



# The Assyrians

## A People without Rights

Tarek Shaded |



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2014

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**“Dealing with the suffering of the Assyrians cannot be valid in the context of individual incidents that are separate from one another and from their antecedents. It must be based on the interrelation of such incidents and their continuity throughout history, and on the notion of them being consequences of a greater cause, the cause of a people without rights and a nation heading in the direction of extinction.**

**The case being so, any attempt to end the suffering of the Assyrians should be within the context of seeking a radical solution for the Assyrian people cause.”**



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## Introduction

Historically, there are various examples of people who have been persecuted and have had their rights denied. However, the Assyrians have suffered injustice at a larger scale. Firstly, they were slaughtered, exterminated and forcefully displaced from their land. Secondly, the world watched in silence as they suffered these barbaric massacres and failed to acknowledge their sacrifice for humanity.

It cannot be denied that Iraqi people are still undergoing a great deal of suffering, not only from current but from previous abnormal policies as well. Amidst this political turmoil, it is evident that Assyrians are being targeted more than others. They are being subjected to persecution, massacres and genocide in Nineveh and other Assyrian cities and villages since the beginning of the last century. During World War I, for instance, Turks and Kurds massacred about two-thirds of the Assyrians. Ethnic cleansing came next in the year 1933 at the hands of the Iraqi army and the Kurds. Later, in the sixties and seventies of the last century specifically, the ethnic Assyrian community was targeted by a Kurdish campaign led by “Mustafa Barzani”, whose rebellion against the successive Iraqi governments resulted in the displacement of thousands of Assyrians. This campaign was followed by the Massacre of “Surya” in September 1969 at the hands of the Iraqi army, led by Lieutenant “Abdul Karim Algehiche”, which claimed the lives of dozens and led to the destruction of the ancient Assyrian towns and archeological monasteries at the hands of Saddam’s army.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on a people whose culture, considered a treasure for human history, is becoming extinct. This study is being carried out for the first time ever by an international human rights organization, However, the world decided to turn a blind eye due to lack of any international interests in the area, such as oil reserves, and as such, they are considered weak. Their weakness stems from the horrors and tragedies they witnessed as a result of conspiracies of major countries on the one hand, and the national, cultural and psychological issues suffered by the intruders into Assyria on the other hand. The recent campaign of Da’ish (ISIS) against the Assyrian Nineveh (Arabized into “Mosul”) has been reinforced by the popular support of the people of Mosul and the previous Tunisian and Algerian leaders of the jihadist groups. In other words, the role of foreigners was limited to leadership, while the evacuation and looting of the “Christian”

houses and the burning of churches was limited to the people of Mosul and its tribal leaders who have long called for an “Iraq of equality”, as they perceive it as “Sunni” Muslims. The same goes to Basra which was abandoned by all the Assyrians after its leaders called for equality through a “Shiite” perspective back in the days of Saddam. The most dangerous and emerging is the support drawing its strength from feeding politically on the sectarian persecution (Sunni-Shiite) against the Assyrians in order to raise the banner of secular kurdification under the consent of the Western media conniving with the “New Oil Entity” Project. This project will ensure the revitalization of Israel and the western control over the global market in the face of “Shiite” and “Sunni” oil, should circumstances change and alliances shift.

The concept of “rejection of the other” controls the minds of Iraqis, from the layman to the politician to the intellectual and the media person despite the boasting of the intellectuals and politicians about the notion that the strength of the Iraqi society lies in its mosaic composition. Yet, these slogans lose their way, not reaching grounds of practical implementation. The truth of the matter has nothing to do with repeating resonant phrases; rather, moving from the phase of chanting slogans into implementation. Still, this in itself demands getting rid of the “rejection of the other” concept once and for all, and for that to happen, generations must be brought up with a different mind-set than those existing.

The Assyrians are the first victims of this ideology and will definitely not be the last. However, this mind-set has had a negative impact on Assyrian’s presence and demographic structure for many years, especially with the presence of Assyrians on the land of Assyria (Iraq) becoming threatened, which calls for immediate remediation.

Moreover, dealing with the suffering of the Assyrians cannot be valid in the context of individual incidents that are separate from one another and from their antecedents. It must be based on the awareness of the interrelation of such incidents and their continuity throughout history, and on the notion of them being consequences of a greater cause, the cause of a people without rights and a nation heading in the direction of extinction. The case being so, any attempt to end the suffering of the Assyrians should be within the context of seeking a radical solution for the Assyrian people’s cause.

The whole world demands supporting the presence of this people in its homeland and supporting its claim for its just rights. The Assyrian experience with the regimes that came to power has proven that the national, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity in general was a stimulant for the activation of the exclusionary pattern of behavior towards the Assyrians. This diversity will remain as long as the Assyrian is an Assyrian, and abandoning and neglecting the truth will only lead to the continued suffering of this people.

## Who are the Assyrians?

The “Assyrians” are a close-knit cultural group considered the first “ethnic” group (in the modern sense) since the third millennium BC. in northern Iraq, where they were united by one social-geographic organization, after which they established the first “state” in history under the rule of King Sargon of Akkad (Sargon I).

Over the span of thousands of years, the Assyrians have emerged as a competitive power in the ancient East in various stages when they overpowered the neighboring regions, thus founding the greatest empire in history from which they presented mankind with the greatest of achievements. They have laid the foundations of engineering, mathematics, agriculture and military sciences, not to forget, they also stood out in the art of sculpture and construction.

Following the fall of the Assyrian state in 612 BC, the Assyrians joined the army of the Persian Empire; they were the topic of discussion amongst ancient historians such as Herodotus (fifth century BC), Xenophon and others who lived in their time after the fall of their statehood.

The Assyrians are considered one of the oldest people who converted to Christianity beginning from the first century AD on the hands of Saint Peter (First Epistle of Peter, 5:13), where they contributed to the evolution of this religion in a theological manner. It is actually the Assyrians who adopted “Sunday” as a Christian holiday and started the philosophy of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one god) at the School of Tatian. The Assyrian were also the first to bring together the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), and they have also succeeded in spreading Christianity in the regions of Central Asia, India, China, Tibet and the Arabian Peninsula.

Currently, the members of this ethnic group belong to various Christian churches: Syriac Orthodox; Syriac Catholic Christians; Chaldean and Eastern Christians. These are divided by Western interests through “missionaries” that never really took interest in the “preaching” of non-Christians.

The Assyrians are characterized by their Neo-Assyrian language (Akkadian influenced by Aramaic pronunciation in addition to their customs and traditions which they have inherited from their ancestors thousands of years

ago. The Assyrian language is divided according to four major dialects: Hakkari, Tur Abdin, Urmia and the dialect of the Plains, referred to as the Syriac language in the church literature.

Also, the Assyrians of the present are distinguished by their strong ethnic sense; they are proud of their history and identity, the price of which they paid with blood and displacement. It is this ethnic sense which seems to be increasing in the face of attempts to destroy their ethnic identity and to hold on to the right of land in the face of the expulsion of the Assyrians from their historical regions. Either their national affiliation under the authority of the Kurds in the north, or their religious affiliation under the authority of the Islamic movements in the rest of the regions of Iraq, has resulted in calling upon them to work on the establishment of an armed Assyrian force. The force will be responsible for guarding its surroundings to find a place for its cause on the Iraqi and international table, or to physically punish the Assyrian politicians who are considered “defeatists”.

Whether or not the ideas expressed by a certain segment of the new-generation Assyrians reflect humaneness, they still portray an unshakeable desire of survival despite structural weakness resulting from sectarianism manipulated by enemies of Assyrians.

## Historical View of the Assyrian Cause in International Forums

In the history of modern Iraq, no issue has suffered from marginalization and misinterpretation more than the Assyrians. It has been raised in a non-objective and biased manner, in an attempt to distort their history and their legitimate national ambitions in Iraq, which was their homeland for thousands of years. The colonial period has had effects on the Middle East since the nineteenth century, particularly on Iraq. It still remains a site of attraction for major powers for political and economic reasons, in a way that it is impossible to separate between the evolution of Iraqi political and social life and international relations and the emergence of the “Eastern Question” at that time. The “Eastern Question” involved Western interventions under the banner of the protection of Christians in the Middle East, which was under the Ottoman Empire and what followed of wars and consequences.

