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## Assyrian Human Rights Report

Prepared by the Assyrian International News Agency

The Assyrians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia and have a history spanning over 6700 years. Today, the Assyrians are the descendants of the ancient Assyrian empire and one of the earliest civilizations emerging in Mesopotamia. Although the Assyrian empire ended in 612 B.C., history is replete with recorded details of the continuous persistence of the Assyrian people till the present time. Assyrian civilization at one time incorporated the entire Near East most notably the area of the Fertile Crescent.

The heartland of Assyria lies in present day northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and northwestern Iran. The remains of the ancient capital of Assyria, Nineveh, lie next to Mosul in northern Iraq. Until earlier this century prior to the Assyrian Holocaust of 1915, the major Assyrian communities still inhabited the areas of Tur Abdin and Hakkari in southeastern Turkey, Jazira in northeastern Syria, Urmi in northwestern Iran, and Mosul in northern Iraq as they had for thousands of years.

The world's 4.5 million Assyrians are currently dispersed with members of the Diaspora comprising nearly one-third of the population. Most of the Assyrians in the Diaspora live in North America, Europe and Australia with nearly 350,000 residing in the United States of America. The remaining Assyrians reside primarily in Iraq and Syria and to a lesser extent in Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey.

The Assyrians are not to be confused with Syrians even though some Syrian citizens are Assyrian. Although the name of Syria is directly derived from Assyria and Syria was an integral part of Assyrian civilization, most of the people of Syria currently maintain a separate Arab identity. Moreover, the Assyrians are not Arabs but rather have maintained a continuous and separate ethnic identity, language, culture, and religion that predates the Arabization of the Near East. In addition, unlike the Arabs who did not enter the region until the seventh century A.D., the Assyrians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia. Until today, the Assyrians speak a distinct Assyrian language (called Syriac or Aramaic by some scholars), the language spoken by Jesus Christ. As a Semitic language, the Assyrian language is related to Hebrew and Arabic but predates both. In addition, whereas most Arabs are Muslim, Assyrians are essentially Christian.

The Assyrians were among the first to accept Christianity in the first century A.D. through the Apostle St. Thomas. Despite the subsequent Islamic conquest of the region in the seventh century A.D., the Assyrian Church of the East flourished and its adherents at one time numbered in the tens of millions. Assyrian missionary zeal was unmatched and led to the first Christian missions to China, Japan, and the Philippines. The Church of the East stele in Ian, China bears testament to a thriving Assyrian Christian Church as early as in the seventh century A.D.

Early on, the Assyrian Church divided into two ancient branches, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East. Over time, divisions within these Assyrian Churches led to the establishment of the Chaldean Church (Uniate Catholic), Syrian Catholic Church, and Maronite Church. Persistent persecution under Islamic occupation led to the migration of still greater numbers of Assyrian Christians into the Christian autonomous areas of Mount Lebanon as well. With the arrival of Western Protestant missionaries into Mesopotamia, especially since the nineteenth century, several smaller congregations of Assyrian Protestants arose as well.

A direct consequence of Assyrian adherence to the Christian faith and their missionary enterprise has been persecution, massacres, and ethnic cleansing by various waves of non-Christian neighbors which ultimately led to a decimation of the Assyrian Christian population. Most recently and tragically, Great Britain invited the Assyrians as an ally in World War One. The autonomous Assyrians were drawn into the conflict following successive massacres against the civilian population by forces of the Ottoman Empire consisting of Turks and Kurds. Although many geopolitical and economic factors were involved in provoking the attacks against the Assyrian, a jihad or holy war was declared and served as the rallying cry and vehicle for marauding Turks, Kurds, and Persians. Although the Muslim holy war against the Armenians is perhaps better known, over three-fourths, or 750,000 Assyrians Christians were also killed between 1915-1918 during the Assyrian Holocaust.

The conflict and subsequent Assyrian Holocaust led to the decimation and dispersal of the Assyrians. Those Assyrians who survived the Holocaust were driven out of their ancestral homeland in Turkish Mesopotamia primarily toward the area of Mosul Vilayet in Iraq, Jazira in Syria, and the Urmi plains of Iran where large Assyrian populations already lived. The massacres of 1915 followed the Assyrians to these areas as well, prompting an exodus of many more Assyrians to other countries and continents.

The Assyrian Holocaust of 1915 is the turning point in the modern history of the Assyrian Christians precisely because it is the single event that led to the dispersal of the surviving community into small, weak, and destitute communities. Most Assyrians in the Diaspora today can trace their emigration from the Middle East to the Assyrian Holocaust of 1915. Many who fled from their original homes into other Middle Eastern countries subsequently, just one generation later, once more emigrated to the

West. Thus, many Assyrian families in the West today have experienced transfer to a new country for three successive generations-beginning, for instance, from Turkey to Iraq and then to the United States.

On account of the Assyrians siding with the victorious Allies during World War One, Great Britain had promised the Assyrians autonomy, independence, and a homeland. The Assyrian question was addressed during postwar deliberations at the League of Nations. However, with the termination of the British Mandate in Iraq, the unresolved status of the Assyrians was relinquished to the Iraqi government with certain minority guarantees specifically concerning freedom of religious, cultural, and linguistic expression.

## **IRAQ**

Many of the Assyrians surviving the Holocaust had been gathered in refugee camps in Iraq pending final resettlement in an autonomous Assyrian homeland. In 1933, however, the Iraqi government declared an ultimatum giving the Assyrians one of two choices: either to be resettled in small populations dispersed amongst larger Muslim populations that had recently been violently antagonistic or to leave Iraq entirely. Some Assyrians chose to leave to neighboring Syria and so notified the Iraqi government of their intention. In response, the Iraqi government dispatched the Iraqi army to attack the Assyrians fleeing into Syria. In their subsequent defeat, the retreating Iraqi army massacred over 3000 Assyrian civilians in Simele and other surrounding towns in August of 1933. Upon his return to Baghdad, the commanding officer ordering the massacre was hailed as a conquering hero. Thus, the first official military campaign of the Iraqi army served as the newly independent government's final solution to the Assyrian question. The demoralized Assyrian refugee population in Iraq was thereby resettled in dispersed villages while the other surviving isolated communities languished in the areas of Tur Abdin, Turkey; Jazira, Syria; and Urmi, Iran.

### **An Unrecognized Minority**

In Iraq, Assyrians have not been recognized as a distinct minority but rather as a religious minority. Thus, in the north the various Kurdish groups refer to the Assyrians as Kurdish Christians whereas elsewhere in the country they are considered Arabs. In the official Iraqi Census of 1977 and 1987, Assyrians were not allowed to describe themselves as Assyrian. Those Assyrians willing to participate in the census were obliged to refer to themselves as either Arabs or Kurds.

At the same time some Assyrians are not considered full citizens of the country. In 1992-93 all Assyrian teachers and professors who had previous Ottoman nationality were forced to retire. One family was deported to Istanbul, Turkey. During the Iran-Iraq war, some Assyrians whose families originated from Assyrian villages in Iran were similarly discriminated against.

### **Religious Persecution and Regulation**

The government of Iraq regulates religious affairs through a separate Ministry of Religious Affairs. All Churches are subject to decisions at this ministerial level. No new Churches may be built or old Churches repaired without direct approval of the Ministry. No printing of prayer books is allowed without the permission of the Ministry. The Ministry must be notified of any movements or transfers of priests within or outside of the country. Any religious, social or educational program needs to be reviewed and approved by the Ministry.

Although some clergy have steadfastly refused, the government pays the salaries of some of the clergy. Priests and deacons are still required to serve in the military and cannot be excused as conscientious objectors. By having such regulatory and oversight powers, the government exercises considerable direct and indirect influence and interference in the Church institutions.

