



ܐܘܢܝܢܐ ܐܘܨܬܪܐܝܬܐ ܐܘܨܬܪܐܝܬܐ
Assyrian Universal Alliance
الاتحاد الأثوري العالمي

Member: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

European Parliament, Brussels

“Iraqi Turkmen: The Human Rights Situation and Crisis in Kirkuk”

26-27 March 2007

“The Assyrians of Northern Iraq”

Presented by Mary Younan, Executive Secretary

Dear Secretary-General, members of Parliaments, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,
Good afternoon,

The focus of the international community, since the beginning of the war in Iraq, has been the perplexing insecurity. The primary cause of the prevailing environment of insecurity has been the country's deeply rooted communal war and sectarian conflicts.

In Iraq, as well as in other Middle East regions, where there prevails material lawlessness and persisting animosity among the rival groups, there has been wide-spread abuse and discrimination of persons who belong to particular groups such as a gender (women), age (children and students), religious (Christians and other non-Muslim minorities in the Muslim states), sectarian affiliations (the Shiites, the Sunnis, the Catholics, etc.) and ethnicities (e.g., Assyrians, Turkmen, etc.). As a result, the persons in the targeted groups are subjected to numerous and repeated instances of persecutions, Killings, tortures, displacements, separation of families and other cruel and humiliating treatments.

Due to their distinct ethnic and religious identity, the Assyrians have been habitually persecuted under various regimes, until this day for refusing to recant their ethnicity and their religion. They face systematic and serious assaults on their fundamental human rights on a daily basis by different levels of authority and denying them peace in their multi-ethnic ancestral nation-state: Iraq. The purpose and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are flagrantly violated and the lack of consistency in the enforcement of equal and inalienable rights of all Iraqis, most specifically in Northern Iraq where the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) claims, as per their website, to "believe in the rights and freedoms of all peoples".

Although Iraq's history speaks for itself, allow me to briefly introduce to you the Assyrian people. The Assyrians are indigenous people of the present day Iraq, descendants of the first people of Mesopotamia. The Assyrian communities, that are predominantly Christian, presently inhabit areas of Tur Abdin and Hakkari in south and eastern regions of Turkey, Jazira in north-eastern Syria, Urmi in north-western Iran, and the Iraqi provinces of Ninawa, Dohuk, and Arbil that is precisely where the Assyrians' ancestral homeland (Assyria) is located.

Since inception of Iraq as a sovereign country, its successive governments and particularly the Ba'ath regimes have consistently targeted and persecuted the Assyrians on national, ethnic, and religious grounds, as part of the regimes' totalitarian and Arabization policies. In the recent history, -- during WWI, WWII, and the years that followed -- the Assyrian population was disproportionately massacred, displaced, and inflicted with widespread persecutions and hardships. They have had their population massacred over the last century.

Forced migrations and now Kurdification policies have scattered Assyrians in nearly fifty countries where they have had to start from scratch struggling to survive and preserve their identity, culture, and history (Diaspora Assyrians). Kurdish authorities have allegedly been expropriating Assyrian lands and villages to deliver them to Kurds according to the American Department of the Secretary of State.

Under these horrifying circumstances which are mostly untold and unreported, Assyrians are driven out of their ancestral homeland. They seek refuge in neighbouring countries where they hope for a safer life.

The wilful disregard of the international community about the Assyrians situation is an outrage and commensurate to the acts of those who have perpetrated these crimes against this indigenous and ancient nation.

Today, the Assyrian nation is struggling to impress upon the international community the importance of being distinctly recognised as a nation in need of significant protection and more importantly a nation in pursuit of autonomy within the territorial boundaries of a centrally governed Iraq.

Assyrians are being persecuted and punished for non-compliance with Islamic (Shari'a Laws). Assyrian women are still being raped and violated for not wearing the Islamic headdress. Assyrians are still being discriminated against in employment. Tragically and ironically, these human atrocities are still occurring and at more threatening and terrifying degrees after the "liberation" of Iraq and its adoption of "democracy".

Assyrians have survived the adversities of history for thousands of years. However, our hope, faith, and determination cannot continue to sustain us from extinction. Without international cooperation and pressure, giving serious regard to this fundamental crisis, this ancient nation will not survive.

The recent exodus of the Assyrians is caused by two major factors:

- 1) rise of insurgency against those residing in the targeted cities; and
- 2) deliberate discrimination and abuse by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in the north.

The US State Department in March 2006 reported allegations that KRG in building Kurdish settlements was engaging in discriminatory behaviour against Assyrians, including denial of due process, judicial enforcements and other legal rights including the right to secure their property from confiscation or entitlement to compensation.

It also found that Kurdish security forces were committing abuses against the Assyrians in the north and that Assyrians were forced out of the Shi'a dominated Basra because of religious, social, and economic discrimination and because of fear for their lives.