The Ottomans have opened the doors of the Middle East to the Western missionaries since the eighteenth century and a series of complications ensued which contributed to the start of the Crimean War (1853 -1856) between Tsardom of Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France. All of this resulted in an interaction of these positions and international interventions with social and demographic conditions of the Christians in the East and especially among the Assyrians, who divided church into several denominations, such as Chaldean, Syriac and Maronite. The Eastern Question was resolved in the aftermath of World War I conforming to the interests of the victorious countries (Russia, France and Britain) and the division of the Middle East into several States under the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1915). The case being so, it was only natural for the Assyrian question to react with the development of events in northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey and to turn later into a victim of compromises between Iraq, Britain and Turkey, along with the Kurdish question.

Prior to World War I, the homeland of the Assyrians was located within what was known as the “Ottoman Empire”, in specific in an area extending between Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the west of Iran. They were concentrated in the province of Mosul, Hakkari, Erzurum, Van, Urmia and al-Jazira. Also, they were called Hakkari Assyrians or Assyrians of the Mountain (Hakkari is a province located in southeast Turkey today, and was part of the north of Mesopotamia before the demarcation in the second decade of the past century).

While the Assyrians of the Plains represent all the Assyrians who lived in regions located in Urmia, Ankawa, Mosul and its outskirts and northern Mosul (Dahuk currently) in Zakho, Barwari Bala, Amadiya and Aqrah). The Assyrians of the Mountains were not subject to the Ottoman laws and had developed for themselves a specific system to manage their own affairs since the Turks were unable to subdue them in the mountains which reach the height of 4300 meters.

Genocide and ethnic and religious cleansings were committed against the Assyrians who were the first victims of organized terrorism. With the outbreak of World War I, the Assyrians participated in the war against the Ottoman Empire to the side of the Allies as an unavoidable option following centuries of massacres at the hands of their surroundings. Even though they make an irregular fighting force according to military standards, the noteworthy fighting spirit and abilities of which they were famous in the mountainous wars and areas they controlled, found their way into the writings of military commanders in the First World War, such as General "Danstroyel" and "Stafford" and others. This spirit and noteworthy fighting skills constituted the safest gate before the advancement of the Russian troops and the obstruction of the advancement of the Turkish troops in the direction of Central Asia and Iran.

The participation of the Assyrians in the war brought about a series of disasters which reached their peak in 1915 when the Ottoman Empire announced Holy Jihad against them. That is when the horrendous massacres began intertwined with their displacement in a death procession, which obliged them to make their way across areas controlled by their enemies towards the Iranian territories. During these misfortunes, they lost around two-thirds of their number because of continuous fighting, disease and starvation.

The British recognized the Assyrians as allies in the warfare against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. This was mentioned by the representative of the British forces in the leadership beyond the Caucasus Mountains in the enlarged meeting held in the Iranian city of Urmia (28/01/1917 AD) and attended by Assyrian leaders and commanders from France and Russia. Also, the statement of the British government on May 31, 1924 stated, "The British government considers protecting the interests of the Assyrian people, taking into consideration the services they have provided by siding with the allies

during the Great War and their future relationship with the Iraqi state, and has decided to seek the extension of its borders to the greatest extent possible in the north in order to contain the majority of the Assyrian people.

Still, the Organization of the League of Nations (formed on April 28, 1919, replaced by the United Nations in June 1946) and Britain handled the Assyrian question in a devious manner, due to which the Assyrian people scattered in exile. The Assyrian question had been raised for discussion for the first time before the Peace Conference on October 30, 1918, after the end of the First World War; no logical solution was reached.

This is why the Assyrians of the Mountains decided to restore their lands which they've lost due to the events of the war, by firepower. With that purpose in mind, their military campaign started in mid-October 1920, except that it failed to achieve its goals for two reasons. First is logistical, where it began to rain and snow heavily, while the second is political and related to the lack of the British desire in the success of the campaign. This was so they can claim the state of Mosul following the discovery of oil and use the territories of the Assyrians of Hakkari (north of Mosul) as a bargaining chip.

Later, it was decided that Assyrian delegations would participate in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, but Britain prevented the delegations from reaching the conference and they were kept in London. The delegation, which arrived late, however, did not achieve any noteworthy success due to the double standards adopted by the conferees so as to ensure the interests of the major states only and in specific Britain, which was preparing to annex Mosul to the future Iraq to pave the way for future oil contracts with the forthcoming Iraqi government as a price for that.

However, in his book (*The Assyrians in the Peace conference / Paris 1919*), "Rubin Bet Shmuel", notes that the failure of the Iraqi delegation in reaching Paris Conference did not prepare the ground for the failure of the Assyrian cause in international forums later as some seem to think. The evidence to this is the participation of the third Assyrian delegation in the sessions of the same conference followed by the Assyrian presence in other international conferences. However, it must be recognized that the Assyrian (Iraqi) issue has turned into an important paper in the hands of the British colonization, which ruled Iraq in the beginnings of its early formation. This paper is pulled in the face of Turks at times to remove the province of Mosul from under



their control, and at other times in the face of Arabs to achieve most of the gains and privileges, the least of which is not oil. At some other times, this same paper is used to silence the voices of the Kurds and marginalize their rights and to remind France that in the case Mosul was granted to the Iraqi Assyrians - the Mosul province went to France in the Sykes-Picot Agreement – the Assyrian northeast of Syria will instantly be detached from it.

This is how the Assyrians lost hope in resolving their ordeal in that international event, and when the Treaty of Sèvres was signed on August 10, 1920 (AD), Article 63 stipulated that Assyrians must be ensured the possibility of ethnic development, and the return of all land and property they have lost during the war. The treaty has also pointed out within Articles 62-64 a solution to the Kurdish problem. Yet, that treaty did not enter into force and achieved little or nothing at all.

Later, the Assyrian question was added to the agenda of “Lausanne” conference, which was held for the period of November 20, 1922 until July 24, 1923, in order to replace the resolutions of the Treaty of Sèvres, after Turkey’s restoration of its political and military role. Topic of discussion included the Assyrian Question, the fate of the Assyrians displaced as a result to the events of the war and the fate of the province of Mosul. No solution was reached.

For that reason, the discussion of these matters was postponed and added to the agenda of "Constantinople Conference”, which was held within the framework of the League of Nations from May 19- June 5, 1924. Proceeding from the strategic framework of ideas, Britain's representative Percy Cox (chief political officer in Iraq for the period extending from 1916 – 1918) called for the expansion of Iraq’s northern border at the expense of the state of Hakkari (home of the Assyrians of the Mountains). Percy justified his request by the unwillingness of the Assyrians to live under persecution again, and Turkey's conclusive refusal of their return to their lands in those mountains prior to the demarcation of the border between Turkey and Iraq.

On August 6, 1924, the British government asked the League of Nations to incorporate issue of the settlement of the Iraqi-Turkish border on the agenda of session (30) of the League Council. The final settlement of the border issue occurred in October of the year 1924, and it came to be known as the “Brussels Line”. After it came into force, it was used to resolve the border dispute between the two countries and the committee formed in that regard

recognized the need to protect the Assyrians who had a part of their lands, now north of Brussels Line, on the Turkish side and the other part south of the line in the north of Iraq. This is how the province of Mosul remained part of the modern Iraqi state.

It is important here to shed light on the role the Assyrians, specifically the Assyrians of Hakkari, played in resolving the issue of the annexation of Mosul to Iraq (16/12/1925), where this specific role of theirs was demonstrated in both a military and political manner. Militarily, the Assyrian regular units resisted the raids of the Turkish forces and became the only force guarding the northern border, at a time when the Iraqi army was in the formation stage. Politically, their role was revealed in their demand to annex Hakkari region to Iraq, and although that demand found no response, they had a great effect on the final decision of the League regarding the issue of Mosul.

After the problem of the Mosul province was solved, Britain did not fulfill its commitments regarding ensuring the rights of the Assyrians, recommended by the decisions of the Council of the League of Nations. Also, there was this inadequate view when it came to dealing with ethnic diversity and its negative effects on Iraq's contemporary political future today.

Nevertheless, the Assyrians continued calling for their national rights and held a meeting in the Amadiya region located northern Iraq (June of the year 1932) where they issued a document that included their demands of recognition as part of the components of the Iraqi people. Even though those demands were simple in their content, some of the members of the ruling elite in Iraq, and with the support of Britain, rejected that document.

