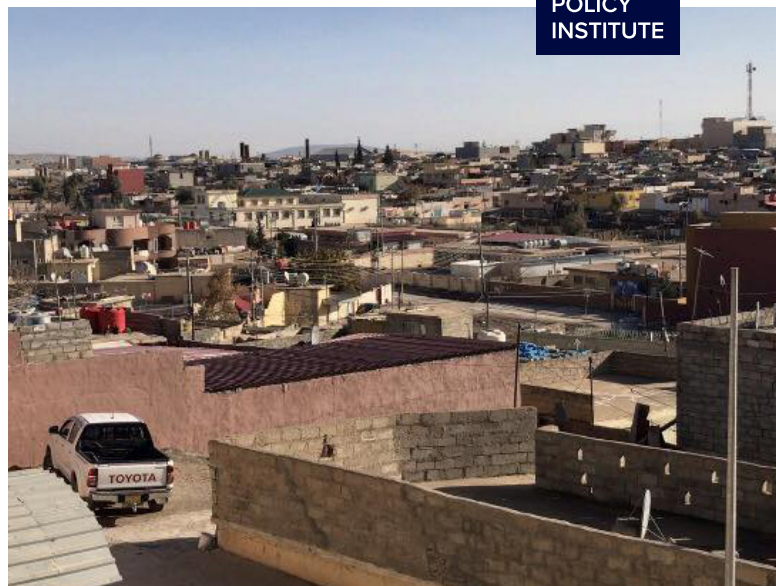


# Recognition of the Simele Massacre of 1933

The Simele Massacre, known to Assyrians as *Pramta d'Simele*, was a massacre committed by the armed forces of the Iraqi state (founded in 1932) systematically targeting the indigenous Assyrian population in northern Iraq in August 1933. The term is not only used to describe the massacre in Simele, but the wider genocidal campaign that took place across more than 100 Assyrian villages in Nohadra (Dohuk) and Nineveh (Mosul) that led to the death of as many as 6,000 Assyrians.



Simele, Iraq photographed in 2017.

## ■ A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIMELE

Historically, Simele, also known as *Shemel* meaning “in the name of God” in Assyrian, was part of Assyria. The town was converted to Christianity in the 2nd century and was later famous for its Syriac manuscripts. Its Assyrian inhabitants belonged to both the Syriac Orthodox Church and the [Assyrian] Church of the East, who were joined by Yazidis in the early 1800s. Both communities were in turn massacred by Arab tribes.

By the early 20th century, Simele was a small Kurdish-inhabited village. Assyrians repopulated the area after escaping the neighboring Hakkari region of modern-day Turkey in the wake of the Assyrian Genocide of 1915. Most Assyrians were driven from Simele

following the 1933 genocidal campaign targeting Assyrians in the region.

**The people killed were entirely innocent. It was enough for them to be Assyrians to be shot.”**

The town is currently part of the Dohuk province under Kurdistan Regional Government jurisdiction. It is inhabited primarily by Kurds, with small numbers of Arabs, Armenians, Yazidis, and Assyrians. It’s estimated that less than 600 Assyrians remain in Simele today.

## ■ THE SIMELE MASSACRE OF 1933

The Assyrians continued their pursuit of statehood despite the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1932, petitioning the League of Nations for autonomy, protection, and a guarantee of freedom to emigrate out of Iraq in the event of massacres against them.<sup>1</sup> Public animosity towards the Assyrians was widespread, as Iraqi nationalist propaganda campaigns had portrayed them as violent rebels. Assyrians feared potential backlash for their ties to the British.

“They [the Assyrians] were solemnly promised a homeland; but when their usefulness was at an end, they were told to remain amongst the people they had held down, and so antagonized, in Britain’s behalf. They were given solemn guarantees they would be safe. What happened? All the world knows. They were shot, hanged, burned, driven across borders to stagnate in a pestiferous valley in Syria.”<sup>2</sup>

On July 29, 1933, Iraqi Arab MP Sayed Chabali Haji Thabit delivered a speech to the Iraqi Parliament which effectively set the stage for the impending assault. In his speech, Thabit vilified the Assyrians, denied their identity, called them “wretched and corrupt people” and stated that they are a “poisonous germ in the head of the government.”<sup>3</sup>

The expected violence against the Assyrians began in early August 1933. Iraqi troops, joined by marauding Kurdish tribesmen, organized a massacre of



hundreds of Assyrian civilians in northern Iraq and looted their villages. Neighboring Arab and Yazidi tribes also took part in the looting. The Assyrians resisted the attacks, and the town of Simele became a place of refuge for Assyrians fleeing the areas under assault.

