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Rays of Literature

Issue 24

July 2025

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Note

“Rays of Literature” is a free online journal dedicated to the publication of literary works by Assyrian writers and poets of the 21st century. Its primary mission is to promote and preserve one of the world’s oldest living languages by providing a platform for contemporary voices in Assyrian literature—voices that might otherwise remain unheard.

Our aim is to support and encourage modern Assyrian authors and poets by offering them a space to share their work with a wider audience. In doing so, we hope to inspire both younger and older generations to write creatively in Assyrian and to contribute to a rich and evolving literary tradition. We envision the journal as a source of nourishment for those seeking diverse, innovative, and distinctly modern Assyrian literary expression.

Last year marked the tenth anniversary of our publication. To commemorate the occasion, we expanded the scope of issues 21 and 22 to include a number of English-language articles, particularly those addressing the Assyrian Genocide. Issue 22 was dedicated to this subject and featured an extensive collection of essays, which resulted in a volume of 448 pages. Due to space limitations, we were unable to include the complete article titled *“Genocides against the Assyrian Nation, 2003–2016”*. Only Part One, covering the years 2003–2013 (prior to the rise of ISIS), appeared in that issue.

In keeping with our promise to our valued readers, we included the remaining two parts of that article in Issue 24, alongside a few additional English-language contributions. This supplementary section continues our commitment to raising awareness of historical and contemporary issues facing the Assyrian people.

In this issue, articles are arranged in reverse alphabetical order based on the authors’ surnames. No special preference has been given to any contributor or subject. Each piece is presented in its original form, without edits or alterations, and the authors bear full responsibility for the content and any grammatical or spelling errors it may contain.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the distinguished authors who have generously contributed their time and talent—whether through original writing or by compiling valuable works from various sources. Their efforts enrich our journal and serve as a testament to the enduring spirit of Assyrian literature.

Interview with Assyrian Poet Baris Badal Dawood

By: Dr. Madeleine Davis on behalf of the Rays of Literature



WS: Dear Baris, on behalf of myself and the online journal *Rays of Literature*, I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to participate in this interview despite your busy schedule. As one of our nation's renowned poets of the 21st century, your poetry in both English and Assyrian has been a valued contribution to our journal. To begin, could you share a bit about yourself, including your place of birth and the journey that led you to settle in Canada?

Baris: Thank you for inviting me to this interview, it will enable me to convey my thoughts on some topics that are crucial to our survival as a nation and to share some details with regards to my passion of poetry, writing, and figurative art, as well as some of my social activities.

On the first day of autumn of 1959, the season known as the symphony of colours, in the City of Tehran, I opened my eyes to this world.

WS: What has your experience been like living in Canada as a foreigner? As an Assyrian, what aspects of life bring you the most fulfilment?

Baris: Canadians do not share a common culture! Canada has a delusional and complex multiculturalism, where most of migrants, and at times, myself included as an Assyrian migrant undertake and retain their own cultural activities often to the point of a social marginalization. In the first few years of my residency, along with few Assyrian friends, we could generate some cultural activities. But after three years of innovative programs, we finally came to a halt because of consequential circumstances. There were some Assyrian groups and organizations (mainly from the Motherland) who have worked under the umbrella of the national and cultural programs, with no significant achievements, apart from some entertaining events and national ceremonies. The lack of correspondence between our organizations led to incompatible results.

WS: In 1991, you established the Ishtar Association in Canada. And you designed and created buttons to be worn by the members of this Association. Could you share the inspiration behind these designs and their significance?

Baris: What started with an inspiration, it was my experience with the periodic newspaper; "ISHTAR" in the early 1980's in Tehran. for a brief time, I was given a task by "Rabi Issa Benyamin", to type some articles in Assyrian, and shortly after, my participation in the Assyrian Youth Cultural Association of Tehran (Kanoon/Ghentroon) along with group of intelligent and gifted people in a luminous and transfigure atmosphere, where the young people (myself included) could embrace collaboration and diverse activities.



Button designed and created by Baris to be worn by the members of Ishtar Association in Canada in 1992
This association was created by Baris in 1991



Button designed and created by Baris for the university graduate students

WS: What inspired you to start writing poetry? Were there any significant events or individuals who influenced your decision to pursue poetry?

Baris: As a child, I always listened admirably to the people who read a poem / story out loud or sang a song; these were enchanting moments. That's how my passion for literature was formed.

WS: Do your poems come to you spontaneously, or do you find yourself carefully thinking and working through the creative process to craft them?

Baris: Every story is a condensed statement, stemming from daily life events. I try to envision one particular episode, in that vision the elements begin to appear; time, circumstances and characters. Then I choose the words which need particular emphasis within a given line and try to take some of the stumbling words out the lines in order to make it easier for readers to understand the narrative.

WS: In Assyrian poetry, traditional rules such as rhyme and meter are often followed. However, your poems break away from these conventions and resemble styles found in English poetry. Are you the first Assyrian poet to write in this way? What led you to adopt this style?

Baris: Literature and poetry are closely intertwined in our cultural structure, poems were written by poets and scholars with rhyme and formal verse, and these patterns were adopted and repeated by everyone for centuries, indisputably! I believe in change, being influenced by the free verse poems in Farsi, I decided to break the old habit and started to write free verse poems in Assyrian. I don't know if I'm the first person who adapted this style. One day, I was reading a book by Austrian Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, I came across this quote; "Limits of my language are the limits of my world". In the beginning I started writing free verse poems in Farsi, because I enjoyed greatly reading poems by famous Iranian poets like; Nima Yooshij, Ahmad Shamlou and Forough Farrokhzad. One day I decided to write a free verse poem in Assyrian, ... and the words started to flow.

WS: Do you find it more challenging to write a poem that adheres to the rules of Assyrian classical poetry while conveying deep meaning, or one that forgoes rhyme and meter but evokes profound emotion and thought that resonates with the reader?

Baris: In order to craft an intellectual story/ poem, one must possess knowledge of literature and social sciences, creativity and imagination! How poets would choose the literary elements of their work, it's simply a matter of choice.

WS: Can you share the titles of any poetry books you have published? Do you have any plans to publish more of your work in the future?

Baris: I haven't published anything yet. Because of circumstantial episodes during the last few years, I had to postpone the publication of my first book. Hopefully by the end of this year the first book will be available with a blend of Farsi, English and Assyrian poems.

WS: Some readers have noted similarities between your poetry and that of Ahmad Shamlou, the renowned Iranian poet. Would you say his work has influenced your writing?

Baris: Ahmad Shamlou was perhaps the most influential poet of modern Iran; indeed, I was inspired by his complicated and unprecedented work. His inspiration has been the greatest!

WS: Recognizing your talents in music and the arts, could you share more about your musical and artistic abilities?

Baris: For a short time, I tried singing, and I play Guitar and an instrument called "Setar", as well as sculpting and painting.



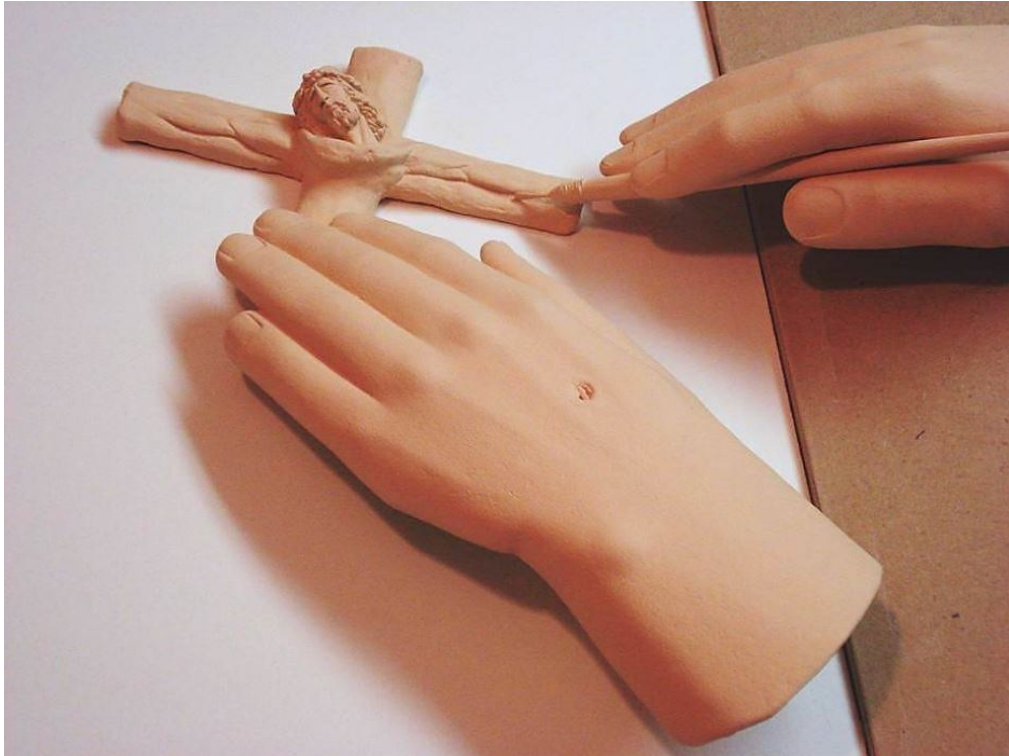
'3 Tar' by: Baris



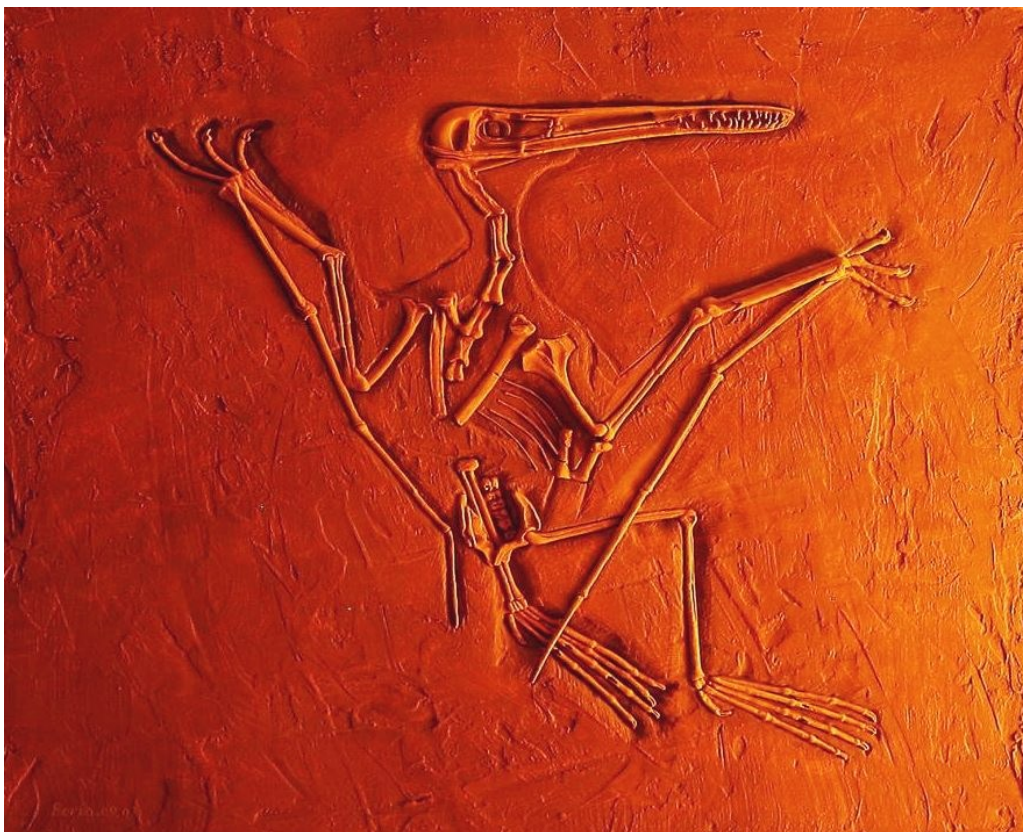
‘Arash’ by: Baris



‘Lady (Banoo)’ by: Baris



‘Choices that Shape Our Future’ by: Baris



‘Pterodactylus’ by: Baris



‘Tranquillity’ by: Baris

WS: You are fluent in multiple languages. Could you share which languages you speak and how you would compare the quality and characteristics of our language to the others you know?

Baris: I learned Assyrian, Farsi and English at school in Iran as well as some Armenian at home (my grandfather was an Armenian), and learned some French in Canada, and some German while travelling frequently to Germany and Austria. Languages change and evolve naturally through time, with new words and grammar, meanwhile in the absence of literature, followed by the lack of perceived relevance, the conversational language will drift apart and disconnect from literature. Apart from Assyrian, all the foreign languages I learned are official and natively spoken languages, therefore our position with respect to condition and circumstances of others is incompatible!

WS: You have composed poetry in three different languages. Which of these languages do you find most challenging for poetry composition, and why?

Baris: Our own language, because it hasn't been exploited in comparison with many other native languages.

WS: What are your thoughts on the future of Assyrian literature?

Baris: Firstly, this question requires access to comprehensive information on condition and existing situation of educational resources. Without the perception of current conditions, it's hard to perceive the future, but having said that, I'm not seeing a bright future.

WS: Do you believe there is potential to elevate our language to a higher level, increasing its significance on the global stage?

Baris: Firstly, we are unable to submit any figure and numbers of literate people or those who have a basic ability to read and write in Assyrian. Secondly, in a general sense, there is no connection between Assyrian organizations globally, that could collectively work on common projects, in order to share insights, to exchange ideas. Without any numbers obtained it will be a baseless statement!

WS: Given the widespread dispersion of Assyrians around the world and the declining use of the Assyrian language among many, how can we cultivate and sustain a readership for our journals and books?

Baris: Language is a cornerstone of a nation! These are some ideas that might generate some enthusiasm:

- * Embracing technology, using the internet as a means of educating people, both in literature and cultural values.
- * Turning every household into a learning centre.
- * Encouraging the members of every family to communicate in our own language.

WS: One idea that has been proposed is publishing journals containing articles exclusively in the Assyrian language to encourage our people, especially the younger generations, to recognize the importance of learning to read and write in Assyrian. This has been one of the goals of *The Rays of Literature*. What other strategies do you think could help encourage our community to learn the language? How can we work to reduce illiteracy among our people?

Baris: We act as a bridge between the past and the present, we should formidably encourage others to speak and learn our language by utilizing podcasts, both in Assyrian and the language of their country of residence.

WS: Many people view English as the global Lingua Franca and assume that everyone should know and use it. As a result, some Assyrians living in English-speaking countries believe that learning another language, including our own, is unnecessary.

While English dominates certain academic and commercial fields, it is not universally sufficient. For instance, during international summits, world leaders often speak their native languages, with real-time translations ensuring effective communication.

Given that Assyrians are spread across different countries, our common unifying language is Assyrian. How can we encourage Assyrians who are reluctant to learn their own language to recognize its importance as a vital means of communication within our global community? How can we emphasize to those reluctant to learn Assyrian that English alone cannot unite us as a scattered people? What strategies can we use to encourage language preservation and highlight its importance for our cultural identity and continuity?

Baris: We are in a position to offer but not to convince! Firstly, we must reach out and connect to our youngsters; to learn more about them, to understand their mentality and to know what is the social significance in their perspectives. We should take one step at a time, to communicate effectively about the critical issues and how we as a community will be able to revive our culture and literature.

☞: Some Assyrian parents choose not to teach their children our language, believing it to be outdated or no longer relevant compared to modern languages. What advice would you offer to these parents regarding the importance of preserving and passing on our linguistic heritage?

Baris: “The ability to learn is a skill, the capacity to learn is a gift and the willingness to learn, is a choice!” One way to gravitate people’s mind and hearts, towards their culture and literature, is to translate a collection of stories, tales and poems in different languages. Hopefully this introduction could create first impression and it might provide a framework.

☞: In many Western countries, Assyrian journals and publications are often produced in the official language of the host country, and Assyrian meetings are frequently conducted in that language as well. Do you believe there are effective ways to preserve and revitalize the Assyrian language? What role can Assyrian associations play in strengthening its use and encouraging more frequent engagement with it?

Baris: The most efficient way to stimulate passion for learning and knowledge is to make animated short films/clips. I’m certain that there are many professional people among us who are capable of creating animated clips to convey our ancestor’s ingenious and innovative ways of invention of distinct instruments, methods of architecture design as well as mathematics, geometry, astronomy, grammar and language, art and libraries.

WS : You have been actively involved in various Assyrian associations in Iran for many years. Could you share some of your key activities and contributions?

Baris: For a period of three years, I studied Civil Engineering in a technical school in Tehran (equivalent of postsecondary program). The list of my social and cultural activities are as follows:

- Taught Assyrian language at ST Mary school in Tehran
- Participated actively as a member of the Assyrian youth of Tehran (Ghentroon), literacy work, calligraphy, theatre (Simele massacre) and few other plays, head of the directing committee for the period of one year.

WS: Have you developed any programs aimed at engaging children and teenagers, to inspire a deeper connection to our nation, people, and culture?

Baris: In 1984 I was given a chance by the late Iranian educator Touran Khomarloo (Mirhadi), the founder of the "Children's Book Council" in Tehran, to take part in an Educational Workshop on "Child Psychology and children's book reviews. Within the period of three years, in Toronto Canada, I managed classes for children and adults, both in literature and history, as well as short plays for children, and arranged a special ceremony, along with a number of friends, for Assyrian professors and university graduates.



Baris performing in a theatrical play in Tehran



Baris and his friends performing various plays in Tehran

WS: How have you managed to find the time to engage in these activities while balancing your daily work commitments?

Baris: “If you want to do something you’ll find the time and the way, if you don’t, you’ll find an excuse!” I always prioritize between work and hobbies; this is how I manage my activities.

WS: Which activity has been the most challenging for you?

Baris: Social activities, because the lack of unity in our communities, our nation has been deeply segregated by religion, sects and different groups. It’s difficult to have a consensus view on any kind of social and cultural activities.

WS: What obstacles have you faced in your social work, and how have you overcome them to continue moving forward?

Baris: Cultural and social activities are achievable only through combined efforts, no one will be able to accomplish anything on their own. Because of lack of knowledge there will be always mistakes, setbacks and hardships. Some do have this false belief of being actively engaged in cultural and social activities by only taking part in entertaining events and venues under a false impression of cultural activities!

WS: Active members of our organizations have often raised two important questions:

1. How can we encourage young Assyrians born in the Diaspora to learn our language?
2. How can we inspire a sense of love and respect for our nation in the hearts of younger generations?

What are your thoughts on these questions, and do you have any suggestions for how our associations can effectively promote our language and culture?

Baris: This is the most difficult question one could imagine! The answer to both questions may conceivably require continuous parental involvement and collaboration. One way is to make short animated stories.

WS: Some believe that parents play the primary role in instilling love and respect for our nation in their children. However, it's disheartening to see that some parents, once

settled in the Diaspora, seem to distance themselves from their past and cultural identity and try to assimilate into the crowds. They speak the local language at home to learn it quickly and prevent their children to be Assyrians. Do you think our associations can play a role in changing the mind set of such parents?

Baris: In such a case, I'm highly skeptical. Lived experiences is a statement that these kinds of people are the lost cause. Those who abandon their language and culture will lose their identity with irreversible consequences!

WS: Many times, we observe that the leaders in our nation and the heads of our associations, who pretend to be working for the progress and advancement of our language and culture, speak in foreign languages with their own children at home or elsewhere. How can such people stand tall among us and convince us that they are truly working for our interests? How do you see such hypocrites that to show off participate in elections and expect our people to elect them? Are such people worthy?

Baris: The question is how these people are selected? What is the definition of social and cultural activities? There are the so called Assyrian cultural groups and organizations throughout the world, what is their purpose and functionality? Apparently, they claim to be cultural organizations, if so, why are we struggling to maintain our identity, our culture and above all, our language!? The most logical response to these questions is ignorance and the lack of knowledge! Our nation is facing a challenging period!

WS: One concern expressed by some younger Assyrians is that when they eagerly join Assyrian associations with the intention of contributing to their growth, they often find that the older members in leadership positions are not truly dedicated. Instead, they perceive these leaders as self-appointed individuals seeking recognition rather than genuine progress. As a result, the younger members lose faith and enthusiasm, eventually leaving. What are your thoughts on this issue?

Baris: Some of us were involved in cultural and social activities for an extended period of time and managed to acquire some knowledge and experience to how plan and organize cultural and social activities with a low budget and well-planned programs. Assuming that a number of us having connection to the young people who are involved or participating in some group/organization activities, if so, we could propose new ideas and programs that would have beneficial effect for all.

WS: Why do you think some Assyrian associations do not succeed?

Baris: Those who aren't able to adapt new thoughts and innovative approaches, specifically in the context of cultural and social activities, will never prevail!

WS: Until 2010 or 2011, the annual State Convention in California was held in Turlock. The event was once very comprehensive, lasting four or five days and featuring a variety of activities. Many young people participated, and the dance floor was often packed. However, over time, the number of participants dwindled, and today, the dance floor is mostly occupied by older Assyrians. As a result, the organizers have been forced to shorten the event, with only the final picnic attracting younger generations. Given the increase in the number of refugees in recent years, one might expect greater participation. What do you think accounts for this unexpected outcome?

Baris: I'm unaware of such incident, However, in this ever-changing world, it is imperative to be mindful of generational divergences, to adjust and to apply new methods of communication, to understand youth perspectives on social significance, subsequently will enable organizers to reach out and connect to them.

WS: What is your perspective on the future of Assyrian organizations in the Diaspora, particularly in countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia? Do you believe there is hope for their continued survival, or do you think they may eventually cease their activities and close their doors?

Baris: What is the primary function of cultural organizations? The answer is simple; ... is to preserve, encourage, to promote language and history development, and community engagement. Those who choose to ignore and disregard these elements, will gradually perish!

WS: It seems that in the past when our people lived in the "Old" countries, the majority of our people were more interested to preserve our identity and culture although those were not our "True" countries and we were ruled by others. Why do you think this interest gradually declines?

Baris: In this day and age, traditions and values, in addition to youth perceptions, are subject to rapid change. Everything is evolving and transforming at a fast pace, followed by entertaining programs and events to amuse and divert! Interactive activities, is one way to attract our youth to participate in various cultural programs and events. Conducting surveys will enable us to recognize what resonates with younger generation.

WS: Do you remain hopeful that our nation will survive and avoid eventual assimilation or fading away? What signs or factors give you hope for the future?

Baris: Depends on our youth's ability to speak our language and participate in cultural activities!

WS: It is rather strange that when our people are well off and comfortable, they do not care about preserving our identity and culture. And only when they live in difficult conditions and in poverty do they start to think about self-preservation, but since they do not have the means, they cannot achieve much. Do you think it would be best for our people to remain in Muslim countries to preserve our identity but suffer physically, or is it better to live in the Diaspora in comfort and well-being but lose their identity?

Baris: Evaluating the impact of past and present experiences, in regard to social and cultural activities, will not result in constructive feedback, because of varying conditions. The only relative comparison is that our private schools were offering Assyrian language classes in various grades. Once again, we understand the significance role of language in preserving cultural identity!

WS: It is disheartening to see that, despite the advances of the 21st century and progress in various sciences, some individuals still adhere to outdated and primitive beliefs from thousands of years ago. In particular, many of our compatriots continue to believe in stories invented long ago and recorded in certain religious texts. One example is the story of Abraham leaving Ur in Chaldea, a place that has no scientific proof of existence, yet some of our people claim their ancestors came from this imaginary land and identify themselves as Chaldeans, which only serves to create division among us. Another example is the Tower of Babel story, which depicts a God fearful of a tower just 70 or 80 meters high, creating various languages in order to bring about confusion among the workers and stop its construction. This tale not only portrays a small, powerless God but also disregards the fact that human tribes with different languages existed long before the rise of civilization and the building of towers and ziggurats. Unfortunately, these myths are still accepted by many as historical facts and are treated as divine truth, contributing to feelings of shame and self-reproach among Assyrians. What are your thoughts on this issue, and how do you think our educated and learned people can help others understand the truths behind these misconceptions?

Baris: I believe the term is “credulous”; those who naively deceived by some information without any supporting facts, because of their insufficient knowledge and understanding, unable to challenge any narratives. On the other hand, intellectual people apply a narrative argument effectively, to explain and connect to the main point by providing supporting evidence.

WS: Many people who still believe in lies written in the scriptures hate Assyrians and blame them for crimes they have not committed or fear them because of silly prophecies and predictions. As a result, for centuries our enemies have tried to kill all Assyrians and wipe us out of the face of the earth so that the prophecies cannot take place! Moreover, such verses from the scriptures cause our people to feel shame, and think that the God of those books hates the Assyrians and has cursed them and wants to punish them. In your opinion how can we resolve these problems and convince people that such verses are meaningless, and how do you think we can rebuild confidence and self esteem among our people?

Baris: The content of this subject is affecting thousands of minds and deserves careful analysis! There is a fundamental difference between knowledge and information. Knowledge is understanding and interpretation that has been processed by the mind through learning, insights and experience. Information is only presented and organized to be accessed and shared. In fact, there are many educated people without knowledge and they believe what they have been taught, undoubtedly!

WS: In 2009, the British Museum in London hosted an exhibition titled *"Babylon: Myth and Reality."* Organized by Assyriologists and archaeologists, the exhibition presented scientific evidence and historical facts contrasting with certain biblical accounts about the Babylonians. The findings suggested that the biblical narratives lack historical foundation. In your opinion, do you think similar exhibitions or scholarly articles could be organized to educate and enlighten our people on such topics?

Baris: Indeed, it's achievable, in collaboration with proficient people, for instance; the striking similarities of the stories of Noah's of Ark (5th century BCE) and the Epic of Gilgamesh (18th century BCE), considering the timeline!

WS: In California, some associations organize trips to wineries to engage younger generations, while others arrange visits to casinos as a way to attract members to their organizations. What are your thoughts on these types of initiatives? Do you believe they are effective in fostering community engagement?

Baris: These sorts of activities are periodic events, but entertaining nonetheless, if integrated with cultural programs, could prove worthy.

WS: Wouldn't it be more beneficial to organize exhibitions, similar to the one held at the British Museum, to engage our community in more meaningful and educational

discussions? How do you see the impact of such initiatives on public awareness and understanding?

Baris: If only our wishes and proposals could have resulted in critical thinking, people would have long nourished their thoughts!

WS: Some of our compatriots believe that we must take weapons and fight for our freedom and independence. Do you agree with them?

Baris: Today's armed conflicts and the future wars, were meticulously planned with only one thing on mind; making profit! To divide and conquer, not to mention; destruction and the loss of lives, to maintain the narrative through scripted media and to prevent disarmament and peace. There are certain groups of powerful, wealthy and authoritarian people, who control the world, with enormous influence on global economy.

WS: In recent years some individuals or groups, without any authority from our people, have engaged in political activities in order to gain the Nineveh Plains. The result of such foolish and unpolished attempts has been this disaster that has befallen us. Thousands of Assyrians have been obliged to leave their homeland leaving all their possessions behind and now live in the misery of Diaspora. Moreover, our churches have been burnt down and our ancient artefacts have been destroyed. Our enemies did this to us to make us shut up for ever, and never speak of having our own homeland. What are your thoughts about the future of our nation? Is there any hope that one day we will have our own country?

Baris: Wishful thinking! I doubt, for the previously mentioned reasons!

WS: Since our political leaders have committed many blunders that have deeply damaged our nation, many of our compatriots believe that it's best for us to give up all political activity and engage solely in preserving and promoting our language and culture. What are your thoughts about this?

Baris: In this world any political movement functioning within the governing system, is advocating for corporate interests. The military budgets surges, compared to the money spent for bringing peace to the world, and curing diseases.

WS: Many of these political leaders and activists are completely illiterate in our language. How can we believe that they truly love our nation, if they don't even trouble themselves to learn our language? Can a political activist in Canada earn respect and votes if he/she does not speak English or French? How can such individuals in our nation expect our people to trust them and stand behind them? What are your views on this matter?

Baris: As mentioned above, the political parties are corporate advocates and have been selected and manifested in a presentation, which is called; "election".

WS: In your opinion which one of your works and activities has been the most important and has achieved the highest value in your mind?

Baris: The poems and my written notes, the fruits I harvested from the tree of life!

WS: Dear Baris, thank you very much for your time and for sharing your thoughts and highly valued suggestions.

Note: If you have questions or suggestions about the ideas and problems discussed in this interview concerning our nation and its future please send them to this address:

simkhesip@gmail.com

Aramaic Loanwords in Neo-Assyrian 911–612 B.C. *

By: Zack Cherry

Abstract: This study identifies and analyzes Aramaic loanwords occurring in Neo-Assyrian texts between 911 and 612 B.C. As two Semitic languages, Neo-Assyrian and Aramaic are sibling-descendants of a postulated common ancestor, Proto-Semitic. The work provides information about the contact between the two languages and about the people who spoke them.

To achieve this scholarly objective, a total of 9,057 Neo-Assyrian texts of different genres were utilized. The study discusses 166 proposed Aramaic loanwords in Neo-Assyrian, which are evaluated according to phonological, morphological, and semantic criteria. The findings demonstrate that only 69 words are confirmed loanwords, and 50 are possible loanwords. Additionally, 47 words are rejected as possible Aramaic loanwords in Neo-Assyrian. The majority of the confirmed loanwords are attested in letters and legal and administrative documents from the seventh century B.C., stemming from the major Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Assur, and Calah. Most of the confirmed loanwords are nouns.

Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from the mid-eighth century B.C. onwards, and the loanwords analyzed provide evidence for the use of Aramaic in Assyria proper as well. **The relatively small number of certain and possible loanwords, however, fails to support the impression that Aramaic was widespread as a vernacular language in Assyria proper, especially towards the end of the period studied. The evidence also corroborates the conclusion, based on the extant prosopographical data, that the predominantly Assyrian character was maintained in Assyria proper until the very end of the Assyrian Empire.**

Comment

By: Madeleine Davis

During my childhood, I often listened to stories from my grandparents, who proudly told me that we are *Souraye* and that our language is *Soureth*. These terms were spoken with warmth and pride, passed down through generations as a natural part of our identity—deeply embedded in our everyday lives, our prayers, and our family conversations. To me, as a child, there was never any confusion about who we were or what language we spoke.

However, this clarity began to blur during my teenage years. At that time, I encountered a very different narrative from certain community leaders and individuals involved in cultural or church associations. They insisted that we must not refer to ourselves as *Souraye* or to our language as *Soureth*. Instead, they urged us to adopt the term *Assyrian*—both for our people and

for our language. According to them, using the word *Assyrian* was not just preferable but necessary, a way of reclaiming a supposedly lost heritage. I found this abrupt shift confusing and disorienting, as if I were being asked to shed a natural skin and wear a borrowed one.

The confusion only deepened when I moved to England in my early twenties for university. There, I began attend a few lectures by non-Assyrian scholars—linguists, historians, and Assyriologists—who brought an entirely different vocabulary into the conversation. They referred to our language as *Aramean*, *Aramaic*, or sometimes *Syriac*. Some tried to be more specific and spoke of *Modern Aramaic* or *Modern Syriac*. The diversity of these terms was bewildering. What struck me most was how passionately some of these academics opposed the use of *Assyrian* as a modern identity label. I remember clearly how one of them scolded me when I introduced myself as Assyrian and said I spoke the Assyrian language. “You mustn’t say that,” they warned sternly. “That’s speaking like the man in the street. The term ‘Assyrian’ refers to a specific ancient empire and has no relevance to any living people today.” According to them, my self-identification was historically inaccurate.

It was only later, when I moved to France, that I felt a sense of linguistic and cultural relief. There, some linguists I met chose to refer to our language as *Soureth*—a term that come directly from our own tongues, from the mouths of our ancestors, unfiltered by foreign labels or academic agendas. They expressed a preference for using the names that native speakers themselves have used for centuries. That perspective resonated with me deeply. Of course! It made perfect sense. For generations—perhaps millennia—we have referred to ourselves as *Souraye* and to our language as *Soureth*. These terms are not academic constructs; they arise organically from our lived experiences, our prayers, and our songs. They are ours, and they are natural to us, like the rhythm of our breath.

To many young people in our communities today, these names may seem unfamiliar, perhaps even archaic. But that is no accident. Generations have been subjected to a systematic campaign of erasure and rebranding—by both external powers and internal agents of assimilation—designed to disconnect us from our ancestral roots. This is a form of cultural brainwashing: an attempt to make us forget that we are the living descendants of the great peoples of ancient Mesopotamia, those who built cities, wrote laws, composed poetry, and preserved knowledge long before others. The goal seems to be to break our continuity, to make us feel like relics of a forgotten past rather than rightful heirs of a living civilization.

Personally, I have grown to dislike the term *Assyrian*, and not only because of academic or political debates. My aversion is deeply emotional and tied to painful stories I have heard. One incident that particularly disturbed me involved a family of *Souraye* friends who sent their children to a private Christian school in San Jose, hoping it would offer their children a nurturing environment rooted in shared religious values. They paid a premium for this opportunity, trusting that the institution would uphold Christian ideals of love, dignity, and respect. But instead, their children were subjected to humiliation by some of the very teachers entrusted with their care. These so-called educators mockingly referred to them as “**ASS-irians**,” emphasizing the first syllable to degrade and ridicule. When I first heard this story, I was appalled. How could such cruelty be found in a Christian setting? Would Jesus Christ—the embodiment of compassion and dignity—ever treat children this way?