With Iraq joining the League of Nations as a member in 1932, and in spite of the guarantees provided by the representative of Iraq in the League regarding the rights of all Iraqi ethnic groups, things started taking a negative turn with the creation of a hostile atmosphere for the Assyrians. This led to incitement of ethnic hatred which ended in the massacres against Assyrians in the town of "Simele" and 63 Assyrian towns in northern Iraq between the fourth and eleventh of August 1933, claiming the lives of around three thousand Assyrians.

Ironically, the League of Nations issued a housing project for the Assyrians, in the form of a document under the title, "Housing Assyrians as a humanitarian work", under publications of the League in 1935/ Department of media/ fifth

issue / Geneva / Switzerland. This included failed attempts to house the Assyrians who survived the massacre through moving them to Al-Ghab plain area in Syria, between Latakia and Hama, or to (Parana), the Brazilian state, the British island of (Guiana) and the Niger Basin in West Africa, and dealing with the Assyrian people like a people without a homeland. This in itself is contradictory historical fact since Assyrians are indigenous peoples in Mesopotamia and have been there for thousands of years, contributing to the enrichment of humanity with civilization they have constructed in ancient Iraq.

## Policy of Genocide against Assyrians

Massacres have turned into an integral part in the lives of the Assyrian people for many centuries and until the present day. These massacres assume many forms and shapes in the context of political circumstances, facts and various conflicts experienced by countries of the Middle East and the rest of the world. This has affected the entity of the Assyrian nation in a disastrous manner.

It seems that the only main purpose behind committing these massacres is the annihilation of the Assyrians as an indigenous people, and the eradication of the Assyrian presence in Assyria and the countries of the Middle East, in general. It is important to take into consideration that the massacres against the Assyrians throughout history find their place under the international definition of “Genocide”, which includes:

- A- Killing individuals or members of the group;
- B- Inflicting harm or considerable or serious physical or mental harm to members of the group;
- C- Imposing upon the group harsh circumstances and living conditions aiming at annihilating and destroying it completely whether wholly or partially;
- D- Imposing measures intended with the purpose of preventing or impeding generation of the offspring within the group;
- E- Moving children or the young of the group in an act of oppression and on intention from their group to another group.

There is no doubt that for every crime committed, there are specific motives providing the criminals with reasons to commit it. If the massacres of genocide, according to different generally accepted definitions, are considered a crime against humanity, then the international community must take action. The United Nations, human rights organizations and all countries adhering to the UN Charter and its Declarations, and the European Union must expose and prevent the massacres committed in the world and bringing the perpetrators before international courts, in order to protect justice and world peace.

If we analyze the manner in which massacres were committed against Assyrians, we would find that they meet all requirements of the definition of “genocide”. In other words, these massacres took several forms and shapes involving individual and group killings on ethnic and religious basis, infliction of mental and physical harm as a result of the ethnic chauvinistic policies in addition to the Arabization policies at the hands of the Ba’ath Party in both Syria and Iraq, absence of recognition of the ethnic identity and absence of constitutional recognition of this people as a basic and indigenous component of the national fabric. Other forms comprised denying Assyrians the right to learn their mother tongue at schools, imposition of an Arab-Islamic culture, pattern of thinking and behavior and the creation of economic conditions leading to the destruction of livelihood of the Assyrian community through seizure and confiscation of property and denial of ethnic, political and cultural rights. After all, this destruction of livelihood demolishes the idea of Assyrians being an efficacious segment contributing to building the country. All of this is combined with the practice of national and racial discrimination and persecution, exerting pressures of threats, intimidation, individual and group assaults, treason, prosecution by the security services, arrests, imprisonment and forced migration due to such circumstances.

The Assyrians are also subjected to a brutal campaign aiming to cancel their historical role, alter historical facts and impose a new reality through demographic change practiced by the authoritarian regimes controlling Assyria in northern Iraq and on the remainder of the lands and property of the Assyrian people. Add to that what is happening in the Syrian Jazeera to impose an ethnic, chauvinistic project in full coordination and cooperation with the authoritarian regime in Syria in order to eliminate the ethnic identity of this people and Kurdify it in the melting pot of the Kurds as is happening in Iraq.

## Genocide during World War I at the Hands of the Turks and Kurds

The “Eastern Question” was resolved in the aftermath of World War I and conforming to the interests of the victorious countries (Russia, France and Britain) and the division of the Middle East into several States under the Sykes - Picot Agreement (1915). The case being so, it was only natural for the Assyrian question to react with the development of events in northern Iraq and south eastern Turkey, and to turn later into a victim of compromises between Iraq, Britain and Turkey.

There is a long history of massacres carried out against the Assyrians, such as the Massacres of the Kurdish Bader Khan in the first half of the nineteenth century, the death toll of which was around 10,000 Assyrians.

Between 1895 and 1898, the massacres committed were organized by the Ottoman Empire against Assyrians living in the cities of Aorhoi (Urfa or Edessa), Amid (Diyarbakir) and Mardin and in other towns belonging to these major cities. These barbaric massacres claimed the lives of thousands of martyrs.

The most horrific genocides against the Assyrians were committed between the years 1914 and 1918 under Turkish supervision and Kurdish-Turkish execution, and claimed the lives of more than 500,000 Assyrian martyrs (equivalent to two thirds of their population at the time) at the hands of the Ottoman authorities siding with the Kurds. This was done specifically in Hakkari, Tur Abdin and Urmia, those historical areas inhabited by the Assyrians among their enemies for centuries. Without the collaboration of the Kurds of the Mountains with the Turks in the genocide, the Turks would not have been able to stand in the face of the Assyrian mountain force, according to military analysts at the time.

With the beginning of genocide, the Turks quickly announced the policy of chauvinistic Turkification, i.e. the unification of all Turkic peoples under the leadership of Turkey. As before and during World War I, the young Turkish leadership saw a solution of the ethnic question in Turkey in exterminating Christian peoples physically or hybridizing them by force.

This was emphasized by many of their leaders including Dr. Nazim Manzar who said, “Only if stirrers of Sofia and Athens stopped meddling in our affairs, we would achieve genuine freedom, and then everyone would see how we

would unify all Greeks, Arabs and Albanians and make them one people, speaking one language.” He repeated these chauvinistic standpoints in one of the meetings of “Young Turks” Party when he said, “I want the Turkish and only the Turkish to live in and dominated this Turkish land beyond dispute. We do not want non- Turkish elements of any nationality or religion; our country must be cleaned of the non- Turkish elements.”

Nazim’s position on this issue has been repeated by “Shaker”, a Party colleague, who said, “In our ethnic culture, we can allow the Turkish seeds only to grow. After all, we are obliged to clean our homeland of all the remaining peoples and uproot them in the same manner weeds are. This is the slogan of our revolution.”

Also, "Anwar", one of the three leaders ruling the country, declared, “I can no longer stand the presence of Christians in Turkey.” After a certain period of time (in the summer of 1915), “Talaat Pasha”, the Minister of the Interior announced the intentions of the “Topkapi Palace” under “The exploitation of the World War in order to permanently get rid of the domestic enemies, since that will not demand a diplomatic intervention from outside.” Based on the directives of the young Turkish leadership, the ruling circles in the Ottoman Empire began applying an calculated program particularly related to the extermination of Christians living in Turkey, including Armenians and Assyrians.

It is only natural that the Assyrians in such a serious situation would expect aid and rescue from their neighbor Russia, the relationships of which have reached a critical stage with Turkey again. Russia, and for understandable reasons (having to do with the tension in the Middle East), took a great deal of interest in gaining ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey and Iran to its side.

In the summer of 1914, the Turks initiated genocide operations against Assyrians in Urmia and Hakkari, especially after concluding the Treaty of Alliance between Germany and Turkey on August 2, 1914. Even before this date, the Turks had entered the village of “Baqra Khatun” in the province of Kars and executed all the men who tried to escape the swords of the enemy and ended up failing (as told by eyewitness S. Marqsof).

Another witness, Mariam, speaks about the escape of the Kavar tribe to which she belongs, from the Kurds in the city of Urmia. Moreover, eight

Assyrian villages in Albaq region in Turkey were ransacked, these being: Causey, Argy, Attis, Menkelawa, Özen, Buruk, Palis and Kalanys. A part of the population of Kalanys was killed while the rest fled to the Assyrian province of Salmas in Iran.

