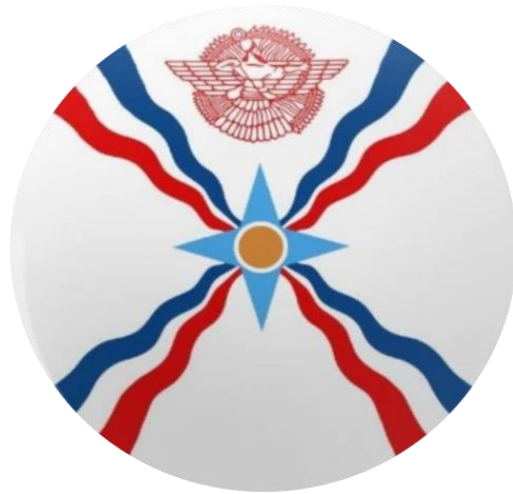


Endangered



The Struggles of the Indigenous
Assyrians in their Homelands

By

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Assyrians

Assyrians are an indigenous people of the Middle East, with a history spanning over 6,700 years. Their native ancestral lands encompass present-day Iraq, Syria, southeastern Turkey, and northwest Iran.

The Assyrians of today are the direct descendants of the ancient Assyrians, who built a great empire and advanced civilization through innovations in city planning, state administration, the development of a writing system, extensive irrigation networks, a powerful military, the world's first library, and magnificent achievements in art and architecture, among numerous other contributions to human civilization.

The Assyrians have endured centuries of massacres, persecution, genocide, and displacement. Notable events include the massacres of 1843–1847, the Seyfo genocide during World War I, the 1933 Simele Massacre, the 1969 Soriya Massacre, and the 2014–2017 genocide committed by ISIS. Ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria have further decimated the Assyrian population in their ancestral lands.

These atrocities have forced Assyrians into a minority status in their own native lands, but they remain an indigenous people with a deep-rooted history that predates the societies that surround them.

Despite these hardships, their faith and cultural resilience have remained unwavering, as they continue to preserve their traditions and identity. Adhering to Christian denominations like the Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church, and Syriac Catholic Church, and Evangelicalism, their faith has been a cornerstone of their identity since the 1st century CE.

The Assyrian language is a blend of ancient Akkadian and Aramaic, dating back to the 9th century BC. Over time, it evolved into Sureth from Suraya (the Assyrian term for "Assyrian") following the advent of Christianity. In the West, the language is commonly referred to as Syriac.

Politically, Assyrians advocate for recognition of their indigenous rights, religious freedom, and cultural preservation. In their homelands, they face challenges like land confiscation, political marginalization, and violence. Despite these struggles, they remain resilient, striving for unity and survival as a nation.

Challenges in Iraq

Assyrians in Iraq face systemic marginalization, ongoing political and security threats, and the continued erosion of their rights, all of which jeopardize their future in their ancestral homelands. Decades of targeted policies, demographic engineering, and external political interference have left them politically disenfranchised, economically disadvantaged, and forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands. These challenges, driven by both state and non-state actors, continue to undermine their ability to sustain a viable presence in Iraq.

Political Disenfranchisement

Recent amendments to Iraq's election law reinstated 3 of the 5 removed quota seats for Assyrians, but no measures were implemented to prevent their continued manipulation by Kurdish proxies and the Iranian-backed Babylon Brigade.¹ As a result, the three seats in the Kurdish-controlled Region of Iraq (KRI) are entirely controlled by Kurdish proxies, while the five seats in the Iraqi Central Government (ICG) remain under Iranian-backed proxies. These proxy representatives serve Kurdish and Iranian interests rather than the Assyrian people, further entrenching political disenfranchisement.

There are numerous issues that require attention, including the flag of the KRI, which reflects a reality limited solely to the Kurdish ethnicity. This raises questions about the extent of the region's commitment to pluralism and highlights how its governance model prioritizes Kurdish ethno-nationalism over genuine inclusivity.

Kurdish parties have systematically excluded Assyrians from meaningful political representation by dominating both parliamentary and ministerial positions designated for them. Despite being the second-largest ethnic group in the region after the Kurds, Assyrians remain politically disenfranchised, with no real decision-making power. Rather than imposing control over Assyrian political participation, Kurdish parties should have engaged in a framework for equitable coexistence under the supervision of a guarantor entity, such as the U.S. government, to establish a system rooted in pluralism, democracy, and the protection of indigenous rights.

Far from upholding the principles it claims to champion, the KRI has instead entrenched ethnic supremacy, where Assyrians are treated as obstacles to be subdued rather than as equal

¹ SyriacPress. (2024, May 23). *Athra Alliance rejects reduction of quota seats for Chaldean–Syriac–Assyrian people in Kurdistan Regional Parliament*. SyriacPress. Retrieved from <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/05/23/athra-alliance-rejects-reduction-of-quota-seats-for-chaldean-syriac-assyrian-people-in-kurdistan-regional-parliament/>

participants in governance. True pluralism cannot exist in a system that rewards oppression, silences indigenous voices, and glorifies those who have worked to erase them.

Targeted Violence Against Assyrians

Political assassination has been a consistent tool of intimidation in the KRI. Francis Shabo, a prominent parliamentarian and the first martyr in parliament representing the ADM, was assassinated in 1993 for his unwavering defense of Assyrian rights. To this day, his case remains unresolved, with no official accountability for his assassination.