General Bakr Sidqi, an Iraqi nationalist of Kurdish origin, was given permission by the government to eliminate “any and all Assyrians.”<sup>4</sup> The Assyrians in Simele were forcibly disarmed before Iraqi troops and Kurdish irregulars arrived in the district on August 11, 1933 without warning or provocation and began to fire indiscriminately against the defenseless Assyrians. Some Assyrian women were mutilated. The inhabitants of 65 Assyrian villages were massacred, including up to 3,000 in Simele, where it is reported that the “worst massacres of all” took place.<sup>5</sup>

“Reports began to surface that even nine-year-old girls were being raped and burnt alive. Most children were stabbed to death as they threw themselves over the naked and headless corpses of their mothers.”<sup>6</sup>

Iraq’s violent campaign against its indigenous community lasted until August 16, 1933, but violent raids on Assyrians persisted through the end of the month. Assyrians were largely confined to their homes in fear of further attacks.

As many as 6,000 Assyrian men, women, and children were slaughtered, while tens of thousands more were forcibly displaced. Thousands of women were sexually assaulted, many of them kidnapped, never to be heard from again.

As many as 6,000 Assyrian men, women, and children were slaughtered, while tens of thousands more were forcibly displaced. Thousands of women were sexually assaulted, many of them kidnapped, never to be heard from again.

Iraqi Army parade held on August 26, 1933 in the streets of Baghdad to celebrate Iraq’s so-called victory against the Assyrians earlier that month.



On August 18, 1933, Iraqi troops were warmly received in Mosul by its Muslim inhabitants. Arches were erected and decorated with melons pierced by daggers, symbolizing the heads of murdered Assyrians. The Iraqi Crown Prince joined them in the city to award the military and tribal leaders who had participated in the Simele Massacre. The Iraqi Army later paraded in the streets of Baghdad in celebration of its so-called “victories” against the Assyrians. General Bakr Sidqi was promoted. “Sidqi used the murders of these thousands of Assyrian ‘separatists’, as they became popularly termed by the national media, to catapult his career as a military hero.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Sargon G. Donabed, Professor of History at Roger Williams University, “Through corroborating sources, the data validates Iraq attempted to solidify its homogeneity as a nation through the purging of those Assyrians at Simele and the surrounding districts, epitomising the complexity of a situation in which the envisaged state-building could only progress via ‘nation-destroying’ of the Assyrians.”<sup>8</sup>

## ■ FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF THE SIMELE MASSACRE

**I saw & heard many horrible things in the Great War, but what I saw in Simele is beyond human imagination.”**

— From a secret report of a British eyewitness in the service of the Iraqi Government, 1933

“Suddenly and without the least warning the troops opened fire upon the defenseless Assyrians. Many fell, including women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover....A cold-blooded and methodical massacre of all the men in the village then followed, a massacre for which in the black treachery in which it was conceived and the callousness with which it was carried out, was as foul a crime as any in the

blood-stained annals of the Middle East. The Assyrians had no fight left in them partly because of the state of mind to which the events of the past week had reduced them, largely because they were disarmed. Had they been armed it seems certain that Ismail Abawi Tohalla and his bravos would have hesitated to take them on in a fair fight. Having disarmed them,

they proceeded with the massacre according to plan. This took some time. Not that there was any hurry, for the troops had the whole day ahead of them. Their opponents were helpless and there was no chance of any interference from any quarter whatsoever. Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge, and having trained them on the terror stricken wretches in the crowded rooms, fired among them until not a man was left standing in the shambles. In some other instances the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form, and men were dragged out and shot or bludgeoned to death and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead.”<sup>9</sup>