In Iraq, the official state religion is Islam. As is common in much of the region, apostasy laws discriminate against Assyrians. A Christian Assyrian is allowed to convert to Islam whereas a Muslim is not allowed to convert to Christianity. Moreover, an Assyrian Christian who marries a Muslim is obliged under law to convert to Islam. If he refuses he may be imprisoned until such time that he agrees to convert. All children from such marriages are necessarily raised Muslim. Any Muslim considering conversion to Christianity must consider the risk to his or her physical well-being or life. Any Muslim killing an apostate is reassured that he will receive a lenient sentence if any at all. With conversion to Islam, Assyrians are thereafter considered Arabs and are no longer considered Assyrians.

### **Political Persecution and Executions**

Numerous human rights organizations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as well as the US State Department and the United Nations (UN) have extensively documented human rights abuses against Assyrians as well as other communities within Iraq. In Iraq, Assyrians perceived as espousing Assyrian causes are treated harshly. On March 2, 1985, Yousip Zaibari, Youbert Shlemon, and Youkhana Jajjo, all members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) were executed in Iraq for promoting Assyrian ideals. The executions served notice to the Assyrian community at large regarding the lack of tolerance towards a proactive Assyrian awareness.

In 1984, 20 Assyrians belonging to the ADM were incarcerated in Iraq. Two years later 16 were released. In 1995, another 4 were released. Another Assyrian member of the ADM, Dinkha Gewargis, was arrested in Dohuk in 1991 and has since disappeared. Inquiries regarding his whereabouts and well-being have not been answered by the government. The former prisoners have reported physical and psychological mistreatment.

Amnesty International in their 1997 Report on Iraq stated that APhysical and psychological torture and ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners remained widespread (in Iraq). Methods of torture reported included beatings, electric shocks to the tongue and genitals, suspension from a rotating fan, burning the skin using heated metal implements or sulphuric acid, and rape. Some prisoners were said to have ben flogged before their release.

Assassinations against Assyrian leaders have been documented by international human rights and Assyrian organizations in northern Iraq as well. One of the most notable killings involved Francis Shabo, an Assyrian member of the Parliament of North Iraq. Mr. Shabo was born in 1951 in Mangesh, Dohuk, and was married with four children. Mr. Shabo was a member of the Chaldean Catholic Church and an active member of the ADM. He was elected to the Parliament in May, 1992 and served as a member of the National Assembly's Economic Committee.

As far as the Assyrian community in concerned, his most important role remained the adjudication of expropriation of Assyrian lands at the hands of the Kurds in northern Iraq. Many of the expropriated villages were in the area of Bahdinan from which Assyrians had earlier been evicted by government forces. Kurds subsequently resettled the villages illegally and have not allowed Assyrians to resettle their lands. Mr. Shabo was shot dead on his way home in Dohuk on May 31,1993. The local Kurdish authorities did not apprehend any suspects or commission an investigation.

Amnesty International inquired into Mr. Shabo's assassination. Amnesty International stated that Athe organization had received the names of people said to be linked to the KDP's First Liq who were allegedly responsible for the killings. However, none of the suspects were apprehended or questioned by Mr. Mahsoud Barzani's party.

Mr. Lazar Mikho Hanna also known as Abu Nasir was an Assyrian Christian born in Mangesh in 1933. He was a member of the Iraqi Communist Party's Central Committee for Northern Iraq. He was also a member of a committee responsible for the Iraqi Kurdistan Front. According to Amnesty International and Assyrian sources in northern Iraq, he was shot and killed on June 14, 1993 near his home in the KDP stronghold of Dohuk. No suspects were brought to justice and no investigation was commissioned.

Amnesty International's February, 1995 report on northern Iraq concluded that AThe security apparatus of the KDP, Rekkhistine Taybeti, and that of the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), Dezgay Zanyari, are said to have units akin to assassination squads, whose members receive orders from senior party officials. There is also widespread conviction that such unlawful and deliberate killings could not have been perpetrated without the knowledge, consent or acquiescence of the leaders of these two parties, to whom the security and intelligence apparatuses are ultimately responsible. The names of individuals alleged to be members of assassination squads within the KDP and PUK have been submitted to Amnesty International, including by officials of both parties who supplied information about the other's security and intelligence activities. Amnesty International also disclosed Adetails of extensive surveillance operations of named individuals, as well as references to killings and attempted killings by the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMIK).

The assassination attempts have continued. Most recently, Franso Harriri was the target of an assassination attempt. In a press release, the KDP announced that at 8:10 a.m. on February 23, 1997, Mr. Franso Harriri survived an assassination attempt. Mr. Franso Harriri is an Assyrian from northern Iraq and is the governor of the province of Arbil. The attack reportedly took place during Mr. Harriri's trip to the provincial headquarters in Arbil. Although Mr. Harriri survived the attack, two of his bodyguards as well as five civilian bystanders were reportedly wounded.

According to the KDP, their investigation pointed to involvement by the PUK. Specifically, the KDP accused Mr. Kosrat Rasool, allegedly a PUK political officer, of masterminding the attack. The KDP further suggested that the motivation behind Mr. Rasool's assassination attempt may have been the intentional disruption of the recent Ankara conference and ongoing peace negotiations in northern Iraq between the two warring Kurdish groups.

### **Attacks Against Assyrian Civilians**

Recent attacks against Assyrian civilians by Kurds in northern Iraq and by others elsewhere in the country have recently increased. Almost without exception, Assyrians have no recourse to seek justice within the country's legal institutions. The lack of a credible threat of reprimand or just involvement by authority in northern Iraq and in the government controlled portion of Iraq has fostered an environment of enhanced violence against Assyrians.

According to the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), on May 23, 1997, Kamal Kiriakos Ablahad, an Assyrian, was shot and killed in Baghdad, Iraq. Mr. Ablahad was employed at the residence of Jamal Al-Tikriti, the son-in-law of the Iraqi President. Following the shooting, Mr. Ablahad was immediately rushed to the hospital where he was declared dead. The medical examiner's report declared the death a suicide. Examination of the body revealed a single gunshot to the head as the cause of death. However, Mr. Ablahad's right index and middle fingers were shot off as a consequence of the shooting. Mr. Ablahad's kidneys were immediately removed as donor organs for transplantation.

Since the gunshot involved Mr. Ablahad's right fingers and head, members of the Assyrian community in Iraq have suggested that Mr. Ablahad was in fact killed in execution fashion and that prior to being shot, he had raised his right hand in an attempt to shield his head and face from the gunshot. Since access to medical care has greatly deteriorated following the UN embargo against Iraq, it has been reported that the motivation for the killing was in fact to obtain kidneys for organ transplantation possibly for someone in the Al-Tikriti household.

The Arabic language newspaper Al-Hayat reported on July 25, 1997 that Uday, the son of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, had shot and killed an Assyrian girl earlier in June, 1997. The Assyrian girl, Asil Salman Mansour, was last seen walking home within the predominantly Christian Doura district of Baghdad. Witnesses reported that the girl was stopped by a Presidential vehicle and was forced into the vehicle by Uday's bodyguards. Ms. Mansour was taken to the Presidential complex at al Jadiriya. According to the news report, Uday attempted to rape the girl but failed. In a subsequent fit of rage, he shot and killed the girl. Reportedly, Uday has become embittered, depressed and even more easily angered since the failed assassination attempt on his life and his subsequent paralysis.

Following the girl's murder, Uday ordered the payment of seven hundred dollars, an Oldsmobile automobile, and a fifty dollar monthly stipend to the family as compensation for the loss of their daughter. The grief-stricken Assyrian family has been ordered not to report the incident; they have accepted the gesture out of fear of further reprisals by the government.

