



# UKH ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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## MOHAMED IHSAN ISSA

Media Advisor and Project Manager

I have always been considered delusional. I envision doing things that those around me think are undoable or shouldn't be done. That's how I get on with life. I failed English when I was 12; I detested the feeling and became fluent by 13. I felt caged



in my hometown and was living in another by 17. I loved journalism and writing; I became one of the most impactful senior editors in the country by 23. The economic terrain was hostile to startups in 2019, so I started a business anyway, and it became a leader in its field by the time I was 27. Today, at 31, I'm still delusional about what life can offer.

I posted a Facebook status that said, "UKH, I'm here to rock your world" on my way to Erbil as an official UKH student. When I arrived, the registrar told me, "Your entrance exam results are impressive; we will offer you an accelerated programme." This moment spoke to me about my potential, and now that I was in an environment that rewarded my abilities, I had to grow. It's a responsibility to leave no stone unturned in seeking opportunities to both take and give.

I wasn't a model student, but I was involved. I welcomed new students to campus, helped others adjust, ensured UKH was competitive in all fields, including the arts and sports, and occasionally stirred opinions on crucial matters. Our lives are not bound by the same limitations set on movie screenwriters. There's no typical arc. We don't control the universe of our existence but solely the narrative of our own being. Hence, this is not a success story but an invitation to be delusional; to believe that you can do much more than others give you credit for.

## TARA REBWAR YOUNUS

Project Assistant at (IOM)

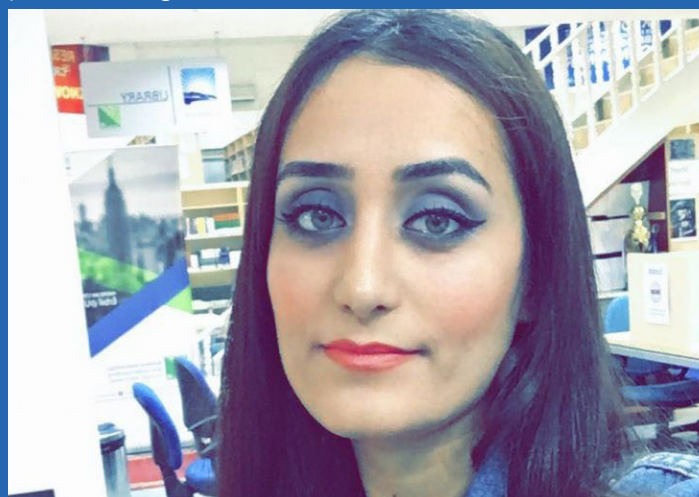
Getting accepted into the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) in 2007 was like a dream come true for me. I can still recall the excitement and anticipation as I put my heart and soul into the entrance tests for the foundation programme, and the joy of receiving my bachelor's degree in information technology. My time at UKH was truly life-changing, shaping me in ways I never could have imagined.

What set UKH apart for me was its innovative approach to education. It wasn't a typical lecture-and-memorise kind of place. Instead, professors fostered discussions, encouraged debates, and challenged us to think critically. It wasn't merely about repeating facts; it was about understanding concepts and applying them creatively. That kind of environment really fuelled my passion for learning.

After graduating, I worked in local and international companies before returning to UKH as a library technician. Returning to UKH felt like coming home. It allowed me to give back to the institution that had shaped me and contributed significantly to my professional journey. Being part of the UKH community once again, I found renewed purpose and passion in supporting the next generation of students as they embarked on their academic endeavours. Helping students in their research felt like coming full circle. Those years in the library connected me with amazing faculty and administrators while teaching me invaluable lessons.

With my IT degree from UKH in hand, seeking new challenges led me to Norwegian People's Aid, an international humanitarian organisation where I delved into Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning, taking the role of MEAL Officer. It was a whole new world, but thanks to the solid foundation UKH provided, I was able to transition smoothly into the international humanitarian sector.

Looking ahead to where I am now, I'm working as a Project Assistant with a UN agency (IOM). This role lets me tap into all the different experiences and skills I've picked up along the way. I'm thankful for the life-changing experiences and education I received at UKH, and I'm determined to apply them to create positive change in the world.



## DASTAN MOHAMED KARIM

**Head of Operations at Mercato Brokers**

My name is Dastan Mohamed Karim, and I am the Head of Operations at Mercato Brokers. I graduated from the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management in 2012 and a Master of Arts in Business Management in 2015.