Sadly, these attitudes often stem from deeply distorted interpretations of Biblical stories. I have found that many Christians, including those who perpetuate such prejudice, have a skewed understanding of the Old Testament. Even within those ancient texts, the historical record is more nuanced than many realize. For example, the Neo-Assyrian Empire is often vilified in

religious narratives, yet the same texts acknowledge that the Neo-Assyrian king acted as protectors of Judah. In fact, the King of Judah himself sent gold and silver to the Assyrian emperor, pleading for his assistance against threats from Israel. So why, I ask, were the Assyrians blamed and cursed in the Bible and not praised and thanked for saving the Jews? And why are our people today made to bear the burden of a narrative that is wrongly interpreted?

This collective amnesia and misrepresentation—whether it comes from scholars, religious institutions, or community leaders—is not just a matter of names and labels. It is about identity, memory, and the right to exist authentically. It is about reclaiming the voice of a people whose history has been fragmented and whose dignity has too often been denied.

Even within educated and professional circles—among archaeologists, linguists, historians, and assyriologists—a persistent and troubling bias has long existed: a reluctance, and at times an outright refusal, to acknowledge the modern existence or continuity of the Assyrian people. This bias has manifested in subtle yet powerful ways, not through open denial, but through the manipulation of language, identity, and historical terminology. One of the clearest examples of this tendency is the refusal to refer to our language as *Assyrian*, even when discussing dialects that we ourselves have always called *Soureth*. Instead, many scholars default to terms like *Aramaic*, *Syriac*, or *Neo-Aramaic*, often with little to no engagement with how we, the native speakers, identify our own speech.

A common justification for using the term *Aramaic* comes from a biblical verse, often cited to reinforce the idea that Aramaic was widely spoken and understood across the Assyrian Empire. The verse in question—Isaiah 36:11—reads:

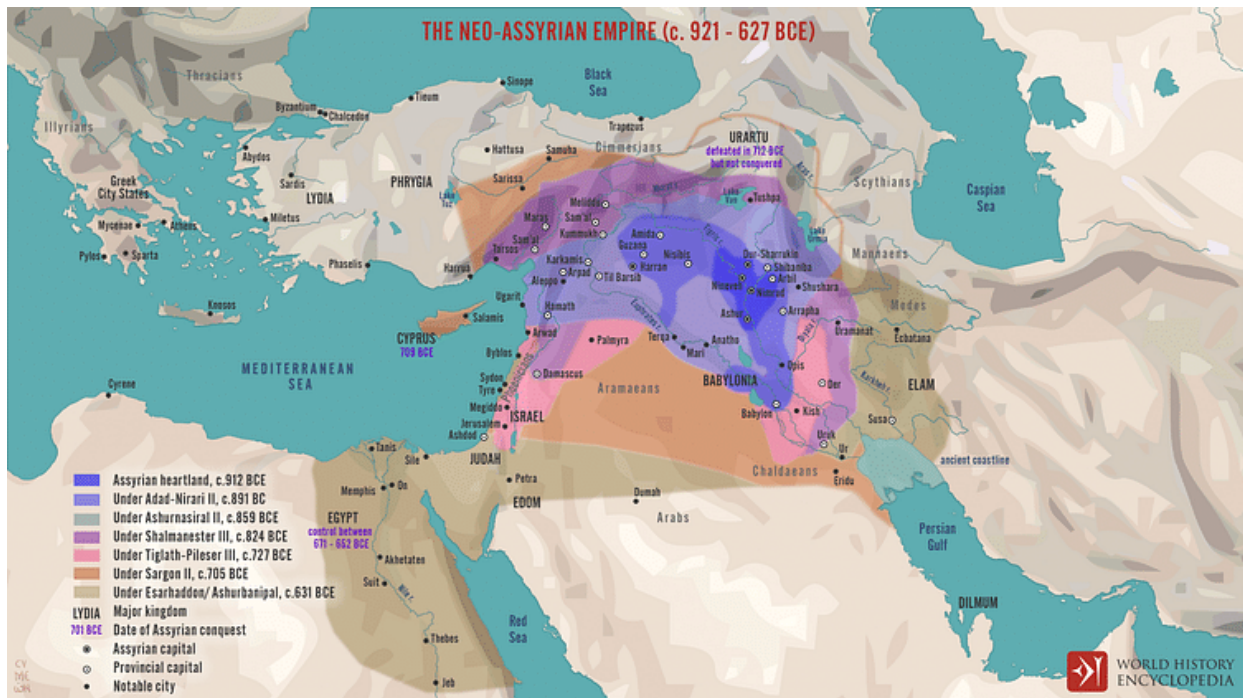
“Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in Aramaic instead of Hebrew; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews’ language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall.”

This verse is frequently invoked to argue that Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the time, the common diplomatic language of the Assyrian Empire, and even the language spoken by Jesus centuries later. But when we read the verse closely, it reveals quite the opposite. If Aramaic were truly the universally understood language, why would the Jewish officials request that the Assyrian envoys use it *precisely so* that the common people *would not* understand? This request only makes sense if Aramaic was not widely known among the general population. In this context, Aramaic seems to function not as a public language, but as a kind of code—used specifically to exclude the understanding of ordinary citizens.

This reading calls into question a long-held scholarly interpretation: that Aramaic had supplanted Assyrian (Akkadian) as the primary language of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. If Aramaic was not understood by the masses, how can we claim it was the *lingua franca*? How, then, did so many modern scholars reach the conclusion that Aramaic became the official language of the empire, and that the Assyrians themselves abandoned their own rich linguistic heritage in favor of it?

When I came across the above academic abstract by Zack Cherry, I felt both confused and relieved. In his work, he carefully demonstrates that Aramaic was not the native language of the Assyrians. This aligns with a deeper historical puzzle: the Neo-Assyrian Empire was the first great world empire—vast, complex, and deeply literate. Its rulers built monumental cities, developed sophisticated administrative systems, and maintained vast archives of written records. It seems profoundly unlikely, even absurd, that such an empire would not have propagated its own language alongside its culture, laws, and military power.

How, then, are we to believe that Aramaic, a language of nomadic tribes and peripheral populations, somehow replaced the language of the empire itself? Is it reasonable to think that a people with no comparable architectural, literary, or scientific legacy could produce a language rich enough in technical vocabulary to support imperial administration, astronomy, medicine, and warfare?



The Neo-Assyrian Empire (c. 921 - 627 BCE)

Simeon Netchev (CC BY-NC-SA)

A map illustrating the rise and expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, an ancient civilization in Mesopotamia from the second millennium BCE that followed two distinct phases of Assyrian history, as successive Assyrian rulers were intentionally bent on expanding the state. They achieved tremendous territorial growth, eventually ruling over the Middle East from the Taurus Mountains in the North to the edge of the Arabian desert and the Persian Gulf in the South, from Egypt and the Levant in the West to the Zagros Mountains in the East. This enormous area was administrated from a single capital in the Assyrian heartland, which subsequently changed from Assur to Kalhu to Dur-Sharrukin and Nineveh. Due largely to their military skill, technological ingenuity, and advanced administration, the Neo-Assyrians established the largest (and some say first) empire the world had seen.

Historically, the Arameans were semi-nomadic groups, often described in ancient records as raiders or bandits who harassed the settled populations in Assyrian provinces. Assyrian inscriptions detail repeated military campaigns launched to suppress Aramean incursions. How could such groups—lacking cities, temples, schools, libraries, or monumental architecture—develop a written language with the complexity and precision necessary to run an empire?

Contrast this with the Assyrians, and before them the Sumerians and Akkadians, who developed writing systems precisely because they needed them. They were inventors, astronomers, engineers, merchants, and bureaucrats. They needed to name, classify, and record the things they created: tools, weapons, architectural designs, astronomical observations, legal transactions, and commercial inventories. These needs gave birth to cuneiform and to the immense vocabulary found in Assyrian texts.

Where, then, are the Aramean equivalents? Where are the Aramean astronomers and mathematicians, their poets and philosophers, their scribes and engineers? Where are the clay tablets that document their contributions to law, science, or architecture? What physical or intellectual infrastructure did they create that could support such a vocabulary? There is simply no evidence of an Aramean civilization capable of producing or sustaining the complex administrative language that an empire requires.

Yet, remarkably—and disturbingly—for many decades, scholars have argued that the Assyrians abandoned their language and adopted Aramaic as their own, eventually disseminating it across the empire as the official medium of communication. It is an improbable claim, and yet it has taken hold in mainstream academia.

Adding to the frustration is the silence of the very specialists who are best positioned to address this question: the Assyriologists. Thousands of cuneiform tablets have been deciphered and studied by experts in the field. These texts span nearly every domain of human activity: law, medicine, astronomy, religion, military planning, and literature. But not one of these scholars has yet stepped forward to clearly and unequivocally state how the Neo-Assyrians referred to their own language. This omission is not just a scholarly gap—it is a mystery, and one that begs the question: why has there been such reluctance to affirm what seems historically and culturally obvious?

It seems as though every term is permitted—*Akkadian*, *Aramaic*, *Syriac*, *Mesopotamian*—except *Assyrian*. The one name that resonates with the people who still speak the language today, and who still identify as descendants of that ancient civilization, is the one name systematically avoided. One wonders when, if ever, a scholar—at least from within our own community—will stand up and reveal with confidence and evidence what the Assyrians themselves called their language. Until then, we remain caught in a maze of imposed terminologies, denied the dignity of naming our own voice.

* This is the abstract of a thesis (2017) proposed by Zack Cherry at the Uppsala University, in the Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Languages, Department of Linguistics and Philology. The Doctoral thesis (392 pages) appeared as a publication of Uppsala University (URN: [urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-320133](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-320133) ISBN: 978-91-506-2638-4 (print) OAI: oai:DiVA.org/uu-320133DiVA, id: [diva2:1089791](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-320133)); and is now available in book format (414 pages, 6.93" × 9.85"12, b&w illustrations, 2023), distributed by Penn State University Press for Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, [State Archives of Assyrian Studies](https://www.pennstate.edu/ass/asssyrian-studies/), ISBN: 978-952-10-9504-7. Please consult the Announcement Section of this issue of Simkhe d'Siprayouta for the cover of this book.

Genocides against the Assyrian Nation 2003 – 2016

Part Two: ISIS Attacks on Assyrians In Syria 2012 - 2016

Prior to persecutions of Assyrians in Iraq, ISIS had bombed many Assyrian villages and destroyed Assyrian churches and Artefacts in Syria and Iraq. The following are reports collected mainly by AINA, the Assyrian News Agency:

AINA News

Jihadists Seize Christian Village in Syria, Expel Its Residents

Posted 2012-05-12 17:45 GMT

(AINA) -- Armed jihadist seized control of Qastal al-Burg village on Thursday, May 10, and ordered its 10 Christian families to leave, according to a report published by UPI on its Arabic language website.

A resident of the village, who did not wish to be identified, said "armed jihadist (expiatory) group came to the village and ordered us to leave our homes empty handed." The armed group, he further stated, "have exercised their control over all the houses, and occupied the church and made it as their command control center."

Qastal al-Burg village is in the province of Hama and is 48 kilometers northwest of Hama.

Translated from Arabic by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi.

AINA News

Car Bomb Explodes in the New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo

Posted 2012-10-24 00:31 GMT

Aleppo (AINA) -- A suicide car bomber detonated his bomb in front of an Assyrian charity complex in Aleppo on Sunday. No one was hurt in the explosion but there was heavy damage to complex, which includes a home for the elderly, a hospital and a grammar school. The Assyrian Archbishop of Aleppo issued the following statement:

On Sunday 21st October 2012, a suicidal booby trapped car exploded early in the morning in the main roundabout of the New Syriac-Assyrian district. It left huge craters and considerable amount of damage to the Beth Hasda Complex, a Syrian Orthodox' charitable endowment, which includes an elderly Home, al-Kalima Grammar School and a Hospital. This is the second incident in less than twenty-four hours to inflict suffering to our humanitarian institutions in Aleppo.

Thank God that the damage sustained was only material and no precious lives were lost. Naturally, the fear, traumatization and horror this explosion imposed on the vulnerable elderly, recovering injured, convalescing patients, and dedicated, overstretched medical staff of these institutions are incalculable.

We unreservedly condemn and denounce the escalation of these armed manifestations, and all kinds of shelling and explosions that can only lead entrenched combatant brothers deeper into this vicious circle of violence, devastation and death.

We also condemn and deplore the continuation of kidnapping, killings, demolition of infrastructure, heritages and the attrition activities aimed at the crippling of the local and national economy.

The status quo of this conflict is apparent and demoralizing as it can only spiral to propagate the culture of anarchy, resentment and disunity, in a city which has never knowingly sustained such level of violence, destruction and decimation in its history. Until recently, we only knew affection, tolerance and a healthy co-existence of the people in our blessed city.

It is heartbreaking to helplessly witness our beloved city of Aleppo and other Syrian cities, villages and hamlets becoming battlefields, and to see their systematic obliteration.

No one can raise the flag of victory over the heaps of such ruins and sacrilege.

Therefore, we wholeheartedly call on you all to join us in prayer in support of all internal and external efforts and endeavors to achieve a lasting cease-fire. To pray for peace and re-consolidate our shaken pillars of harmony and trust, and to hold love, security and national unity as holy aims of our Syrian solidarity.

Let us hope that the blessed Eid al-Adha will bring about truce and concord to all citizen and that Syria will be able to enjoy tranquility and calmness once again.

We wish that our homeland and all citizens will enjoy every Eid, the blessings of God and the graces of Peace.

AINA News

Second Attack in 5 Days on New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo

Posted 2012-10-26 00:06 GMT

Aleppo (AINA) -- The new Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo has come under attack for the second time in five days. Last Sunday a car bomb exploded in front of an Assyrian social services complex (AINA [10-24-2012](#)). No one was injured in that attack.

Today a group of the al-Qaida affiliated al-Tawhid Brigade attacked the New Assyrian quarter. One unidentified resident is reported to have been killed. Many terrified residents fled their homes. The assailants let them flee and then occupied their buildings and homes. It took the Syrian army six hours to arrive and engage the group. Some of the assailants were killed, others fled to the neighboring al-Ashrafia Quarter.

The New Assyrian Quarter is now quiet and residents have been asked to return.

AINA News

Missiles Strike Assyrian Village in Syria, 1 Killed, Many Wounded

Posted 2012-11-15 00:20 GMT

(AINA) -- Four missiles struck the Assyrian village of Tel Nasri in Khabour, Syria. St. Mary's church was destroyed and every house was damaged, according to the residents. A 14 year old child was killed and many were wounded. It is not known who launched the missiles, though it appears that they originated from government forces.



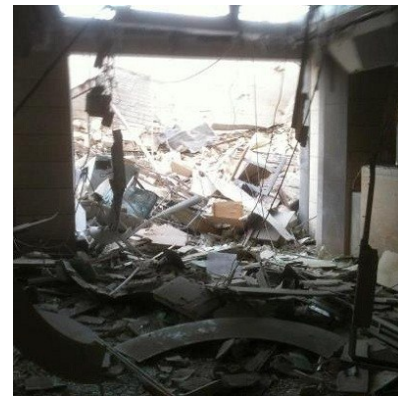
AINA News

Third Attack in New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo, Scores Injured and Killed

Posted 2012-11-20 01:21 GMT

Aleppo (AINA) -- A bomb exploded near a Syriac Orthodox Church in Aleppo at 6 PM on Friday, November 16. Scores of people were injured and killed. Estimates put the number killed between 20 and 80. The bomb damaged the Al Kalima school and the Syrian French Hospital, as well as a nursing home. This is the third attack in four weeks in the New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo. The first occurred on October 21 (AINA 10-24-2012), the second on October 26 (AINA 10-26-2012).

This [video report](#) from Al Ikhabilitya discusses the fear and terror inflicted on the Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) by the Syrian rebels in the New Assyrian Quarter.



AINA News

Rash of Assyrian Kidnappings in Syria

Posted 2012-11-24 01:30 GMT

Hasake, Syria (AINA) -- At least 3 Assyrians have been kidnapped recently from their villages in Hasake, Syria. Two of the victims are young men and the kidnappers have asked for

at least 100,000 USD in ransom for each. The third victim is a 17 year-old girl who was snatched from her street after 4 men, believed to be Kurds, assaulted her 16 year-old brother, knocked him out, and drove off with her.

Violence against Assyrians has sharply risen in the last 12 months, much of it perpetrated by the rebel militia, especially by the Jihadist elements of the rebels, this despite the fact that Assyrians have officially supported the rebel militia (AINA [10-27-2012](#)).

The New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo has been attacked three times in the last four weeks (AINA [11-20-2012](#)). On November 15 four missiles struck the village of Tel Nasri (AINA [11-15-2012](#)).

Thirty Five Assyrian Villages on the Khabur River in Syria



AINA News

25,000 Christians Besieged By Muslim Rebels in Hasaka, Syria

Posted 2013-01-18 19:07 GMT

(AINA) -- A number of bishops from the al-Hasaka district in eastern Syria have put forward a plea for the survival of 25,000 Christians, including Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Chaldeans and Armenians, in this city, within which a number of evacuees have sought refuge from neighboring areas, as [reported](#) by the Vatican's Fides news agency on Thursday.

According to the agency, the testimonies cited by the bishops indicate "a number of roadblocks" on the roads, set up by armed groups, especially militiamen from the al-Nasrah Front. Add to that, they said, gangs are deliberately conducting robberies, kidnappings and attacks even within the city.

The agency additionally quoted one of the priests from al-Hasaka saying, "That every day around 3pm a type of curfew is applied, since armed groups are roaming the streets."

He also stressed that, "kidnapping operations are being conducted, accompanied at times by requests for the payment of ransoms, and in recent days, two brothers from the Bishr family and two youths from the Afram family were murdered in the street, and Christian youths are being threatened and are intimidated by terrorist acts."

On their part, several humanitarian organizations have announced that, "It is impossible to deliver aid to al-Hasaka, because it is very dangerous and also the minimum security requirements are unavailable."

Translated from [Arabic](#) by AINA.

AINA News

Bus Attacked in Syria, Several Killed and Wounded

Posted 2013-01-31 21:12 GMT

Qamishli, Syria (AINA) -- According to the Assyrian website ankawa.com, a bus owned by the Ezla Bus Company, an Assyrian owned business, was attacked Thursday with gunfire near the Syrian capital of Damascus. Several persons were killed.

Qamishli is the largest city in the province of Hasakah.

The bus was on route from Qamishli to Beirut when it was attacked on the Alnabuk Yabroud Road in Damascus.

Among the persons killed was an Assyrian woman in her early twenties, named Nina Jamil Oshana.



Nina Oshana

AINA News

Syria's Christians Disproportionately Affected By the War: Report

By Tuma Abraham

Posted 2013-02-07 23:14 GMT

Stockholm (AINA) -- Five years after writing his report [By God - Six Days in Amman](#), his personal report that changed the perception of the war in Iraq, Nuri Kino is back with a new one. This time it's the war in Syria and its consequences he wants to highlight.

Nuri Kino, [award winning](#) Swedish-Assyrian author and investigative journalist, has met and interviewed nearly one hundred Christian Syrian refugees. In his personal report he gives voice to this otherwise silent minority. He is told harrowing tales of systematic rape and kidnappings. Many, perhaps most of the refugees interviewed express a desire to leave the Middle East for good and have contacted human smugglers. A multi-million enterprise has sprung up around the refugee crisis. Kino has also spoken to several of these smugglers and investigated the trade. His first-hand report includes an interview with a young man who reached Sweden after a hellish journey from Syria. "Jacob" was forced into a sealed container and almost died of suffocation. Only a few days after leaving the container he and some seventy other men were forced onto a ship, where only half of them survived the journey. Nuri Kino says this about his report:

We meet every day by news reports from Syria that evokes strong emotions. But what do we really know about what is going on there? One element can get a sense of a TV channel and another in another TV channel. It is therefore important that the Syrians themselves, witnesses of atrocities, can be heard. I could write short articles but these are forgotten after just one day, that's why I decided to write a longer report. I waited for the right time and when a Syriac Orthodox youth organization would go to Beirut, it felt right to go with.

The war in Syria is growing increasingly worse every day, and it is affecting every Syrian citizen, regardless of ethnicity or religion. But the situation for minorities is even more horrifying. The Christian minority in Syria has no militia and is targeted by everyone. Christian Assyrians (also called Chaldeans and Syriacs) and others have become the number one target for criminals and terrorists. Between The Barbed Wire gives a voice to this people and is a must-read for anyone who is involved or interested in issues of migration and international politics.

The personal report compares the exodus of the Christians from Syria with that from Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The current similarities with the situation in Iraq are alarming. At the peak of the sectarian conflict in Iraq, Christians were killed, some beheaded in front of video cameras by extremists and driven from their homes and businesses, targeted by religious intolerance and the prospect of economic gain. Meanwhile more than half of the Iraqi Christians have been forced to leave the country.



Elias, one of the refugees' children in the monastery requires an urgent surgery.

This is now being repeated in Syria.

Even though Christians make up more than 10 percent of Syria's population, this amount is not reflected in the UNCHR registered refugees numbers who fled to Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The mostly ignored tragedy of the Christians in Iraq has convinced Christians of Syria that international authorities will not step up to protect them. While their plight is well known to the western media outlets they still are forgotten by international aid

organizations. They are fleeing massively.

Nuri Kino's comprehensive 40-page report is available [here](#).

AINA News

Assyrian Man Kidnapped and Killed in Syria

Posted 2013-04-03 22:52 GMT

(AINA) -- Zohair David, an Assyrian from Tel Goran, Syria, who disappeared on Thursday, March 29, was found dead yesterday. Mr. David was kidnapped and killed and his car was stolen.

Mr. David, 44 and married with four children, was driving 3 Assyrians from Tel Goran, an Assyrian town, to Tabga, in the Raqqa province. One of the passengers is a doctor whose presence was requested in Tabga by the Free Syrian Army. After bringing the Assyrians to Tabga, Mr. David failed to return home.

Suspecting foul play, on the following day his family contacted the Free Syrian Army and asked about his whereabouts. The Free Syrian Army instituted a search and found his body on Sunday in a remote area near Tabga. He had been shot to death and his car stolen.

The identity of the perpetrators is unknown.



AINA News
500 Assyrians From Syria Flee to Turkey in Last 3 Days
Posted 2013-04-08 00:16 GMT

(AINA) -- 500 Assyrians from Syria have crossed the border into Turkey in the past 3 days, seeking refuge from the war in Syria. According to Assyrian church officials in Tur Abdin, Turkey, the refugees are now in Gazentap. The Assyrian churches and monasteries in Tur Abdin and its surroundings are at capacity. Church officials are now considering building a tent city to house the refugees.

Assyrians and other Christians in Syria have been disproportionately affected by the war (AINA [2-8-2013](#)), and have been targeted by the Muslims rebels (AINA [1-31-2013](#), [1-18-2013](#), [11-23-2012](#), [11-20-2012](#), [11-9-2012](#)). The Muslim Jihadists have kidnapped Assyrians for ransom, attacked places of worship and created a climate of fear, forcing many Assyrians to abandon their homes and villages and seek safety in Turkey.

The case of Suad Malki is a typical example. In July of 2011 her husband, Dr. Staefo Malki, was sitting in his car, in Hassaka, when two Muslims approached and told him to remove the Holy Cross from his car. He refused. The Muslims shot him. Dr. Malki died later in the hospital. But the trouble for the Malki family was not over. The Muslims telephoned his grief stricken wife and told her that they would kill her three sons if they did not leave.

According to a report by Swedish journalist Nuri Kino:

Even though Christians make up more than 10 percent of Syria's population, this amount is not reflected in the UNCHR registered refugees numbers who fled to Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The mostly ignored tragedy of the Christians in Iraq has convinced Christians of Syria that international authorities will not step up to protect them. While their plight is well known to the western media outlets they still are forgotten by international aid organizations. They are fleeing massively.

Nuri Kino had prepared a comprehensive 40-page report on this event.

Syndicated News
Syrian Rebels Kidnap Two Aleppo Bishops
Daily Star, Lebanon
Posted 2013-04-22 19:49 GMT

BEIRUT -- Two Aleppian bishops were kidnapped by Syrian rebels in the outskirts of the city Monday evening, Lebanon's National News Agency reported.



Greek Orthodox Bishop Paul Yazigi (left) and Assyrian Orthodox Bishop Yohanna Ibrahim.

The driver of Boulos al-Yazigi, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo and Iskandaroun and Yuhanna Ibrahim, the [Assyrian] Syrian-Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, was killed during the attack.

The NNA reported that Ibrahim, Yazigi and the third man, also a priest, were driving from a village near the Turkish border to Aleppo. As they

approached the city, they were met with an armed group that forced them out of the car.

The bishops are believed to be alive and efforts are ongoing to secure their release.

AINA News

Assyrian Village in Syria Attacked By Muslims

Posted 2013-07-30 18:22 GMT

Hassaka, Syria (AINA) -- The Assyrian village of Tel Hormizd was attacked on Saturday, July 27 at about midnight. Fifty Arab Muslims on motorcycles entered the village and began a shooting rampage. According to residents, the Muslims fired indiscriminately, wounding two Assyrians, one of whom is still in hospital. The Assyrians repelled the attack by shooting at the Muslims. It is not known if any of the attackers was injured.

This is the third and largest attack on the village of Tel Hormizd in two months. The Assyrians believe the attackers are from nearby villages, and are attempting to frighten the Assyrians into abandoning their villages so that they may be expropriated.

Attacks have also occurred on other Assyrian villages in the area.

AINA News

Syrian Rebels to Assyrians: Convert to Islam to Keep Your Jobs

Posted 2013-08-04 18:13 GMT

Al Thawrah, Syria (AINA) -- Accounts by Assyrian refugees from *al-Thawrah* (also known as *al-Tabqah*) reveal the real face of the Islamist undercurrent within the Syrian opposition. Furthermore, these accounts serve as a stark and chilling reminder of what has already been suffered by non-Muslim communities in Iraq since 2003.

On February 11, rebel fighters from the al-Nusra Front took control of the city and its strategic dam, the largest of its kind in the country. They also seized control of the three quarters that housed dam workers - many of whom were Christian Assyrians. Whilst they allowed the dam's original staff to remain in the city in order to continue its operation, management and upkeep, those who were not Sunni Muslim were not afforded the same privilege.

"Everything is now in Jabhat al-Nusra's hands," complained one Assyrian refugee, "All the Muslims stayed there, but if any Christians want to go back they have to become Muslim or else they will be killed."

Christians report their property being stolen, their homes being confiscated, and their possessions being sold on the black market in order to buy weapons and ammunition. In many of these cases, those forcefully dispossessed were not even allowed the chance to take with them any of their personal belongings.

According to the jihadist Islamist ideology espoused by such forces as the al-Nusra Front, the properties and possessions of such "infidels" are *halal* (fair game), and it is not a sin to plunder them.

They also threatened Christians with death if they did not comply with strict Islamic laws. "They would call and text me on my cell phone, ordering me to do as they say, or else they would kill me! Can you imagine it?" said a Christian man from al-Thawrah, who had lost all he owned, and is now internally displaced with his family. "Even though I have left they still call me from there to bother me, so I keep my phone switched off unless I really need to use it."

The gruesome story (AINA 4-3-2013) of an Assyrian man from al-Hasakah Governorate, allegedly shot by rebels in an execution-style murder just outside al-Thawrah in April 2013, still sends shivers up the spines of those who knew him. He used to earn a living transporting people between al-Hasakah and al-Thawrah, until his car was confiscated by al-Nusra fighters. "They told him that he could buy it back from them, so he returned to his village to bring them the money," one refugee related, "He should have stayed put and thanked God that they hadn't killed him then and there, but he didn't listen to reason and left with the money they'd requested. No one ever saw him alive again. How will his wife and four children support themselves now?"

Whilst this case has been well-documented, many of the Christian refugees from al-Thawrah insisted that certain details be excluded from their testimonies since, being a small community, they were fearful of being identified and subsequently suffering the consequences. They are also too frightened to provide too much information over the phone or on the internet because they believe that these are being monitored by elements within Syria's opposition.

For most of them, staying in Syria is no longer a viable option either. To leave for Turkey or Lebanon, on the other hand, is also fraught with its own perils. "All the roads are full of rebel fighters," lamented another Assyrian refugee who refused to disclose his location, "It's really dangerous. We have lost everything," said the head of an Assyrian household displaced from al-Thawrah, "There is nothing for us over there now, nothing to return to. We just need help to get out of here and settle in a country that's safe."



AINA News

Syrian Rebels Destroy Orthodox Church in Al-Thawrah

Posted 2013-08-09 16:12 GMT

(AINA) -- The Antiochian Orthodox church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was a landmark of *al-Thawrah* (also known as *al-Tabqah*). It was an impressive, modern structure with a large yard, surrounded by a high wall and well-situated on a main street near the *corniche* -- a well landscaped area hugging the southern bank of Lake Assad which was popular with locals going

on an evening stroll. Its elegant dome, surmounted by a cross, could be seen from all parts of the Third Quarter (also known as *Hayy al-Ishtirakiyah*), where it was located.

Spiritually, this church was under the jurisdiction of the archdiocese of Aleppo, the metropolitan of which, Boulos al-Yazigi, was kidnapped (and allegedly murdered) on April 22 of this year, along with the Syriac Orthodox metropolitan of the same city, Mor Gregorios Youhanna Ibrahim. It was built between 1985 and 1994, on land offered by the *al-Thawrah*'s city council, and could accommodate up to 300 worshippers. Moreover, not only did this church serve more than 250 Orthodox families, but it was also used by local Christian denominations which did not have their own places of worship, including the small Syriac Orthodox congregation.



Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, Al-Thawra, Syria



The interior of the Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus

This was also one of only two Christian places of worship in the town, the other being the small church of St. George, which belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East. Built around 1973, along with a community hall, this was located in the older part of *al-Thawrah*, known locally as al-Qaryah (the village). Around 2000, a plot of land in the Third Quarter was purchased by this community in order to build a new church, closer to the three quarters that housed those working in the Euphrates dam -- and where the bulk of the Assyrians lived. Due to lack of funding, however, this project never materialised and, perhaps, for the better.

On February 11, rebel fighters from the Islamist Jihadist "al-Nusra Front" -- designated by the USA, UN, Australia and UK as a terrorist organisation -- took control of the city and its strategic hydroelectric dam, the largest of its kind in the country. They also seized control of the three quarters that housed dam workers and in which, of course, stood the Orthodox Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, and in which most of the Christians were settled.

Christian eyewitnesses who fled *al-Thawrah*, now displaced in other parts of Syria, as well as in Lebanon and Turkey, tell of religious discrimination by the rebels, as well as forced confiscation of Christian possessions and properties, with many items being sold on the black market in order to purchase weapons and ammunition. Even the churches weren't spared.

"The 'Free Syrian Army' demolished the [Sts. Sergius and Bacchus] church," lamented one refugee, "They tore up the sanctuary curtains, Bibles and other holy books, and broke all the crosses, chairs and icons of Jesus and the saints. They stole electrical appliances like fans, chandeliers and lights. They took whatever was in the church, and sold it all. There is nothing there now."

There is no hope, however, for the Christians to return and rebuild after the conflict subsides -- that's if it indeed subsides. They were once considered better off than their relatives

and friends who still lived in the villages they had migrated from, but are now destitute, having lost everything -- their homes, businesses, and even personal belongings.

"Even though I have left," recounted another Assyrian refugee, "the terrorists still call and text me from there, on my cell phone, to bother me. They recently called and told me: 'If you attempt to return to al-Tabqah we will cut off your head and display it on the mosque so that all the Muslims there can see it and be proud of it.' They say other things too, but what they say is so disturbing, that I keep my phone switched off unless I really need to use it."

Whilst it may be easy to switch off a cell phone, and ignore such threats, it is not so easy to shake off the trauma of dispossession and loss. After spending up to 45 years in a town which became their home, many of these refugees managed to escape with nothing but the clothes on their backs. "We have lost everything," said the head of an Assyrian household displaced from *al-Thawrah*, "There is nothing for us over there now, nothing to return to. We just need help to get out of here and settle in a country that's safe."

AINA News

Syrian Jihadist Rebels Murder Assyrian Man for Being Christian

Posted 2013-09-23 05:57 GMT



Ninar Odisho

Al-Thawrah, Syria (AINA) -- A 26 year-old Assyrian man, Ninar Odisho, was murdered on Saturday, September 21, in the afternoon in the city of *Al-Thawra* (*al-Tabqah*), where he had gone to safeguard his family's house and property. Mr. Odisho was with two Muslim friends when they were approached by Jihadist rebels, who questioned the three men at gun point. The rebels released his friends upon

learning they were Muslim, then beat and bludgeoned Mr. Odisho to death.

Al-Thawrah fell to the Syrian rebels in September, 2012 and came under the control of al-Nusra Front and other Jihadist groups fighting in Syria. Nearly all of the Assyrians were forced to leave the area (AINA [8-2-2013](#)). The rebels told the Assyrians to convert to Islam to keep their jobs, and that if they refused they had to leave or be killed (AINA [8-4-2013](#)).

