graduate of UKH is something I will always hold dear to my heart.

Joining UKH was not an easy process, but it was my only option quite literally. In 2010, I travelled to Erbil, Kurdistan, after finishing high school to spend a year in community service. I fell in love with Kurdistan and its people. By the end of that year, it was time to continue my education. My parents gave me two options: join my brothers abroad or return to my homeland to start university.

I didn't want to leave Erbil. I began looking for English-medium universities, as I didn't speak Kurdish at the time. My options were limited: paying over \$10,000 a year at AUIS or gaining acceptance at UKH. My family couldn't afford the former, so UKH became my only choice and my sole chance to remain in Kurdistan.

I had to pass entry exams in English, Mathematics, and Computer Science. The first step of my dream came true when I not only passed the exams but was also accepted into the second year of the programme, recognising the year I had spent serving the Kurdish community. I'm sure other alumni understand the joy of those moments.

To illustrate how much UKH truly was a land of opportunities, three months after my enrolment, I was informed that my admission had been rejected because UKH, funded by the KRG, prioritised Kurdish and Iraqi nationals who could serve the region after graduation. It was a tough battle, but with the support of my lecturers and fellow students, I fought to stay. I will never forget Dr. Govand Baban's advocacy for my acceptance at UKH; a moment that shaped the course of my life.

This was the first of many "firsts" I experienced at UKH. I became the first non-Muslim Baha'i student elected to the Student Union with the highest number of votes, introduced TEDx to UKH, and



even provided live Kurdish-English interpretation at a high-level event after learning Kurdish.

UKH gave me more than an excellent education; it provided the space to discover my identity as an 18-year-old determined to contribute to society. I graduated from UKH with a job secured at an international marketing firm, just like many other UKH graduates, which is a testament to our high intellectual and ethical standards.

Although I wasn't contractually obliged to serve Kurdistan, I felt a deep obligation. I worked as a marketing lead for major brands like Burger King, Evyap International, and FIB, training hundreds and creating job opportunities for many local talents.

Today, I am a proud Kurdistan representative of the Baha'i community in the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, a member of the Baha'i Office of Representation and Dialogue, and I am the founder of Popcorn Marketing Agency, Business Impact Community (BICI), and the Gift Love online store.

The first step towards chasing your dreams and building a better Kurdistan can begin with choosing the right place for your education; mine started with UKH.

IMAN SALAH

Frac Field Engineer at SLB



My name is Iman Salah Hamad Khoshnaw, and I am a frac field engineer at SLB. In 2017-2018, I took a pivotal step by enrolling in the English foundation programme at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr. UKH played a crucial role in my personal and professional growth, helping me develop my skills and shape my career as a dedicated individual. The experience also allowed me to build valuable connections that have been instrumental in my journey. This experience opened new doors for me and laid a strong foundation for my future studies.

Driven by my passion for engineering, I pursued a degree in petroleum engineering. Throughout my academic journey, I engaged in

meaningful volunteering with UKH and Vision Education, enriching my experience while giving back to my community. I was fortunate to complete two summer internships with renowned international companies, SLB and Weatherford, which were vital in shaping my professional path.

Upon graduating in 2022, I received offers from both companies and ultimately chose to join SLB. I started as an entry-level engineer trainee and have since advanced to Field Engineer One in 2023, with aspirations to progress to Field Engineer Two in 2024. I take immense pride in being the first local Iraqi engineer in my segment, RPS (Reservoir Performance Stimulation), specialising in fracturing and stimulation.

I have worked across various fields in Kurdistan before moving to the Sultanate of Oman, where I spent a significant amount of time. Currently, I am based in southern Iraq, collaborating with different clients in the Rumaila and Zubair fields. I am proud to share that I have successfully implemented the very first two frac jobs in the south, marking these projects as the first of their kind for SLB in Iraq. This achievement not only reflects my dedication but also underscores the growing potential of our industry in the region.

Each day on the job deepens my commitment to making a meaningful impact and showcases the potential for women to excel in the oil and gas industry. I hope to inspire others especially young women so that they can pursue their dreams and embrace their potential. My journey is just beginning, and I am filled with excitement for what the future holds.