At the end of July 1914, the Turks began to withdraw the military reserve force to the Iranian border and started arming the Kurdish tribes. The Turkish officers and soldiers cooperated with the Kurdish factions in committing massacres against the Assyrians on the Turkish territories and on part of the Iranian territory.

Also, on June 28, 1915, the Turkish troops, backed with the support of Kurdish factions, attacked from Mosul and towards Lower Tiareh, under the leadership of "Haider Bek", the Wali of Mosul.. And on June 12, 1915, the Kurdish Sheikh Ismail Agha moved from Artoush in the direction of higher Tiareh where the Kurdish tribes took turns in killing and looting. The most highlighted of those operations was the betrayal of al-Barzani tribe in August/1915 where the Barzanis attacked the Assyrian tribes besieged from the south (Lower Tiareh, Gilo and Takhuma) and burned villages and churches, although the Assyrian tribe of Tiareh served as a refuge for the Barzanis from the persecution of the Turks over the decades, and this is emphasized in the book "Our Smallest Ally" by "Wigram", the Orientalist, who witnessed the genocide.. in the same way it is confirmed by the Kurdish Historian Sami Shores (Kurdish Minister of Culture previously).



## Genocide of 1933 at the Hands of the Iraqi Government

The National Regime in Iraq (the era of Independence) took no interest in beginning its official role with the embodiment of national values and the promotion of the principles of co-existence between different ethnicities, religions and sects and the various social and political components that make up the Iraqi society. At the same time, it did not really consider the recognition of ethnic and political pluralism, the adoption of democracy in governance and leadership and the provision of security and stability for all Iraqis. Instead, the Government of independence led by “Rashid Ali el-Keilany” spread a culture of violence and terrorism in the Iraqi society. It did not hold national ceremonies and weddings to celebrate the era of independence; rather, it held rituals of death and mass killings adding to them the evacuation and expulsion of thousands of Iraqis from their areas of residence.

The 1933 genocide against the Assyrians, which was carried out by the Iraqi army and the Arabian and Kurdish tribes in August/1933, claiming the lives of more than three thousand of the unarmed Assyrians, was the first of the “achievements” of the Iraqi state at its beginning.

With the establishment of the “Kingdom of Iraq” in 1921 at the hands of the British, the Assyrian question in the minds of Iraqis and non-Iraqis was associated with misconceptions and misleading advertising of the government of “Rashid Ali el-Keilany” for political propaganda purposes aiming to distract the public opinion in Iraq from internal problems it was facing. The Assyrians in Iraq were being portrayed as a separatist group working for the benefit of the British so that el-Keilani would get rid of them and receive the consent of the Iraqi people for its rejected party, otherwise known as the “Party of National Brotherhood”.

After the end of World War I, Britain was assigned the file of the Assyrian case in Iraq since it played the role of a mandatory power over it, but it took a position from the beginning against resolving the Assyrian issue when it was being discussed in the League of Nations in 1932, and in all international conferences and forums. The British policy rejected the idea of the Assyrians having self-autonomy, not even in a small part in their country. After all, (Sykes- Picot) Agreement, which was signed in secret between Britain and France in 1916, caused injustice to the Assyrians and terminated all their national hopes in their regions.

The British Colonel Wilson expressed Britain's hostility towards the Assyrians by saying, "What is really worth lamenting is that the greatest empire would allow calculated and deliberate mass killing against the noblest and greatest nation in the Middle East, the Assyrian nation which gave the world the greatest human civilization."

Concerning the Assyrian cause, the British Orientalist Dr. "W. A. Wigram" remarked, "After Turkey had lost World War I, it was necessary for it to accept the conditions of Britain to stop the war with regard to the demands of the Assyrians in their historical areas. Unfortunately, however, Britain made peace with Turkey and forgot all about the Assyrians, this smallest ally, ignoring their rights and their cause, which was submitted before the League of Nations."

After the establishment of the Iraqi state, the Assyrian movement was launched for the purpose of engaging in a legitimate struggle, but el-Keilani government wanted to distort the Assyrian position on the Iraqi question and employ its relationship with Britain for pure internal political aims. To meet that end, it caused the escalation of the situation with the Assyrians through its refusal to recognize Assyrians as an indigenous people in Iraq. Instead, it asked them to put down their weapons before finding a solution to their problem was solved at a time when most of the Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen tribes kept possession of their weapons in conditions burdened with tensions and unrest while the possibilities of ethnic and sectarian conflicts in Iraq and the region were still present. When the Assyrians refused such humiliating and degrading demands against them being a part of the tribes – this was the wish of el-Keilani government- the Patriarch of the Assyrians was arrested and detained with some members of his family in the headquarters of Young Men's Christian Association.

This unjust and illegal procedure was actually the spark, which ignited the events and the armed clash with the Assyrians, and the subsequent bloody reprisals, such as the mass slaughter of the unarmed Assyrians and the killing of the captives in "Simele" and several villages in the Nineveh Plains.

The publicity campaigns carried out by the government of el-Keilani under the authority of the King "Ghazi bin Faisal" exaggerated the truth about the armed clash with the Assyrians, turning it into a historic victory against the "agents of Britain" although it was Britain which brought King Ghazi from Saudi Arabia to Iraq. The Iraqi government claimed that it thwarted the

British schemes aiming to destroy Iraq and cause the crumbling of its unity, while the truth was that the most serious threat to the unity of Iraq was the policy of racism towards ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and the sectarian approach of the government of el-Keilani, under the exploitation of Britain.

When the Iraqi army destroyed what was known at the time as the “Uprising of the Assyrians”, this was not just any ordinary military event in Iraq’s modern history; rather, it was a calculated, act the political repercussions and effects and the intellectual and social interactions of which are still present and existing in the Iraqi society in general and the Assyrian society in specific. The mass graves of the unarmed Assyrians shook the newly developed Iraqi government, causing a deep rift and a significant rupture in the structure of the Iraqi society in addition to more political ruptures. After all, these graves represented the starting point for the deviation in the political life inside Iraq, the dominance of the dictatorship of the military over the regime and the rule under the command of the individual and the family, the violation of human rights and neglect of the Constitution and sowing the seeds of intolerance, sectarianism, sedition and corruption in the Iraqi society. Thus, the Arab political mind and the national thoughts and ideologies in general in Iraq remained to a large extent under the influence of that authoritarian mentality and the ethnic-fascistic tendency. This explains the secrecy by all successive governments in Iraq regarding the massacres of the Assyrians and their mass cemeteries, and the continuation execution of genocides by these governments against most of the segments and ethnicities of the Iraqi people whenever they protested to unfair positions and practices or demanded some of their legitimate rights, especially in the era of the rule of the Ba’ath Party.

In his book “The History of the Assyrian Cause in Iraq”, Professor Abdul Majid al-Qaisi, says, “Dancing in pools of blood, dragging bodies on the 14th of July 1958 and on the 8th of February, 1963, the events of 1959 in Mosul and Kirkuk.. and the joy of the national victory and taking pride in the bodies falling in Halabja as a result of the chemical attacks... all of this is merely one of the impacts of ideological theorizing, the first seed of which was sown by Rashid Ali el-Keilani in the year 1933, through planning for a deliberate clash with the Assyrians and stifling their uprising.”

The division and fragmentation of Iraq today seems present-day more than it had ever been. This goes back to the failure of national governance, in

specific the Ba'ath Party and the current sectarian system, to embody the values and principles of co-existence and human rights among the various segments and ethnicities of the Iraqi society, and the failure of this regime to highlight and embody the (Iraqi identity) in all its social formations and cultural spectra as a national identity of all Iraqi. The homeland and its security seem to have been reduced into the regime and the security of the regime. Today, there is real fear among Iraqis of the disintegration of Iraq into mini-states following internal strife and ethnic, sectarian, denominational and ethnic conflicts between all parties and forces competing in the Iraqi arena.

## The Contemporary Iraqi Thought Crisis towards the Assyrians

Following the fall of the regime of "Saddam Hussein", the rate of kidnappings and assassinations targeting the Assyrians soared in an alarming manner to the extent that they were killed en masse. Even their children had become a target for killing before the eyes of the world and the media.

The perpetrators of these crimes have excuses. At times, Assyrians are accused of collaborating with the foreign troops in Iraq or they are considered promoters of alcoholic beverages, although you can easily find alcohol from members of other groups on the streets of Baghdad,, but it is always the Assyrians who are targeted.