Also according to AINA, on the morning of July 27, 1997, three armed men entered the home of Polus Younan, a 62 year old Assyrian member of the Chaldean Catholic Church. Mr. Younan was originally born in Habbania but lived in the N'eiya w'bayna' section of Baghdad with his wife Medina Shmoel and their 16 year old son Mattai. Ms. Medina Shmoel survived the attack and reported her account to the police. She witnessed the repeated stabbing of her husband in the back with a large knife until the blade of the knife protruded through Mr. Younan's chest. Upon dying, Mr. Younan was rolled into sheets by one assailant as the other two attackers turned their attention to Ms. Shmoel. The attackers struck Ms. Shmoel with the butt end of their rifles until most of her teeth were broken. Throughout the attack, the assailants demanded information regarding the family's money and savings. The attackers then slashed Ms. Shmoel's son Mattai in order to obtain more information. Since the boy is deaf and mute, he was unable to answer the attacker's questioning. When the boy began to lose consciousness on account of his blood loss, the attackers moved him to the bathroom and placed him in a bathtub. No suspects have been questioned or apprehended by the authorities.

In another instance reported by AINA, another Assyrian 35 year old Yousif John Yacoub was brutally stabbed to death on April 12, 1997 while in his home in Baghdad, Iraq. Three Arab men, employed as school guards in a nearby school, were contracted by a cleaning woman at the same school to attack and rob Mr. Yacoub. According to Mr. Yacoub's neighbors who witnessed the attack, Mr. Yacoub was stabbed in the back, neck, and abdomen. The neighbors notified the police who arrived prior to Mr. Yacoub's death. Mr. Yacoub survived long enough to identify his attackers and to give the name of a nearby relative to be notified.

The police kept Mr. Yacoub in his home for questioning while he was bleeding uncontrollably until his death. They never sought to transport him to a hospital in time to save his life. In addition, Mr. Yacoub's relative was never contacted. The relative heard about the incident one day later, at which point Mr. Yacoub had already died. Mr. Yacoub's relative finally arrived at the home only to find that the police had ransacked the place and removed any valuables or evidence.

Two weeks later, Mr. Ameer Shurta, a high ranking police officer and member of the ruling Ba'ath party, along with his wife and children, occupied Mr. Yacoub's house. The police have refused to return any of Mr. Yacoub's possessions to the family. Mr. Yacoub's sister, a Sumerian and Akkadian scholar residing in London, England, has requested that at the very least, the family's photo albums which have great sentimental value ought to be returned. The police have refused.

Mr. Yacoub's family has reported that governmental and police personnel are accomplices in this crime. The police have released the cleaning woman and have claimed that one of the attackers has escaped. The other two were reportedly held for questioning but no recent information is available regarding their whereabouts. According to Mr. Yacoub's family, because of the attackers' ties to government accomplices, the attackers will probably not be punished.

In November, 1996 the Assyrian National Congress (ANC) reported that six Assyrians working in the Presidential Palace in Baghdad were arrested for allegedly conspiring to poison Saddam Hussein. The arrests were confirmed by relatives of the accused as well as the Iraqi Human Rights Organization based in Syria. All of the arrested were reported subsequently executed without any due process, trial or appeal.

The six executed Assyrians included Mr. Gewargis Hormiz Oraha, a 45 year old married man and father of four. Mr. Oraha was from the Assyrian village of Mal Urab, Dohuk but had more recently resided in New Baghdad district of Baghdad. Mr. Yousip Adam Khano was 26 years old, married and had one child. He was also from Mal Urab. Amira Koro Odisho was 35 years old and living in the Karadah district of Baghdad. Mr. Shimon Khoshaba Al-Hozi was 38 years old and married with seven children from the city of Zakho, Dohuk. Mr. Petros Elia Toma was 36 years old, married with three children and was from the Assyrian village of Mal Urab. He, too, had been recently living in Baghdad. The last victim was Mr. William Matti Barkho.

According to AINA on April 27, 1997 an unarmed civilian from Shaqlawa, 58 year old Mr. Sabri Odo Sowrish was assassinated while he worked in his store in Sedara, Arbil. He was struck by three bullets execution style from a silencer. His assailant has not been apprehended. On April 16, 1996 Mr. Adel Odisho Marcus, an Assyrian deacon from the village of Sanat, was killed in Zakho. Mr. Marcus was a relatively well known Assyrian land owner. He was allegedly murdered by Adel Said Slavani, also known as Abu Lukman. Slavani is a well known member of the KDP and enjoys the protection of the KDP. Slavani continues to reside freely in his home district as the acknowledged murderer of Mr. Marcus without fear of governmental involvement. No investigation has been carried out.

## **Disenfranchisement of the Assyrians**

On February 2, 1991 the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait ended the seven month occupation of Kuwait and the ensuing Gulf War. Civil unrest subsequently erupted leading to a grave humanitarian crisis which prompted the UN to pass resolution 688 on April 5, 1991 calling on Iraq to end the repression of the Iraq civilian population. A Safe Haven was established by the allies after a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the government of Iraq on April 18, 1991 and Operation Provide and Comfort was begun. The Safe Haven stretched from Zakho, Duhok, and Amadiya the area was patrolled by Allied military and Iraqi aircraft were forbidden from flying north of the 36th parallel.

The establishment of the Safe Haven created an autonomous area in Northern Iraq that was free from direct Iraqi governmental control. Elections for a Parliament in Northern Iraq were held on May 19th, 1992. The initial plans for the assembly outline a hundred seat all-Kurdish parliament. International pressure from Western countries led to the addition of five temporary token seats for the 1.5- 2 million Assyrian Christians of Iraq. Despite early hopes for an inclusive and progressive democracy with respect for all of the communities of northern Iraq, the situation rapidly deteriorated as competing Kurdish groups bitterly battled each other.

The actual conduct of the elections was filled with irregularities and inequities. The election was conducted with a 7% threshold such that any group not enjoying 7% of the vote would have absolutely no representation. Out of several parties only two, the KDP and the PUK met this criterion. The official result gave the KDP 50.8% of the vote and the PUK 49.2%. All votes from smaller parties not receiving the minimum 7% threshold were reallocated to the two larger parties. Smaller communities not aligned with the two larger parties were discouraged. Assyrians, although reluctantly guaranteed 5 seats on account of international pressure, were nonetheless subjected to preconceived logistic difficulties that made it difficult to appropriately reflect their demographic representation.

In their February 1995 report, Amnesty International stated that many of the smaller parties complained that the extent of multiple voting, as well as other irregularities, cast doubts on the fairness of the elections. In their public statements the PUK and the KDP stated that the elections were on the whole free and fair, but privately some officials from both parties complained of irregularities. The Parliament was eventually disbanded after the security situation deteriorated over the past few years. Control of the area fell into the hands of two competing Kurdish armed factions. The ensuing conflict left thousands dead and thousands more wounded. Those people and communities not aligned with either of the two Kurdish groups, namely the Assyrians, have lived in fear and intimidation. The security of the Assyrians in the Safe Haven drastically deteriorated during this time. Specific attacks against the Assyrian community in northern Iraq have included assassinations, kidnappings, land expropriations, forced conversion into Islam, and linguistic-cultural pressures.

