



Guest Editorial

Mesopotälje in the News Again

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Posted GMT 3-2-2009 1:17:47

Södertälje, Sweden (AINA) -- [Arson attacks](#) in Södertälje, a suburb of Stockholm, have it making headlines again. So far "only" in Swedish media but I guarantee you that the attacks on the supermarkets will soon be world news. Mesopotälje, a merge of Mesopotamia and Södertälje, is already well known at news desks all over the world. A quarter of the city's inhabitants are Assyrians (also known as Syrians and Caldeans). That makes the city unique.

On March 14 2007 I wrote a series of articles about Mesopotälje as "Little Iraq." By that time we had taken in more Iraqi refugees than had all of North America. The feature story was translated in to several languages and sent to members of the American Congress and many others. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom sent representatives to Mesopotälje. The trip resulted in two hearings and a report on the situation of the Iraqi refugees. In April of 2008 Anders Lago, the mayor of Södertälje, was invited to a hearing by the American Congress.¹ Among the media that has reported from Södertälje is CNN, New York Times, BBC, al-Jazeera, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Le Monde. I have worked for many of them.

The arsonists know what they're doing when they choose the supermarkets in Mesopotälje as their target. At this moment we should not speculate about which organization is behind the attacks, but it is clear that the attacks were well organized. They could be connected to the stickers and fliers that many Mesopotäljeians have been able to read. Global Intifada's declarations, where people are encouraged to attack supermarkets that sell American goods, have been around most of the city.

I have a relative that runs a shop near one of the supermarkets that has been put to fire. Everybody's talking to everyone in Södertälje and he is one that I have talked to. He and his friends, all in their twenties, at first laughed at the fliers with their illustrations of how to make homemade fire bombs with a time delay of 20 to 50 minutes.

My relative says: "None of us took it seriously. You don't think that kind of thing would happen in your home town. It is completely crazy. I hope that the arsonists feel that their message has come through and that they don't continue their actions. It's very sad, property for millions of kronor is destroyed. Those who own the supermarkets in Södertälje have not been firing guns in Iraq. On the contrary we are the ones that have helped most Iraqis.

In their call to fire attacks on supermarkets that sell American goods Global Intifada has referred to the number of civilian deaths in Iraq and accused the US of war crimes. It can seem far fetched to make connections between Södertälje and the US war in Iraq. But they do exist. After mayor Anders Lago's speech in Washington DC received much attention, the community of Södertälje and the US embassy in Stockholm started to cooperate to improve the integration of asylum seekers. The US wants to thank Södertälje for its contribution to Iraqi refugees. "It must be the first time a city cooperated with a country like this" Lago said when the deal was signed. The idea is also that youth from Södertälje will be given the opportunity to work or study in the US. In October a student fair was held in the newly built city hall. American companies will also cooperate with the commune and a business fair is planned for this spring.

To the arsonists I want to say: The war in Iraq is a catastrophe! I am one of the experts in this area and have produced documentaries and hundreds of articles. You know just as well as I do that the people living in Södertälje, like the employees of the supermarkets, are not in any way responsible for killed Iraqis. You have made your message with your fires, now leave our community in peace!

And to the law enforcement: Catch those responsible and silence the rumors NOW!

¹ See AINA [4-21-2008](#), [4-12-2008](#), [4-8-2008](#).

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, Assyriksa: a National team without a Nation, was awarded The Golden Palm at the 2006 Beverly Hills

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