Such exodus has already resulted in an international refugee problem. In its most recent report, the UNHCR reported that out of approximately 1 million Iraqis who took refuge in Syria, 36 percent are Iraqi Christians, most are Assyrians.

Assyrian residents of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, who are returning to their ancestral villages in Northern Iraq are reporting being threatened with violence and persecuted by the Kurdish authority in Northern Iraq.

They are forced to join the Kurdish Democratic Party (**KDP**) and to show support to the KDP proposed referendum that allows the Assyrian territories to become constitutionally part of Kurdistan.

The Kurds, beside their participation in the repeated massacre of the Assyrians, have been calling for a federation that would include Assyrian cities that are over 3,000 years old. Assyrians do not want to give the Kurds further powers to rule over the Assyrians. Assyrians do not want an administrative Assyrian region within the Kurdish region. Assyrians want to rule themselves through their democratically elected individuals and organisations.

The establishment of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) in 1968 was a direct result and a decisive measure by the Assyrian nation to confront and alleviate the on-going persecutions and hardships that were no longer tolerable by the Assyrians.

The Assyrian Universal Alliance calls for support from the United Nations, the European Union, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, and the international community for:

I. Autonomous Assyria Federal Region (self-administrated)

In the ancestral Assyrian homeland, the only viable and permanent answer to the Assyrians' predicament is the establishment of a:

- (a) secular,
- (b) pluralistic,
- (c) democratic, and
- (d) federal autonomous Assyria region in northern Iraq, located between the greater Zab and Tigris Rivers exercising laws as per international declarations and covenants.

The historic territory for the subject Autonomous Assyria Federal Region includes part of Ninawa and Dohuk provinces in the northern Iraq; with international borders to the north bounded by Turkey and to the west by Syria. For the purposes of viability, the territory of the Assyrian Federal Region is required to have viable economic elements, such as means of transportation, natural resources, and other economic factors that are deemed necessary for the purposes of self-sustaining the constituents in the territory.

The constituency of the Federal Region shall be all-inclusive and pluralist, consisting of:

- (i) all inhabitants of the territory,

- (ii) all Diaspora Assyrians that were displaced from the Assyrian homelands in the course of the recent history, and
- (iii) the current Assyrian refugees that presently are residing in sub-human conditions in Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran.

The international support for the Autonomous Assyrian Federal Region will assure enforcement of the following primary rights and basic freedoms for all of its constituents:

- a) Rights of Life and Security;
- b) Socio-Political Rights in an all-inclusive Representative Assembly;
- c) Freedoms of Expression and Religion; and
- d) Rights for Economic Freedom.

II. Internationally Protected Safe Haven for the Assyrians

For those many Assyrians that may remain as inhabitants in regions that are beyond the Autonomous Assyria Federal Region, the United Nations, the European Union, and the international community shall provide the region with mandate to impose and enforce internationally protected safe haven for such Assyrian communities.

III. Safe Return of the Assyrian Refugees to Assyria (Northern Iraq)

For the multitudes of Assyrian families that are presently residing in sub-standard living conditions as refugees of the Iraqi war and insecurity, the United Nations, the European Union, and the international community shall extend all the required means and resources necessary for:

- (i) implementation of the Assyrian refugees safe returns, and
- (ii) establishment of viable and permanent settlement of all the returnees in the Assyria Region.

IV. Repatriation of Diaspora Assyrians' Constituency Rights

For all the Diaspora Assyrians, and all those who identify themselves as Assyrians, irrespective of their religion, e.g., Yazidis, Mandaeans, Turkmen, etc... to have unrestricted and equal constituency rights in the Assyria Region.

Therefore, the Assyrian Universal Alliance calls for and requests the United Nations, the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the European Union to pass a firm and binding resolution in support of the four above mentioned provisions; and also mandate the United Nations' members to provide all the means and resources necessary for the immediate implementation of the Resolution.

Although I was to introduce the Assyrians of Northern Iraq, we are all meeting today to discuss Kirkuk. As a daughter of an Assyrian from Kirkuk, I will very briefly say that Kirkuk is an ancient Assyrian capital known as Arraphkha. It is also where Assyria, Babylonia, and Media have battled due to its geographic location. Today, there is a power-struggle, but this time it is for a different and obvious reason over which I will not elaborate. Kirkuk is also where Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, Jews, and others had lived in relative peace for decades.

Above and beyond all ethnic and religious differences, we are all gathered as Iraqis and it is the duty of each Iraqi to ensure that basic human rights of all Iraqis are guaranteed. As the indigenous people of Iraq, it is our right and duty to reiterate our support for Iraq's unity and sovereignty. Therefore, the Assyrian Universal Alliance calls for Kirkuk to be under the control of the central government of Iraq.

Thank you all.