

Azadi Square today

Sun, 20 Mar 2011

The central square in Sulemaniya was absolutely packed today on the eve of the first day of spring. There was literally no room to move around. I am guessing that the crowd was in excess of 20,000. The square has been unofficially renamed Azadi, meaning freedom in Kurdish, by the protesters. Today's crowd was not only protesting but also celebrating. Kurds consider March 21 to be their new year. This new years festival dates back to at least 600 BC, long before the coming of Islam with all its rituals related to lunar movements.

The protest continues of course. The two Canadians, Nasiq Qadir and her husband Farouq Rafiq continue their presence every day, constantly talking with supporters in person or on cell phones, always moving, always surrounded by people. The stress must be relentless for them. It is clear that they are not seeking any political power out of this. They are simply making a way for the voices of ordinary people to be heard. Negotiations are going on between leaders of the protest movement and the government. We do not know how they are progressing but my guess is, that some reforms will be granted, perhaps not enough to satisfy the people, but there will be some positive outcomes from these weeks of protests. I do not think that a complete regime change is likely here but who am I to say that.

On the celebration side, fires had been lighted in the square. Along with the usual speeches there was music and later in the day, fire works. People were decked out in the finest of clothes. Many of the men and boys were wearing traditional Kurdish suits, quite loose and baggy but fastened tightly at the ankles. The waists are held with neatly tied sashes. I do not have the necessary fashion lingo to describe what the girls and women were wearing but it was clearly new and colourful, with bright reds, greens, yellows and blues predominating. The normal western style clothes we see every day had been replaced with long flowing sheer gowns over pant suits. The gowns were covered with golden sequins, at least I think that is what they are called. Well I did my best as a fashion writer so you can all have a good laugh and try to imagine what i am trying to say.

Love to all Allan Slater