**Lt. Col. Ronald Sempill Stafford**

British Administrative Inspector for Mosul

“Here and there in the mountains they came up with fugitive Assyrians. And every Assyrian they caught they shot out of hand. Clearly by now the Army had decided that the Assyrians, as far as possible, were to be exterminated. No pretence was made that these operations had any purely military objective, for the Army Intelligence officers did not even take the trouble to cross-question the captured Assyrians, who were simply shot as they were rounded up...it was evident by now that the Army Command was quite certain in its own mind that, in its decision to wipe out the Assyrians, it would...be backed not only by Arab public opinion, but by the Baghdad Government.”<sup>11</sup>

**Lt. Col. Ronald Sempill Stafford**

British Administrative Inspector for Mosul

Sept. 1933 Satellite image of Bartashah, an Assyrian village northwest of Simele, after an attack by Arab and Kurdish irregulars. The circular pits are traits of bombings. (Donabed, 119)



“My friends and I saw a plane fly into Simele and start firing on us. Assyrians gathered in houses. [Since the men were being slaughtered,] the women began making the young boys (including me) look like girls so they would not be killed. The third day after the killing began, they (some wearing Iraqi uniforms, some not) rounded up some Assyrians and said, ‘Either become Muslim or we will kill you.’”<sup>12</sup>



Elias Haroon Bazi, survivor of the Simele Massacre of 1933. (2011)

**Elias Haroon Bazi**

Simele Massacre Survivor

“Whoever fired the first shot in a brush on the Syrian frontier on the fourth of August, there could be no justification for the shooting down by the Iraqi army of numbers of Assyrians in villages far away...[A]n even worse massacre was planned by the Iraqi army to take place at Alqosh. The people killed were entirely innocent. It was enough for them to be Assyrians to be shot. The [Assyrians] in Dohuk were taken away in batches of eight or ten for a short distance from the villages in lorries and there turned out and machine-gunned.”<sup>10</sup>

**Gerald de Gaury**

British Diplomat and Advisor to Iraqi King Faisal I

“After killing all the men, the soldiers stripped the dead, taking their things of value, and went after the women. The Arabs and the Kurds looted the village. The better-looking women were mishandled, stripped, and let go.”<sup>13</sup>

**Barclay Acheson**

Executive Secretary, Near East Foundation

“I was sitting in my office on the morning of August 15th when Hikmet Beg returned. He came straight into my room in a state of collapse, for he had just come from Simmel, and even he, cynical Turk as he was, had been overcome by the horrors which he had seen. On the previous day I had received reports that

there were large numbers of Assyrian women and children in Simmel living in a state of starvation, but not a word had been said in these reports about the massacre which was the cause of this destitution."<sup>14</sup>

**Lt. Col. Ronald Sempill Stafford**

British Administrative Inspector for Mosul

"When I visited Simmel myself with Major Thomson on August 17th few traces could be seen of what had occurred, but the sight of the women and children is one which I shall never forget—and I spent more than three years in the trenches in France!"<sup>15</sup>

**Lt. Col. Ronald Sempill Stafford**

British Administrative Inspector for Mosul

**■ THE LASTING IMPACT OF GENOCIDE**

The 1933 Simele Massacre, which closely followed the 1915 Assyrian Genocide, effectively ended the Assyrian pursuit for statehood. The Assyrians who remained in Iraq were marginalized by the state:

"The Assyrians found themselves bereft of positions and titles...They counted neither among the 'senior officials, magistrates, judges, army officers, or ministers' nor among the deputies in parliament, while other communities benefited tremendously. Under these conditions, lacking both internal strength in numbers and political clout and external (foreign) support, the Assyrian cultural and national movement developed more slowly and with more difficulty than those of their Arab and Kurdish neighbours. This was especially true following the detrimental fragmentation of its religious communities, through foreign and domestic influence, and as a repercussion from the Simele massacre."<sup>16</sup>

"An added issue was a deliberate policy to contain any spread of (as well as Kurdish and Turkoman) nationalist sentiments and secondly, in the case of the Assyrians, the denial of nativeness."<sup>17</sup>

Over time, many Assyrians in Iraq were stripped of their identity and largely forced to assimilate as the government continued its anti-Assyrian policies. "In fact it was anti-Assyrian sentiment that caused the various ecclesiastical Christian sects to begin (forcibly and of their own volition) to detach themselves from their ethnic identity (since they were also in the process of being persecuted for their religious beliefs) and as an alternative, to identify solely with their religious denominations to avoid retribution."<sup>18</sup>

The 1933 genocidal campaign against Assyrians in northern Iraq also had a deep psychological effect on the beleaguered community.