### **Displacement and Land Expropriation**

Attacks against ancient Assyrian ancestral villages have been ongoing in Iraq. In 1976-77 over 200 Assyrian villages in northern Iraq were razed by the Iraqi government. All inhabitants were resettled in urban areas, primarily in and around Baghdad in order to prevent the establishment of a concentrated Assyrian presence anywhere in the country. Most of the villages have been subsequently reclaimed by Kurds. Following the establishment of the Safe Haven further land grabs by Kurds directly or indirectly supported by local Kurdish authorities have led to the expropriation of lands from 52 additional villages in northern Iraq. It was precisely the resolution of these types of complaints with which Minister Francis Shabo was entrusted prior to his assassination.

In many instances, the confiscations of Assyrian lands by Kurds in northern Iraq are organized and carried out by the local ruling governmental bodies. In other instances, the local government acquiesces without any effort to seek out justice. Never has a Kurd been forced by a local government in northern Iraq to return his illegally expropriated land. Under the current system of justice, an Assyrian has no legal recourse. An Assyrian who chooses to fight for his rights will often have to face the occupying Kurds and the local government supporting them. Moreover, in such a situation an Assyrian could expect total retribution possibly leading to death to himself and his family in return for fighting for his rights.

The Assyrians remain terrorized. The perpetual land grabs serve to rob the Assyrians of their livelihood while simultaneously driving them out of their historic lands. Threats, persecutions, and terror are the means employed by governmental and rogue Kurdish elements. The following is a short list of 52 Assyrian villages that have had their land confiscated.

In the Simele district: in Deirboon, the agricultural department of the Dohuk government expropriated 170 donums of land for Kurdish use for the past four years. In Pakhlouja 1530 donums of agricultural land have been confiscated by Kurds from Zakho for over four years. In Suriya, 530 donums of agricultural land have been confiscated by the sons of a Kurd known as Sheikh Karo for over four years. In Towsana, 735 donums of tillable land have been confiscated for over four years. In Mshara, 250 donums of land have been confiscated for over three years. In Bajidbraf, 190 donums of land were seized and had houses and barns built upon them for over three years. In Bravook, 125 donums of grazing pasture land have been confiscated by local Kurds. In Mansouria, 560 donums of land have been confiscated for over four years. In Fesh Khabour, a vast area of houses and land (larger than any other area of confiscation, but that cannot be quantified) has been expropriated. In the Armenian village of Howrisk, 7000 donums of land have been confiscated by the Al Hajan Kurdish tribe.

In the Zakho district: in Khalakh, 850 donums of land have been expropriated by the agricultural department. In Mal Urab, 45 donums of land have been confiscated. In Azakh, 12 donums of orchards and vineyards have been expropriated for over four years. In Kourigavana, 115 donums of land have been expropriated for over two years. In Bar Roushkisava, 35 donums of land have been expropriated for over three years.

In the village of Gindakosa, Assyrians attempted to drill wells as part of a foreign aid and development project sponsored by the American Organization of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). In order to help deprive the Assyrians of a livelihood the local Kurds vigorously opposed this project. The neighboring Kurdish village of Ikmala opposed and threatened the Assyrians. The local ruling Kurd of Ikmala extorted 20,000 dinars to ensure the go-ahead of the project. The money was paid to Lieutenant Abdulla Spindari, but he continued to oppose the project. In the end, the Governor of Dohuk, Abdel Aziz Tiab approved the project, but Lieutenant Spindari blocked its implementation. To make matters worse, 20 donums of land were taken from the Assyrians and fruit trees were planted on the expropriated land.

In the Barwaribala Zakho district: in Kanibalaf, 35 donums of land have been expropriated for over four years. In Mousakir, another water development project was blocked by the Kurds. In Balouka, houses and land were seized by the Kurds. In Gara, houses and land were seized by the Kurds. In Malikhta, land was seized by the Kurds. Likewise, in Chakalla Ulya, Chakalla Sulfa, Beit Tanouri, Tashish and Chelki Nasara unknown amounts of land have been expropriated from the Assyrians. In Jdeede, 47 houses were built on land confiscated from the Assyrians by Kurds. In Hisa, 30 donums of land were taken and developed into houses and orchards. In Marga Jeea, vineyards and 25 donums of land were expropriated by Ikmala Kurds. In Jameeke 8 donums of orchards were taken and houses were built by the Bapire Kurds.

In the Sarsing Amadea district: in Enishke, 65 donums of land, orchards and vineyards were expropriated. In Bebad, land, orchards, and vineyards have been taken for over three years. In Bei Natha, orchards and vineyards have been expropriated for over three years. In Sarsing, orchards and land have been taken. In Dehe, Aradin, Dohuke, and Kwane orchards, lands and vineyards have been confiscated. In Chamrabatke, land was taken and houses have been built on Assyrian land for over four years. Although the government ordered the Kurds to leave, the edict was never enforced.

In the Denarta Ackra district, houses have been built by Kurds on Assyrian lands. Despite an order by the government to vacate, the Kurds remain in their illegal homes. In Cheshkawa, members of the Zabari clan who are the inlaws of the Barzani clan, have likewise expropriated land and illegally built houses. They are also ignoring governmental orders to leave. The same accounts are prevalent about Chemesinni, Siani, Issan, Argan and Safra Shartapa. In Chemchal, land has been expropriated for over four years. In Hazarjadt, Jule, and Builmet, land has been expropriated for over four years.

In Dowria, the whole village has been overrun and occupied since 1961 by the Barzanis. The title to the village lands remains till today in Assyrian hands, but no action is taken to compensate or return the Assyrians to their homes.

### **Kurdification Policies**

Linguistic pressure has also been brought to bare against the Assyrian community. In the spring of 1996, an attempt was made to Kurdify the educational curriculum and final exams of the northern autonomous region. The official educational language of the whole country until that time was Arabic. Having had all of their curriculum and education in Arabic till that point Assyrian students were concerned that they would be placed at a distinct disadvantage vis a vis their fellow Kurdish students. A group of Assyrian students in Ankawa, Arbil resisted the change in the curriculum. A larger group of rival Kurdish students affiliated with the PUK repeatedly threatened and beat the Assyrian students. The local authorities identified the Kurds as the clear aggressors and issued symbolic restraining orders against them. However, the attacks continued unabated.

One day after signing the restraining order, on May 12, 1996, these same Kurds once again attacked the Assyrians at the Assyrian Student Club in Ankawa. The Assyrian Student Club serves as a gathering place for Assyrian students in Ankawa as well as a dormitory. Two unarmed Assyrians from the ADM arrived to mediate between the groups. The armed Kurdish students opened fire killing Peris Merza and Samir Moshi. Many others were injured. A few Kurdish suspects present at the scene were later temporarily detained but the actual killers were never apprehended despite eyewitness testimonies and identifications.



According to Amnesty International's 1997 report on Iraq, Ain July, Amnesty International raised with the PUK the cases of two ADM members killed in >Ain Kawa in May. The PUK told the organization that an investigation into the killings was initiated but that the main perpetrators had fled to government-controlled areas. A similar response was received by Amnesty International regarding the assassination of Mr. Francis Shabo by yet another Kurdish organization, the KDP.

### **Islamist Attacks**

During 1995-97 Islamist elements in the Khalidia area of Iraq targeted Assyrians. Three separate attacks led to two deaths and one critical wounding. All of the attacks were against owners or operators of clubs or restaurants that also served alcoholic beverages. Ostensibly, the Islamic fundamentalists have objected to the serving of alcoholic beverages in these areas. Many in the Assyrian community believe that the attacks are at least tacitly condoned if not encouraged by the government since no attempt has been made to investigate or stop the attacks. The surviving widow of one of the victims has relayed the information but due to fear of reprisals against relatives remaining in Iraq, she has refused to provide her name.

The role of the government in pressuring Assyrian club owners was uncovered when the government recently ordered the

closing of all liquor stores, bars and restaurants serving liquor. It is estimated by Assyrians in Iraq that 40,000 Assyrians have been made unemployed because of this action.