However, leaked intelligence documents from the Ba'ath-era Directorate of Intelligence, published in 2010 by the Kurdish newspaper Hawlati, linked his murder to Wahid Koveli, a known Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) assassin.²

Despite these revelations and sustained pressure from the Assyrian community, then-Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President and KDP leader Masoud Barzani refused to prosecute Koveli and his co-conspirators, dismissing the credibility of the evidence instead. Consequently, Koveli was never held accountable through the KRG's legal system and continued to rise within the ranks of the Peshmerga, ultimately serving as a decorated commander until his death in 2016 at the age of 46, reportedly from a brain stroke.

Further exacerbating tensions, a mural honoring Koveli was unveiled in 2017 near the Assyrian town of Enishke. This deeply outraged the Assyrian community, as it serves as a deliberate glorification of the very assassin identified in leaked intelligence as responsible for murdering an Assyrian leader—evidence the KRG has repeatedly questioned in an effort to shield his legacy as a Kurdish hero. By shielding Koveli and his co-conspirators from justice, the KRG has not only reinforced impunity for political assassinations, but has sent a clear message that the killing of Assyrians is tolerated, justified, and even honored.

Land Grabbing

Over 54 villages and 94 parcels of land have been unlawfully seized.³ When courts rule in favor of Assyrians, their decisions are never enforced, leaving rightful landowners without recourse.⁴

² Assyrian Policy Institute. (n.d.). *Justice for Francis Shabo*. Retrieved from <https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/justiceforfrancisshabo>

³ United Nations Human Rights Council. *Table for 94 Cases Showing the Land Grab of the Assyrian Villages*. Universal Periodic Review. Retrieved from <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=6727&file=Annexe1>

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council. *English Translation of Table for 94 Cases Showing the Land Grab of the Assyrian Villages*. Universal Periodic Review. Retrieved from <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=6727&file=EnglishTranslation>

Additionally, Assyrian properties are frequently targeted through real estate fraud, further stripping them of their rightful ownership. Kurdish claimants—often with ties to the KRG—falsify land deeds to fabricate ownership, exploiting the legal system to legitimize these land grabs while Assyrians remain defenseless against institutionalized dispossession.

Educational Neglect

Assyrian schools, though registered as public institutions, suffer from teacher shortages, lack of resources, and biased curricula that distort history, depriving students of an education rooted in historical accuracy.⁵ The Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq fills critical gaps by funding lecturers, renovating schools, and printing textbooks—efforts entirely sustained by diaspora-raised funds.

The Syriac education curriculum within the KRI is merely a direct translation of a program intentionally designed to glorify Kurdish nationalism, functioning as yet another tool of ideological indoctrination that entrenches Kurdish supremacy within the education system.

In addition to erasing Assyrian history, the curriculum glorifies figures like Simko Shikak, who assassinated Assyrian Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun, and Bedir Khan Beg, who orchestrated the genocide of Assyrians and Yazidis in the mid-19th century.

Rather than preserving the rich heritage of one of the world’s oldest civilizations, the curriculum deliberately omits Assyrian history while forcing Assyrian students to venerate the very figures who massacred their ancestors and sought to eradicate their existence entirely.

Religious Persecution

In both the KRG and ICG, laws such as the Islamization of minors forcibly convert children, underscoring the absence of genuine religious freedom.⁶ Both governments enforce Sharia law,⁷ further entrenching institutional discrimination against non-Muslims.⁸ Hate speech against Assyrians intensifies during Christian holidays, often propagated in mosques within the KRI, fueling hostility and deepening sectarian tensions.

⁵ Assyrian Confederation of Europe. (2017). *Erasing Assyrians: How the Kurdish leadership is destroying Iraq’s indigenous Christian community* (pp. 52-55). Retrieved from <https://www.atour.com/media/files/news/assyria/20170925-Assyria-Nineveh-Erasing-Assyrians/20170925-Assyria-Nineveh-Erasing-Assyrians.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Department of State. (2023, May 15). *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq*. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>

⁷ Kurdistan Regional Government. (n.d.). *The Draft Constitution of the Kurdistan Region - Iraq*. Kurdistan Regional Government.

⁸ U.S. Department of State. (2011). *2010 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq*. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/171735.pdf>

In Sulaymaniyah, Christian-owned alcohol stores are bulldozed and destroyed with plans to build mosques in their place, illustrating the systematic targeting of Assyrian businesses and religious identity.⁹ The KRG actively encourages the construction of mosques, and the KRI now has nearly 6,000 mosques, most of which were built after the establishment of the No-Fly Zone in 1992.¹⁰

For Assyrians who were victims of ISIS's genocide, the persecution does not end with the fall of the terrorist group. Children born to young Assyrian girls as a result of rape by ISIS militants are forcefully registered as Muslims by the government. Under Iraqi law, Christians are not allowed to raise Muslim children, so survivors who refuse to release their children to orphanages risk having them taken away by the state.

As a result, many Assyrians are forced to relinquish these children to Christian-run orphanages, where they are raised Assyrian and Christian—yet they remain legally registered as Muslims against the will of their mothers. This is a profound violation of religious and parental rights, forcing survivors of genocide and sexual violence to endure the reality that their rapist has more power over the faith of their child than they do.

Religious inequality is further entrenched by legal restrictions on marriage. Under Iraqi law, Muslim men are allowed to marry Christian women, but Christian men are forbidden from marrying Muslim women—a discriminatory policy that reinforces religious dominance while undermining Assyrian and Christian autonomy.