The rebels destroyed the Antiochian Orthodox church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and other Christian churches (AINA [8-9-2013](#)).

AINA News

Syrian Christian Converts to Islam At Hands of Al-Qaeda

By Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

Posted 2013-09-24 20:15 GMT

(AINA) -- Recently, Jihadi sources announced that Tony Malouhi, a Syrian Christian army officer who defected, was released from imprisonment by ISIS [al-Qaeda] after converting to Islam after having been threatened with execution by the group. A Twitter [message](#) from a Jihadi source in Arabic said "So he [Tony] became the prisoner in ISIS' custody as rumors went out that ISIS had killed him until today with his release and conversion to Islam and his name has become Mohammed Nour."



Tony Malouhi

Below is the back-story of his life translated from [Arabic](#).

The events of the revolution have urged all fronts by which one can intervene with the organization Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham, to prevent them from executing a renegade Christian officer [i.e. defector from the Assad regime] in Raqqa.

Sources close to the officer told Aks Alser, that Captain Tony Michel Malouhi had defected and had handed over the district of Mansoura completely to the Free Army, and then he remained for 20 days in the

village of 'Jawar al-Afs' in the province of Homs.

The sources added that the regime had stormed the village and had placed him in Homs prison, then moved him to Tabqa military airport, then to prison security in Raqqa, before the Nasr Salaheddin brigade had taken him prisoner after the liberation of Raqqa.

After a part of the Nasr Salaheddin brigade had pledged allegiance to ISIS, they proceeded to take 24 people prisoner, among them Tony Malouhi.

The sources confirmed that he was due to be executed this morning (Friday, 20 September), in the village of Baruda in Mansura in Raqqa, but the operation was postponed till the evening in light of the fact that the story of Malouhi was now among all activists and residents of the area in which Malouhi had been present.

The concerned activists implored intervention with ISIS in an effort to rescue Malouhi who had himself announced his defection more than a month before the liberation of Raqqa.

AINA News

Al-Qa'ida Desecrates Church in Syria

Posted 2013-10-30 01:40 GMT

Tel Abyad, Syria (AINA) -- recently in the town of Tel Abyad, where there is a small Christian community, the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS: al-Qa'ida) desecrated the local church. This was confirmed by a reliable ISIS source on [Twitter](#):

"ISIS: Raqqa: breaking of the cross raised over the church of Independence in Tel Abyad and seizing of the church after the cross worshippers' violation of their compact of *Dhimma*."

In other words, for failing to adhere to the terms imposed on them as *Dhimmis*, ISIS desecrated the church.

Dhimmis are non-Muslim people, specifically Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, who live under Muslim law. *Dhimmi* status is that of second class citizen subject to discriminatory laws and the imposition of abject humiliation at the hands of Muslims.

Translated for AINA by Aymenn-Jawad Al-Tamimi

AINA News

ISIS Destroys 3000 Year-old Assyrian Artifacts in Syria

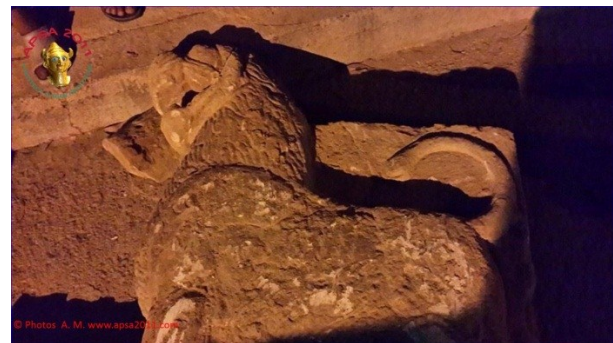
Posted 2014-05-17 07:55 GMT

(AINA) -- According to a report from the website www.apsa2011.com, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) has destroyed Assyrian statues and artifacts believed to be 3000 years old.

The Assyrian archaeological artifacts were illegally excavated from the Tell Ajaja site. Looting of Assyrian artifacts was also carried out in Iraq soon after 2003 by Al-Qaeda, which sold the artifacts to finance its operations. The looting occurred at the Baghdad Museum (AINA 2003-04-19) as well as archaeological sites which were left unguarded as a result of the collapse of the government of Saddam Hussein (AINA 2005-02-17).



ISIS fighters destroying 3000 year-old Assyrian statues in Syria.



AINA News

Assyrian Boy Killed By Sniper in Syria

Posted 2014-06-01 22:02 GMT

On May 28 two Assyrian teenagers were shot by a sniper as they were riding their motorcycle, returning from the village of Tel Hurmiz to their village of Um Gahrgan. Sheem Hormiz Sheeba (17) was driving the motorcycle with his friend Sargon (17) sitting behind him. Sheem was shot through the eye. The bullet exited from the rear of his head and entered Sargon's mouth. Sheem died immediately. Sargon was taken to hospital and is recovering well. Sheem was the only son of Hormiz Sheeba and was buried in his village on May 31. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The area of is under full control of the Kurdish Union Party (YPK) and its militias.



Funeral procession for Sheem Hormiz Sheeba. Hassake, Syria (AINA)

AINA News

Assyrians Leaving Hassakah, Syria for Fear of ISIS

Posted 2014-07-31 15:31 GMT

(AINA) -- The Assyrian population of Hassakah, Syria is leaving the region because of threats from the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), according to a [report](#) by the Adnkronos News Agency (AKI). Citing an official from the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO), AKI reports that the Christian Assyrian residents are abandoning their lands and homes because of fear that what happened in Mosul, Iraq will happen here.

Electric and water service in Hassakah is now severely limited and security is precarious, with kidnappings occurring on a daily basis.

According to the ADO official, ISIS's attempt to capture the city is a threat to the Assyrians, Arabs, Kurds and Yazidis, who have lived in the city for generations. Hassakah is also a rich cultural and archaeological area, with many Assyrian sites. The images of ISIS destroying cultural sites in Mosul has cast a shadow of fear over the city's population, particularly Assyrians. ISIS has already destroyed ancient Assyrian monuments and sites in other parts of Syria (AINA [2014-05-17](#)).

The residents of Hassakah are urging the international community to take action against ISIS, which threatens the city, with its diverse ethnic and religious population and cultural

heritage. Muslims have targeted Assyrians in Syria on several occasions. On February 11, 2013 rebel fighters from the al-Nusra Front took control of al-Thawrah (also known as al-Tabqah) and its strategic dam, the largest of its kind in the country. They also seized control of the three quarters that housed dam workers - many of whom were Christian Assyrians. Whilst they allowed the dam's original staff to remain in the city in order to continue its operation, management and upkeep, those who were not Sunni Muslim were not afforded the same privilege (AINA [2013-08-04](#)).

"Everything is now in Jabhat al-Nusra's hands," complained one Assyrian refugee, "All the Muslims stayed there, but if any Assyrians want to go back they have to become Muslim or else they will be killed."

Assyrians reported their property being stolen, their homes being confiscated, and their possessions being sold on the black market in order to buy weapons and ammunition. In many of these cases, those forcefully dispossessed were not even allowed the chance to take with them any of their personal belongings.

On July 27, 2013 the Assyrian village of Tel Hormizd was attacked. Fifty Arab Muslims on motorcycles entered the village and began a shooting rampage. According to residents, the Muslims fired indiscriminately, wounding two Assyrians. The Assyrians repelled the attack by shooting at the Muslims. It is not known if any of the attackers was injured. It was the third and largest attack on the village of Tel Hormizd in two months (AINA [2013-07-30](#)).

On September 21, 2013 a 26 year-old Assyrian man, Ninar Odisho, was murdered in the afternoon in the city of Al-Thawra (al-Tabqah), where he had gone to safeguard his family's house and property. Mr. Odisho was with two Muslim friends when they were approached by Jihadist rebels, who questioned the three men at gun point. The rebels released his friends upon learning they were Muslim, then beat and bludgeoned Mr. Odisho to death (AINA [2013-09-23](#)).

AINA News

Three Assyrians Kidnapped in Syria

Posted 2014-10-02 05:03 GMT

(AINA) -- Three Assyrian men have been kidnapped in Hasaka, Syria, according to Assyrian Human Rights Watch. The three men were kidnapped in the town of Tel Tamar, in the Khabour region of Hasaka, which is mainly populated by Assyrians. The kidnappers are believed to be affiliated with ISIS.

The three men are:

- Dr. Samir David Hormuz from the village of Tel Nasri
- George Barkho Khoshaba from the village of Tel Balua
- Ninos John Isho from the village of Tel Balua

Assyrian in Syria have been targeted for terror, kidnapping and murder by Jihadists. Here is a partial list:

- Ninar Odisho was murdered in the city of Al-Thawra (AINA [2013-09-23](#))
- Two Bishops were kidnapped (AINA [2013-04-23](#))
- Zohair David, an Assyrian from Tel Goran, was kidnapped and killed (AINA [2013-04-03](#))
- Nina Jamil Oshana was killed in a bus attack (AINA [2013-01-31](#))
- Hundreds Assyrian families were expelled from Al_Thawra by Islamists (AINA [2013-08-02](#))
- The Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo was attacked three times (AINA [2012-11-20](#))

AINA News

Two Assyrians Killed in Syria

Posted 2015-01-23 19:51 GMT



Assyrians Gabriel Bassam Gabro (L), killed in Homs, and Karam Bushe, killed in Hassaka, Syria. Homs, Syria (AINA) -- Two Assyrians have been killed in Syria, one in a suicide car bombing in the New Sabri neighborhood in Homs, Syria, the other in fighting between Kurdish and government forces in Hassaka. The two

have been identified as Gabriel Bassam Gabro, a petrochemical engineering student and a deacon in the Syrian Orthodox Church from Homs, and Karam Bushe from Hassaka.

The bombing occurred on Wednesday afternoon near a commercial compound, killing at least 5 people and wounding 35 others.

In October of 2014 a suicide bomber targeted a student gathering in the New Sabri neighborhood, killing 54 people, including 47 children.

AINA News

ISIS Threatens Assyrians in Syria, Women and Children Evacuated

Posted 2015-02-03 21:47 GMT



Assyrian women and children being evacuated from Tel Hormizd, in Hassaka, Syria (AINA photo)



Photo of ISIS members in Tel Hormizd, Syria. ISIS forced the Assyrian residents to remove the cross from the church (AINA photo)

Hassake, Syria (AINA) -- Two days ago ISIS ordered Assyrians in the region of Hassaka to remove the crosses from their churches and to pay *jizya* (Christian poll tax), warning residents that if they failed to pay they would have to leave or else be killed. There are 35 contiguous Assyrian villages on both sides of the Khabur river, stretching for 80 kilometers from Hassaka west to Ras al-Ain.

On Sunday ISIS entered the village of Tel Hormizd (AINA [2015-01-31](#)) and forced residents to remove the cross from the church. After ISIS left the town, the women and children were evacuated to the town of Um Gargen, directly north across the river, while the Assyrian men, who are armed, stayed to defend their town. Kurdish fighters from the YPG have also entered the town to protect it.



The church in Tel Hormizd, Syria and the cross that was removed from it by ISIS (AINA photo)

An Assyrian from Tel Talaa, 50 kilometers west of Tel Hurmizd, has been kidnapped. The residents Tel Talaa, which is on the southern bank, are also crossing the river to towns on the northern bank, which are mostly empty because the Assyrian residents have emigrated to the West.

In the village of Tel Tawil, located on the northern bank about 60 kilometers west of Tel Hurmizd Assyrian fighters successfully repelled an ISIS attack.

In Tel Hurmizd Assyrian fighters remounted the cross on the Church of St. Pithew, which had been taken down under threats from ISIS.

It is estimated that only 3,000 Assyrians remain in these villages, whose population once numbered over 35,000.



Assyrian fighters guard the church in Tel Hormizd, Syria, an Assyrian village that has been threatened by ISIS (AINA photo).



Assyrian fighters mounting the cross on the Church of St. Pithew in Tel Hurmizd (AINA photo)

AINA News

ISIS Attacks Assyrian Villages in Syria, 4 Killed, Dozens Captured, Churches Burned

Posted 2015-02-23 22:49 GMT



Assyrians fleeing ISIS take shelter in St. Mary's Church in Hasaka, Syria.

The Assyrian church of Mar Bisho on fire, in Tel Shamiran, Syria. Hassaka, Syria (AINA) -- Fighting broke out at 5 AM today between ISIS and Assyrian and Kurdish fighters in the Hasaka province in northeast Syria. ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, and Abu Tena. The ISIS fighters were met by members of Assyrian Guards (called *Natorehs*), an Assyrian Militia, and Kurdish fighters from YPG. 4 Assyrian fighters were killed as well tens of ISIS fighters. According to the latest reports, fighting is still ongoing in Tel Tamar.

ISIS has abducted dozens of Assyrian men, women and children, including 12 from Tel Hurmiz, 15 from Tel Goran. They have been brought to Abdul Aziz mountain. The residents of the villages of Tel Shamiran (approximately 50) and Tel Jazira (about 40) are being held captive in their own villages by ISIS.

According to a [report](#) by Newsweek, ISIS will use the Assyrian hostages for a prisoner swap with Kurdish fighters.

A number of churches have been destroyed, including the church in Tel Hurmiz, one of the oldest churches in Syria, the Mar Bisho church in Tel Shamiran, the church in Qabr Shamiy and the church in Tel Baloua.

There are 35 contiguous Assyrian villages on both sides of the Khabur river, stretching 80 kilometers west from Hassaka to Ras al-Ain. The remaining inhabitants of these villages, some 3000, have now been evacuated, most to Hasaka and about 200 to Qamishli. Hundreds have taken refuge in St. Mary church in Hasaka and and St. Ephrem church in Qamishli.

In Hasaka the Assyrian Democratic Organization was aiding the Assyrian refugees with housing and food.

AINA spoke by telephone to Hani Zaya, whose parents, who live in Tel Goran, were abducted by ISIS. According to Mr. Zaya, local Arabs who are members of ISIS and who knew the Assyrian village residents reportedly brought them to "safe-houses" in nearby villages. None of the captives have answered or made telephone calls. Calls made by relatives of the captives have been answered by ISIS members, who have said there is nothing to be done for the hostages.

An Assyrian woman who lives in Indiana said her mother, father and sister were abducted in Tel Jazira.



ISIS fighters killed by Assyrians fighters.

The Syrian army is reportedly 3-5 kilometers from Tel Hurmiz and has offered assistance.



Milad Sammy Adam, an Assyrian from the village of Tel Baz, was killed in the ISIS attack



Damage caused by fighting in the Assyrian village of Tel Khareta, in Hasaka, Syria

Three weeks ago ISIS ordered Assyrians in the region of Hassaka to remove the crosses from their churches and to pay jizya (Christian poll tax), warning residents that if they failed to pay they would have to leave or else be killed (AINA [2015-02-03](#)).

AINA News

Assyrian Hostages in Syria Are 'Safe', Says ISIS Member

Posted 2015-02-24 20:25 GMT

An Assyrian woman and her children who fled from Tel Tamar because of the attacks by ISIS.

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- ISIS attacked several Assyrian villages in Syria yesterday, killing 4 Assyrian guards and kidnapping more than 90 Assyrian men, women and children, and destroying at least 4 churches (AINA [2015-02-23](#)). About half of the abducted Assyrians were brought to the Abdul Aziz mountain, while the remainder are held captive in their villages, Tel Shamiran and Tel Jazira.



The following are the names of the Assyrians kidnapped from the village of Tel Goran:

- Yikhannis Adam
- Michael Mirza
- Elias Mirza
- Abdo Mirza
- Mirza Mirza
- Wegram Mirza
- Fabronia Mirza
- Miryana Mirza (6 Years old)
- Wegram Mirza (Unconfirmed)
- George Ishmael
- Ishmael Ishmael
- Joseph Ishmael (Unconfirmed)
- George Esho
- Salem Dashto
- Aweya Zaya
- Joseph Zaya
- Joel Zaya (Unconfirmed)
- Tato Odisho
- Jamil Odisho
- George Odisho
- Jamil Kolyat
- Awiya Wegram
- Joseph Esho
- Najma Youkhanna
- Mirza Khaya (Unconfirmed)
- 5 unnamed women

AINA spoke by telephone to Matthew*, an Assyrian in Hasaka, who said that his very close friend Nabil*, a Muslim Arab, expressed sorrow and sympathy for the kidnapped Assyrians. According to Matthew, Nabil is not a member of ISIS but he knows many local Syrians who have joined ISIS. Nabil said he would make inquiries. Nabil called two local Arabs who are members of ISIS and inquired about the condition of the Assyrian hostages. The local ISIS members said the hostages are "safe" and in "good condition" and will be released within a few days.

But given the history of the brutality of ISIS, Matthew said he doubts the hostages would be released.

Assyrian woman describes flight from Tel Tamar

In a video posted of facebook, an Assyrian women describes the events of yesterday morning and how she fled from Tel Tamar to Qamishli. Here is the transcript:

We fell asleep in total quiet, nothing was going on. We woke up to the sound of clashing, we didn't know what it was, until we saw that everyone in the village was fleeing because ISIS had entered the village. We heard that in Tel Shamiran they had seized the women and taken them up to the mountain, and they did the same thing in Tel Jazira. We tried calling them, there was no response. They [ISIS] went into Tel Hurmiz and killed people there, even young men. We didn't understand what had happened fully, but there was so much fear in our hearts that we didn't even know how to escape. In the south [of the village] even old men and women were fleeing. All the roads were closed, there wasn't a single car. No one could help us. We called some people in Qamishli who came to get us, who came to Zumar after Tel Tamar. People were running with house clothes on.

Question: Did they have enough space in the cars?

Yes, no one remained in the village. The men remained and ushered the women and children, and they still remain there, fighting. Let us see when this war will end and we can return to our homes

Question: When did you arrive here?

We left at 8 in the morning, all the phones were ringing. I don't know what time it was, the world was lost on us. By the time we were ready to flee, there wasn't even a route available for us to take, they were all full. It was like that.

AINA News

Assyrians Captured By ISIS Now At 150, Negotiations for Their Release in Progress

Posted 2015-02-26 02:33 GMT



Assyrians killed by ISIS, from left: Milad Sammy Adam, Julian Osi, Tamir Darwish, Marius Hurmiz (AINA photo)

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- The number of Assyrians captured by ISIS in yesterday's attacks (AINA [2015-02-23](#)) is now estimated to be at 150. ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Hasaka, Syria, killing at least 9 Assyrians who were defending their villages. There has been fierce fighting since yesterday between ISIS and Assyrian and Kurdish militia. Up to 130 ISIS members have been killed.

Negotiations to free some of the hostages are ongoing. Prominent Arab Sheiks in Hasaka are acting as intermediaries between ISIS and Assyrian leaders. The Sheiks are pushing ISIS to at least release the Assyrians who did not fight. According to sources in Hasaka, ISIS has agreed in principle to release those Assyrians who offered no resistance but flatly rejected releasing those who fought back.

The group of Assyrians that may be released is believed to be being held in Abdul Aziz Mountain, approximately 60 kilometers from the Assyrian villages where they were captured. This group of Assyrians is from the villages of Tel Goran, Abu Tina and Tel Jazira.

Nine Assyrians Killed

At least nine Assyrians have been killed fighting ISIS, they are:

- Milad Sammy Adam
- George Maholian
- Tamir Darwish
- Marius Hurmiz
- Simon Somo
- Abraham Qatina
- Joseph Afeh
- Julian Osi
- Haysam from Hasaka



Simon Somo, killed fighting ISIS

ISIS has captured 12 Assyrian fighters from Tel Tamar, including two females.

Killed fighting ISIS, from left: Julian Osi, Marius Hurmiz, Joseph Afeh, Haysam



Refugees Need Shelter

The Assyrians who managed to escape to Hasaka and Qamishli left only with the clothes on their backs. There is a critical need for shelter for the 3000 Assyrian refugees.

The Assyrian community in Sydney collected 60,000 Australian dollars yesterday in an emergency fundraiser. The money will be sent to Syria to aid the refugees.

Bishop Meelis Zaia, the Metropolitan of Australia and New Zealand for the Assyrian Church of the East, is meeting with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and other branches of government to request aid for the Assyrians who have been displaced by the ISIS attacks.

The following is a partial list of the Assyrians captured by ISIS:

Village of Tel Hurmiz

1. Solomon Safar Gilyana
2. George Bolus Esho
3. Fuad Oshana Younan
4. Elias Darmo Warda
5. Youkhanna Bolbul Qatina
6. Zaya Benjamin Dinkha
7. Rihana Benjamin Dikha (F)
8. Wedad Eliya Younan (F)
9. Shamiran Esho Younan (F)
10. Naima (F)
11. Hermiz Gewargis Khano

Village of Qaber Shamiyeh

1. Enyir Warda Abdal
2. Fawwaz Joseph Tammo
3. Awiya Youkina Mallik Hermiz

Village of Tel Goran

1. Yikhannis Adam
2. Michael Mirza
3. Elias Mirza
4. Abdo Mirza
5. Mirza Mirza
6. Wegram Mirza
7. Fabronia Mirza (F)
8. Miryana Mirza (F, 6 Years old)
9. Wegram Mirza (unconfirmed)
10. George Ishmael
11. Ishmael Ishmael
12. Joseph Ishmael (unconfirmed)
13. George Esho
14. Salem Dashto
15. Aweya Zaya
16. Joseph Zaya
17. Joel Zaya (unconfirmed)
18. Tato Odisho
19. Jamil Odisho
20. George Odisho
21. Jamil Kolyat
22. Awiya Wegram
23. Joseph Esho
24. Najma Youkhanna

25. Mirza Khaya (unconfirmed)
26. 5 unnamed women

Village of Tel Fweidat

1. Sargon Ninos
2. Joseph Ninos
3. Wedad Rihana Benjamin (F)
4. Mayo Karko Hanna (F)

Village of Tel Jazira

1. Shwel Esha
2. Hanan Esha
3. Munira Esha
4. Amira Esha (F)
5. Ramziya Rihana
6. Raswina Esha (F)
7. Mariam Gawriyeh (F)
8. Abdul-Massih Noya
9. Iris Darmo (F)
10. Sheren Darmo (F)
11. Jamila Kako (F)
12. Mansour Darmo (Child)
13. Najiba Youkhanna
14. Joseph Youkhanna
15. Firyal Youkhanna
16. Hanna Youkhanna (F, Child)
17. Mary Youkhanna (F, Child)
18. Sorin Youkhanna (Child)
19. Edwisha Youkhanna
20. Elissa Ishmael
21. Hamson Youkhanna
22. Salwa Roel (F)
23. Bironia Samo (F)
24. Amana Kako (F)
25. Manal Kako
26. Adam Kako
27. Farida Kako (F)
28. Shamiran Kako (F)
29. Helana Kako (F)
30. Shwarekh Khoshaba
31. Elizabeth Khoshaba (F)
32. Malak
33. Khorshid Giwargis
34. Gabi Ishmael
35. Mouna Esha (F)
36. Jessica Ishmael (F, Child)
37. Sharbel Ishmael (Child)
38. Wanes Ishmael

39. Ishtar Ishmael (F)
40. Timatios Ishmael
41. Shamiran Mako (F)
42. Marleen Ishmael (F)
43. Miryana Ishmael (F)
44. Ashor Nidor
45. Roel Dinkha
46. Aweshalem Dinkha
47. Sadeq Ishmael
48. Loudia Hermiz (F)
49. Rami Ishmael
50. Michael Ishmael
51. Ninorta Ishmael (F)
52. Giwargis Ishmael

There are 35 contiguous Assyrian villages on both sides of the Khabur river, stretching 80 kilometers west from Hassaka to Ras al-Ain. The remaining inhabitants of these villages, some 3000, have now been evacuated, most to Hasaka and about 200 to Qamishli. Hundreds have taken refuge in St. Mary church in Hasaka and and St. Ephrem church in Qamishli.

Thirty Five Assyrian Villages on the Khabur River in Syria



Three weeks ago ISIS ordered Assyrians in the region of Hassaka to remove the crosses from their churches and to pay jizya (Christian poll tax), warning residents that if they failed to pay they would have to leave or else be killed (AINA [2015-02-03](http://www.aina.org)).

AINA News

Up to 373 Assyrians Captured By ISIS,

Executions Have Begun

<http://www.aleteia.org>

Posted 2015-02-26 23:43 GMT



**Funeral service for Milad Sammy Adam and the other 8 Assyrians fighters killed by ISIS.
Hasaka, Syria**



Killed fighting ISIS, from left: Julian Osi, Marius Hurmiz, Joseph Afeh, Haysam

(AINA) -- According to Assyrian leaders in Hasaka, the number of Assyrians captured by ISIS is as high as 373. There are 150 confirmed captives whose names are known. Various news agencies reporting today raised the number of captured Assyrians to 250.

Aid to the Church in Need is [reporting](#) that some of the captured Assyrians have been executed. The Aleteia news agency is reporting that up to 350 Assyrians may have been captured, and that executions have begun. Aleteia [reports](#) that 12 fighters from the Assyrian village of Tel Hurmiz, two of them women, have been executed by ISIS.

According to Assyrian fighters in Tel Tamar, ISIS has withdrawn from the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Shamiran and Tel Jazira. But residents and fighters have not reentered the villages for fear of booby traps left by ISIS.

Assyrian sources in Hasaka say ISIS claims to have sent pictures of the captured Assyrians to the U.S. government with an ultimatum to stop airstrikes against them else all Assyrians will be killed.

Funerals for Fighters

Funeral services were held yesterday for the 9 Assyrian fighters killed while fighting ISIS. Their names are:

- Milad Sammy Adam
- George Maholian
- Tamir Darwish
- Marius Hurmiz
- Simon Somo
- Abraham Qatina
- Joseph Afeh
- Julian Osi
- Haysam from Hasaka





AINA News

Negotiations for the Release of Assyrians Captured By ISIS Still Ongoing

Posted 2015-02-28 04:31 GMT

Danya Seno, killed in the initial attacks on Assyrian villages in Syria by ISIS.
(AINA) -- Prominent Arab sheiks met with Assyrian leaders and clergy in Hasaka today to discuss the plight of the Assyrians captured by ISIS, whose number is between 262 and 373. The sheiks are mediating negotiations between ISIS and Assyrian leaders for the release of the captives. According to Assyrian leaders, no Assyrians have been killed, but there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.



Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks.

On Monday ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

Nearly 3000 Assyrians have fled from the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river to Hasaka and Qamishli. There is a critical need for shelter for the refugees.

An Assyrian women interviewed by ARA News said ISIS has burned the village of Tel Jazira.

AINA News

Conflicting Reports on Release of Some of the Assyrians Held By ISIS

Posted 2015-03-01 00:57 GMT



A protest against ISIS, organized by the Eastern Churches of the Bay Area, was held on Saturday in San Francisco

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- Assyrian activists are reporting that 18 to 21 Assyrians that were captured by ISIS from the village of Tel Goran have been released. AINA has not been able to verify these reports. According to AINA's sources in Syria, Arab tribal leaders who are negotiating with ISIS for the release of the Assyrians have stated that ISIS has agreed in principle to release some Assyrians, especially those who did not fight.

CNN reported today that an ISIS court in Syria has ordered the release of 29 Assyrian hostages.

According to Assyrian leaders in Hasaka, none of the Assyrian civilians have been killed. However, there are reports claiming that ISIS has executed 12 Assyrian fighters it captured in the initial attacks on the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in northeast Syria, in the Hasaka province.

There are also reports claiming that ISIS will demand *jizya* (Christian poll tax) from the Assyrians, and will treat them as *Dhimmis* -- people recognized by the Koran. As *Dhimmis*, Assyrians are entitled to "protection" under Islamic law.

Assyrian leaders in Hasaka have also asked for arms and ammunition so that they may continue the fight against ISIS.

On Monday ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

Nearly 3000 Assyrians have fled from the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river to Hasaka and Qamishli. There is a critical need for shelter for the refugees.

AINA News

Assyrians Protest ISIS Attacks on Assyrians in Syria

Posted 2015-03-01 04:16 GMT



St. Bishu Church in the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiran, Syria, now occupied by ISIS

(AINA) -- Assyrians held protests in three world cities today to call attention to the ISIS attacks on Assyrians in Khabur, Syria, which have resulted in the capture of up to 373 Assyrians by ISIS and the destruction of churches in the 35 Assyrian villages in the Khabur river in the Hasaka province of Syria. At least 9 Assyrian fighters died in the initial attacks and 12 who were captured by ISIS are feared to have been executed.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Protest were held in Beirut, Stockholm and San Francisco. A candle light vigil will be held in Phoenix this Sunday. Other protests are planned for next week.

The number of Assyrians captured by ISIS is between 262 and 373. There are unconfirmed reports that 18 to 21 Assyrians that were captured by ISIS from the village of Tel Goran have been released. According to Assyrian leaders in Hasaka, none of the Assyrian civilians have been killed.

The Protests in Pictures

Beirut

Assyrians in Beirut protest ISIS attacks on Assyrian in Syria





Assyrians in Beirut protest ISIS attacks on Assyrian in Syria (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Sweden
Assyrians in Sweden protest ISIS attacks on Assyrian in Syria



AINA News

19 Assyrians Released By ISIS But Hundreds Remain Captured

Posted 2015-03-01 20:35 GMT

Mariana Mirza, 6, is still being held by ISIS (AINA photo).Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- 19 Assyrians that were captured from the village of Tel Goran have been released by ISIS and have arrived safely at St. Mary's Church in Hasaka, Syria. Negotiations for their release had been ongoing for three days and were mediated by local Arab tribal leaders.

Of the 19 that were released, 17 are men and 2 are women. But not all who were captured from Tel Goran were released. One of the hostages, an elderly woman, said that ISIS did not release her son and 2 other men who were guarding the village.

ISIS also refused to release a 6 year old girl named Mariana Mirza. According to reports from the released hostages, Bobo, the aunt of Mariana's father, had been released but volunteered to stay behind with the girl. The father of Mariana, Abdo Mirza, was given a letter of safe passage by ISIS and instructed to bring money to pay for the release of his daughter.

The hostages looked tired and disheveled but were otherwise unharmed.



See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

The number of Assyrians captured by ISIS is between 262 and 373. With the release of this group of 19, the number still being held by ISIS remains in the hundreds. According to Assyrian leaders, negotiations for the release of the remainder of the hostages are ongoing.

On February 23 ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Baloaa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

Nearly 3000 Assyrians have fled from the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river to Hasaka and Qamishli. There is a critical need for shelter for the refugees.



Mariana Mirza, 6, stands in front of her mother with her sisters and father. Mariana was not released by ISIS even though her parents were (AINA photo)



Assyrian hostages from Tel Goran who were captured and released by ISIS, at St. Mary's Church in Hasaka



Assyrian from Tel Goran who was captured and released by ISIS drinks water at St. Mary's Church in Hasaka



Assyrian from Tel Goran who was captured and released by ISIS drinks water at St. Mary's Church in Hasaka

An earlier version of this story stated that Mariana's mother was captured, but she never was. She is pregnant and had left Tel Goran before the attacks by ISIS in expectation of delivering her child.

AINA News

ISIS Releases 4 More Assyrians, Including 6 Year-old Mariana Posted 2015-03-03 21:43 GMT



Mariana Mirza, 6, was released today, two days after her parents were released. (AINA photo).Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- Today ISIS released four more Assyrian captives who were captured in the initial attacks on the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river, in the Hasaka province of Syria.

Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatrour Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza. Mariana's parents had also been captured and were released on Sunday (AINA [2015-03-01](#)), but ISIS did not release Mariana at that time. Mariana's father's aunt, Bobo, who also had been released, stayed behind with Mariana.

The released Assyrians are now in Hasaka.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

The number of Assyrians captured by ISIS is between 262 and 373. With the release of this group of 19, the number still being held by ISIS remains in the hundreds. According to Assyrian leaders, negotiations for the release of the remainder of the hostages are ongoing.

On February 23 ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

An earlier version of this story stated that Mariana's mother was captured, but she never was. She is pregnant and had left Tel Goran before the attacks by ISIS in expectation of delivering her child.

AINA News

Assyrians Demonstrate in Cities Around the World

Posted 2015-03-04 01:33 GMT

(AINA) -- Assyrians held demonstrations in cities around the world yesterday and today to call attention to the plight of the Assyrians in Khabur region of Hasaka, Syria, whose villages were attacked by ISIS on February 23. ISIS captured between 262 and 373 Assyrians in the initial attacks, subsequently releasing 23 on Sunday and today.

Demonstrations were held in the following cities:

- Phoenix, U.S.A.
- San Jose, U.S.A.
- Paris, France
- Krasnodar, Russia
- Borken, Germany
- Hamburg, Germany
- Wiesbaden, Germany
- Istanbul, Turkey
- Midyat, Turkey
- Tur Abdin, Turkey

On February 23 ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena. Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women. The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Photos and Videos of the Demonstrations

Krasnodar, Russia



Assyrians in Krasnodar, Russia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Assyrians in Krasnodar, Russia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)

Paris, France

Assyrians in Paris, France demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)

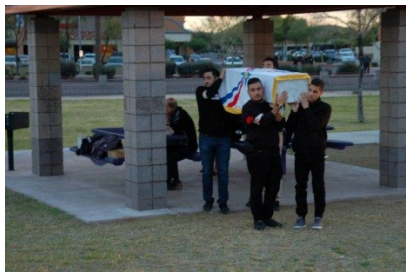


Phoenix, U.S.A

Assyrians in Phoenix, U.S.A. demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Assyrians in Phoenix, U.S.A. demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



San Jose, U.S.A.