ALUMNI STORIES

ROJ MAJED ABDALLA

Head of Marketing at FIB

Reflecting on my journey from the University of Kurdistan Erbil to my current position feels both surreal and deeply connected to everything UKH taught me. I graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering and in 2017 with a master's degree in business management, with each step intertwined with memories, challenges, and the friends and mentors who have shaped me.

During my time at university, I seized every opportunity available: part-time jobs, summer positions, volunteering, and numerous events, seminars, and debates. UKH didn't just provide an education; it prepared me for a world that demands flexibility, proactivity, and resilience.

After graduating, I secured my first official role as a marketing specialist for a newly established payment provider. The excitement was palpable, but so were the demands. I had also just begun my master's degree, juggling work and studies until I reached a point where I had to make a decision: continue with the job or focus on my thesis. I chose to prioritise my thesis, determined to complete what I had started.

Upon finishing my master's, like many of my peers, I wanted to create something of my own. With a fellow UKH alumnus, I co-founded a digital marketing agency; a promising venture at the time. However, just two months in, ISIS entered Iraq. The economic ramifications were devastating, and our dreams felt almost unattainable. In such circumstances, it's tempting to push through the storm, but we quickly realised that a new company needs stability, and expanding in a turbulent economy was a risk we couldn't afford. We made the difficult decision to step back.

Fortunately, my UKH network proved invaluable. A friend referred me to a multinational marketing agency, where I applied and became an account executive for some of Iraq's largest brands. This role was transformative. Collaborating with international brands and standards felt like illuminating a room I had never entered. I eventually progressed to an account manager position, leading projects that were both challenging and enlightening.

Yet again, the market shifted. Due to economic tensions between the Kurdistan Region and the central government, we lost our major clients, and the agency ceased operations. I promised myself a two-week break before beginning the job hunt, but fate had other plans. COVID-19 struck just a few weeks later, and the world came to a standstill.

After lockdown, life gradually resumed, and I secured a position as a commercial manager with one of the largest holdings in Kurdistan. This role presented an extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities, working on diverse projects and business models that pushed my limits and broadened my skills. Eventually, I was entrusted with leading the marketing for the group's most significant entity: First Iraqi Bank (FIB). Together with a dedicated and talented team, we established the FIB name in nearly every household in the Kurdistan Region and achieved a 40% brand recognition across Iraq; an accomplishment I take great pride in. Our customer base expanded by 500% in just one year, a testament to our dedication and passion.

None of this would have been possible without UKH. It wasn't merely a degree; it was a foundation. The culture, values, critical thinking skills, and friendships instilled in me by UKH were the stepping stones for all I have achieved. On a personal note, UKH also gifted me my greatest treasure: I met my wonderful wife there, and we are now parents to a two-year-old son who reminds me every day of the beauty of life.

To all current students and recent graduates, I offer this advice: there will always be challenges, particularly in this region. Do not let them discourage you. They are there to strengthen you, sharpen your vision, and help you discover what you're truly capable of. Pursue what you love, embrace every experience, and live each day with no regrets. Every setback is part of the journey, and each one makes you stronger. Embrace it, and above all, live life to the fullest.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH WITH CPD AND A NEW COLLABORATION BETWEEN CPD AND THE FORUM ZFD

The Centre for Peacebuilding and Dialogue (CPD) at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr has been dedicated from its inception to promoting peacebuilding and dialogue through various activities and programmes aimed at achieving CPD's objectives and UKH's vision.

CPD has clearly outlined UKH's responsibilities in offering a wide range of opportunities as part of the university's role in community services, and it has consistently committed to aligning its efforts with this mission. CPD is once again providing an exceptional opportunity for students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and UKH by designing and delivering youth leadership programmes in peacebuilding, alongside a series of world-class training courses that are certified and internationally recognised. These programmes are intentionally inclusive, bringing together students from various institutions and universities to create a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

A key ambition of CPD is to empower youth in the realm of leadership and their contributions to the peacebuilding and decision-making processes. Additionally, I would like to highlight that, to fulfil this goal, the Centre has sought to expand its network by collaborating with international organisations and institutions that share a common vision and mission in peacebuilding, youth empowerment, promoting dialogue, and fostering tolerance. Examples of such initiatives include a series of workshops currently underway with our esteemed partner, Forum ZFD. Forum ZFD, also known as the Forum for Civil Peace Service, is a German organisation that has been operational since 1996. It



is supported by the BMZ and is committed to promoting peacebuilding and conflict transformation on a global scale. The series of training sessions that CPD and Forum ZFD have co-organised and facilitated primarily focus on community peacebuilding, capacity building for students and recent graduates, and, most importantly, public awareness.