After graduation, I worked with international companies like Chevron and Rosneft. At Chevron, I started as an admin assistant to the supply chain manager and rose to the role of services manager, managing facilities. During my five years in the procurement department, I handled roles like contract administrator and contract adviser, managing tenders, contracts, and due diligence of contractors.

Moving to Rosneft was challenging due to the cultural differences. Chevron focused on business results, while Rosneft emphasised strict adherence to procedures. Adapting to this new culture was tough, but I learned to find common ground. At Rosneft, I built the materials management department from scratch, establishing an industry-standard warehouse and procedures within seven to eight months.

In the last two years, I worked with local companies, focusing on management reforms. At Al-Istiqama, a logistics company serving the United States Army, I was the general manager. I improved business development, operations, customer support, administration, and finance. Within six months, I reformed the company's management structure, segregated duties, automated processes, and significantly improved customer service. Automation was key, using Microsoft Planner for task assignments and communication groups on Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp.



Currently, at Mercato Brokers, I focus on improving customer support, responding to customer demands, and establishing an industry-standard CRM system. Over my 16 years of experience, I have found my passion in managing administration and operations, areas many business owners find tedious but which I enjoy and excel at.

I would not be where I am today without the life-changing experiences I had at UKH. My advice to current UKH students and recent graduates is to study hard and gain as much knowledge as possible. I regret not studying well during my bachelor's degree, which is why I pursued a Master's to compensate for the missed knowledge. This knowledge will distinguish you from graduates of other universities. Also, participate in social and volunteer activities to gain valuable experience and confidence. I was the head of the Student Union, and the confidence I gained from that experience continues to help me in my career. Lastly, work on your self-confidence. It is essential for your personal and professional growth.

## FRIBA SARKAWT

**Country HR Officer at IMMAP**



I am delighted to share my journey, one that commenced with the completion of my high school education with distinction. Following this achievement, I applied for the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) and successfully passed the TOEFL English test, earning admission as a student. Prior to embarking on this educational odyssey, my father, who served as global security in an oil company, encouraged me to pursue studies in the mineral and oil department at UKH.

My time at UKH was not without its trials, especially during my inaugural year of study when my father passed away. Despite this profound loss, I persisted and completed my degree in mineral engineering and management with commendable grades. His unwavering encouragement to pursue education at UKH remained a beacon of guidance throughout.

My tenure at UKH introduced me to the organisational sector, particularly through my involvement with the Hope Foundation, where we provided support to refugee camps. Fuelled by the confidence instilled in me by UKH, I ventured into the realm of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) post-graduation. Beginning as an intern, I gradually assumed diverse roles within various NGOs such as BCF, NRC, ACTED, PAH, and SWEDO, and undertook freelance assignments with the Canadian Embassy. It was during this journey that I discovered my passion for Human Resources (HR), which led me to join IMMAP Inc. as an HR and finance assistant.

My unwavering dedication and hard work were duly recognised, resulting in three promotions within four years, progressing from senior HR assistant to HR officer, and finally assuming the role of acting HR coordinator for a period of three months. Throughout this trajectory, the vision, values, and concepts instilled in me by UKH remained steadfast companions, guiding me through every endeavour. Sharing these principles with future generations has been immensely gratifying, and I found the perfect platform to do so.

Despite encountering scepticism and barriers due to my achievements, I remained resolute, leveraging my success as a response to doubters. Balancing familial responsibilities with professional endeavours, particularly as a mother to a daughter, posed its own set of challenges. However, my experience at UKH endowed me with the resilience and determination to effectively manage both aspects of my life.

The supportive environment and quality education at UKH empowered and emboldened me to pursue my future aspirations with confidence. My journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of education and perseverance in surmounting obstacles to achieve both personal and professional success.





## INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT IN PORTUGAL

The University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) has forged its first-ever Cooperation Protocol with Portugal through the esteemed I-Piaget Institute. This partnership spans six countries of Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique. This historic collaboration marks a new chapter of international cooperation for UKH, uniting the Kurdistan Region with regions renowned for their rich cultural heritage and academic excellence.

Together, we will take initiatives towards achieving knowledge exchange, innovation, and global impact.

The Cooperation Protocol was signed by an external engagement team led by Dr. Bayar Mustafa Sêvdeen, Dean of Research and External Engagement, during the 30th anniversary of I-Piaget Viseu, where UKH was invited as their new strategic partner. UKH is I-Piaget's first partner in Iraq and the Middle East, building a bridge of knowledge exchange between the two parts of the world.

