

Beat: Politics

## Between Serving the People and Affirming Kurdish Rights

### Erbil Water Project

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**USPA NEWS** - In a calm yet deeply symbolic moment, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, Masrour Barzani, inaugurated the first phase of the Rapid Water Supply Project in Erbil. This was more than just the launch of a public utility infrastructure—it came at a time of mounting questions about local revenues and the region's authority, serving as a quiet, practical response to all the campaigns of doubt and marginalisation.

Erbil, a city that has experienced significant urban and population growth in recent years, has suffered from a severe water crisis, worsened by climate change and a decline in groundwater levels. This project represents a qualitative step—not only in meeting a basic daily need but also in affirming the region's ability to manage its affairs and execute vital projects despite political and financial pressures.

What distinguished this project, as Barzani highlighted, was not only the achievement itself but how it was accomplished: a local company, local labor and expertise, and even the majority of materials sourced locally. These are not mere technical details but a subtle message that Kurdistan can rely on itself when it is deprived of its resources or collectively punished through salary freezes or budget withholding.

Barzani's speech during the inauguration was not just a congratulatory address but a calm and transparent message outlining the internal and external challenges facing the region. These include issues like delayed salaries and recurrent drone attacks on Kurdistan's oil fields—an implicit message that every move toward public service is met with attempts to halt progress.

In a notably candid moment, Barzani spoke frankly to his people, pointing out that the region has been deprived of its fair share in public employment, social security, hospitals, schools, and even access to Iraqi markets for its agricultural products. This clear discrimination is not a misunderstanding of figures—it is a deliberate exclusionary approach that demands deep political and public awareness.

Yet, amid this bleak reality, signs of hope remain. The Regional Government remains committed to defending its rights while expressing readiness to cooperate as a partner—not a subordinate. It is determined to proceed with projects like 24-hour electricity, water recycling, and infrastructure expansion, despite all obstacles.

Since assuming office in 2019, Masrour Barzani has launched a series of major service and development projects. Chief among them is the "Ronakî Project," aimed at providing 24-hour electricity across the region. More than 30 new transformer stations have been installed, and the distribution network has been fully upgraded in Erbil and Duhok, reaching over 80% completion by mid-2025.

Over the past four years, the government has completed around 280 strategic projects in sectors such as health, education, roads, electricity, and water, with investments exceeding 3.5 trillion Iraqi dinars. Among the notable projects:

- Construction of more than 500 km of new roads and 15 strategic bridges to facilitate trade and intercity connectivity.
- Water recycling projects in Erbil and Duhok, reducing groundwater consumption by 30%.
- Building or rehabilitating over 250 new schools and developing the digital infrastructure in education.

These efforts are not separate from the broader context of systematic pressure from the federal government on the region, particularly in areas of funding and economic sovereignty. Baghdad has withheld salaries for months under legal and political pretexts, imposing unrealistic conditions that even exceed constitutional limits. It has also restricted Kurdish oil exports via the Ceyhan port, causing billions in losses for the region.

These pressures extend to denying the region its share in centrally funded projects and freezing allocated funds under the budget law, while using the Federal Supreme Court as a political tool to enforce centralised control and block any attempt by Kurdistan to manage its resources independently. Although couched in terms of “sovereignty” and “unity,” these policies effectively amount to “gradual economic strangulation”, aiming to force political submission and undo the constitutional gains achieved post-2005.

In the face of this harsh reality, the Kurdistan Regional Government has chosen not confrontation or populist rhetoric, but a response rooted in facts and achievements. Under Masrour Barzani’s leadership, the Region has witnessed a notable boom in construction and services. Over 1,250 projects have been completed in service and investment sectors, costing more than 4.7 trillion Iraqi dinars, including roads, bridges, housing complexes, electricity, and water networks.

One of the most prominent is the Ronakî electricity project, which has delivered clean energy to approximately 250,000 residents, reducing dependence on generators by 35%. Government plans also include building and upgrading over 400 kilometers of strategic roads, such as the Sheikhan–Lalish Road Project, which is 85% complete, stretching 8.2 km in length and 25.5 meters wide, at a cost of over 26 billion dinars.

In health and education, more than 100 schools and healthcare facilities have been built or rehabilitated across various provinces. Cancer and cardiac treatment centers equipped with modern technology have been opened, reducing patient pressure and the need for treatment outside the region. The private sector has also contributed by developing new industrial zones that created over 15,000 jobs in just two years.

These numbers are not just metrics of achievement—they reflect a vision built on long-term planning rather than short-term fixes. These projects were not executed for political marketing, but to genuinely improve the lives of Kurdish citizens.

With quiet determination, Barzani affirmed that what is being accomplished on the ground is the best answer to skeptics. When projects of this scale are realized without federal support, the real question becomes: What could be achieved if the Region’s constitutional rights were respected and it were treated as a true partner in the country?

The Erbil Water Project, at its core, is more than a pipeline delivering water to homes—it is a symbol of self-governance resilience, the ability to adapt and work under pressure, and a powerful yet silent form of resistance. A reminder that in Kurdistan, “service” itself has become a form of resistance—a defiant response to those who seek to trap the region in manufactured crises.

This moment—full of symbolism and achievement—reminds us that Iraq’s conflict is not only about influence, but also about the very definition of justice. Can justice be selective? Can a people be asked to give up their local revenues and resources while being denied even the most basic rights to a fair share of national wealth?

In conclusion, the Prime Minister’s speech was not an excuse—it was a roadmap: We will keep building—not with slogans, but with service; not with charity, but with rightful claim. With every completed project, Kurdistan’s true face emerges and its voice grows louder, even if spoken softly.

Kurdistan does not ask for sympathy—  
It demands justice.  
And water, electricity, and roads...  
Are only the beginning—much more is coming through will and action.

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