

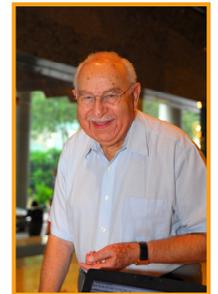


### **NEZIR KIRDAR, 1957 IRAQ/TURKEY**

Travel & Tourism Consultant

At the “ripe old” age of 28, Nezir Kirdar was chosen as the first Eisenhower Fellow to represent Iraq, in 1957. The youngest of his cohort, Kirdar had already founded several companies and organizations, including the first shingle-manufacturing plant and the first Rotary Club in Baghdad.

Kirdar, upon his return to Iraq, believed he “really started to benefit from” the fellowship program. Inspired by his meeting with President Eisenhower, Kirdar ran for a seat in Iraqi Parliamentary elections without belonging to a political party, and won in 1958. Unfortunately, six months later, there was a revolution, the regime was toppled, and Iraq started to go into chaos. In 1963, there was a small meeting in Istanbul which Hampton Barnes (then president of Eisenhower Fellowships) attended with about 20 alumni Eisenhower Fellows. Kirdar then invited Barnes to Baghdad and arranged for him to see top contacts in government. That was the last time that Kirdar was able to host an activity in Baghdad for Eisenhower Fellowships. Afterwards, a new group came to power in Iraq and Kirdar was politically detained for three years, and did not travel for 20 years.



Finally, in 1985, Kirdar took his first trip back to Philadelphia. Then-President of EF Dorie Friend welcomed him back with open arms and had a gathering at the house, including former president Hampton Barnes. That restarted Kirdar’s relationship with Eisenhower Fellowships, which he considers a momentous comeback in his life. Kirdar said, “After all the hardship between 1958 and 1985, I see respect and recognition and welcome from others and that was because of Eisenhower Fellowships.” From that day on, Kirdar has been a living embodiment of the EF philosophy: “Once a Fellow, always a Fellow.” He has attended almost every EF conference as an active participant, re-establishing connections with Eisenhower Fellows from all over the world. In 1988, he adopted a new home in Istanbul, and began a new-found role as a Turkish Fellow. President Suleyman Demirel, a 1954 Fellow, welcomed Kirdar to his country, saying “it doesn’t matter which country you are connected to; once you are a Fellow, all Fellows are the same. There is no difference in rank or country or religion or whatever. Our protocol is not based on what you do, how much you have, or what you run”. With backing of President Demirel and support from the Eisenhower Fellows in Turkey, Kirdar organized meetings of the Alumni Advisory Council in Istanbul in November 1999 and September 2011, as well as an international conference in 2006.

Nezir Kirdar also helped re-institute the USA Fellows program with Turkey as a key destination and when Turkey was selected as the Single Nation Program country in 1993, it was a reflection of the strength of the Turkish Fellows’ network that Kirdar was so influential in preserving. In 2009, EF bestowed the Distinguished Alumnus Award upon Kirdar for his many activities in promoting EF, alumni networking and upholding the Eisenhower Fellowship ideals.

Kirdar has said, “I have believed that privilege is only good if you understand the responsibility that comes with it. You cannot take the privilege and ignore the responsibility. It only has value if you know your responsibility and do what you’re responsible for... whatever I have tried with Eisenhower Fellowships was a great privilege and honor. It is a belonging. And I have tried my best to be a good Fellow, to be an appreciative Fellow, to try to pay back some of the things that the Fellowship has given me. And I don’t call it my Eisenhower Fellowship Period; I call it ‘Our Big Family of Eisenhower Fellowships’.”

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