Assyrians in San Jose, U.S.A. hold a vigil in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Assyrians in San Jose, U.S.A. hold a vigil in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



**Borken, Germany
Wiesbaden, Germany
Assyrians in Wiesbaden, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)**



Hamburg, Germany

Assyrians in Hamburg, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Turkey

Assyrians in various cities in Turkey demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Assyrians in Istanbul, Turkey

demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)

Assyrians in Midyat, Turkey

Tur Abdin, Turkey

Assyrians in Tur Abdin, Turkey demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



AINA News

Assyrian Hostage Released By ISIS: We Cannot Go Back to Our Homes
Posted 2015-03-05 02:10 GMT



ISIS member addresses the Assyrian hostages from Tel Goran at an unknown location
(photo: social media)



ISIS Assyrian hostages from Tel Goran at a unknown location, prior to their release
(photo: social media)

(AINA) -- On February 23 ISIS attacked 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river, in the Hasaka province in Syria, capturing between 262 and 373 Assyrians. The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira. ISIS captured 21 Assyrians from Tel Goran. On March 1 it released 19 of them, and on March 3 it released the remaining two, including a 6 year-old girl named Mariana Mirza.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

AINA spoke by telephone today with one of the Assyrians who was captured in Tel Goran and subsequently released. His name is Robert (name changed). He gave a full account of their ordeal, from the moment they were captured to the moment they arrived in Hasaka after being released.

AINA: Tell us how the attack started and how you were captured.

Robert: There usually are guards in the village. On that day the guards left for Hasaka at 4 A.M. ISIS entered the village at 5 A.M. and knocked on our doors and awoke us. They rounded us up, everyone in the village, and placed us in a small room. On the other [north] side of the river there were Kurdish and Assyrian fighters, and we could hear the exchange of fire between them and ISIS.

AINA: How close is your house to the river?

Robert: Our house is right on the river. We stayed in that room for about three hours until the fighting stopped. In the lull the bell at St. Zaya church in our village rang three times. This made the ISIS guys angry and agitated. They asked us if there was anyone else in the village. We said all of us are here and the village is empty. They asked how can the bell be ringing. We said we don't know.

ISIS then brought a car and drove us to Abdul Aziz Mountain.

AINA: How many of you were there?

Robert: 21. 17 men and 4 women.

AINA: What happened when you arrived at Abdul Aziz Mountain?

Robert: They placed us in two small rooms. We spent the night there.

AINA: What did they say to you?

Robert: They asked us to convert to Islam.
 AINA: That was the first thing they said?
 Robert: Yes, that was their idea that we should convert to Islam.
 AINA: Who was speaking to you?
 Robert: Many bearded people spoke to us, and everyone asked us to convert to Islam.
 AINA: How many?
 Robert: Very many. Everyone spoke to us, whoever saw us.
 AINA: What happened next?
 Robert: We spent the night there. In the morning they brought cars and drove us for about 4 hours into the mountains.
 AINA: Which mountains?
 Robert: Toward Tur Abdin [north; Tur Abdin is an Assyrian city in Turkey]. They placed us in a couple of homes.
 AINA: How long did you stay there?
 Robert: For 5 days, until we were released.
 AINA: When you arrived there what did ISIS say and do?
 Robert: They kept pressuring us to convert to Islam, it was their constant focus. But we were not mistreated.
 AINA: When ISIS asked you to convert to Islam, what was your answer?
 Robert: We said we would not convert. They said you must then pay the *jizya* [a Christian poll tax] or leave the country. That was the option given to us. We said we would pay the *jizya* but we would not convert.
 AINA: How much was the *jizya*?
 Robert: They said this time they would not collect the *jizya* because we had not fought against them. They said that they would release us on condition that we not return to our village. They said if we returned and they captured us again they would kill us without any other option, they would behead the men and enslave the women.
 AINA: Did anything else happen while you were there?
 Robert: No. We were provided with all necessities -- food, water, bathing facilities. They brought us everything.
 AINA: What did they say on the day of your release?
 Robert: They again said that we must not stay in the country, if they captured us again they would kill us.
 AINA: Did you return straight to Hasaka?
 Robert: Yes. They hired a car which brought us back to Hasaka, it was a long car. We drove straight to Hasaka.



ISIS Assyrian hostages from Tel Goran after their release, boarding the bus bound for Hasaka (photo: social media).

AINA: Who was driving the car? An ISIS member?

Robert: No, it was hired.

ANA: How did you feel when you arrived at Hasaka?

Robert: Frankly, we did not believe that we would come out alive, we had been frightened badly. When we arrived at Hasaka we were very happy when we saw the church of St. Mary full and all the people there.

AINA: During your captivity, what were you and the others thinking?

Robert: We were in constant fear, we did not believe they would release us. It was by grace of St. Zaya and God that we were saved.

AINA: Now that you are safely in Hasaka, what are you going to do?

Robert: We cannot return to our village. We will very soon go to Lebanon.

AINA: All 21 of you?

Robert: Not just us, all the Assyrians, Khabur is empty now. Everyone is making plans to leave.

AINA: What is your family going to do?

Robert: We are going to Lebanon. We cannot go back to Tel Goran, as ISIS is occupying the village, stealing and pillaging our homes.

AINA: Only in Tel Goran or in other villages as well?

Robert: All the villages: Tel Goran, Tel Shamiran, Tel Tawal, Tel Hurmiz and all the others.

AINA: ISIS is on the south bank of the river, and the Kurdish and Assyrian fighters on the north?

Robert: Yes. There are no Assyrian civilians left in the entire area.

AINA News

ISIS Crosses River in New Attacks on Assyrian Villages in Syria Posted 2015-03-07 19:49 GMT



Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- ISIS crossed to the northern side of the Khabur river in the Hasaka province of Syria At 2 A.M. this morning and launched fierce attacks on several villages. ISIS fighters crossed through the village of Tel Maghas and Tel Nasri and began fighting with

Kurdish and Assyrian fighters near the Arab village of Rgouba, which is near Tel Maghas, where Kurdish fighters maintain a checkpoint.

Heavy weapons and troops are streaming from the ISIS stronghold at Mount Abdul Aziz for a major assault on the entire area. The Syriac Military Council has asked for international aid.

ISIS appears to be pushing to take control of Tel Tamar, a strategic town in the area.

The villages of Rgouba Tel Maghas and Tel Nasri briefly fell under ISIS control but were recaptured by Kurdish and Assyrian fighters after Syrian regime planes bombed ISIS positions in Tel Shamiran, Oja and other locations.

There is intense street fighting in Tel Nasri. 17 Assyrian fighters are reportedly surrounded in Tel Maghas.

ISIS heavily shelled the towns of Tel Tamar, Tel Nasri, Tel Hafian, and Tel Maghas.

News of the release of the Assyrian prisoners appears to be false and may have been disinformation put out by ISIS in advance of these attacks.

The fighting continues.

Some information contributed by Ashur Giwargis from Beirut.

AINA News

Assyrians Hold Demonstrations As ISIS Continues Attacks on Assyrians

Posted 2015-03-09 22:44 GMT



Assyrians in Mainz, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria.

(AINA) -- ISIS launched a second series of attacks on Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Hasaka, Syria. In Iraq ISIS destroyed a third Assyrian archaeological site, the city of Khorsabad, more than 2700 years old. This comes on the heels of ISIS destroying the city of Nimrud, the Museum of Mosul, and the walls of the city of Nineveh.

In Syria, ISIS is still holding over 300 Assyrians who were captured in the first attacks on the Assyrian villages, which occurred on February 23.

Assyrians held demonstrations in cities around the world over the weekend to call attention to the desperate situation of the Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.

Demonstrations were held in the following cities:

- Augsburg, Germany
- Bellinzona, Switzerland
- Enschede, Holland
- Gutersloh, Germany
- Los Angeles, U.S.A
- Mainz, Germany
- Midyat, Turkey
- Moscow, Russia
- Tbilisi, Georgia

On February 23 ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Photos of the Demonstrations

Augsburg, Germany

Assyrians in Augsburg, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Assyrians in Augsburg, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Bellinzona, Switzerland

Assyrians in Bellinzona, Switzerland demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



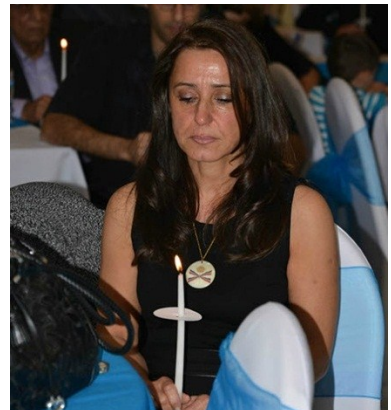
Enschede, Holland
Assyrians in Enschede, Holland demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Gutersloh, Germany
Assyrians in Gutersloh, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



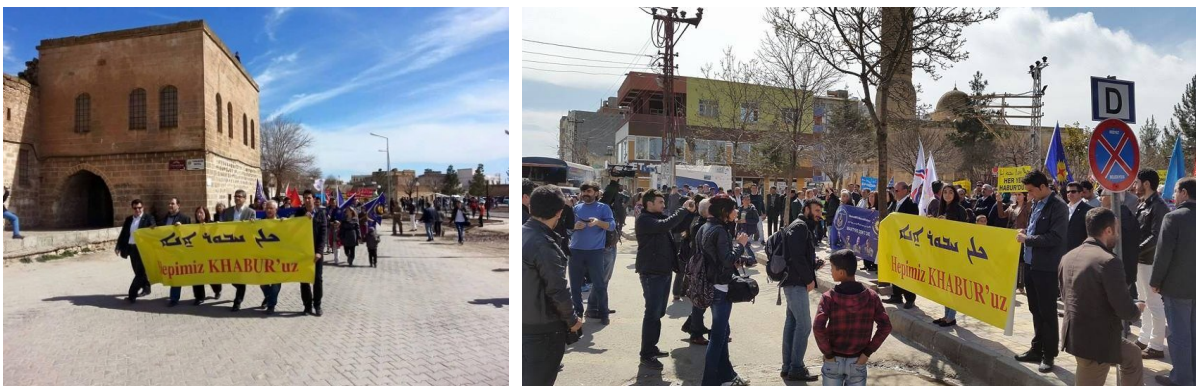
Los Angeles, U.S.A
Assyrians in Los Angeles, U.S.A. hold a vigil in support of Assyrians in Syria
(photos: Assyrian Enterprise)



Mainz, Germany
Assyrians in Mainz, Germany demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



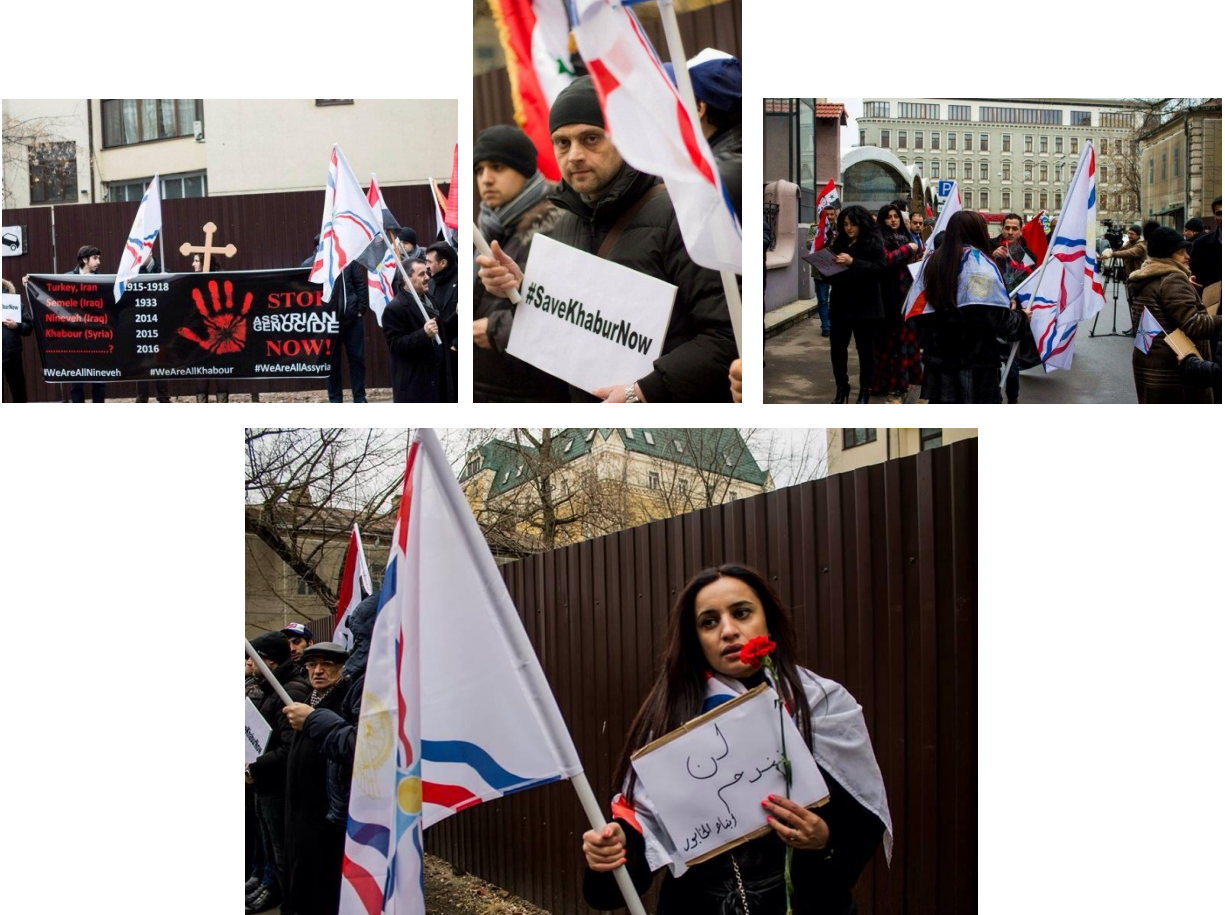
Midyat, Turkey
Assyrians in Midyat, Turkey demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria (AINA photo)



Moscow, Russia
Assyrians in Moscow, Russia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Assyrians in Moscow, Russia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Tbilisi, Georgia Assyrians in Tbilisi, Georgia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



Assyrians in Tbilisi, Georgia demonstrate in support of Assyrians in Syria



AINA News

Release of 52 Assyrian Families Captured By ISIS Delayed

Posted 2015-03-11 00:21 GMT

(AINA) -- According to the Vatican ambassador in Damascus, Mario Zinari, 52 Assyrian families who were captured by ISIS and who were supposed to be freed yesterday have not been released because Kurdish forces bombed the caravan containing the families. After the bombing ISIS decided to delay their release. There is no information on whether ISIS intends to go through with their release.

It is not clear why Kurdish forces bombed the Assyrian hostages caravan.

Yesterday AsiaNews [reported](#) that 52 Assyrian families had been freed.

On February 23 ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages of Tel Goran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Tamar, Tel Balooa Tel Shamiran, Tel Riman, Tel Nasra, Tel Khareta, Tel Jazira, Tel Fweidat, Qaber Shamiyeh and Abu Tena.

Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.

The majority of the Assyrians were captured from Tel Shamiran, Tel Hurmiz, Tel Goran and Tel Jazira (AINA [2015-02-26](#)).

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Ashur Giwargis contributed reporting from Beirut.

AINA News

Assyrians in Chicago Rally in Support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq

Posted 2015-03-14 09:14 GMT

(AINA) -- Assyrians held a rally in Chicago yesterday to call attention to the plight of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq ISIS destroyed a third Assyrian archaeological site, the city of Khorsabad, more than 2700 years old. This comes on the heels of ISIS destroying the city of Nimrud, the Museum of Mosul, and the walls of the city of Nineveh.



Assyrians in Chicago rally in support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.

In Syria, ISIS is still holding over 300 Assyrians who were captured in the first attacks on the Assyrian villages on February 23, which drove 3,000 Assyrians away, never to return. 6 months before that ISIS drove 200,000 Assyrians out of their homes in the Nineveh Plain in north Iraq, and they still have not returned, and most likely never will.

- See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

As they were being released, ISIS told the Assyrians from Syria to never return to their villages, else they would be killed. They are in Hasaka with only the clothes on their backs, all of their possessions lost forever, unreachable in their ISIS occupied village.

But the destruction of ancient Assyrian cities and artifacts in Iraq and Syria is the most devastating -- because of its symbolism. In destroying Assyrian archaeological and historical sites, ISIS is striking at the very root of Assyrian civilization, erasing all traces of their heritage and extirpating them from their lands.



Assyrians in Chicago rally in support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.



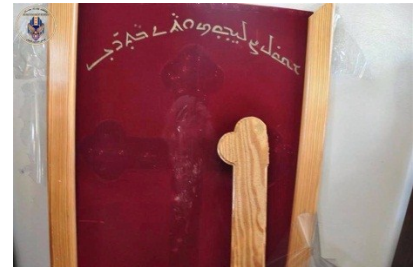
AINA News

ISIS Destroys Assyrian Churches

Posted 2015-03-16 23:28 GMT



St. George in Tel Maghas, Syria, which was ransacked by ISIS is now under Assyrian control (photo: facebook)



AINA News

Assyrians Demonstrate in Istanbul

Posted 2015-03-16 03:19 GMT

(AINA) -- Assyrian held a demonstration yesterday in Istanbul's Freedom Square to protest ISIS attacks on Assyrians in Khabur, Syria.

Despite the heavy rain, more than 200 people participated in the protest in the center of the city. A minute of silence remembering particularly the victims of the attacks in Khabur was

conducted. Erol Dora, the Assyrian member of Turkish Parliament and deputy of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), attended the demonstration.



Assyrians in Istanbul rally in support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.

In his speech Mr. Dora criticized Turkey's silence on what is happening in Khabur, Syria.

The Alevi-Bektashi Federation and Nor Zartonk along with DUR DE platform expressed their support against Muslim extremist. The protesters displayed signs saying "Assyrian people are not alone" and "Killer IS, get out of the Middle East!" and carried pictures of ancient Assyrian sculptures that were recently destroyed by ISIS.

In Iraq ISIS destroyed a third Assyrian archaeological site, the city of Khorsabad, more than 2700 years old. This comes on the heels of ISIS destroying the city of Nimrud, the Museum of Mosul, and the walls of the city of Nineveh.

In Syria, ISIS is still holding over 300 Assyrians who were captured in the first attacks on the Assyrian villages on February 23, which drove 3,000 Assyrians away, never to return. 6 months before that ISIS drove 200,000 Assyrians out of their homes in the Nineveh Plain in north Iraq, and they still have not returned, and most likely never will.

- See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

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Assyrians in Istanbul rally in support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.



Syndicated News

Unconvincing ISIS Video Shows Assyrian Captive Converting to Islam

By Ariel Cohen

<http://www.jpost.com>

Posted 2015-03-25

23:48 GMT

ISIS Video Shows Kidnapped Assyrian Christian Converting to Islam; Jihadists Call It 'Voluntary' (photo: MEMRI). The Islamic State has been known to produce high quality propaganda videos in the past year, with special effects and convincing narratives, but their latest video, supposedly depicting the conversion of a captured Assyrian, is far from believable. In the video, an ISIS member introduces a captured Assyrian Christian, who was likely among the 220 Christians kidnapped from Northern Syria in February. "This is a message to the Christians who are watching and especially the Assyrians captured in the recent raid, by the Islamic State. I address the Christians mobilized by the Jews and the servants of the Cross, who claimed that the Islamic State and its soldiers seek to kill and slaughter," The jihadi said to the camera. "We say to them: Listen to what we have to say and not what is said about us."



Islamic State militants have abducted at least 220 people from Assyrian Christian villages in northeastern Syria during a three day offensive, a monitor that tracks violence in Syria said in February. Since then, they have released roughly twenty of the Christians, but the rest remain in captivity. The video then cuts to the captive, who was likely captured as part of that raid, and who the jihadi upholds as an example of the Islamic State's positive influence. The captive sits on a stoop, looking nervously into the camera. The jihadi explains that the man was once an "armed Christian" but has since converted. "I would like to tell my people and to all the Christians that I have converted to Islam and become one of them," the captive said in a blatantly forced and uncomfortable tone. "If only all the Christians would convert to Islam, rather than be a polytheist. I wish they would join the religion of Islam." When asked by his captors if he forcibly left Christianity, the captive replies that he converted out of conviction, and was not forced at all.



- See the video [here](#).

The captor then goes in for an awkward hug as a sign of friendship or brotherhood, but it looks like a painful ordeal for both parties involved. Finally, with a nervous grin on his face, the captive holds up his pointer finger towards the heavens and proclaims, "I attest that there is no other God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger." An unidentified source told ARA News the militants filmed the video "in the village of Tel al-Jayer." "The Islamic State is holding Assyrian abductees in this village following sudden attacks on Tel Temir's surrounding villages by the Kurdish fighters and allies last February," said the source.

AINA News

ISIS Destroys Assyrian Church in Syria

Posted 2015-04-05 16:28 GMT

The Assyrian Virgin Mary Church in Tel Nasri, Syria, was destroyed by ISIS today at about 9 AM. Hasaka (AINA) -- ISIS destroyed the Virgin Mary Church in the Assyrian village of Tel Nasri in Khabur, Syria today at about 9 AM. after Assyrian and Kurdish fighters attempted to reenter the village. According to reports, the church has been leveled.

On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur River, including Tel Nasri, Nine Assyrian fighters died defending their villages in the initial attacks and there are reports that ISIS has executed at least 12 Assyrian fighters who were captured, two of them women.

ISIS abducted up to 373 Assyrians in the initial attack and subsequently released 23 of them, all from the village of Tel Goran. The remainder are still being held and their whereabouts is unknown.

- See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

AINA News

Assyrian Military Leader Killed in Syria

Posted 2015-04-23 04:15 GMT

Assyrian Guards commander David Gindo, killed in Syria.

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- David Gindo, the commander of the Assyrian guards in the Khabur area, has been killed in an apparent assassination. Elias Naser, who was with Mr. Gindo in the car, was critically injured.

Mr. Gindo was commander of the Syriac Military Unit (MPU), who have been fighting alongside the Kurdish YPG forces against ISIS.



On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages along the Khabur river, capturing 250 Assyrians and driving more than 3,000 from their homes, who have not returned.

See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#).

AINA News

ISIS Bombs Assyrian, Armenian Churches in Syria

Posted 2015-04-29 19:18 GMT

The St. Odisho Assyrian Church in Tel Tal, Syria, was bombed by ISIS yesterday.

(AINA) -- According to reports from Syria and also the Turkish press, ISIS has bombed two churches in Syria, the St. Odisho Assyrian Church in Tel Tal and the St. Rita Tilel Armenian Church in Aleppo. The churches were bombed yesterday.

Located on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province in Syria, Tel Tal is one of the 35 Assyrian villages that was attacked by ISIS on February 23. ISIS captured nearly 300 Assyrians in those attacks and subsequently released 23, all from the village of Tel Goran. The remaining Assyrians are still being held captive.



See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

The entire Assyrian population of these villages, nearly 3,000, has left their homes and are expected never to return. Some have already emigrated to Lebanon. Most are living in Hasaka or Qamishli and are planning to leave Syria.

AINA News

ISIS Demands \$23 Million for Assyrian Hostages, Vigil Held in Australia

Posted 2015-05-01 21:58 GMT

(AINA) -- Assyrian church leaders are reporting that ISIS has rejected a ransom offer for the 230 Assyrians it captured on February 23 in the Hasaka province of Syria (AINA [2015-02-23](#)). 253 Assyrians were captured in the initial attacks on the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river. 23 were subsequently released but 230 remain in captivity, including 52 children, 84 females and 95 males.

ISIS has demanded 100,000 US dollars for each hostage, for a total of 23 million.

Leading the negotiations with ISIS is Bishop Mellis of Australia. In an interview with SBS Radio in Australia, Bishop Mellis said:

We are a poor nation. These people have not done anything wrong and won't harm anyone. We as Assyrians do not have this amount of money you are asking for.

We offered an amount of money that we cannot disclose at this time. With the amount we offered, we thought it was acceptable, to have the return of the 230 people.

After two days, they (ISIS) told us, "the amount the church offered was not acceptable. From now on, we will no longer negotiate with you."

The hostages have been moved to Raqqa, the ISIS stronghold in Syria, and are now awaiting trial in Islamic court under Sharia law, where a Muslim judge will decide their fate. Desperate church leaders have pleaded for assistance neighboring countries, including Turkey, in securing the release of the Assyrian hostages.

Assyrian Candlelight Vigil Held in Melbourne, Australia

Victoria's Assyrian community came together yesterday at a Candlelight Vigil in solidarity with the 200,000 displaced Assyrians in Northern Iraq and the 230 Assyrian hostages held by the Islamic State in north-eastern Syria since February 23, 2015.



The event was held at Federation Square in the heart of Melbourne's Central Business District and drew a large crowd of supporters.

Assyrian Church of the East Bishop Mellis of Australia

The event was attended by representatives of a wide number of Assyrian churches and organizations as well as members of Victoria's Greek, Armenian, Coptic, Kurdish and Alevi communities. Representatives of the Victorian Council of Churches and the international aid organisation Act for Peace were also present along with supporters from the wider Australian population.



Candlelight Vigil Held in Melbourne, Australia, in support of Assyrians in Syria and Iraq.

The solemn event was well received with the program including a minute of silence in honor of all suffering persecution and displacement, the reading of poetry and biblical reflections and prayer.

AINA News

ISIS Release Two Assyrian Hostages in Syria, All 35 Assyrian Villages Liberated

Posted 2015-05-26 22:25 GMT

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- ISIS released two female Assyrian hostages yesterday in Syria, in the Hasaka region. The women were among the 253 Assyrians captured when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages along the Khabur river on February 23. The two released women, both elderly, were Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran. They were both taken to hospital in Hasaka. Mrs. Rehana had a broken hip, Ms. Kanoon had no ailments.



Ramziyya Rehana, an Assyrian released by ISIS after 3 months of captivity, at a hospital in Hasaka, Syria

With the release of these two Assyrians, the number of Assyrians still being held by ISIS now stands at 228. ISIS released 19 Assyrians on March 1st and 4 more on March 3rd -- all from the village of Tel Goran.

The situation in Khabour

All the Assyrian villages on the Khabur river have been liberated. The forces responsible for this were mainly the Syrian army, aided by Kurdish YPG and Assyrian militias.

Assyrians have started to return to Tel Tamer but not to the other villages since they have been destroyed. About 30 families have returned to Tel Tamer so far.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Ashur Giwargis contributed reporting from Beirut.

Syndicated News

ISIS Destroys Churches, Loots Houses in Syria

By John Burger

<http://www.aleteia.org>

Posted 2015-05-28 22:04 GMT

Aleteia has obtained this photo of St. Mary's Assyrian Church in the northeastern Syrian village of Tel Nasri. "The church was exploded and damaged by IS as they controlled the village," said Father Emanuel Youkhana, who heads the humanitarian aid group in Iraq called CAPNI--Christian Aid Program. Islamic



State militants reportedly boobytrapped the church on Easter Sunday this year. Since February, they had controlled many of the villages of the Khabur River valley, a predominantly Christian area, but relinquished control recently due to a combination of US airstrikes, Syrian military assaults and Kurdish and Assyrian military opposition. ISIS' incursion into the region on February 23 led to the mass exodus of the local population and was accompanied by the kidnapping of hundreds of Christians.

A few were released after a short time, but most have not been heard from since. Fides news agency, however, reported Wednesday that two elderly women in the group of more than 230 Assyrian Christians taken hostage in February have been released and were admitted to a hospital in Hassak

AINA News

ISIS Release Assyrian Hostage in Syria

Posted 2015-06-17 18:33 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS released yesterday one of the 253 Assyrians who were captured in Syria on February 23, when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river, near Hasaka.

The released hostage was identified as Francois Sawa, 70, from the village of Tel Shamiram, and was reported to be in good condition. Francois Sawa was released yesterday by ISIS in Syria (screen capture, AssyriaTV).

The release of Mr. Sawa brings the number of Assyrians still being held by ISIS to 227. ISIS released 19 Assyrians on March 1st and 4 more on March 3rd -- all from the village of Tel Goran, and 2 on May 25,



The situation in Khabour

All the Assyrian villages on the Khabur river have been liberated, but ISIS has left booby traps in homes and fields, causing a delay in people returning to their homes. ISIS also destroyed many churches and vandalized a large number of homes in the villages it briefly controlled.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

AINA News

Video Shows Massive Destruction in Liberated Assyrian Village in Syria

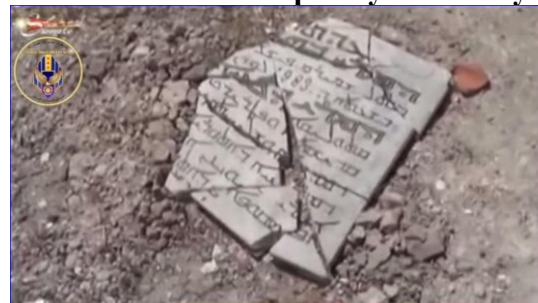
Posted 2015-06-19 00:23 GMT



St. Bishu Church in the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiran, Syria, was destroyed by ISIS.



The cross of the Mar Bishu Church in the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiram, Syria, remains standing, but the church was completely leveled by ISIS (screen capture)



Plaque from the Mar Bishu Church in the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiram, Syria (screen capture).

(AINA) -- A video posted on youtube by the Syriac Military Council (NFS), an Assyrian militia that has been fighting ISIS in Syria, shows members of MFS entering the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiram after it has been liberated from ISIS. The video shows massive destruction in the village. ISIS scorched farm fields, destroyed buildings and homes and completely leveled the church of Mar Bishu. The damage caused by ISIS runs into millions of dollars and renders large parts of the village uninhabitable. In addition, ISIS has left booby traps in homes and farm fields in the villages it has retreated from.

There is little commentary in the video, but at one point one of the Assyrian fighters whistles in astonishment at the level of destruction he sees.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Tel Shamiram was captured on February 23 when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Syria. ISIS captured 253 Assyrians, 108 number from Tel Shamiram. ISIS has released 26 Assyrians to date.

AINA News

ISIS Captures 250 Assyrians in Syria

Posted 2015-08-07 21:49 GMT

(AINA) -- According to reports from human rights groups and observers, ISIS has abducted between 150 and 250 Assyrians from the town of Qaryatain, which fell to ISIS yesterday. Qaryatain is near Homs.

According to a press statement from the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Homs, 250 Assyrians were captured by ISIS, including women and children. A number of them were captured at the Syriac Catholic Mar Elia monastery.

The Assyrian Federation of Sweden is reporting that 100 families are being held. If this is true, this would make the number of abducted much larger than 250.

ISIS has reportedly created a list of individuals to be kidnapped because they are "collaborating" with the Syrian regime.

More than 1,500 people have fled Qaryatain Since fighting started on August 4.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province, capturing 253 Assyrians and driving 3,000 from their homes. It subsequently released 25 Assyrians, but 228 remain in captivity. All the villages have since been liberated but very few Assyrians have returned.

It is estimated that 600,000 Christians have left Syria since the war began.

AINA News

ISIS Release 22 Assyrian

Hostages in Syria

Posted 2015-08-12 00:22 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS has released 22 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.



The 22 Assyrians who were released, 14 of them women, were from the villages of Tal Shamiram and Tal Jazira. The number of Assyrians still being held is now 205.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

ISIS released Assyrians on the following dates:

- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.

- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

Negotiations to release the captives have been ongoing between the Assyrian Church of the East and ISIS, who have demanded \$100,000 for each hostage. According to observers, negotiations are ongoing for the release of the remaining hostages.



Assyrian hostages released by ISIS in Syria.

AINA News

ISIS Destroyes Monasteries and non-Assyrian Churches

Posted 2015-08-20

St. Elian monastery in Qaryatain, Syria, which is near Homs, was destroyed by ISIS after it captured Qaryatain on August 6 (AINA).

Non Assyrian Churches

- The St. Rita Tilel Armenian Church in Aleppo was bombed by ISIS on April 28 (AINA [2015-04-29](#)).
- The Armenian Genocide Memorial Church in Der Zor was [destroyed](#) by ISIS in September, 2014.

- The Greek Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in the northern city of Raqa was **torched** by ISIS
- The Armenian Catholic Church of the Martyrs was **torched** by ISIS and its cross atop its clock tower removed.
- Our Lady of Peace church was **occupied** by the rebels.



Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, Al-Thawra, Syria

The Antiochian Orthodox church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, occupied by Al-Nusra Front



The Armenian Genocide Memorial Church in Der Zor

AINA News

ISIS Destroys 5th Century Assyrian Monastery in Syria

Posted 2015-08-21 01:40 GMT



An ISIS fighter stands in the rubble of St. Elian monastery, an Assyrian monastery from the 5th century, after it has been destroyed.

