



Report on the Rojava Conference by Kurdish Lobby Australia

The Rojava Revolution in northern Syria: An experiment in radical democracy, feminism & ecology

Friday 30 June – Saturday 1 July 2017

Victoria University, Melbourne

*Organised by Australians for Kurdistan and
Kurdish Democratic Community Centre of Victoria*

Day 1: Friday 30 June.

Saleh Muslim, Co-Chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) via Skype:

Saleh Muslim: Athens' democracy had free people but also slaves. A free people means free men and women. Democracy needs protection and freedom for diversities. In northern Syria, women protect themselves and society and there is brotherliness between peoples and nations. But there are two difficulties for the Rojava region. The first is that from the early twentieth century there has been a non-acceptance of Kurds. The second is that anti-democratic monarchies and dictatorships have been attacking societies and continue to attack the project for the Northern Federation of Syria. Project members have been defending themselves and have been protecting humanitarian values.

Michelle Harding, mother of Reece Harding, who joined the Peoples' Protection Unit (YPG) to fight ISIS and died in June 2015 after stepping on an anti-tank mine

'Humanity is defined as the human race and human qualities, the ability to have compassion. We are all equal as humans. We must preserve, protect and defend humanity and allow it to thrive and leave the race in a better condition than what it was before.' Over the past few years Michelle has concluded that there is not much honour and decency, and that truth is being obscured. The same mistakes continue to be made, and there has been little knowledge, few voices and little support from the outside world to establish gender equality and justice in the Rojava region.

On her visit to Rojava, Michelle found the people honourable, kind and gentle. Although they have suffered persecution, they haven't lost their sense of hope, cheerfulness and humour, and are not bitter. They wear poor clothing, shoot simple guns and are without armour plated body protection, but they fight for justice in a true war of good versus evil. Michelle says, 'Their values are 'our' values. We need to stand with them and fight the problems that we probably started.'

Cekdar Deger: Kurdish Democratic Community of Victoria

Speaking on the background, elements of, and importance of Rojava for the Middle East.

1. *Background* – In Rojava there were three million Kurds but the population has grown to 4.5 million since 2011 with IDPs coming to the region. In 2012 Assad's forces withdrew from



Rojava in order to fight Islamists, and Chechnyans, Arabs, Assyrians and Armenians were protected by YPG/YPJ. In 2014 Afrin and Kobane declared autonomy and in 2016 the Democratic Federation of Syria was formed.

2. *Elements* – The federation is a grass roots movement. It rejects the concept of nation states and one religion, distributes power and functions from the bottom up instead of the top down. Everyone participates; there is gender equality, a 40% quota of women on committees and councils, and social justice. There are women's shelters to protect women fleeing poverty.
3. *Importance* – The Rojava project offers a way to develop peace, freedom and democracy for Syria and the Middle East.

Andrea Maksimovic, ACTU-international officer

Andrea Maksimovic: 'It was hard to get people in the ACTU involved in international solidarity, ecological health, education and peace. Turkey has sacked 140,000 public servants, purged teachers, judges and prosecutors and pro-Kurdish political leaders, writers and journalists. Newspapers have been shut down as well as NGO's and women's centres. Government agents have killed people and Kurdish forces, and have gaoled the head of Amnesty International. The Turkish Government has abused worker's rights due to the emergency decree. The International Labour Organisation has received complaints about this. I suggest you join your relevant union to get ACTU on side, get politicians on side, and protest to the Human Rights Commission.'

Rob Starr: human rights lawyer

Rob Starr: 'The Australian Government has recently passed fifty pieces of anti-terrorism law. There is a prohibition against any organisation involved in self-determination. It is ok to fight for Erdogan, Israel and Assad, but individuals cannot attack or oppose any sovereign government. Australia has internment without charge of suspected terrorists, even those from democratic, secular organisations. The terrorism label is applied selectively. Even if Turks are involved in illegal invasions, they are exempt from the charge of terrorism.'