### **Abduction and Forced Conversion to Islam**

Young Assyrian girls are subject to forced abduction. Often they are forced to marry their abductors and to convert to Islam. The ruling authorities as a rule never intervene on behalf of Assyrians.

On January 13, 1996 Wassan Michael, a sixteen year old girl from Simele was kidnapped by armed Kurds. She was threatened and forced to renounce her Christian faith. She was then forced to marry one of the Kurdish kidnappers. The names of the Kurds were delivered to the local authorities but no suspects have been apprehended or questioned. The girl has not been returned to her family.

On January 20, 1996 Janet Oshana, a 13 year old girl from Mal-Urab near Zakho was kidnapped by an armed man named Khorshed Uthman Galesh. The kidnapper's name was provided to the local authorities but he was not apprehended. The girl has not been returned to her family.

The families of such Assyrian girls have no recourse since the Kurdish authorities will not support an Assyrian in such matters. Some Kurdish apologists have stated that Kurdish culture in some villages dictates that a man is not fully a man unless he abducts his bride, and, conversely, that a bride is not truly worth having unless she has been abducted. However, such a heinous disregard for the most basic of human rights is not a cultural attribute shared by Assyrians. Moreover, an abducted Assyrian, unlike an abducted Kurdish girl, is forced to abandon her Christian faith, family, language, and heritage. Many other cases of abduction are not reported because of fear and, in the conservative culture of the Assyrians, because of sheer shame. With no reasonable chance of changing the outcome, some Assyrians accept the disappearance of their girls rather than invite further reprisals and violence.

In 1993, the 16 year old daughter of 54 year old Mr. Lazar Matti was abducted by a Kurd named Mohamed Babakir. The girl was forcibly assaulted and forced to marry her abductor. She was also compelled to convert to Islam. Out of fear and with no other recourse from the authorities, Mr. Matti and his family had to come to terms with the abduction as an accomplished fact in order to avoid the wholesale escalation of communal tension and further violence.

On February 9, 1997 Kurdish officials investigating a recent spate of firebombings of Assyrian stores and businesses in the Shaqlawa area found Mohamed Babakir mysteriously killed. Although various rival Kurdish groups had been engaged in violent conflict, the authorities without any evidence suspected that Mr. Matti and his 25 year old son Havel Lazar were responsible for the Kurd's murder. Although it was widely agreed that no animosity remained between the families, the two Assyrians were arrested in Shaqlawa pending a formal investigation. Despite vigorously protesting their incarceration, the Mr. Matti and Mr. Lazar acquiesced.

That night at evening prayers, the local Kurdish mullah declared that only Mr. Matti could have had the motive to kill Mr. Babakir on account of the earlier kidnapping. The mullah incited the crowd of Kurdish Muslim worshippers and declared that it is morally unacceptable that a Christian Ainfidel kill a Muslim. The mullah demanded that the Kurds avenge the death of Babakir.

On February 10, 1997 Mr. Matti and his son were dragged out of their prison by a mob of roughly 100 armed Kurds and were murdered. Prior to their death, they were taunted, tortured, and finally, butchered into pieces. At the same time, 100 Kurds stormed the family home of Mr. Matti and burned it to the ground. There was no attempt to prevent the mob by the local police; there was no resistance to the mob.

The dismembered remains of the father and son were strewn across fields in Shaqlawa. The Kurdish mob detonated grenades and shot randomly with automatic weapons in order to further intimidate the remaining resident Assyrians. The Assyrians were forbidden to hold a funeral for their dead. Once the body parts were gathered, a funeral was held outside Shaqlawa in Arbil.

Mr. Mahsoud Barzani, the president of the KDP visited Shaqlawa following the murders. In a statement released by the KDP, Barzani condemned the killings and acknowledged recent acts of violence, burglaries, and arson by Kurds against Assyrian homes and shops in the Shaqlawa area. He noted a pattern of intimidation on the part of Kurds in the area. However, neither he nor the local authorities apprehended the responsible individuals for the murder or the incitement. Nor were the police responsible for the safety of their prisoners sanctioned.

### **Lynchings of Assyrians**

Most attacks against Assyrians go unanswered by the authorities and Assyrians usually have no recourse in the justice system. As an example, Mr. Edward Khoshaba of Aqla was tending his sheep in 1995 when he came across three Kurds who had killed and butchered some of his livestock. When confronted, the surprised Kurds attempted to kill Mr. Khoshaba. He was able to kill two of his assailants before the third fled to his home village. Reportedly, when the surviving Kurd returned to his home village, a celebration had ensued as the Kurdish villagers had assumed that the Kurdish intruders had successfully killed Mr. Khoshaba in addition to his livestock. When they learned that two of the Kurdish intruders had been killed instead, the entire village mobilized to exact revenge.

Mr. Khoshaba likewise fled to an area controlled by his Assyrian compatriots. A standoff ensued for some time until Mr. Khoshaba's parents (fearing an escalation in violence) convinced Mr. Khoshaba to turn himself in to the authorities for an investigation and trial. Following his surrender, the Kurdish authorities promptly released Mr. Khoshaba to the relatives of the Kurdish intruders. Mr. Khoshaba was taken to the Kurdish village where he was tied up and tortured until he was near death. The final blows were granted to the elder most woman of the village as a sign of honor. She repeatedly hacked Mr. Khoshaba in the head with an axe until he died. His body was then dismembered into pieces.

The leader of the Kurdish village is Qaem Qam Farzanda Zbeer. No suspects have been apprehended and none of the murderers have brought to justice. There has been no investigation of the authorities who evaded their responsibilities and turned Mr. Khoshaba over to the Kurdish mob.

### **Churches Attacked**

With the earlier mentioned destruction of over 200 Assyrian villages in 1976-77, scores of Churches were also destroyed. Nearly every village had a church and/or monastery. Some of the ancient churches were as much as 1400 years old.

Recent attacks against Churches have also increased. In mid-January, 1996, the holy room of Saint Sbar Eshoo located in Mar Gewargis Church was burglarized. No investigation was carried out and no suspects apprehended.

Later on June 29, 1996 when Turkish troops invaded Iraq in military operations against the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), another Mar Gewargis Church was bombed in northern Iraq.

### **Restricted Humanitarian Aid to Assyrians**

Following the Gulf War, the United Nations imposed an economic embargo on Iraq. According to the UN, all communities inside Iraq have been devastated by the embargo with nearly 500,000 people dying as a direct result. During that time, the limited humanitarian aid reaching Iraq was monopolized by two warring Kurdish factions in the north and by government agencies in the rest of the country. With a worsening economic situation, almost no international humanitarian assistance reached the less well connected Assyrian community.

In May of 1996, Iraq agreed to implement UN Resolution 986, the oil-for-food resolution. Under the resolution, Iraq is allowed to sell two billion dollars of oil semi-annually and to use the revenues for the purchase of humanitarian assistance eg. Food and medicine. The agreement was implemented in December. Because the UN is directly involved in distribution (rather than the warring parties), it is hoped that the Assyrians will finally receive a proportionate share of humanitarian assistance.

### **Plundering of Historic Artifacts/Erasing Assyrian Heritage**

Mesopotamia is perhaps the richest area in the world in terms of ancient archeological sites and artifacts. In northern Mesopotamia, the ancient sites bear testament to the ancient continuing history and heritage of the Assyrians over the past several millenia. Tragically, numerous articles in the Western press as well as in the Middle Eastern press, have described the development of syndicates of plunderers and smugglers of Assyrian artifacts following the Gulf War and the subsequent embargo. Museums have been targeted as well as archeological sites.