Additional unique opportunities for youth and our community will emerge in the upcoming session of CPD; we encourage our youth and community members to participate and engage with the CPD team.

UKH SOUVENIR CORNER

The University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) has proudly launched its first-ever Souvenir Corner, marking a significant milestone as the first initiative of its kind in both the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. This innovative corner offers high-quality, branded merchandise that reflects UKH's identity and educational excellence. It provides students, alumni, and visitors with the opportunity to take home a tangible piece of the university's legacy, fostering a stronger connection to the institution and its values.

In addition to promoting UKH's brand, the Souvenir Corner also plays a key role in supporting the university's commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. By offering eco-friendly items such as reusable bottles and mugs, the corner encourages individuals to reduce waste and adopt more sustainable practices. This aligns with UKH's broader objective of creating a greener campus and contributing to a cleaner environment.

The Souvenir Corner serves as a dual-purpose space: it strengthens UKH's brand visibility while promoting sustainable habits, reflecting the university's ongoing commitment to quality education, environmental responsibility, and a brighter, greener future. Through this initiative, UKH continues to lead by example, empowering the university community to make a positive impact on both their personal environment and the world around them.



JAY KURDII

Social Media Influencer and Entrepreneur

When I reflect on my journey, I can confidently say that the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) played a significant, if not pivotal, role in shaping my future. Obtaining my master's degree in applied Linguistics and TESOL in 2019 was about much more than academics. UKH provided me with not only a degree but also a vision, ambition, and the skills necessary to pursue my dreams across various fields. Studying for my master's at UKH was undoubtedly one of the most challenging experiences I have ever faced. Balancing my marriage, work, and studies was incredibly tough, and there were moments when I questioned whether I could carry on. However, throughout this experience, I learned invaluable lessons about discipline and perseverance. Even in overwhelming times, I discovered that I could be stronger than I had ever imagined. This journey truly revealed to me what I can achieve when I confront challenges head-on.

By now, I am sure you have at least heard of "JayKurdii". Well, "JayKurdii" is me. There's an interesting story behind the name; people often ask what it means. During my time at UKH, Edward Bassett, who taught Contemporary American Literature, bestowed this nickname upon me. Without this UKH lecturer, I might have been known by a completely different name. Today, "JayKurdii" has amassed over a million followers on social media (across various platforms) throughout the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. My audience engages with me for my insights on language, technology, entrepreneurship, and cultivating a robust business mindset. When I share my experiences at UKH, many feel inspired, and some have even chosen to enrol at UKH as a result. That is an incredible feeling for me.



Being a social media influencer in the Kurdistan Region is not without its challenges. There are often criticisms, misunderstandings, and the pressure to remain constantly relevant. However, I believe these obstacles are there to strengthen us. I have learned that it is essential to put challenges behind you and maintain focus on your dreams. Difficulties present opportunities to prove ourselves, to demonstrate our capabilities, and to foster personal growth.

For anyone just starting out, I would say this: success is not a final destination; rather, it is the beginning of a journey that requires courage, patience, kindness, and a positive mindset to learn and continue progressing. This mindset has provided me with a community that believes in me and encourages me to reach for greater heights. I take great pride in being a diligent, disciplined, and consistent seeker of success (if that term can be coined). I am immensely grateful for the doors that UKH has opened for me and the motivation it has instilled to dream bigger and pursue my goals.

RAWAN ARSN

Assistant Lecturer at UKH

One of the most impactful moments during my time at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) was when Dr. Khalid, the Vice Chancellor, shared his insights on success. He explained that success is earned and deserved; each path marked by dedication and hard work. This philosophy resonated deeply with me and continues to guide the lessons I impart to my students.

From the moment I stepped into UKH as an undergraduate in 2011, I knew it was the right choice. Drawn by the university's vibrant community and its commitment to nurturing critical thinkers and problem solvers, I felt destined to forge my path here.