Jessie Smith, Starr lawyers

Jessie Smith: In 2010 the Australian Federal Police raided Kurdish houses in Australia. Those allegedly associated with the PKK have been prosecuted. In the 2016 case of Renas Lelikan, Australian criminal and domestic laws were applied. Australia's foreign policy indicates Australia is happy for Kurds to do the heavy lifting in fighting ISIS but then throws those who join Kurdish forces in Syria (YPG/YPJ) in gaol when they come home. Jamie Williams was charged with attempting to join the YPG. He faced life imprisonment and loss of citizenship. The Attorney General withdrew charges against Jamie because the Attorney General would have had to decide if YPG was a democratic organisation or a terrorist organisation. Terrorism laws are used in the case of any political or military action against a sovereign government. Foreign fighter laws have been applied to mercenaries in Yugoslavia, but not to those who have fought for the governments of Greece and Israel. It is legal to serve in a sovereign state like Saudi Arabia.



Terrorism has no international legal definition. YPG members have been charged in Britain, even though the coalition supports YPG fighting ISIS in Syria.

The use of the term 'terrorism' in relation to armed conflict should be reviewed. Its use should be confined to a country in a state of peace. The definition of terrorism should be related to breaches of the Geneva Convention. The European Union does not prosecute for terrorism, it prosecutes for war crimes. Turkey has not signed the International Criminal Code. This is a matter that the Australia Government should ask about in light of Turkey's crimes against humanity. Syria is also not a signatory to the code.

DAY 2: Saturday 1 July

Saleh Muslim, Co-Chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) via Skype:

Towards a new Syria – the Federation of Northern Syria as a Model.

Saleh Muslim: The genocide of Armenians and Syriacs has not been recognised. Statism means being stuck and not recognising what is needed, not wanting to change when the rest of the world has changed. Statists want to go back to the Ottoman Empire and kill and torture Kurds.

The Syrian Revolution called for freedom, equality and democracy. In 2003 Kurds had to find a way of doing this by organising people, especially women, into a self-administering democracy of free people. As a result the PYD was established in 2003.

From 2004 – 2011 the Kurds of northern Syria organised themselves at the village level and then liberated their territory in 2012. Syrian Kurds have organised women and councils and have formed cantons and civil defence units.

The Battle of Kobane against ISIS began at the end of 2014. Jabhat al-Nusra / Al-Sham supported by Turkey tried to destroy Kurdish society. After ISIS was defeated at Kobane ISIS began to weaken and has continued to do so. However, it is still fighting hard. The Syrian Democratic Forces, which is about half YPG and YPJ and half Arab, continues to fight ISIS.

Democratic Federalism is based on the Social Contract or Constitution. Arabs and Kurds have formed self-administering councils and have joined self-defending units freely, along with Turkmen, Chechnyans and Armenians. This grass roots model is for all Kurdistan and could be applied to Syria.

In the Federation both men and women are creating a free society for all humanity, as in Australia and Europe. Pressure is required so that diplomatic and political organisations support us.

A change in mentality requires time and patience but in Rojava, all people, including Arabs, are fighting and living together. In Manbij the system is working well – there is growing trust. The social economy is a natural emergence of Kurdish society. But for four years it has been under siege by Turkey and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which can close the border crossing and prevent humanitarian aid from entering the region. As a result, the people are learning to do everything themselves by forming co-operatives. Their democracy is organised from the bottom to the top,



from local committees to the top level of government. Women are part of this system but it is not a classical democracy. This society is stronger and able to defend itself and build its economy.

In answer to a question about the nature of opposition to Assad outside Rojava: Other parties support a democratic federation for Syria. There are more than twenty political parties in Syria, in which Arabs, Kurds and Syrians are partners. They consist of liberals, socialists and communists. In Rojava, Muslims accept and live with Yezidis and Christians.

In answer to a question about what happens when large corporations want to operate in Rojava: It is up to the people to decide what happens, especially on the subject of oil and gas. Feasibility studies must be conducted and the companies must co-operate with the peoples' co-cooperatives in which everyone shares in everything in order to enrich the people.

In answer to a question about what will people do if Turkey attacks Afrin: This is a real threat. Originally Turkey supported Daesh and continues to support Jabhat al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sham and others to enforce demographic changes in northern Aleppo, bringing displaced people from Homs and other places to settle in Kurdish villages. There have been shellings in Afrin and Til Rafaat. The YPG responds to this aggression.

