



Assyrians Persecuted in Turkey

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On June 25, 1996 the Turkish military arrested four Assyrian men in Midyat, Tur Abdin. One of the four men, Yusuf Turker, was eventually released. Three others, Gebro Tokgoz, Melek Akyol, and Adnan Kesenci are all still incarcerated in Mardin. The three incarcerated Assyrians may be transferred to Diyarbakir for prosecution.

Based on totally inadequate evidence, the three Assyrians have been charged with providing food and shelter to the PKK. This is a standard accusation made by the Turkish military against the Assyrians as well as others. In fact, the Assyrians 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, 30 innocent Assyrians have been killed in the crossfire.

Often, the PKK threatens any Assyrians who refuse to provide assistance on demand, while the Turkish military judges even the most minimal contact with the Kurdish insurgents as antigovernmental collaboration.

The Assyrians still remaining in the Turkish portion of Mesopotamia are generally known as Suryani, most of who belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church. The Assyrian Democratic Organization (Mtakasta) which represents the Assyrians in Turkey, has stated that the recent arrests may have been provoked by the pro-government Kurdish Hezbollah group in their continuing efforts to dislodge the remaining Assyrians from their ancestral home. Attempts to ethnically "cleanse" the area of Assyrian Christians have been continuing unabated with the tacit approval of the government.

The horrors of the massacre of over 750,000 Assyrians by the Turks and Kurds during World War One are still fresh in the consciousness of all of the Assyrians in the entire region. 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 insecurity and vulnerability.

The response regarding the incarceration of Assyrians in Turkey from US officials is disappointing to say the least. Here one sees people incarcerated under fake charges, tortured, and denied due process according to the very laws of Turkey. And, yet, Amnesty International says this is not in their mandate and suggests that these people may be better off in prison than free because of risk to their security.