Stay tuned as we develop avenues of collaboration, fostering work on sustainability, interculturality, health, and other academic avenues.

## UKH STUDENT TOPS RESEARCH COMPETITION IN ABU DHABI UNIVERSITY

The University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) is proud to announce that Ameer Hameed Majeed, senior student in the Computer Science programme (Undergraduate level) has topped a research competition held in Abu Dhabi University recently.

Ameer and four of his classmates participated in the 11th Undergraduate Research and Innovation Competition (URIC) at Abu Dhabi University on May 23, 2024.

Ameer's research, titled "Optical Character Recognition for Handwritten Syriac Text" was ranked top among 400 research papers from 25 disciplines, representing 64 universities across 14 countries. This is the first time a Kurdish student has achieved this distinction.

Ameer's project aims to develop an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) model so as to recognise handwritten text of Syriac, which is an endangered and low-resourced

language, and output them in a digitized format using fine-tuning of the Tesseract-OCR engine on handwritten data. And it also seeks to bring forth a dataset that consists of handwritten Syriac sentences, of which were collected from volunteers that are capable of reading and writing in the language.

Ameer was warmly welcomed by UKH president Prof. Dr. Keith Sharp today and was awarded a shield of honor for his achievement. UKH vice president Prof. Dr. Dana Mawlood, the acting dean of the School of Science and Engineering Prof. Dr. Tarik A. Rashid as well as Dr. Hossein Hasani, Ameer's research supervisor and Ahmed Qosaeri, the team mentor joined the meeting to congratulate the student group.

UKH extends its warmest congratulations to Ameer and his colleagues on their remarkable achievement.







## ARDALAN ABDULWAHID

CEO of Ronaki Chra Company

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) in 2010. My academic journey at UKH provided me with a profound understanding of societal structures and the complexities of human interactions. Shortly after graduation, I embarked on my professional career, starting as an admin in various educational institutions. This role allowed me to apply my sociological insights practically, managing and improving educational environments to foster better learning experiences.

In 2012, I pursued further academic growth by starting my Master's degree. During this period, I actively participated in numerous dialogue and culture events, enriching my understanding of diverse perspectives and enhancing my ability to navigate and contribute to multicultural settings. These experiences were invaluable in broadening my worldview and honing my communication skills.

Currently, I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Ronaki Chra, a prominent company that owns and operates Shahan Schools and kindergartens. In this capacity, I oversee the strategic direction and operational efficiency of our educational institutions, ensuring they provide high-quality education and nurturing environments for our students. Under my leadership, Shahan Schools have flourished, becoming renowned for their academic excellence and commitment to holistic student development.

In addition to my role at Ronaki Chra, I also work as an adviser for the Khoshnaw Group. In this advisory position, I leverage my extensive experience in education and administration to provide strategic guidance and support for the group's diverse initiatives. My involvement with the Khoshnaw Group allows me to contribute to a broader spectrum of projects, furthering my impact on the community and enhancing my professional expertise.

Balancing these roles has been both challenging and rewarding, allowing me to continuously grow and adapt in dynamic environments. My journey from a Sociology graduate to a leader in the educational sector underscores my commitment to fostering positive societal change through education and strategic leadership.

## ROZHAN SALIH BARZANI

Assistant Lecturer at UKH

My journey of success began the moment I stepped into the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH) in 2019. As a Master's student in Business and Management, UKH provided me with the environment and opportunities to prove my abilities as a woman. During my short study period, I applied for a job at UKH and started working as an admin while writing my Master's thesis. After two years, I began my academic journey. I had never dreamed of being a teacher, but I discovered that being a teacher is a significant and sacred responsibility. The most beautiful part of being a teacher is being loved by my students. In my classes, I don't just teach; I also encourage my students to love their country, feel responsible, and work hard on their dreams. I am now an assistant lecturer, a Ph.D. student, and a researcher, steadily realising my dream of becoming an independent woman and a role model for my community.

The establishment of UKH by President Nechirvan Barzani played a crucial role in my journey. Before joining UKH, I had never attended an English-based school or university. Many doubted my ability to succeed, questioning whether I had the necessary qualifications. Despite these doubts, I believed in myself and spent countless sleepless nights preparing for the English test. My hard work paid off, and I was accepted into UKH, where my true potential began to flourish. After attending my Master's programme, I was able to communicate in English, often better than some students who came from English-based education backgrounds. This realisation made me see that I am a fast learner, and I decided to learn more. Now, I speak five languages. Most importantly, I gained the skill of being unstoppable, becoming more social, and taking advantage of every moment by acquiring new skills.