In answer to how PYD navigates links with PKK internationally and what its relationship is with the KDP: Kurds have more enemies than friends. Turks are paying a lot of money to lobby Russia and the US, which has dampened Rojava relations with both the West and Syria. However, the US and Russia have interests in common with Rojava at the moment. The future is unknown.

PYD has no organised relations with PKK, although we share ideological positions. The PYD is a Kurdish political party and is not ready to fight PKK or be enemies with the PKK. PYD has good relations with all parties in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) except the KDP, which has close relations with Turkey that have created differences. We have differences in relation to the nation state versus the democratic nation. Misunderstandings occur with anyone who has close relations with Turkey. Better relations may develop.

In answer to a question on what will happen if the US abandons Rojava: Nobody created us and nobody can destroy us. We do not depend on the US or Russia. The relationship with the US emerged during the battle for Kobane when the US realised YPG and YPJ were determined to achieve victory. The US initiated contact, so now we have an agreement. The regime could not stand against Daesh, but YPG could. YPG is not afraid of the regime. They are depending on the people, their organisations and their forces. The YPG/YPJ do not receive a salary – they fight for bread and their beliefs. Agricultural activities have continued, and the administrations have received some oil money. Everyone is existing in a self-sufficient economy. However, in the fight for Raqqa, YPG are receiving weapons from the International Alliance.



David Holmes: Australians for Kurdistan

The Kurdish Freedom Struggle Today.

David Holmes: Raqqa will soon fall and Palmyra and Deir Ezzor city will go back to the regime. There are three options for Syria:

1. Dictatorship reconstituted by Russia and Iran;
2. Partition or Balkanisation where, for example, parts of Kurdistan will become like the KRG under the sway of imperialist powers; or
3. A new democratic federal Syria.

In January 2014, three democratic cantons in Syria were declared. In October 2014 the SDF was formed. In March 2016 the Federal system of Northern Syria was formed and in December 2016 the system decided on a Social Contract. This social contract can be found on <http://vvanwilgenburg.blogspot.com.au/2017/03/social-contract-of-democratic.html>

There are four official languages in Rojava. For instance, Cizre is called Beth Naran by Assyrians.

In the 1960s the Syrian regime cancelled the citizenship of more than 100,000 Kurds and moved Arab settlers into Rojava. Since 2011 there has been no counter-possession. The progressive attitude has a big impact on Arab communities. There has been equality of language use, co-chairs of each gender, women's rights and groups decide their own rights consistent with the contract. The old Syria can only be reconstructed by force and violence with support from Russia and Iran.

Unity requires decentralisation, local autonomy and equal language rights in some form of federation. Opponents try to make 'federation' synonymous with partition and breakup. But Switzerland has four languages in its canton system and when Ceylon tried to impose one language the nation split. Although the Syrian Constitution does not allow for a federal system and the Kurds' structures in the north are temporary, the Syrian people will decide their future.

There has been no ethnic cleansing within the territory governed by the federation. Instead they have taken in refugees but Assad will try to restore dictatorial control, using military force and Arab chauvinism. Therefore, the revolution must draw on Arab communities to survive.

Sherko Kirmanj from Malaysia

Reasons behind US support for Rojava.

Sherko Kirmanj: The US has a close relationship with Turkey but is supporting Rojava for eight reasons.

1. Since the start of the Syrian crisis the US has been looking for a partner on the ground. Originally it funded moderate opposition groups to the extent of US \$1.5 billion until the end of 2014, by which time the groups were decimated and dysfunctional. Their weapons ended up in the hands of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.
2. The YPG/YPJ's resistance in Kobane showed the determination of Kurds, and media and the internet community pressured western powers to support the YPG/YPJ fighting ISIS in



Kobane. In this and subsequent operations Kurds proved they could attack, defend, liberate and hold ground and that they were reliable partners. The battle of Manbij galvanised relationships further. Direct contact with the US military and YPG has enhanced discipline and strengthened relations.