Economic Suppression

Assyrian businesses in the region face systemic barriers, including restrictive permitting processes, coerced profit-sharing arrangements, and the deliberate neglect of infrastructure development. Additionally, the KRG consistently fails to pay salaries on time, attributing the delays to the ICG allegedly withholding funds. However, the ICG has consistently met its salary obligations, even offering to pay public sector employees directly—a move the KRG actively obstructs to retain control as the intermediary. As a result, many public sector employees,

⁹ Kurdistan Watch. (2024, January 7). *Video: Authorities bulldoze alcohol shops in the Kurdistan Region, with plans to construct a mosque to prevent alcohol sales*. X. Retrieved from <https://x.com/KurdistanWatch/status/1744067382165803481>

¹⁰ TII Team. (2023, March 28). *129 more mosques built in Iraqi Kurdistan in one year: Ministry of Endowments*. The Insight International. Retrieved from <https://theinsightinternational.com/mosques-built-iraqi-kurdistan-2023-03-28>

including Assyrian lecturers, have gone unpaid by the KRG, compelling the Assyrian Aid Society to step in and cover their salaries.

In response to these economic challenges, the Assyrian Aid Society has played a critical role in mitigating these hardships by implementing infrastructure projects, such as street lighting, irrigation systems, and business development initiatives. Additionally, it provides mobile medical clinics, agricultural support, and other essential services, all funded through contributions from the Assyrian diaspora.

Threats to Security and Existence

From the genocide committed by ISIS to unchecked violence by extremists, Assyrians live under constant threat. During the ISIS offensive, Assyrians were disarmed¹¹ under false promises of protection. Yet when ISIS advanced, the Peshmerga abandoned them without firing a single bullet, retreating from seven key defensive posts—Nineveh Plains, Nineveh Dam, Makhmur, Zumar, Daqooq, Sinjar, and the left side of the Tigris in Mosul. This betrayal left Assyrians defenseless against ISIS executioners.

Deprived of any means of self-defense, Assyrians were massacred, their homes and churches desecrated, and their history destroyed. Thousands of Assyrians were forced to flee for their lives, abandoning their ancestral homeland.

Following the defeat of ISIS, Assyrians were blocked from returning to their lands under the pretext of clearing roadside bombs. In reality, these restrictions were a strategic means for Kurdish authorities to seize Assyrian towns and villages through land grabs.

Kurdish expansionism, the persistence of ISIS ideology, and the absence of security guarantees continue to threaten Assyrians' very survival in their homeland. These tactics not only serve to expand Kurdish control but also to garner Western support and sympathy under the guise of promoting stability and security.¹²

¹¹ Ankawa.com. (2014, August 12). *Notice demanding disarmament circulated by the KRG among Assyrian towns in the Nineveh Plains*. Courtesy of Ankawa.com, published by AINA. Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/images/20140812172915.jpg>

¹² Chiaramonte, P. (2017, February 16). *US group accuses Kurds of keeping Yazidi, Christian refugees from their Iraqi homeland*. Fox News. Retrieved from <https://www.foxnews.com/world/us-group-accuses-kurds-of-keeping-yazidi-christian-refugees-from-their-iraqi-homeland>

State-Sanctioned Neo-Nazism

Hawpa, a Kurdish neo-Nazi group officially registered by the KRG, stands as a direct threat to the survival of Assyrians. Rooted in ethnic supremacy and neo-Nazism, its charter explicitly calls for the genocide of Assyrians, outlining plans for extermination before later being removed from their website in an effort to obscure its extremist agenda. However, the document remains retrievable through internet archives, exposing their true objectives, which remain unchanged. The group continues disseminating propaganda across Erbil and surrounding areas, reinforcing its genocidal agenda built on the deliberate falsification of history and the demand for Assyrian extermination as necessary for the advancement of Kurdish nationalist ambitions.¹³

Hawpa is not a fringe movement; it is an active organization with 1,000 known members, with likely additional operatives working in secret. The group operates freely with official recognition and institutional backing from the KRG, allowing it to expand its influence without consequence. Its leadership has met with high-ranking KDP officials, including the Governor of Erbil, signaling official complicity and endorsement.

Its propaganda—spread through highly visible public displays and online materials—promotes historical revisionist territorial claims designed to fabricate Kurdish indigeneity and erase Assyrians' rightful status as the indigenous people, justifying ethnic cleansing. This state-sanctioned extremism reflects the broader institutional discrimination and systemic oppression that Assyrians endure under Kurdish occupation. The rise of Hawpa deepens fears of impending ethnic cleansing and further cultural erasure, intensifying the existential threat Assyrians face in their homeland.¹⁴

Neglect of Cultural Heritage

Assyrian archaeological sites face vandalism, appropriation, and neglect, a deliberate attempt to erase their history from the land and remove their indigeneity. The KRG actively appropriates Assyrian history rebranding it as Kurdish history to fabricate a historical connection to the region and justify its territorial ambitions for statehood.¹⁵

¹³ Hawpa. (2023, March 31). *The Assyrians*. Hawpa (archived). Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20230723171136/https://www.hawpaofficial.org/2023/03/blog-post_31.html

¹⁴ Hawpa. (n.d.). *Hawpa Organization Instagram page*. Instagram. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/hawpa_organization/