Still, it should be made clear that the suffering of the Assyrians did not start only recently and definitely does not go back to April 9 of the year 2003, the date of the occupation of Iraq. It is deeply rooted in both the history and ideology of Iraqis, evidence to which can be found in the history of the Iraqi state ever since its establishment at the expense of the indigenous Assyrians. Persecution and terrorism against Assyrians found themselves a rich soil in the Iraqi thought rejecting all that is distinguished whether ethnically, religiously or even linguistically. This rejection constantly looks for excuses to justify it and legitimize it in the eyes of those who adopt it.

The widespread idea about the Assyrians during the establishment of Iraq as a state is that their loyalty has always been to the British and not to Iraq. An example of this is the presence of the Assyrian Levies when the presence of non-Assyrian Levies has always been disregarded since the Iraqi government was directly linked to the British. In his book, "The Levies of Iraq", Brigadier General Gilbert Brown mentions that the first Iraqi Levies were the Arabic Levies, the mission of which was British intelligence, followed by the Kurdish Levies. The Assyrians were the last to join the Iraqi Levies, and they were forced by Colonel "McCarthy" after they were starved in the camps of Khanaqin on the Iraqi-Iranian border. This was done at a time when the Assyrian refugees faced the Kurdish-Iranian-Turkish massacres against them, and were forced to pave the road between the Iranian city of Hamadan and Khanaqin at the border in the summer of 1918. This Iraqi double-crossing perception of the Assyrians seems to go hand in hand with the way of dealing with facts under an ideology which adopts looking at events through an eye of ethnic, religious and social discrimination.

This unilateral ideology has resulted in genocide and annihilation against the Assyrians, similar to what was happening in recent years, but in a wider and larger scope. After all, the massacres of "Simele" and "Surya" in addition to many others are still engraved in the memory of Assyrians.

The problem lies in that this thought exists at the level of the Iraqi street, the same way it is amongst the Iraqi elite. This is recognized in the silence of the Iraqi political and intellectual elites and the media expressing the positions and opinions of the political sides. This obvious targeting of the Assyrians expresses the absence of any sense of national responsibility towards this indigenous part of the Iraqi people, which finds its roots in the lack of humanitarian and national sense in its true meaning among these elites. In other words, these elites are, in fact, hiding desires and ambitions not exceeding the limits of ethnicity or religion or denomination according to their own orientations, under a guise of nationalism. They are also providing an interpretation of nationalism in a manner similar to the interpretation of the Ba'ath Party. That is, if the Iraqi according to the Ba'ath Party perception is described as an individual who is faithful to the principles of the Party and the revolution, then the Iraqi in the eyes of the Iraqi elites is the believer in the values adopted by those elite. Otherwise, he is deemed a mere stumbling stone in their way of reaching their "national" goals.

The concept of "rejection of the other" controls the minds of Iraqis, from the layman to the politician to the intellectual and the media person despite the boasting of the intellectuals and politicians about the notion that the strength of the Iraqi society lies in its mosaic composition. Yet, these slogans lose their way, not reaching grounds of practical implementation which calls for the elimination of the root cause of the disease from its roots, even should that prove difficult, for indigenous peoples are not obliged to put up with the abnormalities of their surroundings.

Hence, the international community must support the Assyrian people in its quest for right over its homeland. The Assyrian experience with the regimes that came to power in the countries of the Middle East after the Sykes-Picot Agreement, has proven that the national, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity in general was a stimulant for the activation of the exclusionary pattern of behavior towards the Assyrians. This diversity will remain as long as the Assyrian is an Assyrian.

Overlooking and neglecting the truth will only lead to the extinction of this people and the dispersal of those remaining in the world, whether Chaldean, Syriac, Eastern or Evangelical, between the cultures of the Diaspora. The Assyrian Question is more than an issue of sects and religion; it is a pure ethnic matter fought against by giving religion the upper hand with the aim of dividing it into sectarian movements incapable of demanding a unified national requirement, especially that the ruins of Nineveh and Dahuk are “Assyrian” before they are Christian, and its owners, the “Assyrians”, still exist, regardless of sectarian affiliation.

## Suffering of Assyrians under the Iraqi Government

As a result of injustice, oppression and a long period of persecution exerted by Saddam's regime on the Iraqi people, the present-day stage brought about the need to compensate those who suffered at the hands of the Ba'ath regime. This in itself would have been considered crucial in building a new and just Iraq. However, the after effects of the injustice and oppression practiced against certain segments of the Iraqi people continues even after the Ba'ath regime, due to two main reasons: the first being that this regime had ruled for a long time and its years in power were the worst Iraq had witnessed, and the second reason is that the regime caused a scope of conflict between certain segments of the Iraqi people which remains unabated.

With the start of the Kurdish movement in the beginnings of the sixth decade of the twentieth century, the suffering of the Assyrians increased; the Kurds executed a new series of abuse and attack against the Assyrians and their regions. Thus, the Assyrians found themselves between the hammer of the Kurds and the anvil of the government. Thousands were displaced from their villages while the Assyrian existence shrunk. Also, a large number of Assyrians was killed at the hands of armed Kurds. One among other examples is the killing of (33) Assyrians in "Brewer" in 1962 at the hands of supporters of Mustafa Barzani, while many others were killed in a war they had nothing to do with.

In the early seventies, in an attempt to please the Assyrians and use them as an instrument to strike the Kurdish movement, the Iraqi Ba'athist government issued a decree to return the Iraqi citizenship to all Assyrians who were robbed of it in the wake of the events of 1933. Also, on 25/12 / 1972, a decree was issued allowing the return of the participants in these events (the government considered this an act of pardon even though the Assyrians had not committed any crimes). In the same year, cultural rights were granted by the Ba'athist regime to those whom they called Syriac-speaking people. The regime actually dealt with the Assyrians as a linguistic group thus denying them of their nationality. "Mar Ishai Shimun" had returned to Iraq by then just as the political leader "Malik Yaqo" had done. The Iraqi government then called for the formation of an Assyrian force to attack the Kurds in return for granting them some rights, but the Assyrian leadership became aware of the trick and turned down the offer.



Soon enough, these weak decrees, resolutions and laws (right of citizenship and the rights of Syriac-speaking people) just became laws on paper with no effect.

In the general census of 1977, the Assyrians were forced to register as Arabs or Kurds and were prevented from registering under their real nationality. The same thing repeated itself in the later censuses. In the same year, a campaign was launched to demolish the Assyrian villages and displace its people. According to “Jonathan Randall”, Washington Post correspondent, the Assyrians were punished in al-Anfal Campaign after refusing to register in the statistics of 1987 under the category “Arab” or “Kurd”.

In the late seventies, the Assyrian history fell prey to misrepresentation, especially when the campaign of “rewriting history”, as called by the Ba’athist regime, started. The Assyrian people were the first victims since they were the major players in the history of the region. a new history was invented to Arabize the Assyrians and Assyria, in a manner corresponding to the Arab Ba’athism ideology.

With the outbreak of the First Gulf War, a number of Assyrian were martyred, including 300 from the Assyrian town of Bakhdida, which was called the “City of Martyrs”, for the sake of an Arab-Persian conflict which they had nothing to do with.

In the mid-eighties, the Ba’athist regime launched a new campaign against the Assyrians, arresting hundreds of them and executing three Assyrian leaders “Yusuf Touma”, “Hubert Benyamin” and “Youkhana Isho Jajo” on 03/02/1985. Then, after 3 years, the “Al-Anfal Campaign” punished the Kurds for collaborating with Iran in its war against Iraq. Many Assyrian villages were demolished and their people displaced. Also, more than 1,000 Assyrians disappeared in this campaign, while villages, churches and monasteries, some of which date back to the first A.D. centuries were demolished. Again, the Assyrians paid the price of a Ba’athist – Kurdish conflict which they had nothing to do with.

However, after the Second Gulf War and following the displacement of thousands of Assyrians during it, and after finding the so-called “Safe Area” in northern Iraq, the suffering of this people entered a new phase, as this Area was not in any way safe for them. Abuses were committed against them under the guide of fake democracy, which was executed by the Kurdish

parties. “Arabization” was replaced with “Kurdification” while the occupation of the Assyrian territories increased. All of this happened under the instigation of Kurdish officials and under the eyes of the international organizations working there. In addition, intimidation occurred repeatedly while the names of Assyrian villages and areas were changed into Kurdish names in an attempt to prove their Kurdish existence for future generations. Moreover, incidents of kidnapping girls and forcing them to convert to Islam increased while the authorities took no action even though the identity of the kidnappers was known. As it came to the cases of victims belonging to the Assyrian Christians, those were handled based on Islamic laws.