3. After the rise of ISIS it became obvious that Turkey was at best a bad ally as it opened its borders to terrorists. The best way to stop this was to support the YPG/YPJ/SDF.
4. The US needed fighters on the ground they could support. Kurds needed support.
5. Turkey turned to the east, supported the Muslim Brotherhood, wanted strategic depth and to gain power in the Middle East but Sunni Arabs and Iran resisted.
6. By mid-2015 the US started talking about political solutions for Syria to contain Iranian influence. It put regime change aside when Russia began to support Assad, Iranian-backed groups and Hezbollah.
7. The failure of the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring led to instability in the Middle East. US wanted stability and was looking for political players that could do this. The Rojava administrations were providing stability in an ethnic and religious diverse region.
8. Rojava supports secularism, women's rights and human rights so there were overlapping values, strategies and interests in fighting ISIS, and curtailing Turkish and Iranian influence. There was international pressure for the US to support Rojava as a stable alternative.

However, the US-led coalition does not have a coherent policy in Syria and Iraq. The US policy towards Rojava is not state policy; it is subject to departmental policy – the CIA, Defence or State Departments. The US President has promised nothing for Rojava, so questions remain: Will the US undertake reconstruction in Rojava? Will the Raqqa Civilian Council rule Raqqa? Or will US support be expedient? There are US bases in northern Syria to stop Turkey attacking, but the US idea of a Kurdish state is that established by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Could Rojava be a victim of its own success? Now the US is supporting a non-state actor against another non-state actor and a state actor. As all matters are related, there is a need to de-list the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

David Phillips: Australians for Kurdistan

David Phillips: The SDF has been professionalised and has about 200,000 troops, but supplies and trade cannot go through Syrian government territory, a policy for which Turkey is responsible. Rojava will curtail Iranian influence in Syria and Lebanon. Raqqa and Manbij were originally the homes of Kurds and Assyrian Christians. Rojava Peshmerga members have been trained by the Kurdistan Regional Government and want to get into Rojava. An independent Kurdistan (in Iraq) might lessen Turkey's influence. German and Australian forces are embedded in the region. The Australian Government must support the provision of weapons to the YPG/YPJ/SDF and provide political support for Rojava.



Ercan Ayboga: The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement
Rojava – an ecological Revolution

Ercan Ayboga: Heritage sites in Bakur (eastern Turkey) were declared in the 1950s but by the 1970s capitalism had infiltrated Bakur, with the building of big dams and in both Bakur and Rojava, the introduction of industrial agriculture. Industrial agriculture grew wheat, olives and cotton, resulting in less diversity in seeds, crops and agricultural production, and less biodiversity. Kurds migrated to Istanbul and Aleppo, which caused a weakening of communal structures, and agriculture became less important than oil in the economy. The state prohibited the growing of tomatoes and fruits and built big bread factories. The culture of making bread was lost. Native forests disappeared and were replaced by plantations of non-local pine trees. Grasslands also disappeared, impacting livestock. Cizre supplied half of Syria's oil, the oil being refined in Hama so no industry was developed in Rojava. There was only one factory in Rojava. This was for cracked wheat.

In Bakur, In the 1990s, tens of thousands of hectares were torched, which contributed to massive ecological destruction. Mountain villages were emptied. Two and a half million Kurds were displaced to the cities; 100,000 people went to Europe. In 2010 there was an ecological forum held in Amed (the Kurdish name for Diyarbakir). In 2014, 'The Real Social Movement', part of the Democratic Society Congress, decided to:

1. Fight state projects like dams, mines and roads;
2. Fight impacts of war such as deforestation;
3. Co-ordinate with umbrella organisations in Europe to collect seeds etc. and establish a seedbank in Amed; and
4. Educate people.

Hierarchy, patriarchy and nation states all contribute to the destruction of nature. One needs to impose a cap on artificial needs but there are tens of thousands of people still living in the mountains outside capitalism. They have a dynamic, organic relationship with nature.

The Federal System of Northern Syria has created a democratic, ecological and gender liberated society. Nature is our body, don't destroy it; take only what is needed because everything comes from it: food, water and culture elements ... Spirituality and emotionality are connected to nature but the last decades have seen strong alienation from nature. Forests, water, mountains and animals must be defended.

Since 2013, Rojava has been refining oil. There are now water and street cleaning services and garbage is collected and burnt, and there are an increased number of public spaces, including parks in the towns. However, there are no waste water treatment plants and sewerage is a problem. It goes into the river beds or ground water and causes pollution.