Especially in the north where warring Kurdish groups have led to an environment of near anarchy, Assyrian artifacts have disappeared from museums and archeological sites. Despite the formal ban on international trade in stolen artifacts, vast quantities of Assyrian artifacts are surfacing in Europe and North America. The international appetite for ancient Mesopotamian treasures is reportedly assisted by London-based archeologists who forge authenticity certificates in order to facilitate the trade of illegal artifacts into the legal and legitimate market.

The crude techniques used to secure the artifacts from archeological sites causes the destruction of priceless amounts of artifacts. The sites themselves are also irreparably damaged from the point of view of future scholarly and scientific exploration. Numerous large statues and reliefs have been beheaded or broken into smaller, more easily smuggled pieces.

For some Kurds who wish to erase the Assyrian heritage of Mesopotamia, the illegal destruction of ancient historic sites further diminishes the history and legacy of Assyrians in their native land.

## **TURKEY**

The Assyrians have continuously lived in Turkey for thousands of years. Following the Assyrian Holocaust of 1915-1918 most of the Assyrians of the Hakkari region were killed while survivors fled to other areas of the Middle East. Some Assyrian villages survived in the area of Tur Abdin and Mardin. By the 1960's over 130,000 Assyrian Christians, primarily Syrian Orthodox lived in Turkey especially in the Southeast. Of these, only about 5,000 remain in Turkey today. Most of these have resettled in larger cities such as Istanbul while only about 2,000 Assyrians remain living in their ancestral villages.

The situation for the Assyrians in Turkey has become more precarious since the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) war for an independent Kurdistan in southern Turkey has escalated. Assyrians often find themselves caught between the ultimatum of armed Kurds on the one hand, and the reprisals of the Turkish military and other Kurdish village guards on the other. They are either asked to provide assistance to the PKK which prompts the razing of their village by the Turkish military; or, they are

compelled to join the Turkish government's Kurdish village guards which provokes violent attacks by the PKK. The Assyrians find themselves attacked from both sides of warring Kurds, both the village guards and the PKK.

According to Amnesty International: AVillagers are often reluctant to become village guards for fear of reprisals by the PKK. However, participation in the village guard corps is not voluntary. If they refuse to participate the village may be visited by PKK guerillas seeking food and shelter. It will also be raided by the security forces who may carry out attacks against the families who refuse to participate.

ASecurity raids are generally conducted by gendarmes (soldiers carrying out police duties), sometimes accompanied by village guards. Villagers are usually assembled and subjected to threats, insults, destruction of livestock, and in many cases torture. Homes are searched while men, and sometimes women and children, are made to stand or lie down outside in subzero conditions in winter or, in summer, in the full heat of the sun.

In February 1993 the State of Emergency Coordination Council decided that outlying settlements which might support the PKK should be evacuated, and in recent months it appears to have been routine for all or most of the houses in these villages to be burned. As a result of this policy, thousands of indigent villagers have been forced to move to Diyarbakir and other cities in the southeast. Assyrian Christian villagers who were driven out in this way were forced to sign statements saying that they had left because of PKK activity. There have also been many reports of extrajudicial execution and >disappearances' in the course of such raids.

### **An Unrecognized Minority**

Assyrians in Turkey have been treated as second class citizens. They have not been recognized as an ethnic minority but rather are called Turkish Christians or Turco-semites. Unlike the Greeks and Armenians who have ethnic minority recognition and subsequent rights, the Assyrian Christians are regarded as a religious minority. Because they are not an ethnic minority, they cannot establish their own schools and therefore cannot properly transmit their language and culture. Limited language courses in the Churches have been insufficient and have been hampered by government efforts to close them.

### **Restrictions on Teaching Language and Religion**

Isa Karatas, a noted writer and representative of the Orthodox Church in Turkey was quoted in the Turkish Daily News (August 29, 1996) as saying AThe most blatant example of the situation was experienced in Deyrulzafaran monastery in Mardin. In 1979 the education of religion and language was banned, and the reason given was that the Assyrian children who were being educated there were joining terrorist organizations.

In official religion classes in government schools, religions other than Islam such as Christianity are only given three pages. Moreover, they are portrayed unfavorably. According to Isa Karatas, While Assyrian parents introduce their children to the Bible as the book that shows the way to God and the priests as respected people explaining this way, the ministry's books introduce the Bible as something that has been destroyed and changed and the priests as the ones who changed it to their advantage.

The Assyrians are also misunderstood and misrepresented in official publications. In one of the books of the Education Ministry entitled Fast and Sacrifice in Islam and Other Religions, the author Tahsir Feyizli writes that The Assyrians have been so influenced by Christians that they are like a sect in Christianity.

### **Destruction and Evacuation of Villages**

According to the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO), the main Assyrian organization in southeast Turkey, physical attacks against Assyrians and their villages have been increasing in recent years. The fighting between the Turkish military and PKK Kurdish separatists has brought greater reprisals against the Assyrians from both sides. For example, Isa Karatas revealed in the Turkish Daily News that in 1992 the graveyard of the village of MidyatBulbuk was bombed under the pretext that it may have hidden a secret PKK arms cache. When the Ogunduk village police station was attacked by the PKK on July 21, 1992, the Turkish military burned the entire surrounding village and fields. Sukru Yalin, a seventeen year old Assyrian was wounded.

On June 18,1994 Hormuz Diril, an alderman of an Assyrian village went to the Beytussebab Attorney General's Office to ask why the Assyro-Chaldean village that had been evacuated was burned down by the military. He was subsequently arrested and accused of allegedly aiding terrorists.

According to Amnesty International's Annual Country Report on Turkey, two cousins Ilyas Edy's Diril and Zeki Ercan Diril lived in Kovankaya, one of the last Assyrian Chaldean Catholic villages in Hakkari province. The village was burned down by security forces in 1990 for refusing to participate in the village guard system. All of the villagers fled to Istanbul; later some returned to rebuild their homes.

Ilyas and Zeki attempted to return to Kovankaya on May 15, 1994 following a six month period of employment in Istanbul. On their way they were detained by village guards as they passed through the town of Uzungecit. They were turned over to gendarmes from Uludere, a large nearby town. Following an inquiry by Amnesty International, the Turkish government stated that the two cousins were arrested for Asuspicious behavior and that they were subsequently released 1-2 days later.

According to Amnesty International, The Assyro-Chaldean Catholic community of Kovankaya, which numbered more than 5,000 before the armed conflict began in southeast Turkey in 1984, has dwindled to five families through migration to Istanbul and Europe. On 4 June 1994 Kovankaya was again burned down by security forces and its inhabitants forcibly evicted. The villagers are now living in another settlement in the area. Reportedly they had been seen by other villagers during their detention at the Dargecit Gendarmerie Battalion Headquarters. Several of the released villagers later reported they had been tortured in detention.

The ADO reported that 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 were all still incarcerated in Mardin until their transfer to Diyarbakir for prosecution. Based on totally inadequate evidence, the three Assyrians were charged with providing food and shelter to the PKK under Article 169.

Regarding evidence against the accused, the court stated there was a lack of evidence as far as Mr. Kesenci and Tokgoz were concerned. The accusations were for providing shelter for somebody who is said to be a PKK fighter. The alleged PKK fighter was Mr. Hasan Bas. Mr. Bas forcibly entered the home of Mr. Tokgoz and others and threatened them. When he was rebuffed and the Assyrians refused to assist him, he filed his complaints with the military authorities. The Assyrians of Turkey stated that Mr. Bas was an informant and Turkish military operative. The Assyrians were obviously tortured during the first two weeks of their incarceration while in Mardin. Mr. Tokgoz had two obviously broken teeth. Because Mr. Tokgoz was the acting Mayor of Midyat, it was generally believed that the arrests were aimed at further intimidating the Assyrian community.

