



Guest Editorial

Assyrians Also Have the Right To Be Safe

Nuri Kino

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(AINA) -- Hundreds of thousands of Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) have fled from Iraq to the neighboring countries of Syria, Turkey and Jordan. They are leaving Iraq because of systematic ethnic and religious persecution and are trying to make their way to "Christian countries" such as Sweden, Australia and the United States.

For the Assyrians to have a piece of land with self government in Iraq is of interest to the entire world. To create an administrative region or area (*mantaqa edariya*) is supported under article 125 of the current Iraqi constitution. If this doesn't happen, Iraq's original ethnic people, a group over 6000 years old, will vanish. Hundreds of thousand are currently fleeing the country.

Iraq, or what formally was Iraq, is not even a hundred years old. New countries come into existence every day. Only 10 years ago there was a country called Yugoslavia, today there are several new countries in the Balkans.

Assyrians have not had their own country since the fall of its capital city, Nineveh, in 612 B.C. After that this ethnicity had smaller kingdoms (Adiabene and Hatra) in which the people spoke Aramaic that survived during short periods.

For thousand of years this ethnic group has been massacred, persecuted and decimated. Now, finally, there can be an end to this. A protectorate in the same area where their former imperial capital, Nineveh, lay can be a reality. The province of Nineveh is largely populated by Assyrians.

The Kurdish regional government wishes to expand the Kurdish zone in northern Iraq. They are using their Assyrian finance minister Sarkis Aghajan to encourage Assyrians to apply for a protectorate from the Kurdish government. They, in turn, can demand autonomy with a certain degree of self-government from the U.N., the United States and its allies for Assyrians in the Nineveh province. Today the province belongs to the Arab dominated Iraq.

Assyrian organizations are split, some feel that they should seek autonomy from the regime in Baghdad. Others feel they should turn to Kurds. The majority feel that the demand for autonomy should be requested both from the Kurdish and Iraqi governments. It is important to secure an area with self-government irrespective of where in the future this province should find itself.

I feel that we should seek our protectorate from the Kurdish Regional Government as well as from the Iraqi Arab Government as well as from the U.S.A., its allies and the U.N.

There is no doubt that it is we who have been hit hardest by the war in Iraq. Only three years ago Assyrians constituted six percent of the Iraqi population. Many organizations now calculate that forty percent of the Iraqi refugees in Iraq's neighboring countries are Assyrians. Nearly half of the Iraqi Christian population is, in other words, in headlong flight.

Three demands must be made:

1. Refugee status must be given to the Christian Iraqis which means that they become quota refugees and that the U.N. is responsible for ensuring that they do not live in frightful refugee conditions in the neighboring countries. Today, fathers sell their kidneys to provide for their families in the short term. Quota refugees should also be able to be returned to Nineveh Province instead of having to seek asylum in countries such as Sweden, Australia and the U.S.A.
2. A protectorate in Nineveh with self-government must be given to the country's original inhabitants. This should also be the beginning of an autonomy of their own in a federal Iraq.
3. The United Nations must recognize Assyrians as an ethnic people and not as they are currently labeled as "Christian Iraqis" a religious minority.

There is a lot in this ethnic group's advantage right now. For the first time in modern history the majority of the people are united and are

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jointly placing demands on, among others, the United Nations.

When the Kurds needed security they received their protectorate and this was subsequently developed into a country of their own.

Now it's the Assyrians who are in need of security.

*[Nuri Kino](#) is a journalist in Sweden specializing in investigative journalism, and is one of the most highly awarded journalists in Europe ([CV](#)). He is an Assyrian from Turkey. His documentary, *Assyriska: a National team without a Nation*, was awarded The Golden Palm at the 2006 Beverly Hills Film festival.*

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