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Syrian Security Forces Target Assyrian Town

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(AINA) -- In an unprecedented move, Assyrian Christian villagers (also known as Syriacs and Chaldeans) from Tel Sakr have signed and released an international appeal ([Arabic](#)) for help against collective punishment and strongarm tactics against their village by Syrian government security forces.

According to the appeal, on May 6, 2006 four Assyrian youths attempted to cross the Khabur River in the Assyrian region of northeastern Syria to a nearby village, in order to attend a soccer game. With no bridges in the immediate area, the four boys called out to ask a fisherman on the other side for assistance in crossing with his boat. According to the appeal "the man responded rudely to them and this led to an argument from both sides, where the man began cursing the four youths." As the verbal assault escalated, three of the four Assyrian youths swam across the river to confront the fisherman, eventually leading to a physical confrontation. A nearby farmer interceded and warned the three boys that the fisherman was in fact a Syrian government police officer. Sensing the potential danger they would face from the authorities, the youths fled and have remained in hiding since.



As word reached police headquarters, the Syrian government mobilized their security forces to harass the town of Tel Sakr. According to the appeal, "The entire village of Tel Sakr has become under siege for the past five days where it is being surrounded by the police force, the criminal security force, the political security force (the moukhabarat) and all other types of security forces are surrounding the village despite knowing that the suspects are not in the village."

Assyrian Christian homes as well as Churches have been searched and innocent village residents have been subjected to harassment, intimidation and threats.

One Assyrian observer remarked that the villagers' plea for help and resistance to collective punishment is unprecedented and fraught with risk. "In the past, Assyrian Christians have usually refrained from any criticism of any oppression for fear that the reprisal for criticism would be far harsher. It is not clear whether the authorities will now order greater reprisals".

Assyrian Christians have ample reason to fear Syrian security forces. Syrian security heavy handedness against Assyrian Christians was blatantly demonstrated on October 16, 2004 (AINA [10-31-2004](#), [6-21-2005](#)) when a Syrian military officer and his brother cold bloodedly shot and killed two Assyrians in Hasaka while screaming out anti-Christian epithets. In that incident, Syrian security swept into the historically Assyrian region to protect the murderers and threaten the Assyrian community against reacting to the murders. Syrian forces declared that any action against the killers would be viewed as an attack against the state. To date, the murderers have not been tried despite numerous eye-witnesses to the shootings.

The Assyrian villages along the Khabur remain a vibrant center of Assyrian life in the historically Assyrian region of northeastern Syria. The [35 Assyrian Christian villages](#) straddle the Khabur River in Hasaka province in the northeastern part of the country. Despite underdevelopment and deliberate neglect by the Syrian regime, Assyrian Christians along the Khabur river continue to survive in an agricultural based economy. In the past, Syrian government policy attempted to displace the Christians along the Khabur through an overt discriminatory water utilization policy that disadvantaged Assyrian villages in favor of Arab villages. At one time, the Khabur River had actually dried up into disconnected pools along the Assyrian villages (AINA [8-18-2000](#)).