(AINA) -- Photos posted on ISIS social media sites show the destruction of Mar Elian monastery in Qaryatain, Syria, which is near Homs. Qaryatain fell to ISIS on August 6 (AINA [2015-08-07](#)). An estimated 1,400 Syriac Orthodox and 400 Syriac Catholic Assyrians lived in Qaryatain before it fell to ISIS.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

The Assyrian monastery was founded in the 5th century A.D. as a Syriac Orthodox Monastery. In the 17th century it became a Syriac Catholic monastery. It was renovated by the head of the ancient Mar Musa al-Habashi monastery, the Jesuit Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio, ten years ago.

Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio was [kidnapped](#) by ISIS in July, 2013. His fate is still unknown, although AINA's sources say he was killed by a Saudi ISIS Jihadist upon capture.

ISIS has destroyed dozens of Assyrian churches in Syria and captured hundreds of Assyrians in the past year, as well as destroyed ancient Assyrian archaeological sites.

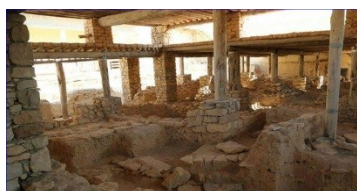


The tomb of St. Elian



The tomb of St. Elian after it has been destroyed and desecrated by ISIS.

The remains of St. Elian are visible



AINA News

Video Shows Massive Destruction in Liberated Assyrian Village in Syria

Posted 2015-06-19 00:23 GMT

AINA) -- A video posted on youtube by the Syriac Military Council (NFS), an Assyrian militia that has been fighting ISIS in Syria, shows members of MFS entering the Assyrian village of Tel Shamiram after it has been liberated from ISIS. The video shows massive destruction in the village. ISIS scorched farm fields, destroyed buildings and homes and completely leveled the church of Mar Bishu. The damage caused by ISIS runs into millions of dollars and renders large parts of the village uninhabitable. In addition, ISIS has left booby traps in homes and farm fields in the villages it has retreated from.

There is little commentary in the video, but at one point one of the Assyrian fighters whistles in astonishment at the level of destruction he sees.

See [attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#) for more information.

Tel Shamiram was captured on February 23 when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Syria. ISIS captured 253 Assyrians, 108 number from Tel Shamiram. ISIS has released 26 Assyrians to date.

AINA News

ISIS Release 15 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria

Posted 2015-09-04 20:00 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS has released 15 Assyrians who were captured in the town of Qaryatain, Syria after they paid the *jizya* (poll tax). The 15 were among the 250 Assyrians captured when Qaryatain fell to ISIS on August 6 (AINA [2015-08-07](#)). After capturing Qaryatain, ISIS issued an ultimatum to the Christian population: pay the *jizya*, convert to Islam or leave.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

The 15 Assyrians who were released arrived safely today at 2:30 PM at the Firuze Episcopate.

Earlier reports and rumors had stated that ISIS had released up to 271 Christians, but these turned out to be false.

Some information for this report was obtained from [AssyriaTV](#).

AINA News

4 Assyrians Killed in Hasaka Car Bombing

Posted 2015-09-16 07:12 GMT

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- Up to twenty people were killed by a car bomb that exploded near the Edward Iwas school on Monday, in the Al Mahatta area of Hasaka. Four Assyrians were among those killed. One Assyrian was injured.

The deceased Assyrians were all from one family and have been identified as Ragheda Tani (40), Miriam Tani (45), Amal Tani (37) and Heart Tani (18).

Assyrians in Syria have been come under attack since the civil war began. ISIS and other Muslim groups have targeted Assyrians and driven them from their homes and villages.

On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned. ISIS subsequently released 48 of the hostages but is still holding 205.

On August 6 the town of Qaryatain, Syria fell to ISIS, who captured up to 250 Assyrians. 15 were subsequently released.

For more information see [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#).

AINA News

ISIS Execute Three Assyrians in Syria

Posted 2015-10-08 07:24 GMT



From Left: Dr. Abdulmasih Enwiya, Basam Michael, Ashur Abraham, three Assyrians executed by ISIS on September 23.

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- ISIS has executed three Assyrians in Syria. The execution was carried out in the morning of September 23, which was the day Muslims commemorated the "Festival of the Sacrifice" (*eid al-Adha*). It is not known why ISIS waited two weeks to release the video.

The three Assyrians, wearing orange jumpsuits and kneeling, were killed by gunshots to the back of their heads. They were identified as Dr. Abdulmasih Enwiya and Ashur Abraham from the village of Tel Jazira, and Basam Michael from the village of Tel Shamiran.

The three Assyrians were part of the group of 253 Assyrian that were abducted by ISIS on February 23, when it overran the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS subsequently released 48 of the hostages. With the death of these three, the number of Khabur Assyrians being held by ISIS is now 202.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

In the video, ISIS said that if ransom for the remaining Assyrians is not payed, they would be executed as well. ISIS has demanded \$50,000 for each hostage, totaling over 10 million dollars.

The video first shows three Assyrians, each of whom states his name and his village. These three are executed. The video then shows three other Assyrians on their knees behind the bodies of the three dead Assyrians. The three Assyrians state their name and village and one says "Our fate is the same as these [pointing at the 3 dead Assyrians lying in front of him] if you do not take proper procedure for our release."

Here are the statements of all six Assyrians:

First group:

1. I am Assyrian Christian Ashur Abraham from the village of Tel Tamar, Jazira
2. I am Assyrian Christian Basam Essa Michael born in 1976 from the village of Tel Shamiran, Tel Tamar
3. I am Assyrian Christian Abdulmasih Enwiya born in 1997 from the village of Jazira district of Tel Tamar.

Second group:

1. I am Assyrian Christian Zaya George Elia, born in 1988 from the village of Shamiran District of Tel Tamar.
2. I am Assyrian Christian William Youhana Melham District of Tel Tamar, village of Tel Shamiran born in 1964.
3. I am Assyrian Christian Marden Tamraz Tamraz born in 1966 village of Tel Jazira. We are here and there are dozens of us. Our fate is the same as these [pointing at the 3 dead Assyrians lying in front of him] if you do not take proper procedure for our release, we realize the inevitable fate.
- 4.



On August 7 ISIS captured the town of Qaryatain and captured 250 Assyrians. It subsequently released 15 of them.

AINA News

ISIS Release 50 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria

Posted 2015-10-15 00:53 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS has released 50 of the 250 Assyrians who were captured in Qaryatain, Syria on August 7 (AINA [2015-08-07](#)). ISIS released 15 Assyrians from this same group of hostages on September 4 after they paid the *jizya* (Muslim poll tax) (AINA [2015-09-04](#)).

185 Assyrians of Qaryatain remain prisoners of ISIS.

The 50 Assyrians were released on September 12 and arrived safely to the Assyrian villages of Zaidan and Fairzeh.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

On September 23 ISIS executed three Assyrians in Syria and threatened to execute the remaining 202 Assyrians prisoners, who were all captured on February 23 in the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province, if ransom of \$50,000 each is not paid (AINA [2015-10-08](#)).

Some information for this report was obtained from [AssyriaTV](#).

AINA News

Bodies of Three Assyrians Killed Fighting ISIS Recovered

Posted 2015-11-04 12:24 GMT



Assyrians killed in Tel Hurmiz, Syria, while defending their village from ISIS. From left: Elias Darmo Auda (23), George Boulos Isho (47), Fouad Oshana Younan (46).

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- The bodies of three Assyrians who died defending their village from ISIS were recovered today in the village of Tel Hurmiz. The three Assyrians, all from Tel Hurmiz, were identified as Fouad Oshana Younan (46), George Boulos Isho (47) and Elias Darmo Auda (23). The bodies were recovered by the Khabour Assyrian Council of Guardians, an Assyrian militia.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river, in the Hasaka province, forcing 3000 Assyrians to flee. ISIS captured 253 Assyrians in the attack. ISIS subsequently released 48 of the hostages and killed 3, leaving 202 still being held.

On August 7 ISIS captured the town of Qaryatain and captured 250 Assyrians. It subsequently released 15 of them.

AINA News

ISIS Release 37 Assyrian Hostages in Syria

Posted 2015-11-07 10:05 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 37 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

The 37 Assyrians who were released, 27 women, are all elderly; most were from the villages of Tel Shamiran and Tel Jazira. They arrived safely in the town of Tel Tamar.



Assyrian hostages freed by ISIS on November 7

ISIS executed three of the hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 165. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.
- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

Here are the names of the 37 hostages who were released:

Name	Village	Birth Year
Anyar Shmoel Abdal	Qaber Shamiya	1942
Maryam Jerjees Joseph	Tel Faytha	1940
Abres Abdelahad Darmo	Tel Jazira	1948
Sadeq Aweqam Ishmael	Tel Jazira	1941
Royel Dinkha Mirza	Tel Jazira	1937
Malek Sadeq Ishmael	Tel Jazira	1948
Shidrakh David Khoshaba	Tel Jazira	1942
Nineveh William Royel	Tel Jazira	1959
Rosweena Elisha Elisha	Tel Jazira	1961
Khanem Elisha Elisha	Tel Jazira	1958
Khosheebo Sarhad Gewargis	Tel Jazira	1950
Ludiya Hormiz Eshaq	Tel Jazira	1955
Samera Yaow Mako	Tel Jazira	1960
Amal Kako David	Tel Jazira	1965
Zabet Solaqa Khiyou	Tel Jazira	1960
Salwa Wilson Royel	Tel Jazira	1966
Fareeda Esho Kako	Tel Jazira	1960
Enwiya Badal Joseph	Tel Shamiran	1941
David Jacob Koriya	Tel Shamiran	1939
Nimrud Jacob Koriya	Tel Shamiran	1935
Korish Elija Talya	Tel Shamiran	1938
Esho Enwiya Eshaq	Tel Shamiran	1950
Georget Jacob Malkey	Tel Shamiran	1952
Surma Enwiya Eshaq	Tel Shamiran	1945
Samera Hormiz Eshaq	Tel Shamiran	1957
Febronya Lazar Samou	Tel Shamiran	1945
Maqdonya Antraneek	Tel Shamiran	1952
Zomo Sulaiman Sawa	Tel Shamiran	1952
Wardiya Joseph Zomaya	Tel Shamiran	1950
Pana Yoshiya Lazar	Tel Shamiran	1961
Alice Awetar Ishmael	Tel Shamiran	1954
Teresa Odisho Odisho	Tel Shamiran	1962
Alice Adam Adam	Tel Shamiran	1953
Samera Nikola Shmony	Tel Shamiran	1952
Maryam Manasha Esho	Tel Shamiran	1962
Youniya Talya Talya	Tel Shamiran	1960
Lulu Zaya Odisho	Tel Shamiran	1965

Negotiations to release the captives have been ongoing between the Assyrian Church of the East and ISIS, who have demanded \$100,000 for each hostage. According to observers, negotiations are ongoing for the release of the remaining hostages.



Assyrian hostages freed by ISIS on the bus to Tel Tamar, Syria



Assyrian hostages freed by ISIS arrive in Tel Tamar, Syria

Some information for this report was obtained from AssyriaTV.

AINA News

ISIS Release 10 Assyrian Hostages in Syria

Posted 2015-11-24 23:50 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 10 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

The hostages, five men and five women, are in good health. They arrived in Tel Tamer in the afternoon and were met by their family members and the Assyrian community.



Two of the ten Assyrian hostages released by ISIS (AssyriaTV).

Their names are:

1. Timotheous Awetar Ishmael -- Tel Jazeera
2. Awiya Youkhana Hormiz -- Qabr Shamiya
3. Adoniya Emanuel Youkhana - Tel Jazeera
4. Awiya Ishmael Youkhana - Tel Jazeera
5. Ampolia Talya Talya -- Tel Shamiram
6. Laya Ibrahim Mirza -- Tel Jazeera
7. Sheren Abdulahad Darmo -- Tel Jazeera
8. Hana Ibrahim Elias Yousef -- Tel Jazeera
9. Dewaniya Benyamin Rehana -- Tel Faitha
10. Shawel Elisha Elisha -- Tel Jazeera

ISIS executed three of the hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 155. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatayn.

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- November 24: 10 released
- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.
- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)



The ten Assyrian hostages released by ISIS (ankawa.com).

AINA News

ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria

Posted 2015-12-09 19:05 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 25 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

All of the hostages are men, two of them boys aged 7 and 9. The hostages are in good health. They arrived in Tel Tamer in the morning.



The 25 Assyrian hostages released by ISIS on December 9.

The names of the released are:

1. Wanis Aweetar Ishmael (Tel Jazira)
2. Saeed Immanuel Youkhana (Tel Jazira)
3. Himsoon Immanuel Youkhana (Tel Jazira)
4. Sameeh Benjamin Simon (Tel Jazira)
5. Khalil Benjamin Simon (Tel Jazira)
6. Amir Wilson Rouel (Tel Jazira)
7. Edward Kako Kako (Tel Jazira)
8. Adam Esho Kako (Tel Jazira)
9. Fawaz Joseph Tammo Qabr Shamiyya
10. Joseph Yoshiya Lazar (Tel Shamiran)
11. Alber Talya Talya (Tel Shamiran)
12. Youkhana Italyoos Ammo (Tel Shamiran)
13. Samson Michelle Lazar (Tel Shamiran)
14. Zaya Simon Goriel (Tel Shamiran)
15. Antwan Pilatos Booza (Tel Shamiran)
16. Alber Pilatos Booza (Tel Shamiran)
17. Faris Aramya Yonan (Tel Shamiran)
18. Joseph Khanisho Youkhana (Tel Jazira)
19. Zuhair Simon Gorie (Tel Shamiran)
20. William Youkhana Malham (Tel Shamiran)
21. Afram Youkhana Malham (Tel Shamiran)
22. David Korish Talya (Tel Shamiran)
23. Joseph Gewargis Isaac (Tel Shamiran)
24. Danny Zaya Goriel (Tel Shamiran)
25. Mansoor Ibraz Darmo (Tel Jazira)

ISIS executed three of the hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 130. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)



Assyrian Bishop Afram Athneil consoles the two children who were released by ISIS.

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- December 9: 25 released
- November 24: 10 released
- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.
- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

AINA News

Three Car Bombs Explode in Assyrian Town in Syria, 50 Killed Posted 2015-12-11 07:55 GMT



(AINA) -- Three car bombs exploded yesterday in the Assyrian town of Tel Tamar in the Hassaka province of Syria, killing 50 people and wounding 100. At least 4 Assyrians were killed. One of the bombs targeted a Kurdish field hospital, the other the Souk Al Jumla market square. Two of the Assyrians killed have been identified as George Ballo and Slivo Isaac. One of the other Assyrians killed was a doctor.

ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

Tel Tamar is one of the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river which were captured by ISIS on February 23, during which ISIS captured 253 hostages. It has released 120 of them and executed 3, leaving 120 still being held. The villages have been liberated but most of the 3,000

Assyrians who lived there have not returned, they have fled to Hasaka and Lebanon, with some reaching Germany, Australia and Sweden.

ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

During its occupation of the Assyrian villages, ISIS destroyed all the churches in the villages, ransacked, looted and destroyed homes. A majority of the villages are uninhabitable. ISIS has warned the hostages it has released not to return to their villages else they will be killed.

AINA News

Funeral Held for Assyrians Killed By ISIS Bombing in Syria

Posted 2015-12-12 02:14 GMT



Funeral for the 4 Assyrians killed by the ISIS triple suicide bombing in Tel Tamar, Syria.

(AINA) -- A combined funeral was held today in Tel Tamar, Syria for the 4 Assyrians who were killed by the triple ISIS suicide bombings yesterday. The deceased Assyrians have been identified as George Ballo, Slivo Isaac, Milia Tolo and Hisham Bato.

The death toll from the bombings is between 50 and 60, with over 100 wounded. The bombings targeted a hospital, a Kurdish security checkpoint and a street market.

ISIS claimed responsibility for the bombings.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

Tel Tamar is one of the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river which were captured by ISIS on February 23, during which ISIS captured 253 hostages. It has released 120 of them and executed 3, leaving 120 still being held. The villages have been liberated but most of the 3,000 Assyrians who lived there have not returned, they have fled to Hasaka and Lebanon, with some reaching Germany, Australia and Sweden.

ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

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AINA News

ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Mostly Women and Children

Posted 2015-12-25 12:23 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 25 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

Two of the hostages are men, seven are women, and the rest are children between the ages of 3 and 11. The hostages are in good health. They arrived in Tel Tamer in the morning.

The 16 children belong to six of the seven women in the group.



Some of the 25 Assyrian women and children released by ISIS on December 25.

The following is a list of the names of the released hostages. The names of the children follow the name of their mother.

- Sammy Awisha Malham (male,41)
- Fadi Michael Eesa (male,41)
- Juliet Yourish Talya (female, 40, 2 children)
- Stella Farid Joseph (female, 10)
- Tony Farid Joseph (male, 7)
- ****
- Ghada Moshe Baram (female, 40, 1 child)
- Maria Akram Odisho (female, 8)
- ****
- Hanan Youkhana Enwiya (female, 46, 4 children)
- Francis Walid Sawa (male, 11)
- Aurinya Walid Sawa (female, 9)
- Ashurina Walid Sawa (female, 7)
- Nahren Walid Sawa (female, 4)
- ****
- Muna Marcus Adam (female, 41, 5 children)
- Louise Ashur Gabriel (male, 9)
- Lamasu Ashur Gabriel (male, 7)
- Ankidu Ashur Gabriel (male, 6)
- Amilio Ashur Gabriel (male, 4)
- George Ashur Gabriel (male, 2)
- ****
- Lena Nawaf Marjan (female, 39, 3 children)
- Ninos Elias Youkhana (male, 10)
- Ishtar Elias Youkhana (female, 7)
- Junior Elias Youkhana (male, 3)
- ****
- Laila Odisho Odisho (female, 47, 1 child)
- Alexander Samih Simon (male, 11)
- ****
- Jamila Kako Kako (female, 41)

ISIS executed three of the hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 105. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- December 25: 25 released
- December 9: 25 released
- November 24: 10 released
- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran

- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.

- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)



Some of the 25 Assyrian women and children released by ISIS on December 25.

AINA News

List of Assyrian and Other Churches Destroyed in Syria

Posted 2015-12-13 02:15 GMT

The following is a list of Assyrian churches and monasteries in Syria that have been destroyed by ISIS and other Muslim groups. Also included is a list of non-Assyrian churches that have been destroyed.

Attacks on Christians in Syria began almost immediately after the Syrian civil war began. The attacks have targeted villages, churches monasteries and the clergy, and have been perpetrated by Al-Qaeda, The Al-Nusra Front, ISIS and other Muslim groups.

Destroyed Assyrian Churches

On February 23 ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Hasaka, Syria, capturing 253 Assyrians. In the subsequent months it destroyed 11 churches and villages, rendering some villages uninhabitable.

Village	Church
Tel Nasri	St. Mary Church
Tel Jazirah	St. John Church
Tel Shamiram	St. Bishu Church
Tel Talaa	St. Sleewa Church
Abu Tena	St. Shimun Church
Qabr Shamiya	St. Qoryaqos Church

Tel Balooa	St. Shimon Church
Kharita	St. Shimun Church
Tel Meghada	St. Qoryaqos Church
Tel Tal	St. Odisho Church
Tel Hormizd	Raban Pityou Church

AINA News

Assyrian Restaurants Bombed in Qamishli, Syria, 16 Killed Posted 2015-12-30 23:19 GMT



Eli Kaspo, with his wife Gemma and daughter, is one of the Assyrians killed in the Qamishli bombings of three Assyrian restaurants.

Qamishli, Syria (AINA) -- Three explosions targeted Assyrian businesses in Qamishli, Syria today. The first was at the Miami restaurant and the second at the Gabriel restaurant, both owned by Assyrians. The restaurants are in an Assyrian neighborhood and commercial district in the center of the city. The explosions at Miami and Gabriel restaurants occurred within minutes of each other.

A third attack targeted the Youth Restaurant, in the western part of Qamishli, which is also owned by Assyrians.

One of the attacks was by a suicide bomber, and the other two are also believed to have been perpetrated by suicide bombers.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

According to a spokesman from the Assyrian Democratic Organization, at least 16 people were killed, 14 of them Assyrians, in the three blasts and dozens were injured. Some news agencies are reporting a death toll as high as 30.

According to the Amaq news agency, which supports jihadists, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The following are the names of 13 of the Assyrians who were killed:

1. Ramy Tarzi Bashi
2. Aboud Hagiki
3. Robert Krio
4. Eli Kaspo

5. Issa Hanna
6. Anton Joseph
7. Eliamo Malke
8. Nedal Abdo
9. Marwan Shamoun
10. Danny Hanna
11. Shabo Malke
12. Jack Tuma
13. Robert Hegame

The following photos of 11 of the Assyrians who were killed:

Aras Ahmad (L, Kurd), Jack Tuma



Issa Hanna (L), Ramy Tarzi Bashi



Danny Hanna (L), Aboud Hagiki





Eliamo Malke (L), Jack Tuma



Shabo Malke (L), Robert Krio



Nedal Abdo (L) Salah Karmo (L)



One of the three Assyrian restaurant in Qamishli, Syria which were bombed today.



The Assyrian owned Miami restaurant in Qamishli, Syria, was attacked by a suicide bomber.

AINA News

Kurdish YPG Forces Attack Assyrians in Syria, 1 Assyrian, 3 Kurds Killed

Posted 2016-01-12 08:47 GMT



Gabriel Henry David, an Assyrian fighter killed in the attack by Kurdish YPG forces on Assyrian forces in Qamishli, Syria.

Qamishli, Syria (AINA) -- Members of the YPG Kurdish militia conducted a surprise attack on Assyrian checkpoints in the Al-Wusta district of Qamishli, which is a predominantly Assyrian area. The checkpoints are manned by the Sootoro/GPF Assyrian security forces and were setup after three Assyrian restaurants were bombed on December 20, 2016 (AINA [2015-12-30](#)), which killed 14 Assyrians.

The Kurdish attack lasted for one hour, with heavy exchange of machine gun fire between the Assyrian Protection Force (Sootoro) and the YPG militia. 1 Assyrian fighter was killed, identified as Gabriel Henry David, and 3 Assyrians fighters were injured. According to reports, 3 Kurdish YPG fighters were killed in the clashes.

The Assyrian Protection Forces are affiliated with the Syrian National Defense Forces.

The YPG militia has previously made several attempts to take control of Al-Wusta but have been stopped by Sootoro. As recently as two weeks ago, Kurdish YPG militia directed their weapons against the Sootoro fighters but fighting was averted at the last moment.

After the restaurant bombings many Assyrian residents of Qamishli suspected the YPG militia to be the real culprit, not ISIS. There was no credible claim of responsibility by ISIS, only a vague statement in a scarcely used social media account. Although one of the bombings was reported to be a suicide attack, it is now known that all three bombings were by a bag placed in each restaurant.

This attack on Assyrian checkpoints has only increased the suspicion by Assyrians that it was the YPG that was behind the restaurant bombings. The attack is seen as an attempt by the YPG to take control of Qamishli and not allow Assyrians any control over their own territories.

Qamishli has a population of 185,000 Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Armenians, with nearly 50,000 Assyrians.

AINA News

ISIS Release 16 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Including 8 Children Posted 2016-01-14 18:52 GMT



Some of the Assyrian hostages released by ISIS today.

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 16 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

Eight of the hostages are children.

ISIS executed three of the hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 89. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- January 14, 2016: 16 released
- December 25: 25 released
- December 9: 25 released
- November 24: 10 released

- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
 - March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.
 - March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran



AINA News

Twin Blasts Target Assyrian Shops in Qamishli, Syria

Posted 2016-01-24 22:42 GMT



The remains of the bicycle which held the bomb that targeted Joseph Bakery in Qamishli, Syria, today



Joseph Bakery in Qamishli, Syria, an Assyrian business which was bombed today

Qamishli, Syria (AINA) -- Two explosions rocked an Assyrian neighborhood in Qamishli. The first targeted the Star Cafe, where a bomb was placed on a bicycle that was left in front of the store. The explosion killed 3 Assyrians and injured 20. The second blast targeted Joseph Bakery.

Two of the Assyrians killed have been identified as Morris Khajo and Fawzi al-Kaldani. Two of the injured are in critical condition.

No one has claimed responsibility for the blasts.

Star Cafe is near the Miami restaurant, one of three Assyrian restaurants which were bombed on December 30, 2015 (AINA [2015-12-30](#)). 16 people were killed in those blasts, 14 of them Assyrian.

Related: Attacks on Assyrians in Syria

After the attacks on December 30 Assyrian security forces, known as the Gozarto Protection Forces (GPF/Sootoro), set up checkpoints around the Al-Wusta neighborhood, the site of the restaurants and a purely Assyrian neighborhood. This led to clashes between GPF and the Kurdish YPG militia, who demanded the checkpoints be removed. One Assyrian fighter and three Kurdish fighters were killed in those clashes (AINA [2016-01-12](#)).



January 26 Update: Funeral service for the three Assyrians killed in the bombing at Star Cafe

AINA News

ISIS Release 22 Assyrian Hostages in Syria

Posted 2016-01-29 19:27 GMT



Bishop Aprim with the Assyrian hostages from Khabur who were released today by ISIS.

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 22 Assyrian hostages in Syria. 16 of the hostages were captured captured on February 23 when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. The other 6 hostages who were released were captured in the town of Qaryatain on August 6, 2015, when ISIS captured the town (AINA [2015-08-07](#)).

The group of released hostages was comprised of women and children.

ISIS executed three of the Khabur hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)). The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 73.

With the release of 6 Assyrians from Qaryatain ISIS is now holding 179 Assyrians from that town.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- January 29, 2016: 16 released
- January 14, 2016: 16 released
- December 25: 25 released
- December 9: 25 released
- November 24: 10 released
- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.
- March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran



Bishop Aprim with the Assyrian hostages from Khabur who were released today by ISIS



Some of the Assyrian hostages from Khabur who were released today by ISIS

ISIS Has released Assyrians from Qaryatain on the following dates:

- January 29, 2016: 6 released
- October 14, 2016: 50 released
- September 4, 2015: 15 released

The following are the names of the hostages released from Khabur:

1. Sabina Hawil Youkhana
2. Ramina Hawil Youkhana
3. Lewis Hawil Youkhana
4. Christine Joseph Lazar
5. Bashara Joseph Lazar
6. Katrine Joseph Lazar
7. Peter Joseph Lazar
8. Ilyan Saeed Youkhana
9. AlmasSaeed Youkhana
10. Lewis Saeed Youkhana
11. Sargon Ninus Sarkis
12. Yosip Ninus Sarkis
13. Valentina Paulus Odisho
14. Marganta Yushiya Adam
15. Somer Shawil Elisha



The Assyrian hostages from Qaryatain who were released today by ISIS.



The Assyrian hostages from Qaryatain who were released today by ISIS.



The Assyrian hostages from Qaryatain who were released today by ISIS attend mass.

AINA News

ISIS Release 43 Assyrian Hostages in Syria

Posted 2016-02-22 17:52 GMT



Bishop Aprim stands with the Assyrians released by ISIS.

(AINA) -- ISIS today released 43 Assyrian hostages in Syria who were captured captured on February 23 when ISIS attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. According to the Assyrian Church of the East, there are no more Assyrians from

Khabur being held by ISIS. However, ISIS is still holding 179 Assyrians it captured in the town of Qaryatain on August 6, 2015 (AINA [2015-08-07](#)).

ISIS executed three of the Khabur hostages on September 23 (AINA [2015-10-08](#)).

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups](#)

Here are the names of the released hostages:

From the village of Tel Jazeera:

1. Martin Tamras Tamras
2. Tamras Martin Tamras
3. Sharbal Martin Tamras
4. Mikhael Sadiq Ismael
5. Gaby Malik Sadiq Ismael
6. Ramy Sadiq Ismael
7. Raman Ameer Wilson
8. Elyan Saeed Yokhana
9. Josephine Martin Tamras
10. Maryam Timatheos Ismael
11. Maryana Timatheos Ismael
12. Manal Kako Kako
13. Emama Kako Kako
14. Munira Shaol Elisha
15. Muna Shaol Elisha
16. Ishtar Wanis Ismael
17. Najat Khnanisho Yokhana
18. Clara Khalil Shimon
19. Lara Khalil Shimon
20. Elias Khalil Shimon
21. Khatoun Khalil Shimon
22. Christy Khalil Shimon
23. Angel Hoseeb Jazaer
24. Elena Raman Rowel
25. Ninorta Shamoel Pityo
26. Gewargis Ramy Ismael
27. Muna Shaol Shaol
28. Jessica Gaby Ishmael
29. Sharbal Gaby Ishmael

From the village of Tel Shamiran:

1. Maryam David Talya
2. Daniela Zia Goriel
3. Leena Mishael Issa
4. Hannan Mishael Issa
5. Jimmy Anwar Talya
6. Odisho Awishalim Yokhana
7. Zia George Eliya
8. Sargis Yonan Shmoni
9. Sharbal Shimon Goriel
10. Basam Shimon Goriel

11. Sanhareeb Mishael Issa
12. Ninos Mikhael Shmoni
13. Martin Yokhana Ammo
14. Adeeb Esho Goriel

ISIS has released Assyrians from Khabur on the following dates:

- February 22, 2016: 43 released (the last of the hostages)
- January 29, 2016: 16 released
- January 14, 2016: 16 released
- December 25: 25 released
- December 9: 25 released
- November 24: 10 released
- November 7: 37 released
- August 11: 22 released
- June 16: Francois Sawa released
- May 26: two elderly women released, Ramziyya Rehana (80) from Tel Jazira and Yoniyya Kanoon (70) from Tel Shamiran
- March 3: Two Assyrians from Tel Shamiram were released, Yatroun Marko and his wife Wardiyya Yonan. Two Assyrians from Tel Goran were released, 6 year-old Mariana Mirza and her father's aunt, Bobo Mirza.

March 1: 19 Assyrians Released, all from the village of Tel Goran

ISIS Has released Assyrians from Qaryatain on the following dates:

- January 29, 2016: 6 released
- October 14, 2016: 50 released
- September 4, 2015: 15 released

AINA News

ISIS Release Assyrian Girl in Syria

Posted 2016-03-28 06:52 GMT



Miriam David Talya, an Assyrian girl who was captured by ISIS last year was released yesterday



Miriam David Talya arrives in Tel Tamar, Syria, after being released by ISIS yesterday (📷 ACERO)

(AINA) -- An Assyrian girl who was captured by ISIS on February 23 last year was released yesterday by ISIS. The girl, Miriam David Talya, was among the 253 Assyrians who

were captured by ISIS last year when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river, in Hasaka, Syria.

Miriam was supposed to be released with the final group of Assyrians released by ISIS on February 22nd (AINA [2016-02-22](#)). For unknown reasons, ISIS did not release her. The Assyrian church began intense negotiations with ISIS for her release, and requested that these negotiations be kept confidential so as not to jeopardize them.

Miriam arrived in Tel Tamar yesterday.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)

Related: [Timeline of ISIS in Iraq](#)

Another girl also captured last year is still being held. ISIS has stated that she has been married off to a high ranking ISIS official and will never be released.

ISIS is still holding 179 Assyrians it captured in the town of Qaryatain on August 6, 2015 (AINA [2015-08-07](#)).

Syndicated News

IS Group Killed 21 Christians in Al-Qaryatain, Says Patriarch Posted 2016-04-11 06:53 GMT



(BBC) -- Reports are emerging of the killing of Syrian Christians by Islamic State militants in the town of al-Qaryatain. The town was retaken by Russian-backed Syrian forces and their allies earlier in the week. Some 21 Christians were murdered when almost 300 Christians remained in the city after IS captured it last August, said the head of the Syrian Orthodox Church. They included three women, Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II told the BBC. He said some died whilst trying to escape while the others were killed for breaking the terms of their "dhimmi contracts", which require them to submit to the rule of Islam. Five more Christians are still missing, believed dead. Negotiations and the payment of ransoms have seen the remainder of the group re-join their families.

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)

Related: [Timeline of ISIS in Iraq](#)

The patriarch said warnings had come that Islamic State planned to sell Christian girls into slavery. But despite the murders, he said restoring harmony among faiths remained his goal. "We lived this situation for centuries, we learned how to respect each other, we learned how to live with each other," said the patriarch. "We can live together again, if we are left alone by

others." The town is now utterly devastated, with street after street and building after building - including a 1,500-year-old Catholic monastery - in ruins.

IS setbacks: Coaches laid on by the Syrian government have been bringing thousands of residents back to al-Qaryatain and the nearby city of Palmyra. IS captured al-Qaryatain in August, and abducted hundreds of residents, including dozens of Christians, many of whom were ransomed by their families. If the government reasserts its control over al-Qaryatain, it would be a further boost for President Bashar al-Assad, whose forces - backed by Russian air strikes - have made a string of gains against rebels in recent months. The jihadists have suffered a series of setbacks in Syria in recent weeks, also losing the ancient city of Palmyra. Al-Qaryatain, about 100km (60 miles) west of Palmyra, was taken over by IS fighters in their first major offensive since they seized Palmyra last May. There has been a dramatic drop in fighting in Syria since a partial ceasefire came into effect last month, though IS and the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front were excluded and are still being targeted.

