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Guest Editorial

Welcome to New Assyria, Sweden Nuri Kino

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(AINA) -- Behind me, you can hear the Swedish National Anthem, *Du gamla, du fria* (you old, you free), it is the church bells of St Ragnhild that are playing our national anthem.

Earlier today, I was on the premises of Samira Herdo Gharib. She is a real enthusiast, someone who helps Iraqi refugees. Everywhere on her premises, there are children in the Swedish colors, blue and yellow. Newly arrived refugees are mixed with compatriots who have been here for thirty years. They are from Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. They are all Assyrians, also called Syriacs and Chaldeans, and they are all Christian. They want to celebrate the country that has given them a refuge, a haven. They want to celebrate Sweden, the Royal Family; several of them are wearing pictures of Queen Silvia and the Crown Princess Victoria. They want to be a part of the Swedish National Day. An elderly Swede walks by the children and mumbles "pathetic".

On the other side of the city's vascular bridge, a mass is being held. It is in honor of father Ragheed Ganni and his three lay workers, who just days ago were [brutally killed](#) in Mosul.

The church is filled everywhere, so is the yard. Assyrians from all over Stockholm, members from all the churches, even the natives, want to show their reverence and participation.

Prominent guests, such as members of the Swedish Parliament and municipal politicians, are sitting inside the church. At the altar, there are priests and bishops in all colors. All the churches in the Middle East are represented. From Mosul itself, the Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Ishak Zakka, has arrived.

The sweet voices of the church choir fill the premises and us with warmth, sadness, but also joy. Some people see a flickering light in all of this darkness. Assyrians, no matter what they call themselves, are preaching and acting in unity.

The most surprising thing during this mass is that the chair of the Swedish xenophobic party, The National Democrats, Marc Abramsson, has come to show his condolences. It is Özkan Kaldoyo, from the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Union, who invited him.

"I want him to understand that we did not come to Sweden to take advantage of the welfare system, that we are not extortionists. We came because otherwise we would be killed. We are persecuted!"

One of the world's most prestigious newspapers is visiting from the USA. There will be a long report on why Södertälje, a small suburb of Stockholm, has become the capital for an ethnically and religiously persecuted group of people from the Middle East.

The reporter of the newspaper leaves the church early in order to interview the municipal commissioner of Södertälje. I cross the bridge again, this time with the president of The Assyrian National Association, Rachel Hadodo, and the vice president Aboud Ado. We talk about a little bit of everything, about the refugee problem, about how the war has affected our people in Iraq, but also about the name schism and local problems in Södertälje.

After a couple of hours, I sit in my sister's car to go visit my brother, who had to break off his honeymoon after a car accident. Before even making it to the door, a friend calls me from Baghdad. "A priest has been kidnapped." Hani Ablahad, a Chaldean-Catholic priest, was kidnapped along with five other youths from his congregation. The only thing anyone knows and what little people saw, was that they were dragged into two cars about a hundred meters away from church.

I call Skandar Beth Kasha, one of the editors of Ankawa.com. They received the information, but do not know any more than I do.

My cell phone beeps, a SMS from a photographer of a well-known magazine. I had forgotten about him. He is in the hotel lobby, waiting for me. Before I have time to sit in the car, Sister Hatune, the nun I travelled to Amman with, calls. She wants me to call a family in the Swedish city of Norrköping. Three children, all under the age of ten, had their father killed in Iraq. In front of their eyes, the fundamentalists first shot him, and then beheaded him. When I call, the family does not want to talk about it. Instead, they want to tell me of other relatives in Iraq who have disappeared, been kidnapped. They want to tell about relatives who are living and hiding in Jordan, and other relatives who have been cheated by refugee smugglers, left in the middle of nowhere in Egypt.

As soon as they mention Amman, I realize that I promised to call my friend Hanna Shamoun.

"The border is filled with Assyrians, who after the murder of the priest in Mosul, are trying to enter Jordan", he says in profound resignation from Amman.

The reporter from the prestigious American newspaper asked me what I am going to do next. Surprised, I looked at him. "A strange question from one reporter to another", I think at first. Then I realize that he actually has understood that I will not allow any weird journalistic ethical rules to control me.

My people are being butchered and I must do what I can to make the world wake up. As so many other Assyrians do... We cannot and must not, give up!

The cell phone beeps again. It is the photographer of the magazine, now tired of waiting.

*[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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