Rojava aims for agricultural self sufficiency, relying on locally generated organic fertilisers, fewer pesticides and increased vegetable production – potatoes, chickpeas and lentils from local seeds. But Rojava lacks pumps, tractors and spare parts. The Mesopotamian Ecological Movement has established a seed bank in Rojava, but work is limited by war, defence, destruction of the landscape and the former centralised economy, which affects people's mentality.

There is also a water crisis. Rojava relies on ground water, which is good quality near the Turkish border but is very saline in Hasaka and the south, and the Euphrates River that runs through Tabqa and the Tigris River that runs through Hasaka. Dams in Turkey have reduced the water flow in these rivers. Turkey has purposely cut the water flow in the Euphrates so although Tishrin dam supplies Kobane and Manbij drinking water there is not always enough. Turkey's dams have also reduced the flow of the Tigris River and this has emptied the dams in Hasaka. In Hasaka, drinking water comes from Serekanye. The irrigation system on the Habur River from Cizre to Hasaka city can no longer be used. Machinery and infrastructure have been destroyed and can't be obtained from Syria and Southern Kurdistan (Bashur, Iraq). People are being educated about water conservation but wheat production is 40 percent less than what it used to be.

The Rojava administrations have distributed 5 percent of all land to farming co-operatives and give subsidised diesel to these co-operatives. These co-operatives must plant trees on five percent of their land. There are many women's co-operatives. Six thousand people are operating bakery co-operatives in Serekanye, Kobane and Afrin.

People get electricity from generators and rely on diesel heaters although Kobane and Manbij use gas. But power plants create pollution. Although the dam and town of Tabqa on the Euphrates was liberated by the SDF, Tabqa Dam still does not generate hydroelectricity. There is a very limited use of solar energy.

The conference then broke up into four workshops. Two are reported below.

WORKSHOP 1: Zerebar Karimi – Turkey: Dictatorship, War against the Kurds, Support for IS

Zerebar Karimi: The more the Turkish state tries to dominate, the more Kurds will resist. According to Dr. Thoreau Redcrow, the recent resistance was fuelled by the 1990s repression of Kurds in Turkey. The ultranationalism of the Turkish state was a modernising project which began in the nineteenth century during the Ottoman Empire when the national identity was weak and insecure about the dominance of multi-ethnicity. Afterwards it was formalised in a new nation state of Turkey by the formidable nationalistic leader, Ataturk Kamal. This led to radical nationalists' brutal crackdown on everyone in Turkey, including Turks.



Dilar Dirik has stated that genocides are fundamental to violent, military-based fundamentalism. Against Alevis, who were communarians and supported women's rights and a social revolution, Dersim was bombed in 1938, which led to an exodus to the cities and a loss of culture. There were similar genocides in 1993 and 1995 instigated by right-wing Islamists sponsored by the state and secular Islamists.

In the 1960s and 1970s the leftist student movement, including Abdullah Ocalan, realised there was no space for Kurds – they had become an internal colony of the Turks, although a minority of Turks supported Kurds being liberated. The PKK uprising began in 1984. According to Dr. Redcrow, who interviewed women held in Diyarbakir Prison Number Five, women prisoners were raped. In the 1990s paramilitary ultranationalists and Islamists operated along with JITEM¹ death squads against the Kurds.

Children were beaten for not knowing the Turkish language. PKK became a revenge organisation to expose the actions of the Turkish state and defend the people against the state. By the 1990s, 10,000 PKK fighters fought for survival and justice. The brutality of the state fed the resistance.

In the last election in Turkey the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) had Turkmen, Yezidi, Assyrian, Kurdish and Arab candidates. But 12,000 members have been arrested, including many HDP parliamentarians and other leaders, and many have been tortured in prison. They are not allowed demonstrations or public activities. One hundred and three municipalities have been taken over by the Turkish government. Peoples' lands have been seized. Three hundred thousand people have been displaced during the state of emergency.

Thirty thousand teachers have been dismissed and twenty thousand removed from their positions. Private investors have been prevented from operating. TV and radio stations have been shut down, and journalists have been gaoled. Thousands have been arrested due to the use of social media. One hundred thousand civil servants have been sacked, along with police, military, and trade union members.