AINA News

ISIS Attack Assyrian District in Syria, Five Killed

Posted 2016-05-22 08:34 GMT



Three Assyrians killed by ISIS attacks in al-Wusta district of Qamishle, Syria. From left to right: George Lahdo, Karim Simon and Toma Khosho.

(📷 AINA)(AINA) -- An attack by ISIS in the al-Wusta district of Qamishle, Syria killed at least five persons, three of them Assyrians, and injured more than a dozen. This is the third time al-Wusta, inhabited almost exclusively by Assyrians, has been attacked (AINA [2016-01-24](#)).

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)

ISIS terrorist stormed the area near Miami restaurant, shouting "Alahu Akbar" (God is great) and "ISIS is here to stay" while firing shots with handguns and lobbing grenades. Assyrian Gozarto Protection Forces (GPF) shot and killed two suicide bombers before they could detonate their suicide belts. One suicide bomber was able to detonate his belt near Miami restaurant and Dominos Pizza.

The three Assyrians killed have been identified as George Lahdo, Karim Simon and Toma Khosho.



AINA News

**Suicide Bomber Targets Assyrian Event in Syria, 3 Killed
Posted 2016-06-19 18:39 GMT**



Patriarch Aphrem, head of the Syrian Orthodox Church.Qamishli,

Syria (AINA) -- A suicide bomber disguised as a priest attempted to enter an Assyrian genocide commemoration event in the al-Wusta district of Qamishli but was stopped by Assyrian forces. The bomber detonated his bomb outside the hall, killing himself and three members of

the Assyrian Sutoro security forces and wounding five. It is believed the bomber was targeting Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II Karim of the Syriac Orthodox Church, who was leading the commemoration.

Related: Attacks on Assyrians in Syria

Related: The Assyrian Genocide

The explosion occurred at the intersection of al-Quwatli and El-Kindi Park road in a neighborhood heavily populated by Assyrians. According to AssyriaTV, the 5 wounded Assyrians have been identified as Gawriye Abo, Riad Habsuno, Marios Malke, Fayez Farman and Siwar Hassan. The deceased have not been identified.

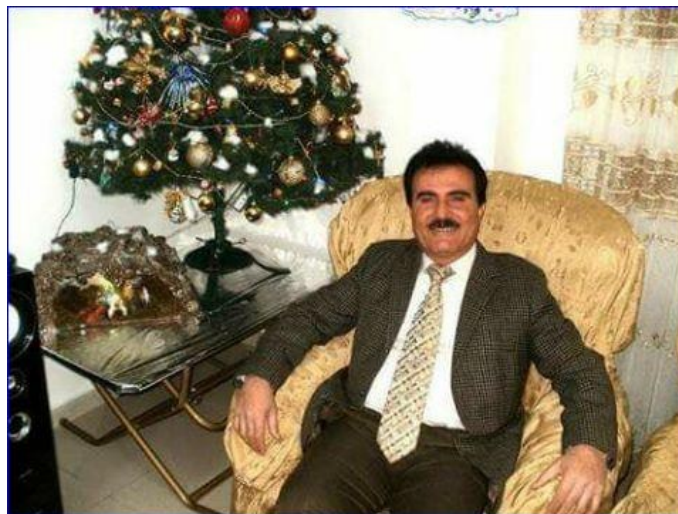
This is the fourth attack on Assyrians in Qamishli in the past six months:

- **May 22, 2016:** an attack by ISIS in the Assyrian al-Wusta district of Qamishli, Syria killed at least five persons, three of them Assyrians, and injured more than a dozen.
- **January 24, 2016:** Two explosions rocked an Assyrian neighborhood in Qamishli. The first targeted the Star Cafe, where a bomb was placed on a bicycle that was left in front of the store. The explosion killed 3 Assyrians and injured 20. The second blast targeted Joseph Bakery.
- **December 30, 2015:** Three explosions targeted Assyrian businesses in Qamishli, 16 were killed.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

AINA News

Assyrian Man Kidnapped, Killed in Syria Posted 2017-07-23 19:52 GMT



Dr. Basil Isaac, an Assyrian from Tel Shamiram in Syria, was kidnapped and killed by unknown assailants. (AINA)

Hasaka, Syria (AINA) -- The body of an Assyrian man, Dr. Basil Isaac, was found two days ago in a village eight kilometers west of Hasaka, three days after he was kidnapped. He died from a gun shot to the head. He was buried in his home village of Tel Shamiram. Dr. Isaac was the former dean of the farming college and deputy dean of the school of education at Euphrates University in Syria.

Related: Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups

No ransom was demanded by the kidnappers, whose identity is unknown.

Tel Shamiram is one of the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province that was captured by ISIS in 2015 (AINA [2015-02-23](#)). 253 Assyrians were kidnapped and ransomed out in the following year. ISIS was subsequently driven out of the villages.

Appendix A

Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups

The following is a list of attacks against Assyrians in Syria by ISIS and other Muslim Groups.

See also: [List of Assyrian and Other Churches Destroyed in Syria](#)

- 2016-06-19 [Suicide Bomber Targets Assyrian Event in Syria, 3 Killed](#)
- 2016-05-22 [ISIS Attack Assyrian District in Syria, Five Killed](#)
- 2016-04-11 [IS Group Killed 21 Christians in Al-Qaryatain, Says Patriarch](#)
- 2016-03-28 [ISIS Release Assyrian Girl in Syria](#)
- 2016-02-22 [ISIS Release 43 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2016-01-29 [ISIS Release 22 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2016-01-24 [Twin Blasts Target Assyrian Shops in Qamishli, Syria](#)
- 2016-01-14 [ISIS Release 16 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Including 8 Children](#)
- 2015-12-30 [Assyrian Restaurants Bombed in Qamishli, Syria](#)
- 2015-12-25 [ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Mostly Women and Children](#)
- 2015-12-12 [Funeral Held for Assyrians Killed By ISIS Bombing in Syria](#)
- 2015-12-11 [Three Car Bombs Explode in Assyrian Town in Syria, 50 Killed](#)
- 2015-12-09 [ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-24 [ISIS Release 10 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-07 [ISIS Release 37 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-04 [Bodies of Three Assyrians Killed Fighting ISIS Recovered](#)
- 2015-10-14 [ISIS Release 50 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria](#)
- 2015-10-08 [ISIS Execute Three Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-09-16 [4 Assyrians Killed in Hasaka Car Bombing](#)
- 2015-09-04 [ISIS Release 15 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria](#)
- 2015-08-21 [ISIS Destroys 5th Century Assyrian Monastery in Syria](#)
- 2015-08-11 [ISIS Release 22 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-08-07 [ISIS Captures 250 Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-06-18 [Video Shows Massive Destruction in Liberated Assyrian Village in Syria](#)
- 2015-06-17 [ISIS Release Assyrian Hostage in Syria](#)
- 2015-05-28 [ISIS Destroys Churches, Loots Houses in Syria](#)
- 2015-05-26 [ISIS Release Two Assyrian Hostages in Syria, All 35 Assyrian Villages Liberated](#)
- 2015-05-01 [ISIS Demands \\$23 Million for Assyrian Hostages, Vigil Held in Australia](#)

- 2015-04-29 [ISIS Bombs Assyrian, Armenian Churches in Syria](#)
- 2015-04-23 [Assyrian Military Leader Killed in Syria](#)
- 2015-04-05 [ISIS Destroys Assyrian Church in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-25 [Unconvincing ISIS Video Shows Assyrian Captive Converting to Islam](#)
- 2015-03-16 [Assyrians Demonstrate in Istanbul](#)
- 2015-03-14 [A Letter to Obama From an Assyrian American Student](#)
- 2015-03-10 [Release of 52 Assyrian Families Captured By ISIS Delayed](#)
- 2015-03-09 [Assyrians Hold Demonstrations As ISIS Continues Attacks on Assyrians](#)
- 2015-03-07 [ISIS Crosses River in New Attacks on Assyrian Villages in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-04 [Assyrian Hostage Released By ISIS: We Cannot Go Back to Our Homes](#)
- 2015-03-03 [Assyrians Demonstrate in Cities Around the World](#)
- 2015-03-03 [ISIS Releases 4 More Assyrians, Including 6 Year-old Mariana](#)
- 2015-03-01 [19 Assyrians Released By ISIS But Hundreds Remain Captured](#)
- 2015-03-01 [Assyrians Protest ISIS Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-01 [Conflicting Reports on Release of Some of the Assyrians Held By ISIS](#)
- 2015-02-27 [Negotiations for the Release of Assyrians Captured By ISIS Still Ongoing](#)
- 2015-02-26 [Up to 373 Assyrians Captured By ISIS, Executions Have Begun](#)
- 2015-02-26 [Assyrians Captured By ISIS Now At 150, Negotiations for Their Release in Progress](#)
- 2015-02-24 [Assyrian Hostages in Syria Are 'Safe', Says ISIS Member](#)
- 2015-02-23 [ISIS Attacks Assyrian Villages in Syria, 4 Killed, Dozens Captured, Churches Burned](#)
- 2014-05-01 [ISIS Destroys 3000 Year-old Assyrian Artifacts in Syria](#)
- 2015-01-23 [Two Assyrians Killed in Syria](#)
- 2014-10-02 [Three Assyrians Kidnapped in Syria](#)
- 2014-07-31 [Assyrians Leaving Hassakah, Syria for Fear of ISIS](#)
- 2014-06-01 [Assyrian Boy Killed By Sniper in Syria](#)
- 2013-10-30 [Al-Qa'ida Desecrates Church in Syria](#)
- 2013-09-24 [Syrian Christian Converts to Islam At Hands of Al-Qaeda](#)
- 2013-09-23 [Syrian Jihadist Rebels Murder Assyrian Man for Being Christian](#)
- 2013-08-09 [Syrian Rebels Destroy Orthodox Church in Al-Thawrah](#)
- 2013-08-04 [Syrian Rebels to Assyrians: Convert to Islam to Keep Your Jobs](#)
- 2013-07-30 [Assyrian Village in Syria Attacked By Muslims](#)
- 2013-04-22 [Syrian Bishops Kidnapped By Rebels](#)
- 2013-04-18 [Islamist Ultimatum to Syrian Christians: Convert, Leave, or Die](#)
- 2013-04-07 [500 Assyrians From Syria Flee to Turkey in Last 3 Days](#)
- 2013-04-03 [Assyrian Man Kidnapped and Killed in Syria](#)
- 2013-01-31 [Bus Attacked in Syria, Several Killed and Wounded](#)
- 2013-01-18 [25,000 Christians Besieged By Muslim Rebels in Hasaka, Syria](#)
- 2012-11-20 [Third Attack in New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo, Scores Injured and Killed](#)
- 2012-05-12 [Jihadists Seize Christian Village in Syria, Expel Its Residents](#)

Appendix B: Related Articles

All Things Assyrian

4th Century Assyrian Church in Saudi Arabia

Posted 2008-08-28 20:59 GMT



Entrance to the 4th century Assyrian Church in Saudi Arabia.

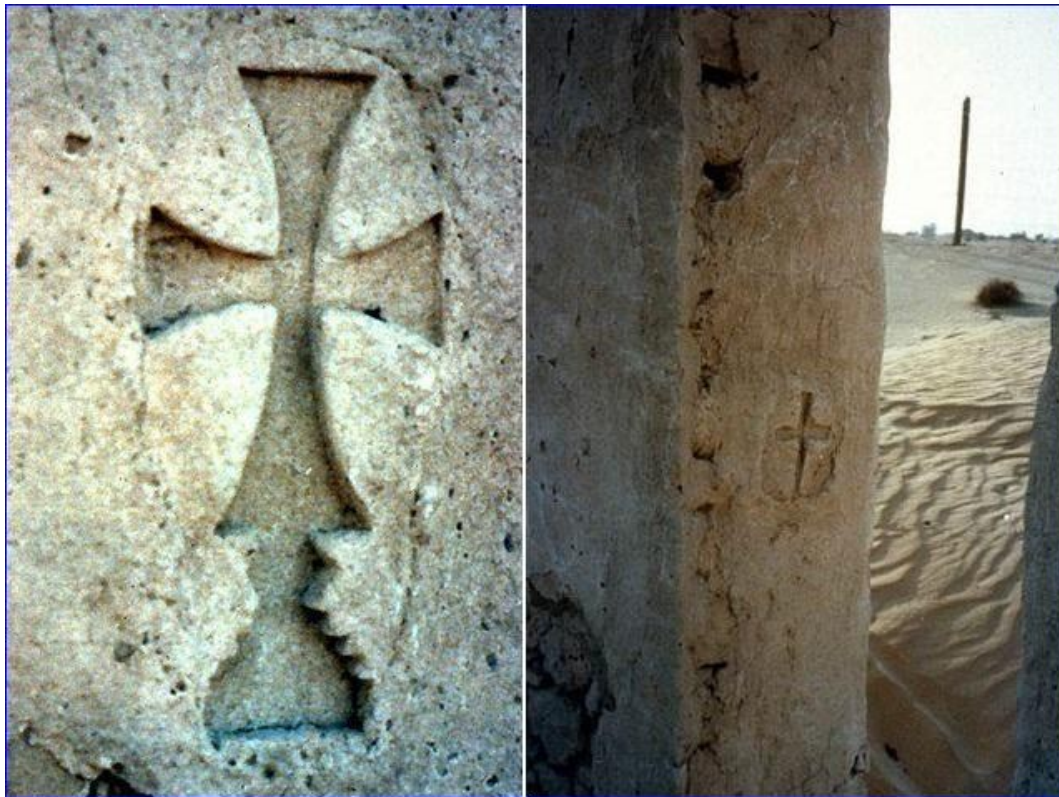
(AINA) -- Bordering the Arabian Gulf and containing the towns of Dhahran, Al-Khobar, Dammam, Qatif, Hofuf and Jubail, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is where oil was first discovered in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s.

Near Jubail are the ruins of what was unearthed in the mid-1980s by a group of people attempting to dig their vehicle out of the sand. The ruins are known as the Jubail Church and are acknowledged by the Saudi government, who will not issue permits to visit it because 'the site is being excavated.' In any case, the original ruins contained four stone crosses, which later went missing, though the marks where the crosses were are still visible. The ruins are thought to date from the 4th century, which make them older than any known church in Europe. Not much else is known but speculation is that it was in some way connected to one of the five Assyrian Church of the East bishoprics which are known to have existed in this area of the Gulf in the 4th century.

The following photographs were taken in 1986 shortly after the ruins were partially excavated and protected by the Saudi Department of Antiquities.



Decorated stucco at 4th century Assyrian church in Saudi Arbaia



Cross design at the 4th century Assyrian church in Saudi Arabia. The recessed outline may have originally contained a stone or wood cross

AINA News

Egyptian Muslim Ring Uses Sexual Coercion to Convert Christian Girls: Report

By Mary Abdelmassih

Posted 2011-07-13 00:15 GMT

(AINA) -- The number of Christian girls abducted and coerced into converting to Islam since the Egyptian "January 25 Revolution" has skyrocketed, according to Father Filopateer Gamil of St. Mary's Church in Giza. "More than two to three girls disappear everyday in Giza alone," he said. "The cases that are brought to public attention are few compared to what the numbers actually are."

Many Christians blame the military council for not intervening to put an end to this problem, which has escalated after the Revolution because of the "emergence of Muslim Salafists," says activist Mark Ebeid, "who believe strongly that converting a Christian Infidel is in some ways like earning a ticket to paradise -- not to mention the earthly remuneration they get from the Saudis."

Jackline Ibrahim Fakhry, 17, disappeared from a town on the outskirts of Cairo, prompting her parents to stage a sit-in until her appearance. They accused 31-year old Muslim Shokry Abdel-Fatah, who used to take lessons with her mother (a teacher) of kidnapping her. After she returned, Shokry said in a television interview that he has loved her since she was nine years old. He brought her to Alexandria where she met many sheikhs to convert, but she refused.

Nancy (14) and her cousin Christine (16) Fathy disappeared from their town in Upper Egypt. Their parents staged a sit-in in Minya until their children surfaced and accused two Muslim brothers, in their late twenties, of being behind their disappearance. The two teens appeared in Cairo, wearing burkas and claiming they had converted to Islam, which is illegal before the age of 18. Instead of being handed over to their parents, they are now in a state care home pending investigations and until they and their parents have reconciled. The two men accused of their abduction have been discharged by the court (AINA [7-4-2011](#)).

This issue has been ongoing for over four decades. Coptic Pope Shenouda III warned against this phenomenon back in 1976, saying "There is a practice to convert Coptic girls to embrace Islam and marry them under terror to Muslim husbands."

Christian parents say their girls are underage children who disappear either due to emotional ties or to blackmail, and they do not get any assistance from the police in locating them, not even after they have been coerced into converting to Islam, which is illegal before the age of 18. Muslims claim the girls, of whatever age, flee their homes and convert to Islam of their own free will (AINA [12-23-2009](#)).



Jackline Abraham Fakhry



Nancy and Christine Fathy

Coptic activist Michael Saeed denies this, saying "there is no legitimate reason which prevents Muslim men from marrying women "of the Book" -- either Jewish or Christian -- without their conversion to Islam. What we have here is a Saudi Arabia funded campaign of Islamization of Christians in Egypt."

Egypt4Christ, which monitors the abduction and forced Islamization of Christian minors, published this week its latest report, which shocked many people because of the age of the targeted Christian girls, the involvement of high ranking officials as well as the Salafist leader from Alexandria, Sheikh Osama Borhammi, who is contemplating running for President in the upcoming Egyptian elections.

Egypt4Christ initiated this project when an Alexandrian priest reported that a ten-year old Coptic girl was sexually abused by a 20-year-old Muslim university student.

The investigation by Egypt4Christ, carried out under secrecy, exposed a highly organized Muslim ring centered in the Fatah Mosque in Alexandria. The investigation also uncovered a systematic "religious call" plan, where young Muslim males in high school and university are urged to approach Coptic girls in the 9-15 age group and manipulate them through sexual exploitation and blackmail. The plan, called "operation soaking lupin beans" (small dried beans, soaked until they grow in size and are then eaten raw), aims at sexually compromising Christian girls, defiling them and humiliating them in front of their parents, thereby forcing them to flee their homes, and use conversion to Islam as a "solution" for their problems.

"The architect of this idea, who diligently promotes it among the Muslim youth, is Salafi Muslim Sheikh Osama Borhammi, in collaboration with other Sheikhs," says Ms. Rasha Nour, head of Egypt4Christ. Some volunteers from the Young Female Muslims Service are also engaged, according to Nour.

The report has published the names of those involved in this Islamization ring, including names of co-operating department heads and officers of the Alexandria headquarters of State Security, the name of a legal firm supporting this ring, the location of places used to keep Christian girls, as well as complete addresses and private telephone numbers of those involved.

Magdy Khalil, political analyst and researcher in Coptic affairs also believes that abduction and forced Islamization of Coptic girls is an organized crime, carried out through an organized and pre-planned process by associations and organizations inside Egypt with domestic and Arab funding.

Recently a new organization named "Alliance for the Support of New Muslim Females" staged protests against the Coptic church, accusing it of abducting Christian-born converts to

Islam. "It is a Salafist organization, without a doubt," says Michael Saeed. "It has a primary role in the Islamization of minors. The proof for this, is that any case of disappearance of a Coptic female in any province in Egypt and at any time, you find they have a complete file on it. A clear blueprint is followed, in coordination with security and legal agencies, to get the results they want."

AINA Editorial

Assyrians and Syria's Struggle For Democracy And Freedom

By Marianne Brückl

Posted 2012-10-27

16:49 GMT



Issa Hanna being interviewed by Marianne Brückl

Augsburg, Germany (AINA) -- The struggle for democracy and human rights in Syria has turned to a disaster for all ethnicities and minorities in the country. The Assad-Regime is not only fighting the rebels but also the innocent civilian people with unimaginable cruelty. Issa Hanna, co-chairman of Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO), Section Europe, has commented in an interview on the current situation and problems in Syria.

Brückl: Mr. Hanna, you are the co-chairman of Assyrian Democratic Organization, Section Europe, and therefore you know best your fellow countrymen situation in Syria. Will you tell me first something about the Christian Assyrians in the country?

Hanna: Currently Syria has a Christian population of about 3 Million, living there as independent indigenous religious and ethnic groups, among them cultural and national minorities, also numbering the Aramaic-speaking Christian Assyrians. They form an ethnic minority with its own language, literature, political and cultural organizations.

The Assyrians have been present in Mesopotamia and Syria for more than three millennia; they became Christians in the first century and became fervent evangelists and missionaries. They belong to the following churches: The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Chaldean Church of Babylon [a Roman Catholic uniate]. In the broader sense also the Greek-Melkite-Orthodox Church, the Greek-Melkite-Catholic Church, the Syrian- Evangelical and the Syrian-Catholic churches.

Even though Syria is a part of the historical homeland of the Assyrians (the name Syria deriving from Assyria), Assyrians were only recognized as a religious confessional group within the Arabic Republic of Syria, which gained independence in 1946. This has to be traced back to the aggressive Arabic nationalism, which has indeed guaranteed general freedom of religion but did not accept other ethnicities or nations.

Brückl: What is the Assyrian Democratic Organization?

Hanna: The ADO was founded in the homeland Syria, in Qamishli, on July 15, 1957. The development of national consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century was the result of two important elements. On the one hand the awakening among our own intellectuals, such as Naoum Faik, Ashur Youssef, Freidun Nouzha, with their clear understanding and far-sight for the Assyrian national question, and secondly the historic tragedies our people suffered in the course of their long history, that found their high point in genocide and displacement in the 20th century during World War I. This genocide we call *Seyfo* in Assyrian, which means sword -- under which the massacres, persecutions and displacements are to be understood.

Out of these common historical experiences the Assyrians developed the national idea, from which resulted the necessity to create an organization that has the ability to campaign for the national future and the needs of our people.

Brückl: What are the goals of ADO?

The Assyrian Democratic Organization is a national, political and democratic movement, which is aimed at the protection of the Assyrian people's existence and the realization of all of its legitimate national attempts as well as its full political, cultural and administrative rights in its historical homeland. We want to achieve the constitutional acceptance as an indigenous national ethnic group within a pluralistic Syria. This is more than necessary as the current developments in the entire Middle East have aggravated the inherently precarious situation and desperate need of the Assyrians in their homelands because of repressions and attempted murder by fundamental Islamic groups.

The ADO has the strong conviction that democracy with all its components that guarantee justice, freedom and equality, is the best system for building civilized societies. Also it is strongly convinced, that women are entitled to all political, cultural, social and economic rights.

Furthermore the Assyrian people have the unlimited right to return into the lands from which they were exiled as a result of the genocide, to reclaim the property, assets and lands, that were snatched away from them; this must happen under international supervision and jurisdiction.

Brückl: What are some of the steps the ADO has taken to achieve these goals?

Hanna: In 2005 the Assyrian Democratic Organization was already part of the so-called group of the "Declaration of Damascus," which aimed to unify the Syrian opposition and called for reforms and democracy.

To implement these goals, the Assyrians are also strongly committed in the opposition. So the Assyrian Democratic Organization as a Christian group is also a founding member of the Syrian National Council (SNC), founded in November 2011. The goal of SNC is to create a new constitution that guarantees equal treatment for all members of the Syrian society -- so Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen and others, regardless their religious, ethnic or national origin. That means acceptance of equal rights for all in accordance with Syria's territorial and demographic integrity and unity. During the National Convention for a new Syria in March 27, 2012, the Syrian National Council has also clearly stipulated these goals.¹

Brückl: Where is the greatest concern regarding the equalization of all Syrian citizens?

Hanna: Democracy and stability of the new Syria will only be realized by implementing the above measure, as the country will be able to guarantee its minorities' existence and rights by an explicit implementation in the new constitution, to realize and to defend these proposed constitutional rights by clearly stipulated and effective mechanisms in all forms of justice and to promote the minorities with their cultural riches including their languages and specific

constructive inputs to the Syrian society in the spirit of a peaceful, harmonic and fair-minded cross-social cooperation.

The Christians in the country desire a secular government, formed by secular powers.

Brückl: Do you see a chance to achieve a consensus between the different ethnicities and religious communities and how could it be realized?

Hanna: As Syria is a multiethnic state, composed of numerous ethnicities with religious and cultural diversity, where also multilingualism prevails, this consensus might be a little problematic to achieve. But this diversity depicts enrichment for the state.

Brückl: The Assyrian Christians are in danger like in other regions of the Near East, e.g. in Iraq, to be exterminated. What might happen to counteract against this development?

Hanna: In the last month over 15.000 Assyrian families had to leave their homes in the city of Homs and other towns in Syria, to flee to the neighboring states Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, or to their former native villages and to their relatives. As in Iraq, violence and anarchy are rising daily in Syria and the crimes toward the Christians make life unbearable.

Therefore we expect from our politicians here in Europe to campaign now more intensely for the Christians in Syria then before and to grant more solidarity but also active assistance to them. Essentially it does not only concern moral but also political support, to give the Christian population security and hold that it can capture a stronger role in the society of the country for the future.

Brückl: Which role is western media playing in this connection?

Hanna: The politicians in the west must campaign specifically for the Christians now. Unfortunately that has not been the case so far, judging from the articles of the leading media. On the contrary, many in the western media have accused the Christians of generally supporting the Assad Regime. That is not accurate. The Christians have suffered under the rule of the Assad-Regime as well as all the other parts of the population. They are not for Assad, but they are simply in sorrow about their security and future.

Brückl: Who on your opinion bears the main responsibility for the escalating situation in the country?

Hanna: To answer your question, it is first necessary to consider the general view of Syria.

For nearly five decades the country has suffered from structural crisis in the political, economic and cultural sectors, and most of all in human rights. The reason for this is that all these areas were controlled not only by an authoritarian but a totalitarian regime, which has monopolized and aggressively controlled all aspects of life, power structures, resources and distribution of wealth. That way the regime has deprived the people of all civil freedoms and rights and so cut off the entry to any participation in political life, which is the basic requirement for a democratic society. This toward advantage and development of the country were blocked.

Brückl: What influences and trends are currently the most important in preventing peace in the country?

Hanna: Military attacks by foreign states aggravate the situation for the Christians, which causes at least a wave of emigration. Thus, more and more chaos will be generated in the country. Furthermore the fundamentalists still have more chances to cause escalation and to gain more space, and to gain the advantage.

The longer this lasts the more complicated will become the situation for the Christian population.

Brückl: How could these be eliminated and who has the most influence to contain this?

Hanna: If the 6-point plan will be adopted by Kofi Annan's successor Brahimi and implemented by both sides, the state of Syria can be saved from chaos. And they can establish a stable transitional government and slowly restructure the state in all sectors. This should be in the interest of all great powers, but the solution will not be simple.

I would urge all to take seriously the 6-point-plan so that chaos in the country can be prevented.

Brückl: Do you believe that democratic elections such as have taken place in Egypt and which have caused even more misery for the Christian population, would lead to an improvement of the Christian situation in Syria?

Hanna: In either case the situation in Syria must be judged differently from Egypt. The people in Syria are different. For centuries Christians and Muslims in Syria have lived peacefully together, and they rarely experienced this Islamic fundamentalism. I believe if given the chance we will experience Syria differently. Syria is a multiethnic state, Syria is multilingual, the different mother tongues can be spoken there. This is enrichment for the country. Therefore there are better chances, better prospects for Syria than in Egypt.

Brückl: How can the West work against the prospect of a complete displacement of the Christians from their native homelands?

Hanna: Western countries should be in solidarity with the Christians in Syria, to highlight the persecution of Christians, and to give concrete support economically and politically.

Brückl: Do you keep it for the right solution to affiliate more and more Christian refugees in Europe? Or is there on your opinion another possibility to rescue the Christian population within their country?

Hanna: We as Assyrian Democratic Organization desire that we will succeed in supporting our people in Syria to help them stay and live in peace in their motherland. But if refugees have fled country, it is expected that the host country shall receive these people on humanitarian grounds.

Brückl: Do you believe that strife and tension between Syria and Turkey will lead to conflagration?

Hanna: Turkey has tried, with the downing of the Turkish aircraft, to expand its position and to drag Syria into its circle of influence. I think this was a test for Turkey and NATO to discover what kinds of weapons Syria possessed. The current skirmishes at the Syrian-Turkish border are, however, minor incidents in comparison to the happenings in Syria itself.

Brückl: What will the Assyrian Democratic Organization do give more support to the Christians in their native country?

Hanna: We try as much as possible to raise awareness of this problem, to inform all about the real situation, and we also try from here to circulate any objective information to governments, human rights organizations and the media, so that an accurate picture is presented.

Hence, numerous conferences are concerning the situation in Syria are taking place. The Italian government is especially committed in cooperating with the Syrian National Council to compile solutions for the conflicts. The last one took place on September 20, 2012, in Rome (AINA [9-26-2012](#)). There the ADO presented a relevant document to the Rome Conference, in which it clearly emphasized its demands, goals and chances. Those conferences also represent an essential instrument for imposing more pressure upon the Assad-Regime.

Brückl: What do you personally desire most for Syria's' future?

Hanna: I wish that freedom and justice will rule in Syria among its population and that all together will rebuild the country as a healthy state. My desire is also that Syria as a country in Near East will play again a great role.

Brückl: Thank you cordially for this extensive interview.

This interview was originally published in [German](#). It was translated from German by Marianne Brückl. It has beend edited by AINA.

Notes:

¹ *The constitution guarantees equal treatment between any religious, ethnic or national components of the Syrian society -- Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen and others. It will accept equal rights for all in accordance with Syria's territorial and demographic integrity and unity.*

AINA Editorial

Islamist Ultimatum to Syrian Christians: Convert, Leave, or Die

By Matthew J. Thomas

Posted 2013-04-18 18:36 GMT

(AINA) -- Syria's Christians fear an Islamist takeover should the current government be overthrown. During the ongoing civil war there has been a well-documented rise in the number of salafi-jihadist groups operating in Syria that pose a direct threat to Syria's Christian community.¹ These militant opposition forces espouse an Islamist ideology, which incorporates elements of Wahhabism² and Salafism³ and whose stated goals and objectives are by definition hostile towards Christians. Firsthand accounts from Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon reported by award winning investigative journalist Nuri Kino detail the horror in which they described kidnappings, rapes, harassment, theft and other violent reprisals at the hands of Islamist groups.



Nina Oshana, killed in a bus attack in Syria

Those who survived reported "just being Christian is enough to be a target,"⁴ disproving theories that violence and kidnapping directed towards Syrian Christians is purely incidental or for economic reasons. One individual openly declared "We're not poor. We didn't run from poverty [...] we ran from fear."⁵

There are several dozens of armed Salafi-jihadist groups both foreign and domestic currently operating in Syria that explicitly advocate Islamist agendas and possess the intentions and capabilities to commit violent persecution towards Syria's Christians. Most notably from the global Sunni jihadist milieu is *al-Jabhat al-Nusra lil-Ahl al-Sham min Mujahedin al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad* (The Front for Supporting the People of Greater Syria by the Mujahedin of Syria on the Battlefields of Jihad) A.K.A. *Jabhat al-Nusra*, which in December 2012 the U.S. government officially listed as a terrorist organization.⁶ Also, on April 9 of this year the leader of *Tanzim Qai'dat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia) A.K.A. al-Qaeda in Iraq released an audio announcement that officially declared the unification of al-Qaeda in Iraq and *Jabhat al-Nusra* including the establishment of an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, effectively expanding the threat to Syria's Christians.⁷ The other notable militant Islamist group is *al-Jabhat al-Islamiya al-Suriya* (Syrian Islamic Front), a large armed coalition

force comprised of several interdependent blocs and alliances organized throughout Syria.⁸ Even the relatively less hardline *al-Jaysh al-Suri al-Hurr* (Free Syrian Army) and *al-Majlis al-Watani al-Suri* (Syrian National Council) are by no means monolithic entities, rather both exist as umbrella organizations comprised of several independent and competing ideological currents and sub-currents including Islamism.

Indeed, regardless of the means employed whether violent or non-violent to achieve the stated goals and objectives of these Islamist movements, the future is unfortunately no less hostile towards Christians. Within an Islamic State governed by *Shari'a* (Islamic Law), Jews and Christians, known colloquially as *ahl al-Kitaab* (People of the Book), are afforded a certain protected status called *dhimmi*, but only if they willingly submit to a tribute or coercive tax known as *jizya*.⁹ Based on Islamist interpretation, which is strictly literal and employs the "doctrine of abrogation" promulgated by the 13th century Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah,¹⁰ the later and more belligerent *suras* (chapters) of the Qur'an take precedence over the earlier and more tolerant *suras*.¹¹ As a result, the salafi-jihadists frequently reference *Sura al-Tawba* (The Repentance) otherwise known as *Sura al-Bara'a* (The Ultimatum), which is the 9th chapter of the Qur'an, to justify their violent actions. Numerous internationally recognized translations of Verse 29 of *Sura al-Tawba* explicitly state,

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.¹²

Ultimately, Syria's Christians as well as Jews will be forced to suffer persecution at the hands of Islamists unless they convert to Islam, submit to *Shari'a* and pay the *jizya*, emigrate or die.