¹⁵ Kathem, D., Robson, L., & Tahan, C. (2022, March 24). Cultural heritage as an object of political contestation. In *Cultural heritage predation in Iraq: The sectarian appropriation of Iraq's past* (pp. 21–23). Chatham House. Retrieved from https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022-03-24-cultural-heritage-predation-iraq-kathem-robson-tahan_0.pdf

Beyond rewriting history, the KRG has desecrated Assyrian cultural heritage. Assyrian artifacts and ruins are regularly defaced, used for target practice, and left to decay. Kurdish forces have conducted military exercises on Assyrian historical sites, turning them into training grounds rather than preserving them as protected heritage.¹⁶ The Kurdish flag is frequently graffitied over ancient Assyrian structures, further marking their intent to erase and replace Assyrian identity.¹⁷

Most recently, the KRG failed to protect the ancient aqueducts of Assyrian King Sennacherib, one of the oldest known engineering marvels in history, allowing luxury vehicles to drive over and erode the site during a Lexus ad campaign. This came after the Peshmerga had already used the aqueducts for military exercises, further contributing to their degradation. Now, in an effort to feign concern and deflect responsibility, the KRG is suing Lexus, despite its own failure to safeguard this irreplaceable heritage. This follows a consistent pattern of permitting destruction and then shifting blame, reflecting a broader strategy of neglect, exploitation, and historical erasure to advance Kurdish nationalist ambitions.¹⁸

Forced Displacement

Centuries of violence and instability have driven millions of Assyrians from their homes, leaving fewer than 300,000 in Iraq today. While Assyrians have faced displacement and persecution for generations, the situation has drastically worsened in recent decades. Prior to 2003, the Assyrian population in Iraq exceeded 1.5 million, but systematic persecution, targeted violence, and state-sanctioned marginalization have led to one of the largest indigenous exoduses in modern history. Since 2003, more than 118 churches have been bombarded and destroyed, further eroding Assyrian cultural and religious presence.¹⁹

The ADM has highlighted that while ISIS committed genocide against Assyrians, the population loss within KRG-controlled areas has been even greater, raising serious concerns about long-term displacement and demographic engineering. Policies of intimidation, land confiscation, and denial of basic services have systematically forced Assyrians out of their ancestral homeland.

¹⁶ Assyrian International News Agency (AINA). (2023, May 30). *Kurdish Forces Conduct Military Exercises on Assyrian Archaeological Site*. AINA. Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/news/20230530161455.htm>

¹⁷ American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR). (n.d.). *The Malthai Reliefs*. ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives. Retrieved from <https://www.asor.org/chi/reports/incident-report-feature/The-Malthai-Reliefs>

¹⁸ SyriacPress. (2025, February 11). *Iraq: Antiquities Directorate in Nohadra (Duhok) sues Lexus over damage to ancient Assyrian aqueduct*. SyriacPress. Retrieved from <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2025/02/11/iraq-antiquities-directorate-in-nohadra-duhok-sues-lexus-over-damage-to-ancient-assyrian-aqueduct/>

¹⁹ Assyrian International News Agency (AINA). (2007). *Incipient Genocide: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq*. AINA. Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/reports/ig.pdf>

Assyrian villages remain underdeveloped while neighboring Kurdish villages receive proper infrastructure. The Barzani-led government obstructs Assyrian home and business expansion, enforces dependency on loyalist contractors, and seizes properties without notice or compensation. Attempts to resist or seek justice are met with threats, violence, or imprisonment.

The situation is exacerbated by ongoing KRG-backed projects that threaten remaining Assyrian communities. One such threat is the proposed Nahla Dam, which, if constructed, would uproot families and flood their lands, mirroring historical displacement strategies used to erase indigenous communities. While it is unclear if the KRG will proceed with the project, the mere threat of its construction serves as a tool of intimidation, pressuring Assyrians to flee the region.²⁰

Additionally, the Nahla Dam has not been authorized by the Federal Government of Iraq or by Turkey, which controls the region's water supply and must approve such projects, further calling into question the KRG's motives in advancing this plan.

Another example of displacement in the Nineveh Plains was the Mosul Expansion Project, a plan that, if implemented, would have forcibly uprooted Assyrians from their homeland. Although the project was eventually halted, it remains a clear demonstration of how government-backed initiatives threaten Assyrian land rights and contribute to long-term displacement.

Meanwhile, in Ankawa, an Assyrian-majority district, water was intentionally diverted for over 30 days to supply a golf course built by the Barzani family, depriving Assyrians of water access in the midst of a water crisis while the rest of Erbil remained unaffected. The decision to construct a luxury golf course during a severe water shortage drew strong criticism from organizations, which condemned the audacity of prioritizing elite recreational facilities over essential water access for residents suffering from the crisis.²¹

Further restricting Assyrians' ability to sustain themselves, the KRG has imposed excessive military checkpoints in Nahla under the pretense of protecting Assyrians from the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a US-designated terrorist organization. Yet, these checkpoints are

²⁰ The Young Assyrians. (2024, October 6). *New Water Dam Projects in Iraq Pose Threats to Indigenous Assyrian Archaeological Sites and Settlements*. The Young Assyrians. Retrieved from <https://www.theyoungassyrians.org/news/new-water-dam-projects-in-iraq-pose-threats-to-indigenous-assyrian-archaeological-sites-and-settlements>

²¹ Najm, R. (2023, August 23). *The Audacity of the Erbil Hills Golf Course Amidst Iraq's Water Crisis*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/audacity-erbil-hills-golf-course-amidst-iraqs-water-crisis>

strategically placed in front of Assyrian villages rather than around them, offering no real protection. Assyrians are caught in the middle of ongoing clashes between the PKK and Turkey, as the PKK operates from the mountains, launching attacks on Turkey, which then retaliates with airstrikes that set Assyrian villages ablaze.²²

Instead of safeguarding the population, these checkpoints serve as tools of restriction and control, severely limiting access to food, agricultural fertilizers, and medical care—particularly during curfews, when movement is even more restricted, cutting off entire communities from essential resources.