In early October 1996 Turkish forces killed 28-30 unarmed refugees on the Iraqi border as they attempted to cross into Turkey. They were most likely killed on the Turkish side of the border. After the Turkish forces killed these people, their bodies were turned over to the Iranians who subsequently returned them to their Kurdish contacts in Northern Iraq. Since there was a delay of several days, one cannot with certainty affix a specific date to the killings. The most plausible date remains October 2, 1996 according to sources in the area.

All of the people were definitely unarmed. They were being accompanied by a Kurdish smuggler who assisted refugees attempting to flee northern Iraq to Turkey.

Of the 30 people killed, 5 were Assyrians . The names of the five Assyrians are as follows:

- Emad Gewargis Sliwa from Ankawa
- Deldar Yousif Yacoub from Ankawa
- Salar Marbana Ghareb from Ankawa
- Milas Isaac from Shaqlawa
- Farhad Beia Soreeshoo from Shaqlawa

The Turks claimed that the people killed were mistaken by Turkish forces for PKK fighters during a firefight between the Turks and PKK. In addition, they stated that the accidental killings occurred at night while visibility was reduced. In point of fact, the victims were unarmed no one was returning fire from their side. Still more, eyewitness reports have stated that the Turks actually captured the people initially and only later massacred them while they were in Turkish custody.

According to the ADO, all tolled 30 Assyrians from Turkey have been documented killed in Southeast Turkey over the past ten years. The following is a list compiled by the Central European Section of the ADO in Augsburg, Germany:

- Erdino Aho killed on 6/9/87 in Tur Abdin.
- Yarar Fehmi killed on 3/25/89 in Midyat.
- Gorgen Yakub killed on 4/21/90 in Midyat.
- Bulut Gevriye killed on 5/1/90 in Enhil.
- Bulut Sami killed on 5/1/90 in Enhil.
- Aykil Yusuf killed on 6/3/90 in Arnas.
- Aykil Edibe killed on 6/3/90 in Arnas.
- Davut Malke killed on 10/9/90 in Midyat.
- Onal Semun killed on 11/14/90 in Binebil.
- Akgul Bahe killed on 11/14/90 in Binebil.
- Surer Yusuf killed on 11/14/90 in Binebil.
- Buyukbas Celil killed on 11/14/90 in Binebil.
- Tahan Ishak killed on 3/23/91 in Midyat.
- Adil Ferit killed on 8/27/91 in Enhil.
- Adil Ismuni killed on 8/27/91 in Enhil.
- Bayru Mikayil killed on 12/3/92 in Idil.
- Yontan Yakub killed on 7/26/92 in Kiziltepe.
- Aksoy Fikrril killed in 8/92 in Midyat.
- Yuksel Circis killed on 9/22/92 in Savur.
- Kalayci Aziz killed on 1/13/93 in Midyat.
- Koc Isa killed on 1/13/93 in Midyat.
- Ozbakir Yusuf killed on 1/13/93 in Midyat.
- Aydin Aydin killed on 1/13/93 in Midyat.

- Durmaz Gevriye killed on 1/13/93 in Midyat.
- Savel Gevriye killed on 2/6/93 in Hah.
- Matte Yacub killed on 2/16/94 in Midyat.
- Tutus Sukru killed on 6/17/94 in Midyat.
- Ciftci Aziz killed on 7/14/94 in Mardin.
- Dr. Tanrivardi Edvar killed on 12/18/94 in Midyat.

Most recently in September, 1997 a family of Assyrians was killed in Mzizah in Tur Abdin. The two killed were parents of a Syrian Orthodox priest now residing in Paderborn, Germany.

On August 2, 1992 according to the Turkish Daily News, the Assyrian cemetery and Assyrian houses were destroyed in the village of Catalcam in Dargecit. On January 21, 1993 the village of Izbirak located in Midyat was attacked by Kurdish village guards. Four Assyrians including Melke, Suleyman, Borsoma, and an unidentified woman were kidnapped. The remaining villages were forced to become village guards themselves. At least 20 Assyrian villages have been evacuated in the last three years in southeast Turkey including Kosrall (Silopi), Elbeyendi (Midyat), Bardakci (Midyat), Baglarbasi (Midyat), Yamanlar (Midyat), Baristepe (Midyat), Murcemekli (Midyat), Gungoren (Midyat), Dagici (Nusaybin), Ocyol (Nusaybin), Guzelsu (Nusaybin), Dikek (Nusaybin), Taskoy (Nusaybin), Girmeli (Nusaybin), Sare (Idil), Yarbasi (Idil), Izbirak Koyu (Dargecit), Alayurt Koyu (Idil), Arica (Gercus), Yamanlar (Gercus) and Binkalbc (Gercus).

### **Revocation of Citizenship**

The Turkish Ministry Commission numbered 95-6805 revoked the citizenship of 35 Assyrians. The following list was reported in the Turkish Daily News:

Melke Davut (Midyat), Yakup Gonen (Midyat-Gevriye), Bulut Samuel Bulut (Midyat-Yemisli), Yusuf Aykil, Edibe Aykil (Midyat-Baglarbasi), Bahi Akul Semun Unal, Yusuf Surer, Celil Buyukbas Mardin Bulbul, Fehmi Yarar (Midyat), Aho Erdinc (Nusaybin-Taskoy), Ishal Tahan (Midyat), Afem Adil, Ismuni Adil (Midyat-Yemisli), Mihayel Bayru, Idil Fikri Aksoy (Midyat), Yakup Yontan (Kiziltepe), Circis Yuksel, Savur Dereici, Aydin Aydin, Nusaybin Uckoy, Musa Demir, Yusuf Ozbakir, Isa Koc (Midyat- Yemisli), Gevriye Durmaz, Midyat Dogancay, Gorgis Savci, Dargecit Anitli, Fuat Bayindir, Idil Hanna (Aydin), Dargecit Arutil, Yakip Mete (Midyat), Sukru Tutus (Idil), Aziz Ciftci (Mardin), Doctor Edvart Tanriverdi (Midyat).

Many of these names are also noted to have been killed according to the ADO.

### **Forced Abductions**

Twenty Assyrian girls have been kidnapped since 1980. Some of the names reported in the Turkish Daily News include: Hasine Selege , 14 years old taken in 1994 from Midyat Mercimekli village, Turkan Gulec abducted in March, 1994 from Midyat Altinbas village. Marta Ilik abducted in September, 1994 from Nusaybin Odabasi village, and Lahdo Barinc abducted on February 22, 1993 by people claiming they were village guards. After eight months, she was released for DM 100,000.

Those girls not released are forced to convert to Islam and marry their abductors.

### **Islamist Attacks**

According to the Turkish Daily News, the priest from the village Ogunduk, Melke Tok, was abducted by people suspected of being Hizbullah supporters on January 9, 1994. The priest was reportedly buried alive and pressured to convert to Islam. He reportedly escaped and subsequently left the country.

On January 13, 1993 Hamdi Simsek and his son Hikmet disappeared. According to Mr. Simsek's wife Heylon, the two men were arrested by soldiers. They gathered us in the center of the village. They hung the cross that signifies our religious beliefs on the neck of the imam of the vilage, Ibrahim Akil, and said, "We will kill you all because you are Christian." The ADO has also reported increasingly violent attacks by predominantly Kurdish groups.