"When I visited Alqosh myself on August 21st I found the Assyrians, like the Assyrians elsewhere, utterly panic-stricken. Not only were they disturbed, but their spirit was completely broken. It was difficult to recognize in their cowed demeanour the proud mountaineers whom everyone had known so well and admired so much for the past dozen years."<sup>19</sup>

Assyrians who had been exposed to genocidal trauma suffered from long-term consequences on their mental health and psychosocial conditions. The events of the 1915 Assyrian Genocide and the 1933 Simele Massacre also resulted in transgenerational trauma among Assyrians—the signs of which are still evident today.

Upwards of 20,000 Assyrians left Iraq for neighboring Syria following the massacre, resettling along the Khabour River in the northeastern region. In the years that followed, these settlements were developed into villages, yet Assyrians still refer to them as "campeh" (camps).<sup>20</sup> The Assyrians almost exclusively inhabited this region for nearly a century until the Islamic State launched an assault on the 35 Assyrian villages of the Khabour Region in February 2015. Most of its Assyrian population is now externally-displaced or have joined the millions of Assyrians in diaspora. The majority of Assyrians who fled Khabour in 2015 were either survivors of the Simele Massacre or their descendants.

Many Assyrians from other parts of Iraq, including the Nineveh Plain and Baghdad, who were not directly



Assyrian refugees who survived the Simele Massacre of 1933 in Iraq pictured in the Khabour Region of Syria. (1935)



affected by the Iraqi Government's violent campaign against Assyrians also chose to leave as anti-Assyrian sentiments continued to spread across the country.

Following the Simele Massacre, the Patriarch of the [Assyrian] Church of the East Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII (who had been detained in Baghdad for his appeals for Assyrian independence) and members of his extended family were forced into exile. The Patriarch eventually resettled in the United States, and the patriarchate was officially relocated to Chicago, Illinois in 1945 where it remained until 2015.

In response to the Simele Massacre, Assyrians in the United States formed the Assyrian American Federation, known today as the Assyrian American National Federation (AANF), the oldest surviving Assyrian organization in the United States. The formation of the AANF marked the start of the Assyrian movement in diaspora.

"The impetus for national reunification took another boost in 1933 in the aftermath of the Semeil massacre....The reaction of Assyrian Americans was to establish the Assyrian American Federation (AAF) in 1933 to send relief to the victims, and plead the case of the Assyrians before international organizations. Senharib Balley was the architect who envisioned the structure of an umbrella organization uniting the different regional associations. He was inspired by the political structure of the United States which, in turn was borrowed from the Native American Confederacy of the Iroquois nations. AAF united all the Assyrian American Associations organized in different states as its affiliates. This was supposed to be a historical landmark for the Assyrians in the sense that a unification of various sectarian groups was achieved under a national agenda."<sup>21</sup>

## ■ THE LEGACY OF THE SIMELE MASSACRE OF 1933

During the 1915 Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocide, more than half of Turkey's Assyrian population

was massacred under the Ottoman Empire, by Turkish and Kurdish forces. The term 'genocide' was coined by Raphael Lemkin, who was directly influenced by the Simele Massacre and the Armenian Genocide.<sup>22</sup>

The [Assyrian] Church of the East parish built in Simele was dedicated to the victims of the Simele Massacre and is named Umra d'Sahdeh (the Church of Martyrs).

Assyrian Martyrs Day is observed annually on August 7 to commemorate the anniversary of the Simele Massacre. It was officially declared a national holiday by the Assyrian Universal Alliance in 1970<sup>23</sup> and is recognized by Assyrians worldwide.

## ■ THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION OF SIMELE AND ASSYRIAN SUFFERING IN IRAQ

Despite conclusive evidence documenting this crime, the Iraqi Government has historically denied and consistently neglected the Simele Massacre.

In its immediate aftermath, the Iraqi Government attempted to hide its genocidal intent and eliminate any evidence of the Simele Massacre:



"Every effort was made to hush up what had occurred and a censorship for a time imposed on out-going letters. It was soon seen, however, that the killing could not be kept secret, for the Christians in the north had sent the news abroad, and in the nature of things an affair of this kind was bound to get out."<sup>24</sup>

◀ Newspaper clipping from the Lethbridge Herald published on August 18, 1933.