Guilt by Association: Syria's Christians Labeled Pro-Assad

The question of who would protect the Syrian Christians after the fall of Assad has historically led many Christians to support the status quo out of fear.¹³ A Congressional Research Service report from August 2012 accurately portrays the dilemma of Syrian Christians who are "caught between their parallel fears of violent change and of being associated with Assad's crackdown."¹⁴ According to a September 2012 report by the Institute for the Study of War, President Assad has "used the threat of jihadists within the opposition to galvanize support for the regime among the Alawite and Christian communities."¹⁵ Similarly, the U.S. State Department's 2011 International Religious Freedom Report for Syria also recognizes the rising level of animosity towards Syria's Christians as well as Assad's attempts to translate their fears into political support by sponsoring pro-government demonstrations in predominantly Christian neighborhoods and violently rebuffing those viewed as undermining this effort.¹⁶ Consequently, even individual Christians who have neither professed nor shown any inclination of support for the regime may still be identified as pro-Assad and thereby targeted for violent persecution by the Islamists and other opposition forces, or by government security forces for being perceived as unsupportive.

"Arab Spring" is "Christian Winter" -- Persecution of Christians is a Regional Issue

Christian persecution is prevalent not only throughout Syria but also the entire region. Congressman Frank Wolf (R-Virginia) has consistently published reports testifying that

Christians throughout the Middle East, specifically in Syria, Egypt and Iraq, have been suffering persecution at an alarming rate, including a sustained campaign of violence, discrimination, mass emigration and internal displacement -- all of which too often go unrecognized and unreported.¹⁷

In an urgent attempt to bring attention to and spur action from policymakers, Congressman Wolf recently traveled to the region and met firsthand with Christian refugees from several Arab nations, including Syria, and reported "In fact, it often appears that there is an anti-Christian bias at the State Department. For years the department refused to recognize that Iraqi Christians were being targeted, insisting instead that they were simply victims of generalized violence."¹⁸ Unfortunately, the same can now be said of Syria's Christians, as Western naivety falsely assumes that anti-Assad opposition forces are automatically pro-democracy, pro-secular, and pluralist and Christians are merely victims of incidental violence. However, a recent report from the British newspaper The Guardian reveals that until recently hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians sought refuge in neighboring countries like Syria, but now they are once again forced to flee due to rampant religious persecution. The report continues by stating the majority of Christians have been emptied from the broader Middle East, and while the "Arab Spring" may have sprung new life for Islamists in the region, it has most certainly brought death to Christianity in places like Syria.¹⁹

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Notes

¹ "Evidence of the Influx into Syria of Foreign Jihadist Fighters," Insights, Jihadist Website Monitoring Group, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, November 2012. Available online at: <http://www.ict.org.il/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=55Of1Jrll6Q%3d&tabid=320>. (Accessed 9 April 2013).

² Wahhabism is the official religious doctrine of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a Salafist form of Sunni Islam founded by the 18th century cleric Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab that is based on an extremely strict and puritanical interpretation of the Qur'an and *Ahadith* (sayings, statements, acts of Prophet Mohammed), which it considers as the sole authoritative texts.

³ Salafism is a radical movement within Sunni Islam that seeks to restore the 7th century mode of Islamic governance, colloquially referred to as the pure or golden age of Islam, that existed during time of *al-Salaf as-Salih* (virtuous ancestors), specifically the Prophet Mohammed and *al-Sahaba* (companions) who include *al-Muhajirun* ("the emigrants" or initial followers of Islam who made the hijra or migration with Mohammed from Mecca to Medina) and *al-Ansar* ("the helpers" or Medinan followers of Islam), as well as *al-Rashidun*, known as the four "Rightously Guided Caliphs" namely Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

⁴ Quote taken from p. 17 in Nuri Kino, "Between the Barbed Wire," UngdomsInitiativet, 11 January 2013. Available online at: <http://www.betweenthebarbedwire.com>. (Accessed 9 April 2013).

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⁸ Aron Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of The Syrian Islamic Front," Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Occasional Paper No. 17, March 2013. Available online at: <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/86861.pdf>. (Accessed 9 April 2013).

⁹ See p. 22 in Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah is a 13th century Islamic scholar and theologian from the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence that is most famous for the *fatwa* (religious edict) that declared it permissible to wage militant jihad against the Mongols, who sacked the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad in 1258, because they were perceived as living in a state of *jahiliyya* (ignorance) and pre-Islamic paganism. The *fatwa* was controversial because previously it was considered forbidden to violently oppose the Caliphate, since such actions would constitute *fitna* (secession). Islamists use this *fatwa* and historical context to justify their extremist ideology by engaging in *takfir* (act of calling another Muslim an apostate) and denouncing the current Muslim regimes as un-Islamic and in a state of *jahiliyya*.

¹¹ See p. 76 in Bale, "Islamism and Totalitarianism."

¹² See translation by Yusuf Ali for Verse 29, Chapter 9 of the Qur'an taken from "Quran.Com." Available online at: <http://quran.com/9/29>. (Accessed 10 April 2013).

¹³ See p. 4 in Michael Singh, "Syria's Humanitarian Crisis," Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 19 March 2013. Available online at: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/SinghTestimony_20130319.pdf. (Accessed 9 April 2013).

¹⁴ Quote taken from p. 2 in Jeremy M. Sharp et al., "Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response," Congressional Research Service, RL33487, 21 August 2012. Available online at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>. (Accessed 9 April 2013).

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¹⁶ See p. 7 in "Syria: International Religious Freedom Report for 2011," U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Available online at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/193119.pdf>. (Accessed 10 April 2013).

¹⁷ "Wolf Calls on Religious Leaders in West to Speak Out on Behalf of Persecuted Church Globally," Congressman Frank Wolf, 9 January 2013. Available online at: <http://wolf.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=34&itemid=2108>. (Accessed 10 April 2013). See also, "Wolf Issues Report Following Trip to Middle East," 7 March 2013. Available online at: <http://wolf.house.gov/press-releases/wolf-issues-report-following-trip-to-middle-east>. (Accessed 10 April 2013).

¹⁸ Quote taken from p. 14 in "First the Saturday People, then the Sunday People: Report on a trip to Lebanon and Egypt," Congressman Frank Wolf, February 2013. Available online at: http://wolf.house.gov/uploads/lebanon_egypt_tripreport2.pdf. (Accessed 10 April 2013).

¹⁹ Rupert Shortt, "In the Middle East, the Arab spring has given way to a Christian winter," The Guardian, 2 January 2013. Available online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2013/jan/02/middle-east-arab-spring-christian-winter>. (Accessed 10 April 2013). See also, Sam Dagher, "An 'Arab Winter' Chills Christians," The Wall Street Journal, 5 December 2011. Available online at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203710704577053221510203422.html>. (Accessed 10 April 2013).

AINA Editorial

Stranded: the Forgotten Assyrians of Al-Thawrah, Syria

By Dr. Nicholas Al-Jeloo

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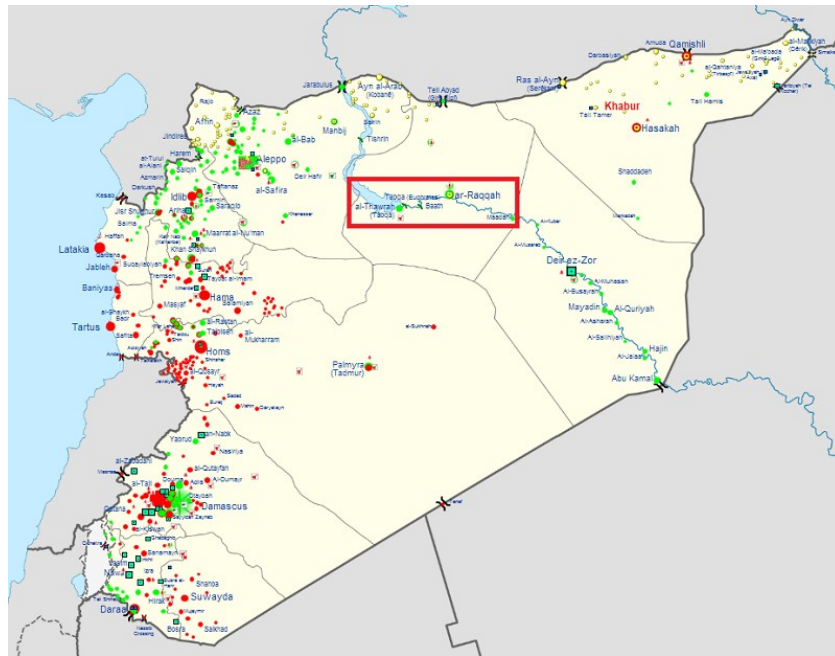
An Assyrian shop in First Quarter

When considering the present civil war in Syria, the focus of most Assyrians in the diaspora has understandably been directed towards the governorate of al-Hasakah, which harbours the largest concentration of ethnic Assyrians in the country. Little attention has been paid, however, to the small yet considerable communities 210 km to the southwest, in al-Raqqah Governorate. Prior to the eruption of the Syrian conflict in 2011 there were as many as 250 Assyrian families in the governorate, concentrated mainly in *Madinat al-Thawrah* ("Revolution City"), still known locally by its old name of al-Tabqah (or Tabgah). A smaller number of Assyrians also resided in the provincial centre, 45 km to the east, as well as in the border town of Tell-Abyad.

The Assyrians of al-Thawrah

Before 2011, the *nahiyah* (sub-district) of al-Thawrah was home to 70,000 people, including Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians and Armenians, with Muslims and Christians residing peacefully side-by-side. The city is located about 330 km northeast of Damascus and 130 km southeast of Aleppo. Up until the 1960s it was an insignificant village on the Euphrates River named al-Tabqah. With the construction of the Euphrates dam and its accompanying power station between 1968 and 1977, however, it developed into a service town and was expanded to house up to 12,000 Syrians and 900 Russian technicians who came to work on the project. This hydroelectric dam is the largest of its kind in Syria and provides electricity to many areas, including Aleppo.

In 1973 the fast-growing town was renamed al-Thawrah, in memory of the March 8th coup d'état which, in 1963, brought the Ba'ath Party to power in Syria. New, well laid out and immaculately planned neighbourhoods were built to house many of the incoming workers, including the First, Second and Third Quarters (named after the Party's principles of *Wahdah, Hurriyah w-Ishtirakiyah* -- unity, liberty and socialism). In contrast, the old part of town to the south (al-Tabqah proper) maintained its traditional style and layout, and is still locally known as *al-Qaryah* ('the village'). It should be noted that the government did help in offering cheap housing to dam workers and their families. Owing to their low salaries, however, and a lack of employment in other industries in the city, many of these families were unable to develop themselves economically.



The first Assyrians to settle in al-Thawrah were dam and construction workers, as well as civil, electrical and mechanical engineers. They were eventually joined by their wives and children, and soon the community grew. Most of the Assyrians in the city belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, and by 1973 they had established a small church, dedicated to St. George, and a community hall in al-Qaryah. They were served by a succession of priests from the Assyrian Church of the East until early 2013, when the community was displaced. Around the year 2000, a plot of land in the Third Quarter was purchased by them in order to build a new church, closer to where the bulk of the community lived, and in the same neighbourhood as the local Antiochian Orthodox Church. This project never materialised, however, perhaps for the best.

On the eve of Syria's civil war more than 200 Assyrian families (1,000 individuals) lived in al-Thawra, concentrated mostly in the First, Second and Third Quarters, on the right bank of the Euphrates, north of the old town, and beside the dam. Out of these, 110 families belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East and originated from the villages along the Khabur River in al-Hasakah Governorate. These were followed in number by the Syriac Orthodox Assyrians, who totalled about 80 families, along with a few Chaldean Catholic, Syriac Catholic and Protestant families. Whilst these communities were smaller, did not have their own churches, and were not

served by their own local priests, there was a plan to build a modest Syriac Orthodox church. This, however, did not come into fruition either.



Entrance to al-Thawrah

Al-Raqqah Governorate becomes a war zone

After taking over the northern part of al-Raqqah Governorate in September 2012, the "Free Syrian Army" made the provincial capital a primary target. On October 20, Reuters reported that the al-Nusra Front claimed responsibility for attacking and overrunning the Suluq air defence barracks in al-Raqqah, in cooperation with the al-Fajr Islamic Movement and a group of Chechen fighters of the Muhajiroun Brigade, killing 32 soldiers.¹ On November 14, Catholic news agency Fides reported a car bomb exploding in front of the Antiochian Orthodox church of the Annunciation in that city, damaging the church and causing two deaths -- both of whom were civilians. This succeeded in spreading terror amongst the local population, and was a grim sign of things to come.²

On November 26, 2012, a main route from al-Raqqah to Aleppo passing through al-Thawrah along the Euphrates was reported to be dotted with both regime and rebel checkpoints.³ By 30 December 2012, it was reported that opposition forces were fighting in the city and two days later it was reported that a majority of al-Raqqah Governorate was in rebel control.

On January 10, 2013, the civil war came to al-Thawrah when fierce artillery shelling from Tabqa military airport was reported in the city.⁴ A month later on February 11, Syrian rebels, including al-Nusra fighters, took control of the town and its strategic dam, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (an information office opposed to the Syrian Government) and videos posted by rebels. Fighters also seized control of the three neighbourhoods that housed dam workers -- in which many Assyrians lived.⁵

On February 22, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, Mor Gregorios Youhanna Ibrahim, who was kidnapped and **allegedly murdered** by Islamist rebels on April 22, reported that hundreds of Christian families had suffered forced displacement from al-Thawrah due to

fear and anxiety caused by the fierce fighting there. He had been informed by a local priest that, in just one night, more than 80 families left the city.⁶

The humanitarian crisis in al-Thawra was wrought with helplessness. A few beleaguered Assyrian families remained stranded there since they could not manage to survive anywhere else due to economic reasons. These were unreachable due to the hazardous situation on the roads, which had been rendered a battlefield. Snipers and kidnapping were also a danger, making it very difficult to move around even within the city itself. Add to that the many difficulties in communicating via telephones and the internet, which are still not operating in many areas under rebel control.



Al-Thawrah Dam



First Quarter

On March 4, the Jihadist organisations Jabhat an-Nusra, Harakat Ahrar as-Sham (known as the Syrian Islamist Front) and the brigade of Huthaya bin al-Yaman captured al-Raqqah, making it the first provincial capital claimed to come under rebel control in the civil war. They also captured the Governor's Palace and arrested the provincial governor. The 'secular' "Free Syrian Army" hardly had any role in this operation.⁷ The only regime forces that remained in the Governorate were holed up in the al-Thawrah military airbase, which had come under shelling by the rebels, as well as in the Division 17 base outside al-Raqqah.

On March 29, Zohair David (44), an Assyrian from Tell-Goran in al-Hasakah Governorate, was kidnapped and his car stolen. He had just driven 3 Assyrians there from his village, one of whom was a doctor whose presence was requested by the rebels. Zohair, who was married with four children, was found shot dead in a remote area near al-Thawrah nearly a week later.⁸ On that same day it was reported that rebels besieging the Division 17 base were in control of three quarters of that base with the Syrian Army holding the command centre.⁹



First Quarter Main Road

As of May, al-Thawrah is occupied by the Uwais al-Qarni Brigade. Four of the dam's eight turbines are operational and the original staff continues to manage the dam, still receiving pay from the Syrian Government.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in al-Raqqah, members of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham publicly executed three Alawite men on May 14.¹¹ Recently, on July 29, fighters belonging of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant kidnapped Italian Jesuit priest Paolo Dall'Oglio while he was walking in al-Raqqah, even though he had been prominent in championing the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad. There are fears for his safety.¹²

A note on al-Nusra

The al-Nusra Front, or *Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham min Mujahidin al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad* ('Front of Defence for the People of Greater Syria by the Mujahedin of Syria on the Battlefields of Jihad'), is the principle jihadist rebel group operating in Syria and an Al Qaeda

associate. The group announced its creation on 23 January 2012 and is generally made up of Sunni Islamist Jihadists. Its goal is to overthrow the Assad government, and then establish a Pan-Islamic state ruled by the Qur'an and Shari'ah law. The group also aims to reinstate the Islamic Caliphate.¹³ It is described as the most aggressive and successful arm of the rebel force. The group was designated by the United States in December 2012,¹⁴ the United Nations in May 2013,¹⁵ Australia in June 2013¹⁶ and the United Kingdom in July 2013¹⁷ as a terrorist organisation.



View of al-Qaryah from First Quarter

Such militant jihadist groups pose a direct threat to Syria's Christian communities, since they espouse an Islamist ideology, which incorporates elements of Wahhabism (the official religious doctrine of Saudi Arabia) and Salafism. In short, their stated goals and objectives are by definition hostile towards Christians. Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon describe kidnappings, rapes, harassment, theft and other violent reprisals at the hands of these Islamist groups. According to many of them, "just being Christian is enough to be a target."¹⁸ It would thus appear that the violence directed towards Christians in Syria is not purely incidental, nor is it motivated by economic reasons. Many other Christians fear being incorrectly identified as pro-Assad, by association, and thereby targeted for violent persecution by the Islamists and other opposition forces.¹⁹

The current situation of the Assyrians

The Assyrians of al-Thawrah and al-Raqqah are now dispersed and internally displaced, with some families having fled to government-held areas of al-Hasakah, Qamishli, Aleppo and Damascus. Others are now refugees in Lebanon and Turkey, awaiting their fate. According to Syriac Orthodox Archbishop in al-Hasakah, Mor Eustathios Matta Roham, these families, "... cannot go back to their home towns, because many of them lost their houses and property."²⁰ Additionally, some 25 families from al-Thawrah belonging to the Assyrian Church

of the East are currently stranded in the Tartus Governorate, concentrated mostly in the majority-Christian town of Safita.

Most of these families are under great economic stress after having lost everything they possessed -- their homes, their businesses, the schools they used to send their children to, their jobs and their livelihoods. Now, by no fault of their own, they have found themselves destitute, having fled their homes under the cover of night; and with many of them currently in need of food, clothing, medicine and shelter. Particularly, they are in dire need of monetary aid, in order to be able to support themselves in a country where prices of simple commodities have now gone through the roof. Many of them hope to be accepted as refugees and allowed to settle in Europe, North America or Australia, since they can no longer imagine a secure or stable future for themselves in Syria.

Notes

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⁸ "Assyrian Man Kidnapped and Killed in Syria" (AINA), 4 April 2013, [/news/20130403175229.htm](#).

⁹ A Syrian Army source at the base reported that 80 soldiers had been killed and 250 injured in the fighting, and that many injured troops had died of gangrene, "Syrian regime troops appeal for immediate aid in Al-Raqqa" (Al Arabiya), 4 April 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/04/04/Syrian-regime-troops-appeal-for-immediate-aid-in-Daraa.html>.

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All Things Assyrian
U.S. Troops Saved Art As the 'Monuments Men' of Iraq
By Lance M. Bacon
<http://www.armytimes.com>
Posted 2014-02-18 01:42 GMT



The 'Warka Mask,' a Sumerian artifact from 3100 B.C., was looted from the National Museum of Iraq in the final days of Saddam Hussein's regime. It was later found buried in someone's backyard (Samir Mezban/The Associated Press). What once served as a national bank looked more like a tomb. And it was, for the enemy soldiers who had recently tried to blast their way into the vault. The reinforced confines and simple physics left little of them.

A new team of unlikely allies pressed deep into the dark recesses. The temperature, already in triple digits, increased with every step. The stench of stagnant sewer water was almost unbearable.

After the painstaking process of cutting locks, the massive vault was opened to reveal the Treasure of Nimrud -- 613 pieces of Assyrian gold jewelry, precious stones and sculptures that has been called history's third-greatest treasure after King Tut's tomb and the Bactrian Hoard treasure of Afghanistan.

By now, you've probably heard of George Clooney's new film "The Monuments Men," which is based on the true story of World War II troops who rescued art from the war zone. Well, this isn't their story. This is the story of a modern-day group with a similar mission.

These "monuments men and women" fought to preserve Iraq's past while fellow soldiers fought for the country's future.

Included in their ranks was Maj. Corine Wegener. The now-retired Army Reserve civil affairs officer was a curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts when she volunteered to deploy to help support the National Museum of Iraq. Her expedited orders carried the signature of three generals, and she was on scene in May 2003, weeks after massive looting subsided in Baghdad. As many as 15,000 artifacts were lost in the mayhem.

"This is the cradle of civilization. The collections in the museum represent the finest aspirations of humankind in ancient Mesopotamia," she said. "A lot of the objects that were taken from the museum were in my Art History 101 textbooks. It was so important to me to help recover those objects and get the museum back up and stable."

Wegener was met by a "traumatized" museum staff. Shattered artifacts littered the floor. File cabinets and computers that kept all records had been stolen. It seemed like the end of an already troubled history for the international museum.

The Treasure of Nimrud was its crown jewel. This 2,800-year-old treasure, discovered in 1988, was placed in the national bank before the first Gulf War. But its fate was a mystery. Besides explosions from within and without, and the looters and floods, there stood another antagonist: Saddam Hussein's son Qusay, who had stolen billions from the bank and was reported to be after the treasure. "When they opened those boxes, their morale improved 100 percent," Wegener said. "It was a much-needed boost for the National Museum, and the nation."



The Nimrud treasure: gold bowl with the common Assyrian flower icon.

'Mona Lisa of Mesopotamia'

Reclaiming priceless artifacts is not always as glamorous as movies make it out to be. One example is the recovery of the Lady of Warka. Known as the "Mona Lisa of Mesopotamia," this priceless 5,200-year-old sculpture is the earliest known representation of the female face. It had been stolen from the National Museum, and the curators turned to Wegener for help. She educated coalition forces, enlisted the help of military police and put up "wanted" posters throughout Baghdad.

The Army's 812th Military Police Company tracked the sculpture through underground art dealers and found it buried in a backyard. Capt. Vance Kuhner called her with the news.

See the treasure of Nimrud

"I take it this thing is pretty important?" the captain asked her.

"Uh, yeah," she replied.

"Then I'd better tell the guys to stop tossing it around," he said. After a few moments of stunned silence, the captain eased her anxiety. "Ma'am, I'm just kidding. It's locked away in the unit safe and we'll bring it to you tomorrow."

In another find, soldiers from Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha were looking for weapons of mass destruction days after coalition forces took control of Baghdad. What they found was the Iraqi Jewish Archive -- thousands of Jewish communal and religious books and documents that had been confiscated from synagogues. They were in the basement of Saddam Hussein's intelligence building, which was filled with four feet of water.

Wegener worked for three months to salvage the documents from water and mold damage, an effort aided by experts from the National Archives. She served as a courier when the documents were brought to a freeze-drying facility in Dallas and later to the National Archives. The collection has been restored and is on view in New York at the Museum of Jewish Heritage until May. It is scheduled to be returned to Iraq this year.

Wegener now serves as a preservation specialist for cultural heritage at the Smithsonian Institution, and has formed the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield. Called the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, the agency provides emergency response when cultural property is jeopardized by armed conflict or natural disaster. The culture mission

While similar exploits in World War II earned a place in history and Hollywood, modern monuments men and women are not as widely known.

Lt. Col. James Ahern was senior observer-controller for civil affairs at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, La. After 12 mission rehearsal exercises, it was evident the jobs assigned to civil affairs in Iraq were not what soldiers were trained to do in the U.S. This was not lost on Army leadership, which was looking to reconfigure the capability.

Ahern in 2007 was sent to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force in Balad to get a firsthand look so trainers could adjust accordingly. But the State Department snatched him up soon after arriving. They had the lead in stability operations but didn't have the people for the job -- especially people with expertise in cultural heritage preservation and graduate degrees in history and library information science with archive specialization.

Ahern was assigned to a Provincial Reconstruction Team embedded in 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, out of Ramadi. There, he joined an effort to identify lost books and artifacts, develop a working inventory and help design a new public library.

Ahern had to first defuse a cultural clash. The person in charge of the library was a Sunni woman, who was requesting assistance from a Shiite-led government. To say that she was getting resistance would put it mildly.

The team bridged the gap. They also obtained "democracy funds" to purchase books. They helped salvage history that would have otherwise been lost.

This mission is not new. In fact, it helped propel the Army Reserve from a singular medical mission. This was solidified by the 1954 Hague Convention, which requires all who sign the treaty to provide military specialists who protect cultural property.

In fact, the authors were looking at the Monuments Men of World War II when that rule was penned.

Still, the recent wars have proved many military leaders do not know they are supposed to -- or how to -- conduct such cultural missions.

"The capability that exists only in the Army Reserve was utilized by them, but largely through serendipity," Ahern said. "There was no request for forces. I just happened to be there."

The Army is giving civil affairs concerted consideration, especially in light of regional alignment and the push to ensure soldiers are culturally aware of the lands in which they may serve.

It is possible that soldiers will be trained to identify and mark culturally significant items and locations. Such sites may even be identified on electronic battlefield maps. But the bulk of the responsibility will fall to Army Reserve civil affairs companies attached to brigade combat teams.

"Like other 'citizen soldiers' in the Army Reserve, we work in our field in the civilian sector," Ahern said. "Our job in uniform is our passion in life. So to be able to help at this level, in this way, there really aren't words to describe how that feels."

Syndicated News

Controversy Over an Assyrian Woman Marrying a Muslim Man

By Nuri Kino

<http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org>

Posted 2014-03-27 18:22 GMT



Sara and husband.

On March 8, International Women's Day, many of the people in southeastern Turkey only want to discuss one thing. She is Sara, an 18-year-old Assyrian/Syriac woman, who was allegedly kidnapped by sympathizers of Huda-Part, Allah's party, the Kurdish equivalent to Hezbollah. Others say she merely followed her heart and converted to Islam to marry the love of her life. Or that that she is just a pawn in the upcoming election, that they have manipulated a naive and vulnerable Christian girl to marry a Muslim in order to get more votes from Islamists, because if you convert a non-Muslim you have completed a great deed for Allah and Muhammad, and you should be rewarded. I decided to hear her own version of this modern Shakespearean drama, in a place where world politics has a habit of colliding with ancient civilizations and religions at war.

It is early morning in Midyat in southeast Turkey. The rooster is crowing and the first prayer of the day is heard loudly from the eleven mosques. I have booked an appointment with the only Assyrian parliamentarian in Turkey, Erol Dora, to talk about the upcoming election. When I mention that I am also interested in hearing the story about Sara, he introduces me to Vadi Aydin, a colleague and also his bodyguard. "He traveled to Idil to see the leaders of the clan she is with and her husband's family," Dora says.

"We were four people who went to see her," Aydin says. "It was the 20th of February, and we met at the home of one of the relatives to the family she is staying with in Idil. There was

a lot of tension in the air. Understandably so as we were there to take her back and they were there to tell us that they would keep her. The whole town sympathizes with Huda-Part . . . and we belong to the competing Kurdish party. That only made things worse."

He shakes his head and says that just the mere thought of "that little girl" in the company of fundamentalists upsets him.

"Finally they agreed. If Sara truly was not a victim of a kidnapping then we would leave the family alone, but if she told Hasibe anything else we would take her home to her mother. They took Hasibe to Sara. Half an hour later Hasibe was back and we left Idil empty handed."

Aydin said the whole situation is unfortunate for Sara, but also for the other Christian Assyrian/Syriacs who left the area.

"This might be difficult for people who are not from here to understand, the girl's naivety is used as a political weapon in the election campaign. Islamists show the voters that they do the errands of Allah, and that they have managed to convert a non-Muslim. And at the same time they are scaring the other Assyrian/Syriacs into leaving Turabdin."

When Aydin and Dora leave us, I decide to travel to Idil myself.

An hour later, we drive into a very colourful town with approximately 20,000 inhabitants, most of them Muslims. There are flyers hanging everywhere. Most of them belonging to the biggest parties in the area: yellow, red and green for the biggest Kurdish party, BDP, or orange for the current Turkish party, AKP. Music and election propaganda streams out of loud speakers. It is a warm day and the people of Idil are enjoying the sun. Everywhere there are groups of older men who are either discussing local or national politics. On the main street young boys and girls are dressed in a modern fashion and without any veils, as a stark contrast to many of the older veiled women and abaja-clad men.

After a long lunch and discussion among the restaurateurs and servers about the upcoming election, poverty, corruption, religion and history, I am ready to start looking for Sara. But before I leave, I enter the kitchen and give the two veiled women who cooked our food a tip for International Women's Day. They are very happy, not so much for the money but more because a stranger congratulates them on such an important day.

On the street, an Idil inhabitant whispers to me: "Be careful, the family the Christian girl is staying with belongs to Huda-Part. They're not to mess with, they are very dangerous."

We walk into the grocery store where she was last seen. Apparently it is owned by her husband's older brother, who we find standing behind the cash register.

He is very upset. He says he has had enough, a young man and woman have fallen in love and married and he does not understand why everyone is making such a big deal about it. Another man joins us. He introduces himself as Nuri, my namesake, and says he is married the store owner's sister. He is even more upset.

"What do you want? What does everyone want from us? Leave us alone," he spouts out. "No one was forced to anything. Can young people not fall in love? You can fall in love across religions. No?"

When I and Eliyo Eliyo, an Assyrian architect who has followed with me from Midyat, tell him we are here to understand and learn, not to argue, and as I ask everyone to calm down, we are presented with plastic chairs to sit on. We sit down in front of the cash register. There is still tension in the air. When I hold my hand out, the store owner introduces himself as Hasret Akdeniz. He is now trying to control his temper and tells his version of Sara and his younger brother's love story.

"They met three years ago. My younger brother was in her village Midin to work for twenty days but they have kept in touch since. And a few weeks ago he surprised us all by saying he wanted to marry her. It was no more than that. And she ran away from her village, came here and said she wanted to marry our brother. It was not anything we wanted, chose or interfered in."

Nuri, the brother-in-law, continues:

"There are plenty of unmarried Muslim girls in Idil. Beautiful. Rich. But he chose a Christian girl. The whole thing is hard for all, even for us. We have run this grocery shop for twenty years, Assyrian/Syriacs have always been faithful customers. We have plenty of friends amongst them. But now that has ended, none of them shop here anymore."

I show them wedding pictures that are available online and ask them why Sara is shown wearing a veil. Both look at me with a surprised look.

"She is married, of course she should wear a veil," Nuri says. "Unmarried women, look at the street, it's filled with them, and they can choose not to wear a veil, it is up to them what road they take, but a married woman must wear a veil."

When everyone calms down and we finish the soda we were treated to, I tell them I would like to meet Sara and get her version of the story. Only she will know the full truth.

Akdeniz gives Nuri a signal to take over the cash register. We ask if we should follow their car. Instead, he offers to drive us.

Suddenly we are on our way to the home where Sara lives. I am under the impression we are going to the village the family is from. But a few minutes later, still in central Idil, he stops the car. We jump out in front of three newly built pink houses, on a street where most of the houses are new. In every balcony and window there are people, some curious and some upset, who wonder why we are here. From one of the balconies a man raises his voice above everyone else.

"They are definitely not entering my house. You are stupid for taking them here," he screams at Akdeniz, and we understand that he is the father, also known as the clan leader. He looks like he's about to have a heart attack, red in the face, gesticulating. He is Sara's father in law, the man that politicians in Mardin and Midyat say is the local unofficial Hezbollah leader. He is screaming. Threatening. Swearing. I am telling him to come down from the balcony and meet me eye-to-eye. He hesitates, but then disappears from the balcony and we hear him and a few others hurry down the steps behind the main door they are refusing to open for us.

He runs out of the building and almost hits his son, who drove us to the house, therefore giving away their address.

"If you don't leave immediately there will be trouble," he shouts with his fist in the air whilst giving me a threatening look. When I say we are reporters interested in Sara's story and that we are not here to fight, he threatens to call the police. I think that sounds like a good idea so I ask him to do so. I would have done it myself if I had the number.

He gazes at his son, who brought us here, and shakes his head. Then it starts again, the screaming and shouting. I shout back that I can't hear anything that anyone is saying unless everyone calms down.

"Ok, I might let you in," he says suddenly, "but on one condition: You have to ring her mother and demand she takes back her police report." I don't understand.

"Her mother has reported us to the police; if she withdraws her statement I'll let you into my house. Those are my conditions."

I repeat that we are journalists, we neither can nor want to persuade Sara's mother, or anyone else, to do anything. We can, however, relay the message. By now, we all speak with

raspy voices. But it has paid off; a woman whispers in Kurdish that they are done, that she is ready, and refers to Sara.

They make space for us in the doorway so we can pass through. We continue to an apartment on the first floor where we are asked to remove our shoes. All the floors are covered in rugs. There are teenagers, children, men and women. The whole house is full. We are escorted into a large sitting room without any furniture other than rugs and mattresses.

A young couple sits tightly together at the front of the room. The man was in the crowd on one of the balconies as we arrived at the house. Though it is not only from the balcony I recognize him, but from wedding pictures circulating on the internet. The woman must be Sara. She is more beautiful in person than in the pictures, where she is covered in loads of makeup. She is wearing no makeup at all now, but instead is covered in gold on her neck and both arms. She casts us a demure glance. He looks down to the floor.

