



## Letter to Australian PM Calls Attention to Violence Against Assyrians in Iraq

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Canberra (AINA) -- On May 4 ten Assyrian (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) groups from Melbourne, Australia, representing political, cultural and charity organizations, wrote to the Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Stephen Smith MP and other notable leaders, expressing their concern at the treatment of Iraq's Assyrian Christians and urging further action to stem the barrage of persecution suffered by them since the fall of the Baathist regime in Iraq. The recent targeting of Assyrian Christian university students near Mosul has reinforced the deteriorating situation in Iraq and its particularly adverse effects on the Assyrian Christian minority.

The text of the letter follows:

4 May 2010

The Hon K. M. Rudd MP  
Prime Minister of Australia  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

We the undersigned representatives of Victoria's Assyrian Chaldean Syriac community write to express our deep concern at the ongoing persecution of the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac people of Iraq.

On the 2nd of May, only a few weeks ago, reports of a double bus bombing were received from Iraq detailing the targeting of Christian students traveling to the University of Mosul to attend classes by as yet unidentified assailants. Four buses were traveling from the predominantly Christian district of Qaraqosh, in the town of Hamdaniya to Mosul (which is 390km north of Baghdad). Qaraqosh is located in the Nineveh Plain, the heart of the Assyrian ancestral homeland.

Reports emerging from Iraq since the bombings indicate that to date 4 people were killed and 188 injured (most of them seriously) during the targeted attacks. Injuries sustained by 24 of the students were so dire that they have been sent to Turkey for immediate treatment.

Regrettably, these attacks are only the latest in what has widely been termed the extermination of Iraq's indigenous Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Christians. In a recent report entitled [Incipient Genocide: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq](#), the Assyrian International News Agency reports that commencing in June 2006 almost 70 churches have been bombed in Iraq. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 there have been, on very conservative estimates, nearly 400 documented murders of Christians. Similarly, priests and deacons have also been murdered. Amongst these murdered clergymen was prominent Archbishop Paulus Faraj Rahho who was kidnapped on February 29 2008 in Mosul and whose dead body was found on March 13 2008. Persecution of Iraq's indigenous Christian population has included rapes, medieval style beheadings, crucifixions and attacks upon Christian homes. Thousands of Christians have been forced to either convert to Islam or be killed. Since 2003 there has been a mass exodus of Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Christians from Iraq, who prior to the invasion numbered some 1.5 million people. While this number equates to a mere 3 or 4% of Iraq's population, the United Nations has shockingly reported that Christians from Iraq comprise 40% of its refugees. These refugees, as a result of heinous persecution, are now living in abject poverty as refugees in Syria, Jordan and Turkey awaiting resettlement in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia.

Religious persecution of Iraq's Christians and other minorities has been so intense that the United States Commission on International Freedom has recommended that Iraq be included in the 'Countries of Particular Concern' list under the United States International Religious Freedom Act. While reports of the persecution of Iraq's Assyrian Chaldean Syriac people since 2003 have been widespread, and condemnation by churches and international human rights organisations have been scathing, as yet no concrete action has been taken by either the Government of Iraq or world bodies such as the United Nations to protect Iraq's Christians from persecution. Sadly, the perpetrators of much of the persecution since 2003 have not been brought to justice.

In the interim, the following measures are vital to bring justice to and assist the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac people:

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1. The establishment of an international commission examining the repeated crimes against the aforementioned people in Iraq.
2. The establishment by the Iraqi Government of a university in the Nineveh Plains in order to alleviate the intense risk faced by Christian tertiary students travelling long distances to advance their scholarly education.
3. The establishment of an international fund to support infrastructure and social programs for the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac people in the areas where they account for large segments of the population, i.e. the Nineveh Plains.

The ongoing ethnic cleaning of Iraq's ancient Assyrian Chaldean Syriac community is a startling reality. The laxity of the Iraqi Government, world bodies and other governments to take substantial action on this matter is highly disturbing. If immediate action is not forthcoming the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac people, the indigenous people of Iraq, will be obliterated from a region in which they have lived continuously for almost 7000 years.

We reiterate our ongoing call for immediate action on this matter and thank you for what we are sure will be your understanding and support.

Photographs of student bus bombing can be viewed [here](#). Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Jacob Haweil on 0425 757 618. Alternatively, correspondence can be forwarded to P.O. Box 420, Niddrie VIC 3042 or to [aaalf@live.com](mailto:aaalf@live.com).

Yours Sincerely,

Deacon Sam Nissan Bet-Tajee, Popular Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Council  
Khoshaba Hozaya, Assyrian Democratic Movement  
Majid Rafoo, Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Council of Australia  
Sarhad Hozaya, Assyrian Aid Society  
Jacob Haweil, Australian Assyrian Arts and Literature Foundation  
John Haddad, Beth-Nahrin Cultural Club  
Edwina Dinkha, Australian Mesopotamian Women's Association  
Bushra Francis, Chaldean Culture Society  
Elias Matti Mansour, International Committee for the Rights of Indigenous Mesopotamians  
Manahel Hurmez, Chaldean/Assyrian Iraqi Women's Group

CC: Hon. Stephan Smith MP (Foreign Minister), Members of the House of Representatives, Members of the Senate, Embassy of the Republic of Iraq (Canberra), Kurdish Regional Government, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the National Council of Churches in Australia.

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