Iraqi officials rejected reports that a massacre had taken place:

"The Iraq Government denies this massacre, claiming that it was punitive action against rebels. Obviously Government officials, the police and the army will not testify to it, and there seem to be no male survivors. Also intimidation would doubtless play a part in the prevention of testimony."<sup>25</sup>

Attempts to redistribute blame on Kurdish tribes and irregulars in addition to the Assyrians themselves have been discredited by historians. The official Iraqi account was that the Assyrian casualties were the

result of an armed conflict with Arab and Kurdish tribes has also been disproved.

Under Ba'athist Iraq (1968-2003), Assyrians were not recognized by the state as an ethnic minority. Arabization policies under the Ba'ath Regime were designed to eliminate the Assyrian identity and way of life in Iraq, as well as their ancestral ties to the land. Assyrians thus became known simply as Christians, and their ancient history was appropriated by Arab nationalists, while their modern history was denied.

Assyrians were optimistic about the democratization of Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein, hoping that it might present the opportunity to secure a more meaningful place in Iraqi society.

However, the Iraqi Constitution adopted in 2005 formally recognizes massacres committed against Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen, but fails to mention the suffering of Assyrians and does not recognize the state-sanctioned 1933 Simele Massacre or subsequent genocidal campaigns targeting Assyrians. The preamble currently states:

"Acknowledging God's right over us, and in fulfillment of the call of our homeland and citizens, and in a response to the call of our religious and national leaderships and the determination of our great authorities and of our leaders and politicians, and in the midst of international support from our friends and those who love us, marched for the first time in our history towards the ballot boxes by the millions, men and women, young and old, on the thirtieth of January 2005, invoking the pains of sectarian oppression inflicted by the autocratic clique and inspired by the tragedies of Iraq's martyrs, Shiite and Sunni, Arabs and Kurds and Turkmen and from all other components of the people, and recollecting the darkness of the ravage of the holy cities and the South in the Sha'abaniyya uprising and burnt by the flames of grief of the mass graves, the marshes, Al-Dujail and others and articulating the sufferings of racial oppression in the massacres of Halabcha, Barzan, Anfal and the Fayli Kurds and inspired by the ordeals of the Turkmen in Bashir and the sufferings of the people of the western region, as is the case in the remaining areas of Iraq where the people suffered from the liquidation of their leaders, symbols, and Sheiks and from the displacement of their skilled individuals and from drying out of its cultural and intellectual wells, so we sought hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder to create our new Iraq, the Iraq of the future, free from sectarianism, racism, complex of

regional attachment, discrimination, and exclusion."<sup>26</sup>

Many Assyrians feel the lack of recognition is deliberate and contributes to the erasure of their history and trivializes their suffering.

The preamble in the 2006 KRG draft constitution also fails to mention the massacres of Assyrians in 1933:

"They (the former Iraqi governments) conducted ethnic cleansing policies through the use of chemical weapons in Halabja city, Balisan and the Badinan area and many other areas. Thousands of young Faily Kurdish people were driven towards death, chemical experiment and mass graves, after these martyrs' families were displaced outside of Iraq and had their national identity taken. This was followed by a campaign to kill Barzani people and the so-called notorious Anfal campaign that killed 182,000 Kurdish civilians including the young and old, women and innocent children."<sup>27</sup>

In April 2017, Iraqi Assyrian MP Imad Youkhanna addressed the office of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in an open letter urging recognition of the state-sanctioned massacres of Simele (1933) and Soriya (1969) which claimed the lives of thousands of innocent Assyrian civilians and resulted in the dispossession of the indigenous community, as well as forced demographic change in areas they have historically inhabited. The letter was read in a parliament session held on August 7, 2018.<sup>28</sup>

Youkhanna called for a bill that recognizes both massacres and offers compensation for victims and their descendants, including the return of confiscated property wherever possible. He also urged the Iraqi Government to restore Iraqi citizenship to those Assyrians externally displaced by these massacres.

The international community has also failed to formally recognize the 1933 Simele Massacre.

