



Congressman Flanagan Concerned for Assyrians Arrested in Turkey
7-17-1996

Secretary of State Warren Christopher
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of four Assyrians arrested by the Turkish military on June 25, 1996 in Midyat, Tur Abdin. One of the four men, Yusuf Turker, was eventually released. The three others, Ciebro Tokgoz, Melek Akyol, and Adnan Kesenci are still incarcerated in Mardin. These three incarcerated Assyrians may be transferred to Dyarbakir for prosecution.

These Assyrians are charged with providing food and shelter to the PKK. These allegations are completely baseless. In fact, the Assyrians of Turkey have never supported either side in the brutal fighting. Over the previous several years, the Assyrians have frequently found themselves caught between these warring factions. Since 1992, thirty innocent Assyrians have been killed in the crossfire. Often, armed PKK operatives forcibly enter an Assyrian village and threaten any Assyrians who refuse to provide assistance upon demand.

Unfortunately, it has been well documented by international human rights organizations that the Turkish military has frequently utilized such allegations against the Assyrians and all other minorities in the area. Even the most minimal contact between the PKK and others, even if forced upon the civilian population, is judged by the Turkish military as antigovernmental collaboration.

The Assyrians still remaining in the Turkish portion of Mesopotamia are generally known as Suryani, most of whom belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church. The horrors of the massacre of over 750,000 Assyrians by the Turks and Kurds during WWI are still fresh in the consciousness of all the Assyrians in the entire region. It is suspected these arrests may have been provoked by the progovernment Kurdish Hezbollah group in their continuing efforts to dislodge the remaining Assyrians from their ancestral homelands.

One of the incarcerated Assyrians, Gebro Tokgoz, is the acting mayor of the city of Midyat where most of the remaining Assyrians live. By persecuting the Assyrians' political leadership, the Turkish military hopes to create a general environment of apprehension and insecurity in the Assyrian community. It is generally believed and feared that these are not so subtle attempts to ethnically "cleanse" the area of Assyrian Christians has been continuing unabated with the tacit approval of the Turkish government.

Assyrian Americans are deeply concerned about these developments as well as the reports of

torture, denial of due process, and the threat that these victims may "disappear" in Turkish custody. I urge you to protest these arbitrary, illegitimate and cynical arrests.

Please keep me apprised of the situation. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Flanagan
Member of Congress