The Hague (AINA) -- The Commission on Foreign Affairs of the Dutch Parliament held a hearing on October 31 to address the deteriorating condition of the Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) of Iraq. The hearing was the result of a report given to the Dutch Parliament on May 30 by an Assyrian delegation concerning the grave situation of Iraq's Assyrians. The delegation, coordinated by Attiya Gamri Tunc, member of the Provincial Parliament of Overijssel for the Labor Party (PvdA), met with five Dutch political parties. The delegates were A. Abdo (Assyria Foundation, Netherlands), R. Abdo (Assyrian Youth Federation, Netherlands) and S. Gabriel (Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and member of the City Council of Enschede).

After the delegation's visit, Dutch MPs submitted questions to the Foreign Minister, Mr. M. Verhagen, regarding the financial aid the Netherlands sends to Iraq, and why this aid is not reaching Assyrian NGOs, and if this is the result of obstruction by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Other questions addressed the needs of the Assyrians in Iraq, the refugee crisis, the condition of the Assyrians in North Iraq, the relationship of Assyrians to the KRG and the need for an Assyrian government in Iraq.

The answers that were provided by Mr. Verhagen were not satisfactory, leading Dutch member of Parliament (MP) Kees van der Staaij (Reformed Political Party, SGP) to organize the hearing to better understand the situation of Assyrians of Iraq. Testimony came from:

- The Jubilee Campaign
- Open Doors, a Dutch human rights organization that is active in Iraq
- Fabroniya Atto, an Assyrian lawyer in Holland who did a field study on the Iraqi refugees in Jordan
- Hormis Ishak, representative of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, the largest Assyrian political party in Iraq
- Attiya Gamri Tunc

MP Joel Voordewind (Christian Union) asked what the Dutch government can do for the Assyrians today and wanted to know why the Assyrians who are members of the KRG do not want an independant Assyrian administrative region for the Nineveh Plains, a predominantly Assyrian area in Northern Iraq, outside the Kurdish controlled region.

Open Doors spoke about the situation of the Assyrians in north Iraq and Baghdad, emphasizing that in Baghdad Assyrians are living in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, with significant numbers of them having fled in the past six months, leading to...
a refugee crisis. According to Open Doors, the number of refugees is not known by UNHCR, but it is believed that Assyrians comprise a disproportionate percentage of the refugees.

Jubilee Campaign gave testimony on the refugee crisis in Syria and Jordan. It is estimated that up to 150,000 of the 750,000 refugees in Jordan are Assyrian, and nearly 400,000 of the 1.2 million in Syria are Assyrian. Jubilee Campaign's testimony was in contrast to the testimony of the Iraqi ambassador to the Netherlands, who spoke ten days earlier in the city of Hengelo, where 10,000 Assyrians live, and stated that the refugees are wealthy individuals who elected to live in Jordan and Syria. Both Jubilee Campaign and Open Doors dismissed this and asked the Dutch government to help the Assyrians refugees.

Attiya Gamri Tunc testified about the precarious security conditions of the Assyrians, who do not have their own militia and lack financing. She asked for a Dutch delegation to visit Iraq on a fact-finding mission.

Kees van der Staaij (SGP) wanted to know what the Assyrians want in the Nineveh Plains. Mr Ishak explained that the Iraqi constitution allows the establishment of an Assyrian autonomy, but this effort is actively blocked by the Kurds in the KRG. Mr Ishak asked the Dutch government to support the establishment of an Assyrian self-administrative region in Northern Iraq and stated that the Assyrians in the Nineveh Plains do not wish their region being absorbed by the KRG.

MP van Dam (PvDA) asked if the problem of the Assyrians is a religion or an ethnic problem and also wanted to know what the need is in the Nineveh Plains.

MP Kathleen Ferrier (Christian Democratic Party, CDA) asked if Assyrian NGO's get financial support from Dutch organizations. She wanted to know why the NGO's in the Nineveh Plains do not get money for the refugee problem and who gets the money. Open Doors explained that the KRG gets money but does not allocate it for Assyrians.

The hearing concluded with the following recommendations:

- Send a team of Dutch MPs and human rights organizations on a fact-finding mission to northern Iraq, to determine the needs of the Assyrians.
- Introduce legislation in the Dutch Parliament to allocate funds specifically for Assyrian NGOs in the Nineveh Plains area of northern Iraq.

MPs Voordewind (CU) and van der Staaij (SGP) are expected to introduce legislation this week in the Dutch Parliament; the legislation will allocate financial aid directly to Assyrians in the Nineveh Plains. It is not clear yet if the two major parties in the parliament (PvdA and CDA) will support the legislation.
The May 30th Assyrian delegation to the Dutch Parliament (left to right): Albya Tareq, Koos van der Staaij, A. Abdo, R. Arao, Sabri Gabriel