The Assyrians felt betrayed by their British allies, who did not challenge the Iraqi narrative of the events that had taken place:

"Since they had created this state of affairs, the British authorities were naturally disinclined to change it. Even after the end of the mandate, the embassy was more concerned to cover up for the Iraqi government than to deplore their sins of commission: after the Assyrian massacre in the summer of 1933, Sir Francis Humphrys recommended that Britain should do her utmost to forestall the dispatch of a League of Nations Commission of Enquiry."<sup>29</sup>

A failed resolution introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.Res.440) on September 24, 2015 referred to the Simele Massacre:

“Whereas many of the Christian communities of the Khabor region of Syria fled Simele, Iraq in 1933 as a result of a massacre of over 3,000 Assyrians, and were resettled along the Khabor River in Syria, and have once again been forced to flee due to violent persecution...”<sup>30</sup>

The flawed resolution was not enacted and died in a previous session of U.S. Congress.<sup>31</sup>

Individual members of United States Congress at both the Senate and House with a sizeable number of Assyrian constituents have previously released statements commemorating the Simele Massacre.

## ■ MASS GRAVESITE IN SIMELE NEGLECTED

Assyrians murdered in the 1933 Simele Massacre were callously buried in mass graves. Relatives of those killed were prohibited from unearthing the bodies for a proper burial.

The mass gravesite of the 1933 Simele Massacre is marked with a sign reading “Simmel Archaeological Hill” atop a large dirt hill. The bones of Simele Massacre victims are scattered across the site, protruding from the dirt and exposed to passersby. The area is unprotected and is treated as a waste yard and is often littered with trash. The Kurdistan Regional Government has also built a communications tower on the top of the hill, which Assyrians find offensive.

Assyrians have long called for a dignified reburial and proper memorial at the site, but it continues to be neglected.

In his April 2017 letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Assyrian MP Imad Youkhanna called for the installation of a proper memorial at the site.

“Simmel Archaeological Hill” in the Dohuk Province of Iraq. (2017)



Many Assyrians feel that the Simele Massacre gravesite in juxtaposition to the massive park built in Erbil honoring former KRG Deputy Prime Minister Sami Abdul Rahman who was killed in a suicide bombing in 2004 and the Halabja Monument and Peace Museum commemorating the tragic 1988 Halabja Massacre is a representation of the inequality between the KRG’s treatment of Kurds and the indigent Assyrians.



▲ Top: Simele Massacre mass gravesite with human remains exposed. (2016)  
▼ Bottom: Remains of Simele Massacre victims lying in open view in Simele.

## ■ PREVENTING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

In an attempt to conceal the horrific crimes committed in the Simele Massacre, the Iraqi Army destroyed much of the evidence and the government effectively blocked proper access to the grave sites for decades, creating challenges for scholars and researchers. Some of the villages were burned in August 1933. The majority of the villages affected are now inhabited by Kurds, and most evidence of the massacre has been erased over time. Known mass graves have never been excavated.

The Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have consistently denied Assyrian children the right to a proper education on Assyrian history in Iraq.

API researchers interviewed a number of Assyrians of various Christian denominations who reside in different parts of Iraq and found that many have no prior knowledge of the tragic events of 1933. For example, when a 22-year-old Assyrian man from Ankawa was asked about the Simele Massacre, he said he was unaware any such event had taken place.<sup>32</sup> A 40-year-old Assyrian woman from Nohadra (Dohuk), said she had only learned of the events of 1933 through the Assyrian Church of the East, but admitted she only had a vague understanding of what had occurred. She also said she was unaware of the mass gravesite in Simele until a video surfaced online in 2017.<sup>33</sup>

Assyrian schools (also referred to as Syriac schools or Assyrian Aid Society schools) in areas under KRG jurisdiction are issued unfair educational curricula related to Assyrians. The required textbooks provided to these schools fail to mention the Simele Massacre, but include sections on Kurdish warlord Simko Shikak describing him as a hero. Shikak led multiple massacres of Assyrians during the 1915 Assyrian Genocide resulting in the slaughter of thousands. He is notorious for the murder of Assyrian Patriarch Mar Benjamin Shimun XXI in 1918 under false pretenses, under a flag of truce.

wards their community, but deliberately erasing their history and ties to their ancestral lands.