Education-wise, the curriculum was Kurdified, and Assyrian students were forced to study that Kurdish leaders who caused the displacement of their parents and ancestors, are heroes. In a lot of cases, the requirement for those who had the right to obtain seats in Higher Studies was to be affiliated with the ruling Kurdish parties in the region, which was implemented by the Baath Party.

As for the crimes committed against the Assyrians under Kurdish control, they are many and most of them case were closed even though the identity of the perpetrators was known. Some of them were senior officials in the ruling Kurdish parties, as in the case of the murder of “Helen Sawa” (16 years old) at the hands of a member in the political bureau of Barzani's Party. Also, Assyrian martyr “Francis Shabu”, was killed on 01/06/1993 because of his outspoken nationalist opinions and his demand of the return of the Assyrian lands occupied by the Kurds.

All of these contributed to the shrinking existence of Assyrians. This was actually the main objective of the Kurds: evacuate the rightful owners from their lands, and then bringing the Kurds from neighboring countries (Iran, Turkey, Syria) into these lands. In regions under the Ba’athist regime, however, policies of repression were incessant and incidents of arrests and disappearances took place on a regular basis. The Assyrians were also prevented from giving Assyrian names to their children.

In the new millennium and with change drawing near, the Assyrian suffering continued in the midst of the hope for change for the better. The shock, however, came when the “Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period” (April/2004) was issued. Assyrians were divided with the creation of a new ethnicity under the name of “Chaldean Ethnicity” bearing

in mind that Chaldeans are Catholic Assyrians. At the same time, the Assyrian language was not considered an official language like Arabic and Kurdish,. Actually, the authenticity of this language and its status of being one of the oldest languages in Iraq morally required making it an official language in Iraq.

What's even more unfortunate is the recognition of northern Iraq as a "Land of the Kurds" (i.e. Kurdistan) without paying any respect for the presence of the Assyrian people in Iraq. With the issuance of Iraq's Permanent Constitution in December/2005, all of the articles of the temporary law were canceled with the exception of articles /53/ and /58/, which "Kurdify" Assyria. The Assyrians in particular and Iraqis in general are still paying the price of these compromises between Kurds and Islamists. The differences between the Iraqi component and the Kurdish entity today are the best example.

## Persecution of Assyrians in their Historical Regions of Presence

Racist violations and practices against the Assyrian people in addition to the continued targeting of the Assyrian Christians through killings, kidnapping, intimidation and threats to displace them from their towns, villages and homelands which they've lived in since the dawn of history continues unabated.

**In Syria:** churches and monasteries are targeted by terrorist groups, and their clergy was kidnapped, leading to the migration of more than 60% of the Assyrian people to America and Europe after they opened its doors for them without resolving the issue of their land. Germany, in specific, played a significant role in the Syrian crisis recently. The Kurds of Turkey also dominate the Assyrian regions in the north east of the country and consider it the "Syrian Kurdistan". They have actually started imposing taxes on Arabs and Assyrians and have recently issued a law for mandatory enlistment in the ranks of the Kurdish militia. The Syrian regime, however, and even with the present issuance of the new constitution, still does not recognize Assyrians and insists on arabizing them and their history though it grants them religious freedom.

**In Iraq:** The Iraqi government covered up the killings and displacement against the Assyrian people since the assailants, no doubt, belong to groups in power (Islamists or Kurds). Moreover, the Iraqi government is unable to protect the Assyrians under Kurdish domination over their land and does not even express its opinion concerning that matter. What happened on the streets of Zakho in the December/2011 by the Kurds against the Assyrians and Yazidis seems to be the best proof of the inability of the central government to intervene in the issue of seizing Assyrian lands in Dahuk and Erbil in spite of the repeated complaints of the Assyrians.

This is accompanied by the incessant imposition of control over the regions where the Assyrian people live and the execution of an ethnic cleansing policy by the various Iraqi movements in central and southern Iraq. The Kurdish government went about changing the demographic profiles of the towns, cities and regions where the Assyrian population constitutes a majority and proceeded with confiscation of land and property.

Thus, Assyrians were exposed to a brutal campaign aiming to cancel their historical role, alter historical facts and impose a new reality through

demographic change. According to official documents at “Assyria Patriotic Movement”, the area of the occupied Assyrian territory in Dahuk alone imposes great alarm on the fate of the Assyrians in their homeland, while the Kurds boast about “granting” Assyrians their right to prayer, enhancing the Kurdish position in the Western “Christian” World which rarely takes any interest in the preservation of ethnicities. This is also what’s happening in Al-Jazeera, Mesopotamia, where a chauvinistic, ethnic Kurdish national project is being enforced for the purpose of eliminating the ethnic identity of Assyrians.

**In Turkey:** After the genocide of Assyrians at the hands of the Turks and Kurds, the assaults from both parties returned on what remains of their historical lands. After all, in the eighties of the last century, the militias of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) were taking turns with the Turkish army in the assaults on the Assyrians of areas such as Hsah, Harbulu and Gerhan until they were all displaced to France and Belgium; none of them remained in their homeland.

In addition, the Turkish government has confiscated the lands of the Assyrian peasants in their villages and filed successive lawsuits against their churches and monasteries in southeast Turkey in order to seize them. The most important of these monasteries is Mor Gabriel Monastery for the Syriac Orthodox, which dates back to the year 397 AD and is deemed one of the oldest monuments of Christianity. Turkey also prevents the Assyrian Christians from learning and speaking their language while the primary education curricula in Turkey spreads distorted images of the Assyrians which portray them as traitors and conspirators.

**In Iran:** Assyrians in Iran were the group taken captive by King Cyrus II of Persia following the fall of Nineveh in BC, and according to Herodotus, the historian (fifth century BC), the Assyrians have been enlisted in the Persian army and participated at its side in the battles of the Persians. During the First World War, the Iranians collaborated with the Turks and the Kurds in the extermination of the Assyrian people under the command of Mahdi Shams, Majid Sultani and Arshad Hamayon and others, where they killed tens of thousands in the city of Urmia and Salams Plain in the west of Iran. When the current regime in Iran spread its control, of the population of Assyrians constituting around 100,000, 85% was displaced due to the Islamization policy adopted by Iran, deeming Christians as second-class citizens.

## Intellectual Alienation between the Assyrians of the Diaspora and the Assyrians of Iraq

The Assyrians of the present are distributed between Iraq, Syria and Turkey and in smaller numbers in Iran, while most of them (85%) have been displaced to the United States and European countries, specifically Sweden and Germany, where their enthusiasm to return grew. They took advantage of the freedom provided by the Diaspora and established organizations working on sending the Assyrian voice to international forums. Among those, we find the Assyrian Universal Alliance, the American Mesopotamian Organization, the Assyrian Federation in Sweden, Assyria Patriotic Movement... and others.

These organizations have strong relationships with the governments of the Assyrian Diaspora while their activities are distributed between the United States, Russia and Europe. But their voice went unheard so far due to the predominance of the crisscrossing economic interests of the countries concerned in Iraqi affairs, especially with the divisive ideas from within Iraq itself supporting those interests with their entanglements and divisions.

This Assyrian suffering gives the Assyrians of the present one choice out of three:

- 1 - Accepting the annexation of the Nineveh Plain to the Kurdish dominance, in a manner which will facilitate either their Kurdification or “democratic” displacement in the future;
- 2 - Migration from their lands and in this way the world would have committed a crime against itself in the elimination of one of the oldest human and cultural races;
- 3 - International protection of the Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain, as happened with the Kurds in the year 1990, thus preserving the existence the Assyrian people in an ethnic, Christian and cultural manner, which will encourage the return of hundreds of thousands from the Diaspora.