Barzani militias have also resorted to direct harassment to force Assyrians out of their homes. In Alqosh, a checkpoint forces Assyrians to take a two-hour detour to access farmland that is only five minutes away, deliberately making it difficult for them to sustain their livelihoods. Assyrians are also subjected to targeted eviction campaigns, and those who resist face threats and coercion. The KRG even bans the use of the word “Assyrian” in the names of new businesses, further erasing Assyrian identity and restricting economic independence.²³

When fires erupt due to Turkish airstrikes, both the KRG and the ICG refuse to intervene, citing security concerns over the ongoing conflict between Turkey and the PKK. Yet, despite these concerns to justify their inaction, the KRG continues to maintain checkpoints that offer no protection to Assyrians and instead serve only to restrict their movement and access to basic necessities.

This deliberate neglect forces Assyrians to battle the fires alone, armed with nothing but agricultural tools and their bare hands, lacking even the most basic firefighting equipment. Without support or protection, they are left vulnerable to severe burns, smoke inhalation, and death.

These restrictions align with the United Nations definition of genocide, which includes “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” in the UN Genocide Convention, Article II(c).²⁴ The systematic

²² Snell, J. (2024, October 26). *Turkish airstrikes, PKK militants cast shadow of fear over Assyrian village of Rabatkeh*. The Assyrian Journal. Retrieved from <https://theassyrianjournal.com/2024/10/26/turkish-airstrikes-pkk-militants-cast-shadow-of-fear-over-assyrian-village-of-rabatkeh/>

²³ Rubin, M. (2023, January 24). *Stop giving Iraqi Kurds a free pass on religious freedom*. Washington Examiner. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2568944/stop-giving-iraqi-kurds-a-free-pass-on-religious-freedom/>

²⁴ United Nations. (n.d.). *Definition of genocide*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition>

deprivation of resources, denial of movement, and targeted displacement are not isolated policies but part of an orchestrated campaign to erase Assyrians from their homeland.

Strategic Demographic Change

The demographic composition of contested areas such as the Nineveh Plains and Kirkuk is being deliberately altered by both Shia militias, including the Babylon Brigade, and the KRG as part of broader efforts to consolidate control and expand territorial claims.²⁵

In the Nineveh Plains, the Babylon Brigade, led by Rayan al-Kaldani, has been actively resettling Shabaks into historically Assyrian areas, shifting the region's demographics in favor of Iran-backed militias. At the same time, the KRG is implementing similar tactics by bringing in Kurdish families from Iran, Syria, and Turkey, providing them with voting cards and settling them in key areas such as Nineveh Plains and Kirkuk to strengthen Kurdish claims over these contested regions.

The political and economic coercion of Assyrians is also a central tactic in these demographic changes. Assyrian soldiers are forced to secure 25 votes each for al-Kaldani's party or face a \$750 fine and expulsion from their position, resulting in the loss of their salaries.

This blatant use of economic pressure and political manipulation further disenfranchises Assyrians and forces them to either comply or face financial ruin. These systematic demographic shifts are not organic population movements but calculated strategies designed to weaken Assyrian political and territorial claims, ensuring long-term control by external forces while further marginalizing the indigenous Assyrian population.

Erasure by Inaction

The failure to implement laws and policies meant to protect Assyrians is a defining feature of governance in both ICG and the KRG. Just as land restoration policies have failed to return confiscated Assyrian properties to their rightful owners, the broader pattern of inaction has left Assyrians vulnerable to ongoing persecution, dispossession, and demographic erasure.

A glaring example of this failure is Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, which was drafted in 2005 to guarantee administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights for Assyrians and other minorities. Yet, nearly 20 years later, it remains unimplemented, offering no tangible protections while the Assyrian population continues to dwindle.

²⁵ Chapman, C., & Taneja, P. (2009). *Uncertain Refuge, Dangerous Return: Iraq's Uprooted Minorities*. Minority Rights Group International. Retrieved from <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/01/download-710-download-full-report.pdf>

This deliberate inaction allows oppression, persecution, and ethnic cleansing to persist unchecked, reinforcing Assyrians' status as second-class citizens in their own homeland. Even more alarming is that Assyrians, Yazidis, and Mandaean—who are the indigenous peoples of Iraq—are not even officially recognized as such. Instead, they are treated as mere religious minorities, stripping them of their historical and legal claims to the land.

As Assyrians continue to be denied security and representation, the lack of implementation does not just erase their rights—it erases them. Whether under the authority of Baghdad or Erbil, the result is the same: unfulfilled promises, institutional neglect, and the slow, calculated destruction of an entire people in their own homeland.

Challenges in Syria

Assyrians in Syria continue to endure severe challenges, compounded by systemic discrimination, land dispossession, and political marginalization. The presence of extremist groups and self-proclaimed governing authorities has further destabilized their communities, leaving them vulnerable to violence, economic suppression, and erasure.