In an open letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi dated March 6, 2017, ten Iraqi-based Assyrian political parties called on the government to address the issue:

“We ask that you [Haider al-Abadi] address unfair legislation and educational curriculums related to our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people that demean our importance and reduce our role as an indigenous component and partner in the homeland...We ask that you correct the educational curriculum and take into consideration historical evidence, as well as religious and nationalistic pluralism.”<sup>34</sup>

## ■ KRG ATTEMPTS TO KURDIFY THE MEMORY OF THE SIMELE MASSACRE

Assyrians in Iraq have expressed widespread frustration over attempts by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to politicize the 1933 Simele Massacre in Nohadra (Dohuk) to benefit the Kurdish nationalist agenda.

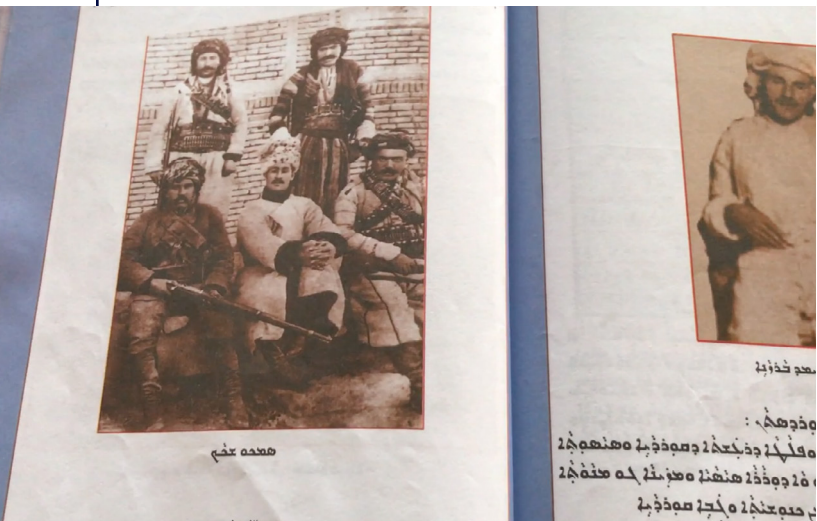
In his 2013 official statement on Assyrian Martyrs Day, former KRG President Masoud Barzani referred to the victims of the Simele Massacre as “martyrs of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement.”<sup>35</sup>

In 2017, he used the solemn holiday as an opportunity to promote the September 2017 Kurdish referendum, writing in a published statement:

“The only medicine for all of our pains and the only guarantee to ensure that disasters are not repeated is to take steps toward independence.”<sup>36</sup>

Many Assyrians are offended by his remarks and understand them to constitute part of the KRG’s ongoing effort to “Kurdify” Assyrians in the region.

Published July 16, 2018.



A page from an Assyrian school history textbook required by the KRG, depicting Simko Shikak as a hero. (2017)

Assyrians feel that by honoring Shikak but excluding sections on the Simele Massacre, the KRG is not only glorifying their genocide and promoting racism to-



# Our Recommendations

## ■ FOR THE UNITED STATES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Formally recognize the Simele Massacre of 1933, as a just resolution to the genocidal campaign will help advance reform in Iraq and promote its transition into a pluralist and tolerant society.

## ■ FOR THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT:

- Formally recognize the 1933 Simele Massacre and other genocidal campaigns targeting Assyrians in Iraq and amend the Iraqi Constitution to also recognize the historical suffering of Assyrians within Iraq's borders.
- Accept sole responsibility for the Simele Massacre of 1933 and offer appropriate compensation to the victims and their families, including those externally displaced.
- Restore the citizenship of persons who were citizens of Iraq by birth or by descent who lost Iraqi citizenship as a result of the August 1933 Simele Massacre.
- Allocate funds for a lasting memorial honoring the victims of Simele Massacre of 1933 at the massacre site in Simele whilst offering a dignified reburial of the human remains which lie in open view. The memorial should be designed and built by Iraqi citizens of Assyrian origin selected by the community.
- Establish an apolitical historical commission that includes Assyrian scholars to investigate archives related to the Simele Massacre of 1933.
- Rework biased educational curricula related to Assyrians which omit historical injustices, consequently demeaning their position in Iraqi society and denying their rightful status as an indigenous component of Iraq.

## ■ FOR THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT:

- Formally recognize the 1933 Simele Massacre as well as the wider suffering of Assyrians on lands currently administered by the KRG.