Finally, the United Nations Special Rapporteur Report on Religious Intolerance, Mr. Abelfattah Amor summarized the state of the Assyrians in Turkey:

In a communication dated 5 September 1994, the Special Rapporteur transmitted the following observations to the government of Turkey:

According to information received, the Assyro-Chaldean minority are suffering serious violations, in particular in the area of religious tolerance. In religious matters, their freedoms are being curtailed and Muslim religious education is compulsory for this Christian minority. In the monasteries, activities have been cut back and made subject to prior supervision of the authorities. In practice, the right to build new churches cannot be exercised. The Assyro-Chaldeans have no schools, even at primary level, or social institutions; they are forbidden to open their own establishments. They are banned from public service.

They are also reported to be victims of regular attacks by armed individuals and groups who not only rob them of their property and abduct their daughters, but also perpetrate murder, thereby creating an atmosphere of fear, apparently with the aim of forcing them to leave their villages. Thus, since 1975, more than 100,000 Assyro-Chaldeans have left the country and only

10,000 remain.

## **SYRIA**

In Syria, Assyrians are not treated as equal citizens under the law. The official state religion is Islam. Article 3 section 1 of the Constitution states that The religion of the President of the Republic has to be Islam. Section 2 of Article 3 states that Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of legislation.

### **Regulation of Churches**

Among the various branches of the Syrian Secret Police (al-Mukhabarat), there is a section responsible for Security of the Christian Denomination. This particular section is also affiliated with a branch of Secret Police for Political Security (Mukhabarat al-Seiasieh). The specific function of this section is the regulation of and gathering intelligence regarding Christian institutions, Churches, and religious personnel.

Each Christian religious organization is assigned a member of the Secret Police. The agent's responsibility is to monitor events, programs and people within his assigned Church and report specific information about the congregation. Religious or educational programs are carefully monitored by the State and require approval.

Some Assyrians from Syria who have fled to the United States have asserted that in some cases home Bible studies were prohibited because the government feared subversive activity. All functions were required to be held in the Church with a secret police official in attendance. The Assyrian Evangelical Church in Syria was even more closely monitored. The Evangelical Church was accused of illegally acquiring funds from the West.

### **Christian Education**

All private Christian schools were confiscated by the government in 1967. Some schools were allowed to reopen with the stipulation that the sub director or vice principal be a government appointee. Only a small percentage of schools were allowed that option. With the exception of those Christian elementary schools founded earlier, establishing new Assyrian Christian elementary schools is expressly forbidden. While Muslim Syrians have many different means to propagate Islamic teachings and programs such as through public and private schools, Islamic institutions, mosques, and through all forms of the media, Assyrian Christian religious freedom is limited to the physical confines of the Church which is closely monitored and regulated.

Although there is no universal compulsory Islamic education of Christians, some cases of forced instruction in Islam have been reported. In some schools Assyrians in grades 1-6 are required to memorize verses from the Koran.

### **Apostasy Laws**

As in many other countries in the Middle East Christians are allowed to convert to Islam but the converse is strictly forbidden. An Assyrian man from an Assyrian village in northeast Syria fell in love with and married a Muslim woman. In order for the state to recognize the marriage he was compelled to convert to Islam. When he refused, he was attacked on several occasions and severely beaten. Because he held fast to his faith his marriage was never officially recognized. When he had children he was compelled by law to register and to raise his children as Muslims. Because he refused, his children were never allowed to register in schools.

Muslim relatives of a Muslim apostate are reassured that any attacks against the apostate including in extreme cases murder will only receive lenient if any punishment at all.

### **Political Persecution**

Assyrians espousing proactive Assyrian sentiments are viewed with grave suspicion by the government. These Assyrians are subject to surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and torture depending on the seriousness of the perceived threat to the government.

On the evening of June 24, 1997 , Mr. Bashir Saadi and Mr. Yonan Talya were arrested in Hassaka, Syria. The following day, Mr. Aziz Ahi, a resident of Kamishli, was also arrested. The three men are Assyrian Christians from the Hassaka province in northeastern Syria. They belong to Mtakasta, otherwise known as the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO). Mr. Bashir Saadi is a representative of the large Assyrian Christian community in northeastern Syria and is a former member of the Syrian Parliament.

The ADO had sponsored a water development project to aid in the transportation of potable water from Hassaka to numerous Assyrian villages in the Khabur area following the drastic reduction of water flow in the Khabur River. The three Assyrians arrested were accused of complicity in raising funds for the project from members of the Assyrian Diaspora community in the U.S.A. and Australia and of subsequently misappropriating those funds for their personal use. They were also accused of abusing the name of the Syrian government.

The three were held without access to a lawyer. They were refused family visits. No trial had been set for over three months.

Sources from the area have been deeply concerned that the three men have been in danger of being physically abused and tortured.

## Summary

The Assyrian identity entails an inextricably intertwined combination of language, culture, religion, ethnic heritage and a sense of belonging to an ancestral home such that to deny full expression of anyone element threatens Assyrian identity and existence as a whole. In the past, especially during this century, all of the elements of Assyrian identity have been under attack and the scattered Assyrian communities have correspondingly suffered. Historically, the Assyrians' neighbors have repeatedly attempted to Arabize, Kurdify, Turkify, or Persify the Assyrians. Scarcely has there ever been genuine political recognition of the true distinct Assyrian identity. Moreover, all of their neighbors have shared in the common attempt to directly or indirectly Islamicize the Assyrian Christians. This report highlighted some of the human rights abuses suffered by the Assyrians in the Middle East.

The Assyrian communities this century have continued to be driven out of their homelands leading to further scattering and fragmentation. Emigration into the Diaspora has left those remaining behind less numerous, strong, energetic, and ultimately, more vulnerable. Continued movement of Assyrians out of their historic ancient homes will only serve to further scatter and disperse Assyrians. Assyrian identity already hemorrhaging will be mortally wounded.

Rather than encourage the continued exodus to the West, the root causes of Assyrian insecurity and disaffection ought to be carefully studied. Rather than draining the struggling communities of still more members, positive proactive programs need to be established in the various Middle East countries that enhance and promote human rights for all minority groups.

In the short term, the most precarious situation for the Assyrians remains Iraq. With a still deteriorating situation in northern Iraq, future American and United Nations action ought to secure the rights of all of the communities, including the Assyrians. The authority to distribute humanitarian aid ought not be left in the hands of those who have fostered an environment of conflict, violence and anarchy. Proceeds from UN Resolution 986 allowing Iraq to sell oil for food that are earmarked for northern Iraq ought to be equitably distributed to individual communities on a proportionate basis. The food and medicine from these oil sales ought not be channeled exclusively through the warring factions. With Assyrians comprising 15% of the population of North Iraq, 15% of the proceeds ought to be directly allocated to the Assyrian community. Such funds will allow Assyrian and other communities to rebuild their destroyed villages, redevelop historically Assyrian lands, and obtain desperately needed food and medicine.

In the final analysis, any solution for Iraq in particular and the region as a whole needs to address the rights of all of the communities with mutual dignity and respect. In order to fully protect the Assyrian population and identity, an internationally and regionally recognized safe haven and autonomous area needs to be carefully delineated within the areas of historically Assyrian villages just as has been done for other communities. In Iraq, the 1957 census lists all of the Assyrian villages prior to the accelerated policy of urban resettlement. Such a haven would best ensure the survival of the Assyrian identity vis a vis language, religion, and culture preservation.

Since the integrity of Iraq and neighboring countries is necessary for regional stability, this Assyrian safe haven and minority guarantees necessarily ought to satisfy the United Nation's declared respect for the national sovereignty and integrity of Iraq and neighboring countries. Regionally, neighboring countries needs to be assuaged that such a development would contribute to regional stability rather than detract from it. Moreover, the security and national interest of all the surrounding countries including Iraq would be furthered with the development of a progressive respect for human and civil rights of all minority communities.

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