The Turkish military has attacked Rojava with its warplanes and Special Forces. The Turkish state believes PKK wants to divide Turkey but Kurds want human rights.

¹ JITEM is the abbreviation for 'Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele' or 'Jandarma İstihbarat Teşkilatı'. In English: 'Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism' or 'Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization'. JITEM is the controversial wing and intelligence agency of the Turkish Gendarmerie. It was active in the Kurdish–Turkish conflict.



WORKSHOP 2: Nick Friedman and Tony Ittis

Nick Friedman: Socialists support progressive aspects of liberation movements in other parts of the world although there is not much progress in the West. David Graeber and Rahila Gupta have done some informed analysis on this. About Rojava, there is a lot of fake news. A 2015 Amnesty International Report said that there was forced displacement and ethnic cleansing occurring in Rojava but a March 2017 UN Report found that there was no ethnic cleansing and any displacement was a military necessity because of the war with ISIS. A 2014 Human Rights Watch report found that abuses in Rojava were less widespread than in regime-controlled and opposition-controlled areas. The Assad regime rules with an iron fist.

Tony Ittis: The mischaracterisation of the Rojava revolution in the *Green Left Weekly* inspired the formation of Australians for Kurdistan in 2014. It was the brilliance of Abdullah Ocalan to understand that nation states are inherently repressive of people, particularly minorities.

There were activist committees in the early days of the Syrian uprising but the militarisation of the uprising was a mistake and endangered these activists committees. This militarisation was encouraged by regional and world powers. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was made up of gangsters practising extortion and that is why some people saw the jihadi militias as saviours. The FSA and jihadis destroyed the uprising. Syrian Kurds are not trying to separate from Syria. ISIS in Turkey has focused on those who oppose the AKP government, mainly targeting Kurds.

Conference Statement

Democracy, feminism & diversity: Support the radical alternative in northern Syria

[This statement was adopted by the conference, *The Rojava Revolution in northern Syria: An experiment in radical democracy, feminism & ecology*, Melbourne, July 1, 2017.]

1. This conference strongly supports the Kurdish people and all those oppressed groups fighting for their basic human rights in the Middle East — ethnic and religious minorities, women and LGBTI people.
2. The Rojava Revolution in northern Syria, based primarily in the oppressed Kurdish community, has developed into a multi-ethnic struggle to build a new type of society.
3. The process taking place in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria is profoundly progressive. Its unrelenting efforts to build a radical, grassroots commune-style democracy, its unprecedented struggle to empower women as full participants in society, and its attempt to incorporate all ethnic and religious groups into the revolutionary process are a beacon of hope for the region.
4. Any attempt to restore the old repressive, centralist “Syrian Arab Republic” would be a catastrophe for the peoples of Syria. Violence, ethnic and religious sectarianism, and



discrimination will only succeed in fragmenting the country.

5. The example of the DFNS shows the way to build a new democratic Syria. Local and regional self-government and federation on a truly democratic basis that recognises and celebrates the diverse ethnic and religious mosaic of the country is the only way to preserve its unity.
6. The western governments say they are fighting terrorism. But their policies in the Middle East — domination, war and conquest, and looting of resources — created the conditions for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (principally Al Qaeda and the Islamic State). Turkey, a key member of the West's NATO alliance, directly nurtured these forces as a means of furthering its genocidal anti-Kurd agenda and its designs for regional hegemony
7. The emancipatory policies carried out by the DFNS — along with the struggle of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the defence militia of the DFNS — are the most effective weapons of the peoples against terrorism.
8. All international and regional powers should stop supporting their reactionary local clients.
9. The YPG/YPJ and the SDF have every right to procure the weapons they need from the western powers or Russia. This does not make them in any way responsible for the actions of these powers.
10. We call on the Australian government, the United Nations and all other international agencies to recognise the right of the DFNS to participate in all negotiations regarding the future of Syria and to call for its inclusion in all such forums.
11. In Australia it is the duty of supporters of the liberation struggle in northern Syria to make determined efforts to publicise its inspiring achievements and build practical solidarity with it.

This report was written up by Kurdish Lobby Australia. Much thanks to the conference organisers for organising this conference.

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