Extremism in Power

Assyrians face systematic persecution from both jihadist and Kurdish forces, each using different tactics to suppress the community. Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, the leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), is a notorious war criminal whose history traces back to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the same terror network that carried out mass atrocities against Assyrians, Yazidis, Mandaean, and even Americans.²⁶

Now in power, he presents a deceptive facade of religious coexistence. However, the reality on the ground tells a different story—marked by brutal murders, forced conversions, and systemic atrocities under his rule, all extensively documented in video footage.

For Assyrians, his rise to power is not a political shift but a continuation of terror, serving as a chilling reminder of the ongoing existential threats they face in their homeland.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a rebranded iteration of the People's Defense Units (YPG), have further exacerbated the marginalization of Assyrians. The SDF maintains well-documented ties to the US-designated terrorist organization PKK—a fact acknowledged by former US Special Operations Commander Raymond Thomas, who admitted to orchestrating the rebranding of the YPG as the "SDF" to secure Western support despite its PKK affiliation.²⁷ The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) claims to promote inclusive policies, but in practice, these remain unimplemented or manipulated to disproportionately target Assyrians under the guise of "democratic" governance.

These systematic actions, compounded by ongoing geopolitical tensions and external conflicts, have left the Assyrian people unprotected, disenfranchised, and increasingly vulnerable to extinction.

²⁶ Zeidan, A. (2025, February 10). *Ahmed al-Sharaa*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ahmed-al-Sharaa>

²⁷ Reuters. (2017, July 21). *U.S. general told Syria's YPG: 'You have got to change your brand'*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us-general-told-syrias-ypg-you-have-got-to-change-your-brand-idUSKBN1A62SS/>

Banning of Assyrian Curriculum

Assyrians in Syria are denied the right to educate their children in their own language and history. Efforts to implement an Assyrian curriculum have been systematically prohibited, leaving Assyrians with a stark choice between two untenable options. The central Syrian curriculum, which includes Sharia law, is banned by the AANES and carries the risk of retaliation from AANES authorities.²⁸

Meanwhile, the Kurdish-imposed AANES curriculum promotes historical revisionism, glorifies terrorism, lacks accreditation, withdraws Syrian government support for the schools, and exposes Assyrians to targeting by Turkey and extremist groups.

In 2018, several Assyrian schools in northern Syria were forcibly closed by the Kurdish self-administration, known as the Democratic Union Party (PYD). These closures were due to the schools' refusal to adopt the Kurdish-imposed curriculum and failure to register under the self-administration's regulations. The affected schools, administered by the Syriac Orthodox Church since 1935, had been teaching the Syrian government's curriculum while offering classes in the Syriac language.

The PYD's curriculum promotes Kurdish nationalist ideology, glorifies the PKK, and includes idealized maps of "Greater Kurdistan." This directly undermines Assyrian indigeneity and is a deliberate attempt to impose Kurdish nationalist policies on Assyrian educational institutions to further erase Assyrian presence from their ancestral homeland. As a result, these forced school closures sparked widespread protests from the Assyrian community.

The closure of Assyrian schools under the Kurdish self-administration is part of a broader campaign of intimidation and repression against Assyrians who resist policies designed to erode their cultural and educational rights.

Following the forced school closures, the academic director was brutally beaten, while an Assyrian journalist covering the shutdowns was detained.²⁹ These targeted acts of violence and suppression reflect a pattern of intimidation against indigenous Assyrians who oppose the Kurdish self-administration's policies of Kurdification and glorification of terrorism. Such tactics

²⁸ Assyrian Policy Institute. (2018, August 10). *Kurdish Self-Administration Orders Closure of Assyrian Schools in Northern Syria*. Retrieved from <https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/post/kurdish-self-administration-threatens-closure-of-assyrian-schools-in-northern-syria>

²⁹ Morning Star News. (2018, October 1). *Kurdish Authorities in Syria Close Schools Run by Assyrian Christians*. Morning Star News. Retrieved from <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/10/kurdish-authorities-in-syria-close-schools-run-by-assyrian-christians/>

are designed to silence dissent, instill fear, and further marginalize Assyrians, ultimately deterring resistance to the systematic erasure of their heritage.

Land Grabbing in the AANES

The confiscation of Assyrian lands within the AANES remains an ongoing issue, systematically depriving Assyrians of their ancestral homes and farmland.³⁰ This reflects the deliberate demographic engineering that has erased Assyrian presence from their own cities. Beth Zalin (Qamishli) was built by Assyrians who fled the World War I genocide, seeking refuge from across the Assyrian city of Nisibin (now in Turkey). When Assyrians and other groups began settling there in 1920, it was merely a French garrison. By the 1931 census, Assyrians made up the majority with 955 families, alongside 650 Armenian families, 250 Jewish families, 20 Yezidi families, only a combined 125 Muslim families of Arabs, Kurds, and Mhallamis.³¹ Today, however, Beth Zalin has been transformed into a majority Kurdish city, not by natural migration, but through systematic forced displacement and calculated demographic manipulation, erasing the indigenous populations that built it.

Approximately 15% of Assyrian lands in AANES-controlled territory have been seized, further accelerating the demographic erasure of the community. In areas deemed “unstable,” the SDF have confiscated homes under the pretext of “stabilization,” often making empty promises of eventual return that are never fulfilled. These actions mirror previous land grabs committed by Kurdish forces during ISIS’s reign of terror, where Assyrian homes and properties were stolen and never restored to their rightful owners.