- Address unfair legislation and educational curricula related to Assyrians that demean their importance and reduce their role as an indigenous component of Iraq. Correct educational curriculum required at Assyrian schools and take historical evidence into consideration.
- End the politicization of Assyrian suffering and ensure statements issued by the KRG Cabinet and KRG officials in relation to the Simele Massacre do not distort the events of 1933. Retract official government statements issued previously that misrepresent the 1933 Simele Massacre.

## FURTHER READING:

- *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies* (Routledge, 2018) by Hannibal Travis
- *British Betrayal of the Assyrians* (1935) by Yusuf Malek
- *Cultural Rights and Democracy: Iraqi Assyrians, a Case Study for Government Intervention* (Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project, 2018)
- *Genocide in the Middle East* (Carolina Academic Press, 2010) by Hannibal Travis
- *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) by Sargon George Donabed
- *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (1935) by Ronald Sempill Stafford
- *Year of the Sword: The Assyrian Christian Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2016) by Joseph Yacoub

# Appendix



كومياري عيراق  
مجلس النواب  
مجلس النواب  
مجلس النواب  
مجلس النواب

جمهورية العراق  
مجلس النواب  
هيئة الرئاسة  
مكتب المقر

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العدد : ١٧٧ / ٤  
التاريخ : ٢٠١٨ / ٤ / ٤

مكتب النائب / عماد يوخنا

**الى / فخامة السيد رئيس الجمهورية المحترم**

**م/ مقترح قانون ( الاعتراف بمذبحة سميل ومذبحة صوريا )**

نهدبكم اطيب تحياتنا

تطبيقاً للدستور واسوة ببقية مكونات الشعب العراقي واعترافاً بالمذابح وجرائم الإبادة التي حصلت على ابناء المكون الكلداني السرياني الاشوري ، يرجى التفضل بالموافقة والاعزاز الى الجهات المختصة لتقديم مقترح قانون خاص بالاعتراف بالمذابح السنية الصويت التي حدثت في سميل عام ١٩٣٣ و صوريا ١٩٦٩ بحق ابناء المكون الكلداني السرياني الاشوري من قبل الحكومات العراقية في حينها وان يترتب على هذا اعتراف بالمذابح وتعويض الضحايا وذويهم بكامل حقوقهم المادية والمعنوية واعادة الجنسية العراقية لهم وفق المادة (١٨ ثالثاً) وكما نطالب باعادة املاك الضحايا المصادرة منهم وايضا اقامة نصب تذكاري لهم في مواقع المذابح في منطقتي سميل و صوريا في محافظة دهوك ، علماً اننا والسادة النواب ممثلي المكون قد سبق وان قرأنا بيانات تضمنت المطالبة بالاعتراف بهذه المذابح تحت قبة مجلس النواب في السابيع من اب من كل عام (تكري يوم الشهيد الكلداني السرياني الاشوري).

مع وافر الشكر والتقدير ...



عماد يوخنا  
مجلس النواب العراقي  
عضو لجنة الامن والدفاع النيابية

نسخة منه :  
• المديرية الصادرة.

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Office of the Representative Imad Youkhanna

Date: April 4, 2018

To His Excellency the President of the Republic

Subject: Proposed Law Recognizing the Simele Massacre and the Soriya Massacre

We offer you our best regards.

In accordance with the Constitution and as is the case with other components of the Iraqi people, and in recognition of the massacres and crimes of genocide that claimed the lives of members of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian component, we kindly request that you approve and instruct the relevant authorities to submit a law recognizing the disgraceful massacres that occurred in Simele in 1933 and Soriya in 1969 against the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people by the Iraqi Governments in a timely manner. The formal recognition of these massacres should result in compensation for the victims and their families, granting them full physical and moral rights, as well as the restoration of their Iraqi citizenship in accordance with Article (18/thirdly A).

We also demand the repatriation of the victims and the return of properties confiscated from them, in addition to the installation of proper memorials in their honor at the sites of the massacres in Simele and Soriya in the province of Dohuk. Noting that we and representatives of our community have previously read statements calling for the recognition of these massacres on the floor of the Council of Representatives on the seventh of August every year, which is recognized as Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Martyrs Day.

With thanks and appreciation,

Imad Youkhanna

Headquarters of the Iraqi Council of Representatives  
Member of the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee

# Notes

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