The Assyrian organizations, however, disagree due to the geographical environment which affected the political views; some of them are libertarian while others surrender to the fait accompli. Today, there are dozens of

political, social and youth Assyrian organizations, including the “Assyrian Democratic Movement” led by “Yonadam Kanna”, a member of the Iraqi parliament. The Assyrian organizations inside Iraq are backed by the people in an emotional rather than a national baseline, being “steadfast and unswerving in their homeland” according to its supporters. This is exactly why they are popular despite the resentment of many of their inconsistent and unclear positions under “Islamic-Kurdish” pressure exerted on it. The main point of argument with the organizations of the Assyrian Diaspora is the fact that Iraqi organizations mobilize Diaspora masses and repeat the same views that are considered “defeatist” by some and thus obstruct the work of the organizations of the Diaspora. This is exploited by the Iraqi regime, in exchange for granting positions and financial allocations to some of the Assyrian officials in Iraq.

In order to maintain its popularity, which decreased alarmingly following years of silence, all the Assyrian organizations in Iraq declared their demand of international protection of the Assyrian people on July/2014. There were also demonstrations in northern Iraq and in all the countries of the Assyrian Diaspora calling for saving the Assyrians of Iraq and Syria and preserving their presence in their historical lands.

## **Assyrians and Human Rights**

From all that has been mentioned above, we can recognize that the Assyrians in their historical homeland – prior to the establishment of the Iraqi state and afterwards - have been subjected to constant persecution obliging them to migrate to the outside of their land. They were slaughtered and displaced in an unimaginable way! The results of these massacres were the significant shortage in their number, in addition to diseases, poverty and misery suffered by the survivors.

These endeavors have been successful in bringing disasters on the Assyrians as a whole since their villages were destroyed and they were forced to abandon their property and migrate. Conspiracies followed them to the countries abroad to sow seeds of prejudice and disputes. All these circumstances robbed the Assyrians of their freedom to live freely and enjoy the bounties of their land. This is why, freedom was a main demand when it came to the Assyrians.

## **The Assyrian Question and International Organizations**

In the period following World War I, several new countries were established and these were made up of various religious and national minorities, which was reflected in international treaties and declarations including clear provisions stipulating the protection of minorities. The Assyrian question was introduced raised for negotiations in the Peace Conference held in Paris in 1918, but the participants didn't reveal any interest in the issue of the persecution of minorities in the Ottoman Empire. It was the same with conventions and treaties between the Ottoman Empire, which lost the war, and the victorious states represented by Russia, Britain and France, where both the Treaty of Sevres and the Treaty of Lausanne (1921 to 1923) were adopted, leading to the loss of the rights of peoples in the Ottoman Empire, including the Assyrians, due to the lack of Turkish commitment and the crossing points of the new political and international interests.

The same scenario was repeated in the Constantinople Conference in 1924 and in all the sessions of the League of Nations, which was formed in 1919 among the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles. The League of Nations had the right to investigate any complaints submitted to it regarding, transgressions and violations against minorities through its Trusteeship Council. In 1933, the General Assembly of the League of Nations issued a



decree through which it hoped the states which didn't sign the Minority Protection System would take into consideration the rules of justice in dealing with minorities under the yoke of sovereignty.

Despite the failure of the League of Nations, the United Nations and the international organizations in finding a solution for the ethnic conflicts, the attention given to the rights of minorities increased, and the efforts of the international community brought about the birth of the Charter of the United Nations issued in (San Francisco) on 26/06/1945. The Charter expressed the desire of the states to establish a new world on civilized basis aiming to respect the will of the peoples and protect their right to peaceful coexistence and stability.

## **Protection of Minority Rights**

Later, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted several Human rights declarations and Conventions, the most important of which saw the light in 10/12/1948. The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) under resolution 217 A(III). Its preamble stated the following: "The General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind and striving to promote respect for these rights and freedoms by teaching and education and adopting progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of the Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their powers."

When the United Nations was established, its Charter didn't clearly provide specific articles related to the protection of minorities; it merely settled for the provisions pointed at in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared that "all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without discrimination". It also acknowledged the "right to life, liberty and security of person", and prohibited "slavery and servitude, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and arbitrary detention". According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are entitled to "be recognized as persons before the law and equal before the law", entitled "to a fair trial in a public hearing by an impartial tribunal", and to "establish a family without restrictions as to race, sex or religion", not to

mention stressing on “freedom of conscience, thought and religion”. In addition, it recognized the right of everyone “to social security, just and favorable working conditions, and adequate standard of living for himself and his family”; article (55) states that the United Nations is working on the “universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”.

Some interpret the avoidance of the Charter of the United Nations to mention minorities explicitly, based on the emergence of the concepts of state sovereignty strongly in such a way that the mention or protection of minorities can be deemed interference in internal affairs, and a cause to the destabilization of certain states. Based on this perspective, the United Nations considered the issue of the protection of minorities a jurisdiction and responsibility of the state which views that minority as part of its citizens. The establishment of real democracies in the countries of the world is the best guarantee for the protection of minorities. However, unfortunately, this has not been achieved in the Middle East.

Less than two decades had passed when the United Nations was forced to explicitly emphasize the protection of fundamental human rights, including the rights of minorities, especially following the exposition of horrendous practices of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the universal rejection of the brutal practices against ethnic or religious groups.. In 20/11/1963, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was issued, emphasizing that “all human beings are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination to an equal right to protection of the law and an equal right to protection against any discrimination and against any incitement on the basis of such discrimination.”

According to the Declaration, “any doctrine based on racial discrimination or racial superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous”, and “there is no justification for racial discrimination, whether in theory or in practice.” The Declaration also expressed grave concern related to “discrimination based on race, color or ethnic origin in some regions of the world.”

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination set regulations and rules to “prevent discrimination between human beings on the basis of race, color or origin, which represents an offense to human

dignity” (Article 1). It prohibited any state to “encourage, advocate or support, through police action or otherwise, any discrimination based on race, color or ethnic origin by any group, institution or individual” (Article 2). It also considered “all incitement to or acts of violence, whether by individuals or organizations against any race or group of persons of another color or ethnic origin, a crime against society and punishable by law” (Article 9).

In 18/12/1992, the United Nations issued a Declaration on (The Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities). It stressed on all international conventions on human rights, civil and political rights, the prevention of crimes of genocide and the prevention of all forms of discrimination against women and children. The United Nations observed that the “promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, contribute to political and social stability of the countries in which they live.”

Article I of the Declaration on (The Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities) stated that, “The states, each in its territory, shall protect the existence of minorities and their national cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and shall create favorable conditions for the promotion of that identity”, and that States “shall adopt appropriate legislative measures to achieve those ends.”

The Declaration also noted the importance of “the right of minorities to enjoy their own culture, practice their religions, beliefs and rituals, use their own language freely and participate effectively in the public cultural, religious, social and economic life”.

Among the main international documents on human rights that have been adopted in the United Nations and which received an important position in international law, we can find the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966, and the International Covenant on Social, Cultural and Economic Rights in 1966; the three documents constituted the so-called “international bill of human rights”.

The formulators of international treaties from 1966, reaffirmed the duty and obligation of the States to promote human rights, and they added two collective rights, namely: the right of peoples to self-determination, and their

right to use their natural resources freely. In addition, the rights fitting the scope of responsibilities of each treaty are described in an explicit manner in the treaty.

The “right of self-determination” which emerged as one of the basic principles in international politics in the twentieth century, as a natural right of every people or nation to found a state of their own on their national territory. This principle was announced by the American President “Wilson” (1856-1921) during World War I where it was recognized as one of the fourteen points known as “the Principles of President Wilson”. Those principles attracted the interest of the civilized world and were thus included in the Charter of the League of Nations. The right of self-determination was considered a legal right which colonized states and peoples can enjoy.

Among other human rights conventions, we find the International Convention on the (Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination) in 1965, the (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) adopted in 1979, the (Convention against Torture) in 1984, and the (Convention on the Rights of the Child) in 1989.

## **The Assyrians and the Rights of Indigenous People**

The United Nations Declaration on the “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” adopted in September/2007, is considered one of the most important international declarations in this regard since it recognizes the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples, whether cultural, linguistic, religious or other, as a group, in a broader and more inclusive manner compared to all international human rights instruments.

The United Nations Declaration on the “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” holds great moral value due to its adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

This Declaration reaffirms the right of indigenous peoples, whether groups or individuals, to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Human Rights Law. It recognizes that “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular discrimination based on their indigenous origin or identity”.

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, these people freely “determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”. Also, “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination, the right to autonomy or self-governance in matters relating to their internal and local affairs and to and means for financing these autonomous functions”. There are also other provisions.