Assyrians seeking legal recourse face severe systemic delays, bureaucratic roadblocks, and prohibitive legal costs, making it nearly impossible to reclaim their lands. The AANES uses legal and administrative barriers to stonewall Assyrian land claims, forcing many to abandon their rightful property rather than endure a futile and expensive legal battle.

Kurds displaced by Turkish military operations have occupied Assyrian homes left vacant following ISIS’s invasion and occupation of Syria, during which the group carried out genocide, mass executions, and forced displacements of indigenous populations.³² Particularly in the Khabur River basin of the Hassakeh governorate, these properties remain illegally held despite

³⁰ Al-Salem, M. (2025, January 14). *Syrian Democratic Forces Forcefully Seize Residential Apartments in Qamishli*. Enab Baladi. Reposted by Assyrian International News Agency (AINA). Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/news/20250114130213.htm>

³¹ Hayek II, Mar Ignatius Antoun. *History of the Parish of Nisibin and Hasaka* (Reprint). Beirut, 2006.

³² The Syria Report. (2024, October 29). *Displaced Kurds Refuse to Evacuate Vacant Assyrian Homes in Rural Hassakeh*. The Syria Report. Retrieved from <https://hlp.syria-report.com/hlp/displaced-kurds-refuse-to-evacuate-vacant-assyrian-homes-in-rural-hassakeh/>

repeated appeals from Assyrian representatives. Approximately 1,400 homes, shops, and farms continue to be occupied in villages such as Tel Baloua, Tel Sakri, Tel Tawil, Um Gharqan, Tel Jazeera, Tel Jumaa, Um Kayf, Tel Hermuz, Qabr Shamia, Tel Baz, Tel Rumman Foqani, Tel Tal, Barwar (Tel Massas), Tel Goran, Gawar (Tel Maghas), among others.

Additionally, the SDF controls properties belonging to absent Assyrians in the Tel Tamr area, further preventing rightful ownership from being restored. Efforts to reclaim these properties through legal avenues are met with bureaucratic obstacles and prolonged legal processes, further hindering Assyrians from regaining their rightful homes and lands.

This pattern of land confiscation not only displaces Assyrians but also strategically reshapes the region's demographics, ensuring Assyrians remain politically and economically weakened. The continued expropriation of Assyrian lands under AANES rule mirrors past injustices and underscores a broader effort to erase Assyrians from their homeland.

Political Marginalization

Assyrians lack genuine political representation in both the Syrian Central Government and the AANES, leaving their rights and interests unprotected and without effective advocacy. Furthermore, the AANES prevents Western governments and international actors from directly engaging with Assyrian leaders, all while claiming to represent “Christians” and fostering a false narrative of inclusion that perpetuates our exclusion from decision-making processes.

Assyrians have repeatedly demanded that their social, cultural, and national rights be explicitly safeguarded within the AANES Social Contract, calling for guaranteed political representation and protection of their identity.³³ Despite these appeals, Assyrian voices remain excluded from the governance structure, further reinforcing their political marginalization and disenfranchisement.

Genuine Assyrian political parties that advocate for Assyrian rights face significant suppression. Organizations such as the Assyrian Democratic Organization and the Assyrian Democratic Party are vilified and marginalized, accused by the AANES of aligning with external powers—the Syrian regime, or Turkey—both of which have also long oppressed Assyrians.

These baseless accusations serve only to justify further persecution and to silence legitimate calls for justice and equality. By labeling independent Assyrian political movements as proxies of

³³ Yassin, S. (2023, August 29). *Assyrians in Syria's Tel Tamr demand including their rights in new Social Contract*. North Press Agency. Retrieved from <https://npasyria.com/en/103560/>

foreign powers, the AANES delegitimizes their demands and ensures that Assyrians remain vulnerable, voiceless, and disenfranchised in their own homeland.

Economic Repression

Turkey's blockade of gas, diesel fuel, and water severely impacts both Assyrian and Kurdish communities. When Assyrians speak out against human rights abuses committed by all regimes responsible for their oppression, the AANES retaliates by cutting off food supplies and "disappearing" individuals. Assyrians are trapped in dire economic conditions, forced to rely on diaspora support for survival, as local opportunities for stability remain virtually nonexistent.

Desecration of Sacred Religious Sites

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have repeatedly desecrated Assyrian churches and cemeteries by digging trenches and establishing military positions within these sacred sites as part of their strategic operations against Turkey. These actions not only violate the sanctity of religious spaces but also provoke Turkish retaliatory bombings, leading to further devastation of Assyrian heritage and civilian infrastructure.

One of the most striking examples of this destruction is the Mar Sawa Church in Tel Tawil, Khabour, which was severely damaged as a result of Turkish airstrikes following the SDF's militarization of the site. These reckless military tactics place entire Assyrian communities at risk, exposing civilians to deadly attacks and forcing further displacement. Following these attacks, the SDF routinely issues statements condemning Turkey, deflecting any shared responsibility for the destruction of these religious sites and surrounding civilian areas.³⁴

Meanwhile, Assyrian leaders are unable to speak out against these violations, as those who publicly criticize human rights abuses by Kurdish state actors within the AANES are often "disappeared" or assassinated. This climate of fear and suppression ensures that Kurdish authorities continue their abuses unchecked and with impunity.