After graduation, my journey led me back to UKH in 2017 as a teaching and lab assistant while pursuing my MSc, funded by UKH for being among the top three students in my cohort. The countless hours spent on campus fostered a profound connection with the university, turning it into a second home. Over 13 years have passed since I first joined UKH, and my pride in this institution only grows stronger.

During the pandemic, I secured a position with the United Nations on a significant digitisation project, a long-held aspiration. This role showcased my problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and robust networking abilities, leading to a promotion as a national officer. This chapter of my career vividly demonstrates how clear vision and determination can transform dreams into reality.

My academic and professional pursuits advanced further when I was awarded the prestigious Chevening Scholarship, enabling me to pursue a second Master's degree in MBA with a focus on Artificial Intelligence at Cardiff University. Competing against 71,000 applicants and securing my place was not just an honour but a reaffirmation of the solid educational foundation at UKH.

The journey of turning dreams into reality is profound and compelling. It stands as a testament to the power of determination and vision in achieving one's goals. As I reflect on my transformative years at UKH, I am filled with gratitude for the myriad experiences that have shaped my academic and professional life. It is an honour to give back to the university that has offered me so much, inspiring a new generation of leaders and innovators.

At UKH, we are not just preparing for the future; we are actively shaping it with intention and precision, crafting a legacy of excellence and impact.



AVAN KANABI SHERWANI

Registry Officer and Assistant Lecturer at UKH

In 2015, I began my academic journey at UKH, pursuing a BSc in Civil Engineering, and graduated as the top student in 2020. UKH not only provided me with technical knowledge but also fortified my resilience in navigating life's challenges. The problem-solving mindset I developed during my time there helped me approach both academic and personal obstacles with confidence.



After completing my studies at UKH, I pursued a master's degree in Civil Engineering at Eastern Mediterranean University in Cyprus, where I graduated with a CGPA of 4.0. This experience taught me resilience and independence. I encountered diverse perspectives, which broadened my understanding of engineering solutions and global collaboration. It wasn't just the academic demands but also cultural differences and language barriers that pushed me to grow, both personally and professionally. This journey made me more adaptable and reinforced my ability to excel under pressure.

In September 2024, I received the Associate Fellowship certificate from Advance HE, marking another significant milestone in my professional journey.

Currently, as a Registry Officer and Assistant Lecturer at UKH, I apply the knowledge and skills I gained during both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies. My role allows me to bridge academia and administration, ensuring that academic policies are not only feasible but also aligned with the needs of students and faculty.

Looking ahead, I plan to pursue a PhD in Civil Engineering and further my experience as a lecturer, aiming to contribute more effectively to both academia and the registry at UKH. The university's supportive environment continues to inspire me, and I'm excited to give back to the community that shaped my career.

SAMAN HUSSEIN MOHAMMED

Production Technology Engineer at Northvolt Lab

This idea has always been central to my dreams as an aspiring engineer. When I received the call confirming my acceptance at the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr (UKH), it felt like the beginning of a journey I had long envisioned. I knew that UKH would not only equip me with technical knowledge but also foster the mindset necessary to create meaningful change in the world, helping me turn my aspirations into reality.

After graduating from UKH, I pursued a master's degree in Power Engineering-Energy Transition in Poland. This achievement was a direct result of the solid foundation I built at UKH. As I progressed through my studies, I was awarded an Erasmus scholarship to complete my final thesis between Sapienza University in Rome and Silesian University of Technology. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I completed my master's at Silesian University. Nevertheless, the knowledge and skills I gained at UKH made me competitive enough to secure such opportunities abroad.

In January 2021, I was offered a position at Northvolt Lab, one of the largest producers of lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles, located in Västerås, Sweden. As a Production Technology Engineer for Cathode Active Material, I draw directly on the foundation I received from UKH. The technical expertise and critical thinking skills I developed during my studies have been instrumental in my role, enabling me to contribute effectively to cutting-edge advancements in the energy sector.

The education I received at UKH not only opened doors internationally but also gave me the confidence to pursue my dreams. The university provided me with a broad understanding of modern engineering challenges, instilling in me the ability to adapt and thrive in any environment. UKH is more than just a place of learning; it is a springboard for success, empowering students with the tools to carry their knowledge forward and make meaningful contributions to the world.