UKH not only shaped my academic and professional abilities but also empowered me to break barriers and defy expectations. Reflecting on my journey, I encourage the youth of Kurdistan to actively seek opportunities and shape the future of our nation with innovation. Never wait for opportunities to come to you; venture out and strive for growth. With determination and effort, you will find success. Most importantly, I urge the women of Kurdistan to fight for their dreams and manifest their immense potential. Never depend on anyone for your success; believe in yourself and work tirelessly towards your goals. Our country needs your input to thrive, and a society that harnesses the abilities of its women can overcome any obstacle.



## ALUMNI STORIES

### BAXTIYAR GORAN

**Political Assistant, Embassy Office of Canada  
in Erbil**

I still remember the exact moment when I received a phone call from one of the members of staff of the University of Kurdistan-Hawler. I admit that the call changed my life.

I was sitting and playing video games on my computer, feeling disappointed that two people with whom I shared a taxi journey from Bardarash to Erbil to take the entry exam at UKH had been accepted a week earlier, while I had heard no news from UKH even though I was certain that I did well in the exams. It was 9:29 AM on September 29, 2010, when I was informed that I had successfully passed the entry exam and was accepted to study for a Bachelor's degree in politics and international relations at UKH. That phone call was indeed the start of the successful career that UKH instilled in me.

Coming from an educational background where I graduated from a public high school with very limited exposure to the English language, then joining a top university in the Kurdistan Region where the education system is completely in English and almost all the teaching staff are native English speakers, was a difficult start. It was a challenging journey to embark on, especially during the two years of the Access Programme. In the meantime, this was an opportunity to learn, improve, and thrive.

The environment and learning experience that UKH made available for me, and the rest of the students created a transformative journey, enabling us to navigate academic challenges, forge

life-long friendships, and discover our passions. It was a process to prepare 'qualified youth' for a highly demanding labour market, and 'opened the door of opportunity' to me personally and to all other graduates.

The experience I personally gained during my five years of BA and two years of MA studies at UKH was truly transformative in many ways. It was not only about academic excellence, but also about the learning process I went through, facilitated by the wide range of networking opportunities that UKH helped us create and the valuable volunteering opportunities that UKH provided for me personally. These were truly life-changing experiences, especially the two years at the Student Union—one year as Head of Public Relations and the other as President of the Student Union.

I can confidently say that UKH played a pivotal role in shaping my journey and career trajectory. Having worked at the KRG's Joint Crisis Coordination Centre for four and a half years and at the same time at the Kurdistan24 English website for four years just three months after my graduation is truly a testament to the transformative power of UKH's education system that helped us pursue our dreams. Now that I am working as a political assistant at the Embassy Office of Canada in Erbil, all thanks to UKH's investment in empowering and equipping us with the skills and knowledge required in the current labour market.



## ARI TAHA GURON

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation  
Administrator at UKH**

How inspiring it is to see your remarkable journey, from being the first group of IT students at UKH in 2011 to now serving as a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Administrator at the best university, UKH. Moreover, after my BSc degree in IT, I have worked in many leading private sector companies as an IT Support and Manager. For instance, the first company I started to work for was Audi & Volkswagen, a leading German automotive brand. Afterwards, I worked for DeFacto Company as an IT Support Supervisor. After my Master's degree, I worked as the Head of Department at Ayanda Private Technical Institute for one academic year, followed by two years of professional work at the Mosul Dam Project in Mosul.

Despite the challenges of losing my parents, I persevered and continued my education, eventually becoming a post-graduate student at UKH in 2015. This resilience and determination are truly admirable. That degree opened many doors for my skills and knowledge. For instance, being a four-year academic teaching staff member at the Catholic University in Erbil is another achievement as a UKH alumnus. CUE really played a great role in empowering my professional and personal growth, giving me the chance to become the Student Affairs Manager during my professional journey there. Moreover, many other academic institutions have offered me job offers to join them due to my status as a UKH alumnus and possessing the needed experience alongside the required skills the marketplace wants. Thus, I am proud of myself for being lucky to be a UKH alumnus, which opened many doors of opportunity for me.

UKH has played a pivotal role in my personal and professional growth, and it's heartwarming to see how I have embraced the privilege of being a UKH alumnus. My achievements are a testament to the transformative power of education and the supportive environment that UKH fosters. Thank you, UKH, for cultivating an environment that empowers individuals like me to thrive. Here's to celebrating the privilege of being a UKH alumnus!