Targeted Violence Against Assyrians

The assassination of David Jendo, leader of the Khabour Guards, and the attempted assassination of Elias Nasser are chilling examples of the brutal repression of Assyrians under the AANES. In April 2015, both Jendo and Nasser were abducted from Nasser's home by five YPG militiamen under the pretense of a secret meeting. While Nasser survived with severe

³⁴ Syrian Democratic Times. (2022, June 7). *Assyrian Christian Church Devastated by Turkish Shelling*. Retrieved from <https://www.syriandemocratictimes.com/2022/06/07/assyrian-christian-church-devastated-by-turkish-shelling/>

injuries, Jendo was killed, and Nasser’s home was looted.³⁵ Despite Kurdish representatives claiming the YPG members acted independently—a common tactic used to evade accountability for their role in these crimes—at least two of the assailants were well known for harassing the Khabour Guards. Jendo’s outspoken condemnation of the YPG’s looting of Assyrian homes in 2015 made him a direct target for retaliation. This assassination underscores the lengths to which the AANES will go to silence Assyrian leaders and those who courageously speak out against their human rights abuses.

Jendo and Nasser’s cases are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of targeted violence against Assyrian leaders, journalists, and educators. Assyrian journalists who report on human rights violations and Assyrian educators who resist the Kurdification of their schools have been subject to intimidation, detention, and even physical attacks. This systematic repression of Assyrian voices ensures that genuine leaders—those who advocate for the community’s rights—are silenced through threats, imprisonment, or outright assassination.

The tactics employed by the AANES to eliminate Assyrian leadership mirror broader authoritarian strategies used to marginalize and weaken indigenous communities. By removing key figures who resist their policies, the AANES effectively suppresses any meaningful opposition, consolidating their control while erasing Assyrian political agency.

AANES Release of ISIS Prisoners

The recent resurgence of ISIS has further destabilized the already precarious security environment. Video footage and reports of the Kurdish administration in the AANES releasing ISIS prisoners in the summer of 2024 have heightened fears among Assyrians—not only of the extremist groups now re-emerging but also of the AANES itself, which facilitated their release.³⁶ This troubling development has amplified the threats to Assyrian safety and intensified efforts to erase Assyrian presence and identity in the region.

³⁵ Assyrian Confederation of Europe (ACE). (2017). *Assyrians on the Edge: Documenting the Plight of Assyrians in Iraq*. Assyrian International News Agency (AINA). Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/reports/ace201701.pdf>

³⁶ Associated Press (AP). (2024, July 27). *Kurdish administration in Syria releases group of prisoners affiliated with IS [Video]*. YouTube. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/Mn_a4eNhQ4k?si=YZ37FCqI7pFOcPzo

Call to Action

Assyrians are seeking support for the following initiatives to ensure their survival, rights, and prosperity as an indigenous people:

- **Establish the Nineveh Plains Governorate:** Create a politically neutral protection zone in the Nineveh Plains as a safe haven for the Assyrian community, with locally-embedded Assyrian armed forces sanctioned by the federal government and composed of individuals from local communities for effective protection, in accordance with Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution.
- **Establish a Framework for Cooperation:** Urge international powers, particularly the United States, to exert pressure on the ruling parties in Erbil to establish a formal mechanism for Assyrian-Kurdish cooperation. This partnership must be based on a legally binding document ensuring mutual coordination, equal representation, and the protection of indigenous rights. It must end the marginalization of Assyrians, prevent exclusionary policies within Kurdish-controlled institutions, and safeguard Assyrian land and cultural rights. International oversight is essential to guarantee that this framework is not merely symbolic but a genuine commitment to pluralism and equitable governance.
- **Self-Administrative Rights:** Advocate for self-administrative rights in their historic homelands within Iraq, the KRI, Syria, and the AANES ensuring their administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights through legislation.
- **Recognition and Protection as Indigenous People:** Recognize Assyrians as indigenous people in their historic homelands with rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), affirming their administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights.
- **Culturally Appropriate Education:** Ensure access to Assyrian curricula and the preservation of their language and history free from revisionism and cultural appropriation.
- **Political Representation:** Advocate for quota seats and self-administrative rights to ensure genuine governance free from external interference.
- **Economic Development:** Provide targeted aid to revitalize Assyrian villages and create sustainable livelihoods.
- **Accountability for Abuses:** Hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable, including those responsible for land seizures and the resurgence of ISIS.
- **Preservation of Heritage Sites:** Protect Assyrian religious and cultural landmarks from destruction and appropriation.

Additional Resources

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For more information, scan the QR code for updated links and resources.





Contact Us

 For general inquiries, media requests, partnerships, advocacy support, or to donate, kindly reach out to us at:

 **assyrianadvocacy@gmail.com**

We welcome requests for collaboration with individuals, organizations, and policymakers committed to protecting the rights of Assyrians and other indigenous and vulnerable communities in the SWANA region. Whether you are looking to support our advocacy efforts, amplify our message, or learn more about the challenges our people face, we encourage you to reach out.

 Interested in supporting our work? Your contribution helps sustain our advocacy, humanitarian efforts, and initiatives to preserve Assyrian identity. Email us to learn how you can donate and make an impact.

 Join us in taking a stand. Every voice and every effort matter in the fight for justice, human rights, religious freedom, and the preservation of Assyrian identity. Contact us today and be part of the movement.