The Assyrians, as an indigenous people living on their historical land for the past thousands of years, are still being subjected to serious violations, especially after the rise of the frequency of religious conflict in the region,.

**In Iraq:** Baghdad government continues to evade its legal responsibilities in the protection of its Assyrian Christian citizens, who are subjected to systematic ethnic cleansing. A large number of Assyrian citizens have fled after receiving death threats by the Islamic State. In a similar context, processes of demographic change resume in addition to encroachment upon the lands of the peasants in the Assyrian cities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in while the government remains silent despite knowing the identities of the perpetrators;

**In Syria:** The Syrian government continues arresting and prosecuting a number of Assyrian opinion leaders and political activists. (32) cases under arbitrary arrest have been documented since the year 2011, during which these detainees were subjected to the worst kinds of torture, humiliation and practices which degrade human dignity. On the other hand, the armed extremist organizations in Syria continue launching attacks against the Assyrian Christians in Ar-Raqqah and other Syrian cities. At least three cases of killing committed by the extremist groups in al-Hasakah province have been documented as well. It should be noted that the density of the Syriac Assyrians is concentrated in that province;

**In Turkey:** The security pressure exerted on the Assyrians of the country goes on for the purpose of eliminating their ethnic and religious identity through denying them the right to learn in their mother tongue. Also, the Turkish state continues in its attempts to seize some of their churches, as happened in the case of the historic Mor Gabriel Monastery and turn others into mosques. Moreover, the confiscation of the lands of Syriac-Assyrian peasants in Midyat areas in addition to the incitement against them in school textbooks and curricula goes on;

**In Iran:** The Assyrian component still suffers under the whips of the clerical regime ever since 1979. The Assyrian Christians in Iran are still denied the right to express their ethnic identity and exercise their culture and heritage and learn their language,

**In Lebanon:** The aggravated security and political situation continues to overshadow the effectiveness of the governmental institutions, especially after the participation of Lebanese groups, such as Hezbollah and others, in the Syrian war. The vacancy of the presidency in Lebanon is considered one of the main reasons of this crisis, which obliges some of the Assyrian Syriacs in Lebanon to immigrate for fear of the repetition of the Iraqi and Syrian scenarios.

The Assyrian national identity has remained marginalized throughout the rule of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq, but after its fall, the Assyrians in Iraq have become more marginalized and have only one right, and that is the right to prayer. The honor and sanctities of the Assyrian people have been violated, forcing them to leave all their possessions and take refuge in the villages and cities of the north, or migrate to neighboring countries, especially Syria, Turkey and Jordan.

Arson, killing, confiscation of lands and intimidating people, are all acts of terrorism exercised by the parties participating in the governance of Iraq. More explicitly, they are “exercised by the Iraqi state” since all of these practices stem from militias cooperating with the army and the armed forces, under the supervision of movements participating in the Iraqi constitutional institutions (government and parliament). All of this takes place for the purpose of demographic change in favor of Islamization and Kurdification.

Some are trying to belittle the risks of this barbaric policy and blame “outsiders”, bearing in mind that the seizing of Assyrian lands in Assyria (northern Iraq) comes under the supervision of the Kurdish authority, just like the demographic change comes under the supervision of Arabist politicians in Mosul, and the transgressions of the Shabak (category of Iranian Shiites) under the supervision of the Iraqi government and under Iranian support. All of these practices and others come under the umbrella of a contrived policy implemented by each party according to taste and temperament, taking advantage of the failure of the Assyrian representation in the Iraqi official platforms.

The forced migration of hundreds of thousands of members of the Assyrian people was the result of the policy of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination the biased school curricula, the one-sided media, the decisions of the political parties and the policies adopted by the authoritarian Coalition between the Kurdo-Islamic parties in Iraq to seize their lands and property.

In this context, it would be irrational to measure the rights of the Assyrians based on their numbers since they were driven out of their lands. Those responsible for the atrocities must be prosecuted or at least there should be a compensation for the Assyrians for what they lost at the hands of the Iraqi government since its establishment.

Assyrians as an indigenous peoples living on their ancestral lands have rights acknowledged by the International Community in its Resolution No. 295/61 for the year 2007 on the rights of indigenous peoples. These are:

- "Equality to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different and to be respected as such",
- "Affirming that all doctrines , policies and practices based on or calling for superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences, are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust",
- "Concerned that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of several things, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests",
- "Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples, which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources",
- "Welcoming the fact that indigenous peoples are organizing themselves for enhancement of their political, economic, social and cultural levels, and in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur",

- “Emphasizing that the demilitarization of the lands and territories of indigenous peoples contributes to peace and to achieving progress and development on the economic and social levels and understanding and friendly relations among nations and peoples of the world”,
- “Considering the rights enshrined in treaties, conventions and other constructive arrangements between States and indigenous peoples are, in some cases, issues of international concern and interests which establish international responsibilities and take on an international dimension”,
- “Recognizing that the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, emphasize the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”,
- “Bearing in mind that nothing in this Declaration may be used to prevent any peoples from exercising their right to self-determination in accordance with international law”,
- “Emphasizing that that the United Nations has an important and continuing role to play in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples”,
- “Recognizing that indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights emphasized in international law, and that indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples”,
- “Recognizing that the situation of indigenous peoples varies from one region to another and from one country to another, and that the importance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural information should be taken into consideration,”

“Thus solemnly proclaims the following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect.”



These are some of the keystones of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. There is no doubt that some of the countries, will seek to find ways to go around it and deny the indigenous peoples their rights. This is actually what we see in Iraq towards the Assyrian peoples, one of the ancient indigenous peoples, who gave a lot to humanity. Still, in the present, Assyrians live on their ancestral land of their fathers, denied of their most basic rights.

## **Protection of the Assyrian People**

Even though sixty six years have passed since issuing the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, people in different parts of the world still suffer so that this Declaration would go into effect for real due to its significance and what it includes of human values that achieve the desires of human beings to live in dignity, freedom and equality.

This Declaration is deemed an important document adopted by the United Nations, and the implementation of its provisions is a moral responsibility of the governments and all the major powers. After all, these rights are integrated, perfect and equal and no party is entitled to violate them.

As noted, this Universal Declaration of Human Rights has established and stabilized the concept of protecting the rights of individuals, peoples, groups and minorities under an international legal system.

The protection of the Assyrians in Assyria is a global and moral obligation on the United Nations, the European Union and all the major countries in addition to those that have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Also, providing protection for those people who have suffered through history to the present day from systematic genocide campaigns by terrorist groups and governmental agencies is mandated by international declarations and conventions.

This is why these parties and bodies must take on their legal and ethical responsibilities by implementing all that they have signed for the purpose of preserving what remains of their credibility. The International Court of Justice and the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court must try all authorities which have committed crimes against humanity and against its peoples, including the indigenous Assyrians.

We appeal to the Human Rights Council and relevant United Nations bodies and organizations in addition to all human rights forums and civic institutions in the world to:

- 1 - Exert pressure on the governments of the countries in which Assyrian people live in order to stop all acts of group genocide, killing, deportation and detention against the children of this indigenous group immediately and urgently;
- 2 - Demand for the establishment of a self-autonomous territory belonging to the Assyrians in Iraq or Syria or Turkey or anywhere else on their historical homeland, to serve as a safe haven for them, in accordance with the content of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially in its third and fourth articles, which acknowledge the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination;
- 3 - Support and empower Assyrian civil, political, human rights, media and relief organizations in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey and Lebanon, to support and activate its participation in the political life in its homeland, reconstruct its damaged regions and provide it with all forms of material and political assistance and support;
- 4 - Bring the perpetrators of crimes of genocide against the Assyrian people to national, international or joint courts for purposes of deterrence and prevention of the recurrence of such practices against indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.

Based on that, what the Assyrians are demanding in their historical homeland and in the Diaspora is a legitimate right recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In other words, this Declaration “recognizes the right to fully enjoy, as groups or individuals, all fundamental freedoms acknowledged in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Law. Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination in the exercise of their rights, especially discrimination based on their indigenous origin or identity, and they are entitled to self-determination under international supervision.”

Also, there should be an international protection for the Assyrian people, until it is able to manage its affairs on its own and live with dignity in its land just like the Arabs and the Kurds. The international protection of the Assyrians will encourage the return of the Assyrians to their historic homeland to embark on the journey of restoring their community which suffered at the hands of its surrounding.

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