"It's a lie that we are part of or sympathize with Huda-Part. An even bigger lie is that she was kidnapped, persuaded or manipulated. Shame on those who say so," says a man who initiates the discussion but does not introduce himself. Later, we are told he is still another of Sara's brothers-in-law.

He is even more hot-tempered than his father. Every question I ask fires him up and he acts as if we are in the middle of a fist fight. Once again I'm forced to shout that enough is enough; either we use a friendly tone with each other or we leave the house and report how we could not conduct a civilized conversation with the family. Some try to calm the others who are more upset.

We are offered coffee and water and the tone gradually becomes friendly, or at least friendlier.

After a lot of persuasion I manage to get permission to speak to Sara in Turkish, the language she and I share. But to be able to speak to her at all, she must first move closer; she is now at least four meters away from me. Whispers start floating left, right and center; people whisper to each other and then to Sara. She is granted permission to move closer. She and her husband are now just a meter or so away. Before any one of us has the chance to say anything, the husband produces the marriage certificate to show us. Sara then says:

"Please, I beg you, convince my mother to withdraw the police report. The district attorney can request that I undergo a psychological evaluation. The whole situation is very upsetting. I chose to come here, I chose to become Muslim and now everyone will believe I am retarded -- "

She is interrupted by her father-in-law.

"I'm rich, I'm powerful, and my son could get any of our beautiful Muslim women. No one would turn me or him down if we asked for them. More beautiful girls. Richer girls. More intelligent. I have a lot to offer, gold, property. My son chose her and no one else. As I said, more beautiful... "

A woman silences him, gesturing towards Sara.

"I cannot understand why everyone makes such a big deal out of this. After all, at the end of the day we are all Kurds", blurts one of Sara's brothers-in-law.

We are astounded. What does he mean? Eliyo and I exchange glances. "I'm not Kurdish," I say. Emotions fly high again. The brother-in-law acts surprised.

"You should be ashamed to say such a thing. All who are born and live in this area are Kurdish, you just happen to confess to the wrong religion. We are all Kurdish, you, we and everyone else here, except for certain public service officials who are Turkish."

I turn to Sara. What does she think? Is she Kurdish? Her eyes begin to water. Everyone else's eyes are on her: "No, we are not ... I haven't heard that we ... in the village where I grew up we are not..." She is interrupted again.

Each time Sara says something, she looks around the room to assure herself that she had said the right thing. This time she nervously looks only at me and Eliyo. She briefly also turns to Adam Ottawa, the photographer.

I ask if she misses her family.

"Of course I miss my little brother and my mother. It was only the three of us." She tells us of how her father died when she was a child, and her mother had to work day and night to provide for her children, in a small village of about 50 households.

Adam would like to photograph Sara and her husband, but she wants to know what the picture will be used for. "There will be no pictures," her brother-in-law decides. I instead turn to her father-in-law to ask if we can at least take a picture of him. Such a brave man like himself. He wants to know first where Adam is from. I inform him that Adam is from Iowa, USA.

"May Allah's martyrs forever be blessed," is the surprising response I get.

As we stand up to leave after taking the pictures, Sara's husband begs us to listen to him. He emphasizes that they were married out of love. Sara in turn gives me her mother's mobile phone number and asks me once again to call her.

"My mother will lose a lot of money on a trial," she says, worried. She turns to one of the brothers-in-law with a questioning look.

"Yes, that's right, she will lose a lot of money because of the complaint she lodged about us manipulating Sara -- money we know she doesn't have, tell her that," he says. "It's alright for us, we can afford a trial, but she can't."

In the car, I dial the mother's number. No answer.

It is now dark; it's already 5 p.m. when we ask to be let past the gates of the Syriac-Orthodox monastery Mor Gabriel. During the past few years the monastery's board has dedicated most of its energy to fight the government's confiscation of monastery land, parts of which were returned only days before from none other than Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan himself. The archbishop, Samuel Aktas, greets us with open arms. He insists we dine with them. It is lent: vegetables, fruits and bulgur is offered, all from the monastery's farms.

"You should be aware that there is always an ulterior motive," he explains during the meal. "In the same manner of using a poor naive girl to fish for votes, Erdogan uses us to attract liberal votes. 'Look! How good I am towards Christians,' he wants to display."

Aktas is annoyed. "She does not understand how big this is, how many she has hurt. What emotions she has stirred. She is just a little child. Parliamentarians, other politicians, us priests and many others, have spoken of nothing else in the last few days. This was somewhat of the last straw. We have endured so much in the last few years, oppression and persecution, sometimes openly but mostly not. And today, after only seven years in jail, they've set free the people who brutally killed Christians in the Turkish city of Malatya."

It reminds me of what one of the police chiefs in Mardin said about Sara. "Promise you will not publicize my name," he asked me. "It's very simple; had it been a Muslim girl who ran away with a Christian boy, we would not have been able to guarantee the safety of the boy's family. I am not prepared to say more than that."

The next morning, I have an appointment with the teacher and Yazar Kaygisiz, a feminist well known for fighting for Christian and women's rights. She has also tried to meet with Sara,

and is surprised that we managed to do so. "All we got to see was the marriage certificate," she tells us.

"I do not believe that she got married and converted by free will," Kaygisiz says. "Too many things points to the contrary. For instance, the guy only had six months left to finish his military service. Why not wait until he finishes and comes home? Yesterday, when you got to meet them, he was only on leave. The fact they claimed that they do not belong to the Huda-Part, Allah's Party, is plainly ridiculous. We know for sure that they do. Another thing is that she didn't use her mother tongue when she called home, instead she spoke in broken Kurdish with her mother to tell her two things: that she had got married, and that she had found the proper religion."

Kaygisiz's voice is full of resignation. "The situation for Assyrians/Syriacs is sad. Far too few people dare to speak openly about the persecution. Of course, the law protects them, but real life, the life they live here, is different. Not a day goes by without news reaching me about yet another assault. I'm sorry, but I cannot stop thinking of Sara: She will now live in a large Islamic family whose language, culture or religion she barely knows, while the man she supposedly fell in love with is not even there. It's sick."

Before we part, she says, "What is important to understand is that everyone tries to assimilate the Assyrian/Syriacs: first the Turks, then the Arabs, and now the Kurdish. Suddenly some Kurds insist that the Assyrian/Syriacs must refer to themselves are Christian Kurds. You must include this point in your report. And one last thing, how come that several of the most prominent Turkish artists, actors and singers have married Christians but do their utmost to hide it? Well, otherwise they wouldn't get a single record sold or never again be considered for an acting part.

"A Christian person I know in Istanbul got married to a famous Muslim Turkish pop star, it's very secret. Now I know why."

In Mardin, I meet with the author and teacher Yusuf Begtas, who for many years served as a managing director at the monasteries Mor Gabriel and Deyr ul-Zahfaran. We are interested in his view of Sara's situation.

"I'm deeply touched by the fate of this family," he says. "Sara's father and I did our military service together. He died of a serious illness; Sara was only a little child then. Already before that the family was in deep economic difficulty because of expenses for medical care and medicine. He left behind a family in financial misery. Perhaps it is the poverty that drove her to this?"

I call the archbishop, Samuel Aktas. There was something he said when we met that has acquired new meaning. I want him to repeat it.

"We believe that they have been manipulating her for years. Well, yes, simply preparing her for this," he says. "For them it is a feat to have managed to convert one of us. I understand that in European ears it may sound as though we exaggerate our feelings. One has to live here to understand why this has hurt us, how it has upset us and frightened us at the same time."

Nuri Kino is an independent investigative reporter, filmmaker, author, Middle East & human rights analyst. This article was translated from Swedish by Izla Rhawi and Vivianne Deniz.

AINA News

A Letter to Obama From an Assyrian American Student

Posted 2015-03-14 09:14 GMT

Reine Hanna, an Assyrian college student in Chicago, penned the following letter to President Obama:

Dear Mr. President:

I woke this morning to find that your appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" was trending on every major social media platform. I watched the clip of the "Mean Tweets" segment - something I have seen previously featuring the likes of Snooki, Lil Wayne, and Justin Bieber. My initial reaction to the clip was in distaste, simply because I find it odd that the President of the United States would level himself with such celebrities. But I get it, I do: Mr. Kimmel even prefaced the clip by reminding us you are human, after all. With this in mind, I don't see any issues with you as our President golfing, submitting an NCAA bracket, or visiting late-night TV shows. I can also see why many Americans may have found your appearance last night so funny.

But you should know, Mr. President, that there are Americans that haven't laughed in weeks. Not since the attacks launched on the Assyrian towns in Syria on February 23, 2015. Actually, we haven't really had the heart to laugh since ISIL invaded the Nineveh Plain in the summer of 2014. After all, how can we? How can we laugh without knowing the fate of the nearly three-hundred innocent Assyrian men, women, and children that were taken hostage? After watching our ancient reliefs reduced to dust? How can we laugh after seeing that terrible image released just yesterday of a woman hanging dead from a log, dangling alongside her two young sons?

Mr. Kimmel is right, Mr. President - you are human. But as a human, how can you laugh, sir? While girls as young as your beautiful daughters are taken captive and sold as slaves? As a husband and a father, how can you allow such atrocities to occur to innocent women and children knowing you have the power to stop them?

During your interview, the recent events in Ferguson were addressed, at which point you stated, "What had been happening in Ferguson was oppressive and objectionable and was worthy of protest..." As an American of Assyrian background, I - like many others - feel that what has been happening to Assyrians in Iraq and Syria is beyond oppressive, undoubtedly objectionable, and most certainly worthy of protest. Even so, you have yet to make a direct statement related to the ongoing plight of Assyrians in the Middle East, and instead, have chosen to mask it, which consequently belittles our suffering. Please understand why we would be insulted by your inaction, capped with your appearance on Mr. Kimmel's show last night.

I understand that your sense of responsibility is tied to the American people, and that what happens within our borders is your priority. But these people - they are the family and friends of American citizens. The United States, for a number of reasons, has an obligation to the innocent people of Iraq and Syria. We look to you the same way they do - as our only hope. We ask that you acknowledge our tweets, our phone calls, our emails, our petitions - our pleas. As Americans, but more importantly, as humans - we ask for your immediate attention and action. And as a law-abiding, tax-paying, voting citizen - I ask that you, as my president, consider us during this difficult time.

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. -- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Syndicated News

Assyrian Priest Wrestles With Turkey's Ethnic Tensions

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org>

Posted 2015-04-22 20:05 GMT



Fr. Yusuf Akbulut, Syriac Orthodox priest of Diyarbakir's Virgin Mary Church March 2015 (Photo: WWM).

In the courtyard of the 1,700-year-old church over which he presides, Fr. Yusuf Akbulut beams with pride. He points out that the excellent stone and woodwork is a result of the craftsmanship of his ethnic group, the Syriac Christians of Turkey.

"The Syriacs were always the goldsmiths, metal workers, stone workers and artisans," he said. "They have a tradition of being skilled craftsmen."

Yusuf Akbulut, 50, is the priest of Diyarbakir's Virgin Mary Church, a Syriac Orthodox congregation in southeast Turkey. He speaks Syriac as his mother tongue, a language closely related to Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his disciples.

Despite his church's incredible heritage, there are only 40 people in his congregation. They are tiny remnants of Syriac Christianity, an ancient Eastern-rite church centered in northern Mesopotamia. In the early 20th century, over 60 percent of Diyarbakir's population was non-Muslim. Now the Syriac community is so small that the newcomer Turkish Protestant church across the street has more members.

As the local leader of a minority religious faith, Akbulut's role is tenuous in Turkey. On the one hand, he feels compelled to speak up for oppressed Syriac Christians across the Middle East, now heavily persecuted by the self-proclaimed Islamic State for the past 10 months. On the other hand, he must not go too far and risk running into problems with Turkish authorities, as he did 15 years ago.

Fr. Akbulut fell into trouble with the government in 2000-2001 for some offhand comments picked up by the Turkish press, declaring that his minority Christian community had been among the victims of the massacre of Anatolian Christians carried out by the Ottoman Empire in 1915, exactly one hundred years ago.

In recent years nine (mainly Western) countries around the world have built memorials to remember the Assyrian genocide. Australia's monument, which was strongly opposed by the local Turkish community, has been vandalized three times since it was erected in 2010. The attacks always coincide with an event to acknowledge the Assyrians who lost their lives. In the first attack, a star and crescent moon - similar to the Turkish national flag - were sprayed onto the memorial. Nazi swastikas were painted on the memorial plaque in the most recent attack, nine days before the centennial anniversary on 24 April.

There is a security guard posted outside Fr. Yusuf's church. He is a Muslim who occasionally practices reciting the Quran aloud, clearly audible to visitors.

The Virgin Mary Church is a gorgeous work of architecture in a run-down part of the city of Diyarbakir. The church contains Syriac inscriptions and intricately carved wooden altars and pews. It was first built in the third century, but the original building was destroyed and a new structure built over it. The church underwent a major renovation in 2005, funded by the Syriac Orthodox diaspora in Europe and the United States.



St Mary Church Diyarbakir, March 2015 (Photo: WWM).

Akbulut's son leads tour groups through the church. He shows them its Syriac inscriptions and tombs of saints. On one tour in mid-March he explained the role of fasting in the Syriac tradition to a confused group of Muslim tourists, who asked "Are Christians required to fast for a full 40 days, like Jesus did?"

Diyarbakir is mostly populated by Kurds, a large ethnic group spread across southeastern Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. They speak a language distinct from Turkish and consider themselves tolerant of different races and religious groups.

One person proud of this ethnic heritage is Ahmet Kesen, a local politician affiliated with the People's Democratic Party (HDP), a Kurdish political party that dominates politics in southeastern Turkey. In the HDP all top positions are split between men and women. In the nearby city of Mardin the co-mayor is a 25-year old Syriac Christian woman named Februniye Akyol.

"We have lived together in this land for centuries," Kesen said. "Whether Syriac, Armenian, or Yezidi, this makes no difference to us." His party (which is campaigning heavily to surpass the Turkish government's 10 per cent election threshold in the general elections this June to enter Parliament) is for the first time fielding both an Armenian and a Yezidi candidate. The sole Syriac member of the Turkish Parliament, Erol Dora, had first to run as an independent but then he affiliated with the HDP.

Diyarbakir has experienced a resurgence of Kurdish cultural expression in recent years. The Kurdish language had been completely outlawed for public use until the last decade. The government has gradually eased up on Turkish-only language policies, so that now Kurdish translations of Turkish signs cover the city, even in municipal buildings.

Fr. Akbulut does observe that tensions are easing in the city, compared to recent decades. He credits his Kurdish neighbors for treating him, as a Christian, with friendly respect. Any difficulties that have come to him he blames on the national government.

"The state is not as open. [President Recep] Erdogan once said about Turkey [that we are] 'one language, one religion, one race.' But we Christians are the oldest religious group in this city!"

Syndicated News

An Assyrian Woman's Struggle for Her People's Future

By Diana Darke

<http://www.alaraby.co.uk>

Posted 2015-05-18 07:41 GMT



Februniye Akyol, the 26 year-old co-mayor of Mardin, Turkey. A Syriac [Assyrian] Christian woman is challenging sexual and religious discrimination in conservative southeastern Turkey and building bridges with her co-religionists fleeing persecution at the hands of the Islamic State group in Syria.

In the southeastern Turkish municipality of Mardin, the 26 year-old co-mayor, Februniye Akyol, is a local girl from the Syriac Christian minority.

Despite the nearby border with Syria having existed for nearly a century, those in her Syriac community retain close ties with family members on the other side.

Even now, when the border crossings are officially closed, they are in constant touch by mobile and the barriers are sometimes discreetly opened to allow clandestine meetings.

Februniye was christened Fabronia Benno, but she was forced to use the "turkified" version of her name to enter Turkish politics, something of an irony as one of the main reforms she seeks to achieve are language and cultural rights for her community, which was once 200,000 strong here in its heartland of the Tur Abdin, but now numbers now less than 5,000.

"What we want," she explains when I met her recently in her Mardin office, "is for all mother tongues to be permitted in Turkey, so that not just Turkish but also Kurdish and Syriac can be taught in schools and spoken, just as they are in European countries."

Never had she envisaged a political career. As the first local Syriac Christian woman to leave her home and go to university in Istanbul, everyone assumed she would use her education as an escape route to Europe, like many Syriac graduates before her.

Instead Februniye returned and began an MA at Mardin's Artuklu University in Syriac cultural studies, the only such course on offer in Turkey.

Then, with only two months to go until local elections scheduled for 30 March 2014, Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), made the radical

suggestion that a Syriac woman should run for co-mayor alongside Ahmet Turk, the respected 72 year-old Kurdish candidate.

At first there was opposition to the idea, with the predominantly Kurdish population of Mardin preferring to field their own female Kurdish candidate for the job. The standard policy of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Turkey's main Kurdish party, is to have gender equality in all top political jobs to promote female participation in governing bodies. But Februniye, still a student, was asked to stand.

When the pair won, Februniye became the first Christian to govern a Turkish metropolitan municipality. Working alongside her former enemies, the Kurds, was difficult at first, Februniye confesses. Syriacs have in the past suffered persecution, including rape and theft of homes.

"In the 1990s we suffered badly," she tells me softly. "My father, a silversmith, was arrested and we didn't know where he was. It affected me deeply. Many of us were forced to leave our homes."

She decided she could work alongside Ahmet Turk when he became the first Kurdish leader in Turkey to apologise publicly to the Armenian, Syriac and Yazidi minorities for the massacres that his ancestors had committed in 1915.

Patriarchal prejudice

Despite Mardin's heavily patriarchal society of Arab, Turkish and Kurdish Muslims, Februniye says she is determined to fight the region's traditional prejudices against women.

"The only way to put an end to domestic violence, honour killings and disrespect towards women," she says, "is for women, as half the population, to be represented on all committees, to re-educate people and to challenge the old ways."

Inside Syria, IS fighters are already frightened of the female Kurdish YPG fighters who helped deprive them of victory in Kobane. They also believe they will go straight to hell if they are killed by a woman.

In IS-controlled Raqqa, not far to the south, women cannot leave the house except for worship or approved work, and even then, only if accompanied by a man.

A woman's role in the "caliphate" is to be a domestic servant to her husband and to breed the new generation of IS fighters. Minorities, such as Yazidis, are sold into sexual slavery for as little as \$10 each.

Beatings of females and sexual intercourse with pre-pubescent girls are lawful, according to IS publications.

If western governments are at all serious in their fight against IS, they should be giving Februniye and her colleagues every possible support.

Otherwise the ideological line in the sand risks being overrun and the barbarity will edge ever westwards.

1 Comments

Charles Kochou

2015-05-18 17:09 GMT

"If western governments are at all serious in their fight against IS, they should be giving Februniye and her colleagues every possible support". Dear Februniye, we are proud of you and your colleagues for speaking up and doing what is right. However, the problem is that the West is NOT serious on war on terror and is only using this strategically to divide sovereign nations in the Middle East for the sake of the "greater Israel" in the NWO and we are just caught in the middle of this quagmire.

Syndicated News

Turkey Assassinates Three Kurdish Female Activists

By Jan Nasro

ARA News

Posted 2016-01-06 07:05 GMT



Amid the continuous military operations by the Turkish forces in the southeastern Kurdish province of Sirnak, three prominent female political activists were reported dead on Tuesday.

Turkish security forces shot dead the three Kurdish activists in Silopi town of Sirnak province.

Seve Demir, member of the Democratic Regions Party (BDP), Pakize Nayir, co-leader of the People's Council in Silopi, and Fatma Uyar, member of the Free Woman Union were found dead subsequent to a security raid in Silopi town on Tuesday.

The assassination of the three Kurdish female activists raised the outrage of the Kurdish parties in Turkey.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP) and the Democratic Regions Party (BDP) issued a joint statement condemning the assassination.

"This crime confirms the brutality of the authorities against the Kurdish people and the peaceful activists. Those women have been struggling for the legitimate civil rights of their people," it said.

Under the pretext of combating rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkish army and security forces have been waging fierce operations against the Kurdish towns of Cizre and Silopi in the southeastern province of Sirnak for weeks.

Local sources argued that the Turkish operations aim at punishing the entire Kurdish population in the region for alleged cooperation with the PKK.

At least 20 civilians were killed and dozens more wounded in Turkish bombardment in Cizre town over the past two weeks.

"People are suffering the most under the current siege and curfew. There are wounded civilians who need treatment and dead people who must be buried," a Kurdish media activist told ARA News in Cizre. "The government avoids mentioning the humanitarian crisis in Cizre and Silopi to justify its military operations under the pretext of fighting the PKK."

Syndicated News

Kurds, Assyrians Called 'Traitors', Abandon Syrian Opposition Bloc

<http://sputniknews.com>

Posted 2016-01-11 06:32 GMT



Assyrian female fighters, members of the battalion called the "Female Protection Forces of the Land Between the Two Rivers" fighting the Islamic State group in Syria.

(AFP/DELIL SOULEIMAN).A number of influential Kurdish and Assyrian political parties have reportedly broke away from a Syrian opposition bloc, which labeled them 'traitors' and 'terrorists' and refused participation in peace talks.

Ranks of the Syrian opposition are getting thinner once again.

The arguably most influential political party of the Syrian Kurds, PYD (Democratic Union Party) -- which formed one of the best anti-Daesh ground forces, YPG -- and its Christian Assyrian ally, the Syriac Union Party, along with Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (PDK-S) have suspended their membership in a Syrian opposition bloc known as the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC), Kurdistan24 news outlet reported on the weekend.

The Kurdish PYD was a founding member of the leftist Committee, which is often regarded as the main non-armed umbrella group for the Syrian internal opposition.

"Many reasons led us to freeze our membership in NCC," Sihanouk Dibo, a high-ranking representative of PYD told Kurdistan24. "The most important one to us is that many NCC members designated the Syrian Kurdish forces of People's Protection Units (YPG) as terrorists."

First and foremost, acceptance of foreign military aid in fighting Daesh caused that the NCC began stigmatizing its only non-Arab members, a statement published by PYD on Thursday, corroborated.

"NCC's inclusion of the Kurdish forces of YPG, YPJ (Women's Protection Units) and SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) in the list of terrorism and demeaning of their victories against IS (Daesh) violates the ethics and noble goals of struggle against terrorism," the release read.

"Our goal is achieving a democratic Syria for all the Syrians regardless of their ethnicity or sect," PYD stated.

In December 2015, the Kurds were ostracized from opposition talks held in Saudi Arabia. Riyadh invited 116 representatives from various political and militant groups of Syria to a two-day conference, but some of the participants reportedly had close ties with violent extremist groups. The Kurds and allied groups held their own meeting in the northeastern Syrian province of Hasakah instead.

The Riyadh summit resulted in the formation of a 32-member council, which is set to choose 15 delegates to represent the Syrian opposition at the peace talks with Damascus, due to be held in 2016 in accordance with the Vienna communique of November 14, 2015.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stressed that the Vienna-format talks on resolving the Syria crisis should include all of the country's opposition groups, as well as a delegation from Damascus.

Spokesperson for the Secretary-General of UN recently commented on the exclusion of Kurdish representatives from the talks.

"It is important that as many voices as possible, the wide... the different cultures and minorities and religion groups that exist in Syria be represented at the talks," Stephane Dujarric highlighted.

SDF, mentioned in a citation above, a secular military anti-jihadist alliance of northern Syria, backed both by Russia and the US, consists mostly of the Kurdish YPG/YPJ units alongside Arab and other minor ethnic militias. The local coalition was formed in northern Syria late last year, but has already carried out several successful operations against Daesh and captured a strategic dam over the Euphrates River and still continues to advance.

?The political branch of SDF declared on Sunday that it is currently working with Moscow and Washington on obtaining representation at the forthcoming peace talks, AFP reported.

Syndicated News

Assyrian Bishop Wants Friendship With Israel

By Bradley Martin

<https://www.algemeiner.com>

Posted 2016-06-22 00:29 GMT



Archbishop Awa Royel.

Israel has stability, the ear of the world community, and the ability to be a modern state in the Middle East. Israel has withstood the test of time," says Mar Awa Royel, the first American-born Assyrian bishop in history. Born David Royel in Chicago, Illinois on July 4, 1975, His Grace Mar Awa, Bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East, who presides over the Diocese of California, conveys his desire for friendship between Israel and the Assyrian people.

Noting that "we've had a long history," he cites prophecy in the Book of Isaiah in order to provide a biblical foundation for his desired brotherhood with Israel, and describes several church-organized pilgrimages that he has led to Israel.

While there are very few Assyrian Christians in Israel, until 1853 the Assyrian Church of the East shared a part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Numerous records and Assyrian manuscripts are now in the possession of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Israel.

Bishop Royel also described the relations and commonalities between Jews and Assyrian Christians in Iraq prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. Even after the Arab Muslim conquest of the Middle East, which installed Arabic as the lingua franca of the region, Assyrians continued to speak Assyrian.

The Nash Didan (Aramaic for "our people") refers to Jews who lived in villages in northern Iraq (modern-day Kurdish Regional Government) and near the borders of Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. Tradition indicates that the community was founded by Jews who fled to that area during the Babylonian Exile, and did not return to their homeland after the declaration issued by Cyrus II of Persia. Assyrian and the Nash Didan dialect are very close. It is currently estimated that about 300,000 of the Nash Didan live in the state of Israel.

"We are the most Semitic of the churches," says Bishop Royel. Jews and Assyrians in the region were bound by more than a common linguistic heritage. Royel describes the Targumim (the Aramaic translations/paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible and accompanying rabbinic

teachings) as an influential text in Church doctrine. In fact, the Targumim are the antecedents of the version of the Old (and New) Testament of the Assyrian Church of the East. Queen Helena of Adiabene, an Assyrian who converted to Judaism in about 30 C.E., spent the latter part of her life in Jerusalem, where she gave gifts to the Second Temple of Jerusalem and was meticulous in her observance of the precepts of Judaism.

Assyrian churches themselves are a fusion of synagogue and Jerusalem Temple worship. "There are no examples like it in any churches that are found in North America," says Royel. "Facing east, there is a Holy of Holies, and a bima in the middle of the church building where the Scriptural readings take place." The Assyrian Church of the East also follows the Jewish practice of not pronouncing the holy name of God when the Bible is read in church. Readings from the Old Testament are also featured more prominently than in other church services.

The Assyrian Church at one time had an estimated 80 million adherents. As it now stands, their worldwide numbers have been reduced to a little less than 4 million people collectively. In Iraq, 1.5 million Assyrians lived in the country at the start of the US invasion in 2003. Today, the Assyrian Christians in Iraq number around 150,000. That is a 90 percent reduction of Assyrian Christians in their ancient homeland.

"Iraq does not view Assyrians as part of their society," says Royel. "Maybe, it is time to reconsider Sykes-Picot. There is talk of establishing martial law in Iraq, like in Egypt, but that doesn't seem practical. Egypt is more homogenous than Iraq."

When asked what a modern state of Assyria would look like, Royel stated that he would like very much to see a free Assyrian homeland for his people to live in peace within its borders. Friendship between Israel and Assyria would be mutually beneficial, with both countries being strong allies. Whereas Israel would serve as a model for a successful Middle Eastern state for Assyria, Israel would gain a strong ally in an increasingly tumultuous region.

Bradley Martin is a Fellow for the Haym Salomon Center for American Jewish Thought and Research Assistant for the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research.

Syndicated News

Did Obama Betray Syrian Assyrians to Please the Turks?

By John Zmirak

<https://stream.org>

Posted 2016-08-27 10:19 GMT



Members of the Syriac Military Council fighting at the Manbij frontline to cut ISIS off from Turkey.

American policy in Syria has been marked by a long list of flip-flops and failures. Remember Obama's "red line" meant to stop the Assad regime from using chemical weapons? That was quickly erased when Congress made it clear there was little public support for using U.S. forces to topple another secular dictator in favor of rebel groups whose radical Islamist views made them no less dangerous to our interests. The "moderate" rebels to whom the U.S. was airdropping weapons proved to be virtually mythical creatures, and those weapons ended up in the hands of al Qaeda's allies. Then we learned that a rebel group the Pentagon had backed was fighting another that the CIA had armed.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin has executed on Russia's behalf a clear and consistent policy, which has helped keep Assad in power -- to the benefit of Russia's Mediterranean influence, and to the benefit of the beleaguered Christian minority in Syria, who find him less of a threat than the Islamist alternatives.

There was one policy, just one, that the U.S. had engaged in which seemed to be working out well: Our government's backing of the Syrian Democratic Forces, Kurdish-led militias that are allied with local Christians (the Syriac Military Council and the Nineveh Plain Force), that with growing success are taking territory away from ISIS. In those liberated regions, the SDF has established enclaves where Christians have religious freedom and their own armed militias, and women take part in government (unlike in most of the Middle East). As religious freedom activist Johannes de Jong [reported here](#) at *The Stream*:

The successes of the Syriac Military Council and the Nineveh Plain Forces changes the picture we may have of the Syriac-Assyrian Christians in Iraq and Syria. It also challenges us to

rethink our strategy to support them. No more than you or I do these Christians aspire to live in refugee camps on care packages. They ask for our assistance in standing up and defending themselves in their own country, where their families have kept the Faith for almost 2,000 years.

But now the U.S. government has decided to abandon the Kurds and their Christian allies, as [Michael Horowitz reported](#) in the *International Business Times*:

Five days ago, US jets were scrambled to protect Kurdish forces in their self-declared Northern Syria Federation from Assad's air force in the eastern city of Hasakah.

Today, in the aftermath of a limited Turkish intervention on Syrian soil, the US is demanding the Kurds leave the northern city of Manbij, which the Kurds fought and died to capture during the past two months -- backed by US warplanes.

That these two events happened less than a week from another is astonishing, even in such an unpredictable and volatile environment as the Syrian civil war. That the US is letting down its only remaining ally in Syria, at a time when other powers, namely Russia and Iran, have acted aggressively to protect theirs, is damaging to the overall US position in the region. ...

By demanding the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) leave Manbij, the US took the strategy it itself initiated, nurtured and supported, and dumped it into the trash.

Why?

What motivation does the Obama administration have for turning against its erstwhile allies, the best hope in a desolate region for establishing something like a free and pluralist government? According to Horowitz, we are currying favor with Turkey -- the former secular democracy which is morphing before our eyes into an Islamist dictatorship, in the wake of a failed coup that has proved a pretext for a massive purge of secular-minded dissidents.

This is the same Turkey that has gone from provoking Russia (by shooting down a plane that was fighting ISIS) to cozying up to Putin. Turkey is also [blackmailing the European Union](#) for huge cash payments and visa-free travel throughout the continent, with the threat that if these demands are not granted, Turkey will dump hundreds of thousands more Syrian migrants across the EU border into Greece and Bulgaria.

So concerned are U.S. generals over Turkey's untrustworthiness that they have [pulled U.S. nuclear weapons out](#) of their longtime Turkish base of Incirlik.

Turkey has for decades savagely repressed its large and growing Kurdish minority, and its autocratic president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, would rather see ISIS prevail in Syria than the creation of a free, democratic Kurdish region that might serve as a magnet for armed Kurdish rebels in Turkey.

To patch up relations with that regime, the Obama administration has apparently decided to throw its Kurdish and Christian allies to the wolves -- and embark on a campaign of flattery aimed at Erdoğan. On August 24, Vice President Joe Biden traveled to Ankara and told Erdoğan:

The attempted coup went to the heart of who your people are -- principled, courageous and committed. And for a people who have struggled so long to establish a true democracy, this was, from my perspective and the president's perspective, the ultimate affront. So my heart goes out to not just the government, but to the Turkish people.

Biden gushed that "the American people ... stand in awe" of Erdoğan and his supporters for beating back the bungled coup. Biden did not mention the ugly crackdown that was taking place all around him as he spoke. As [Bridget Johnson reported](#) on PJ Media:

Erdoğan's purge since the coup attempt has included basically any secular opponent to his Islamist government: more than 40,000 people have been rounded up, from soldiers to jurists to bankers and even teachers and a comedian. Human rights groups have [charged](#) that the rule of

law has gone out the window as detainees have been kept in makeshift facilities without proper access to legal representation and suffering beatings, rapes and starvation. Erdoğan has also intensified his battle against the free press.

Meanwhile, religious freedom activists concerned for Christians in the region are profoundly worried about the implications of this U.S. flip-flop. Johannes de Jong, who works closely with Syrian Christian leaders, told *The Stream*:

It is clear that the Turkish push against the [Kurdish-led] SDF is very worrying for the Syriac Assyrian Christians of the area, and even more for the growing number of Kurdish Christians of Rojava. It shows how much influence Turkey can have and it's obvious that Turkey is the oppressor of Christians and Kurds. Turkey still denies the [1915-21] genocide against Armenians and Assyrians. One major way for the U.S. to restore trust among the Christians is to properly arm the Syriac Military Council. And, obviously, the U.S. needs to make substantial steps to show that it indeed continues to support the SDF. The U.S. needs to stop the ongoing attacks on the SDF and to investigate the claim that *Turkey used chemical weapons* against the SDF and the civilian population the SDF protects. [emphasis added]

Syndicated News

Assyrian Teen Hits Back At ISIS By Sculpting Nimrud's Ruined Artifacts

By Basma Atassi

Posted 2016-11-17 18:15 GMT



Thabit has been sculpting immaculate statues that resemble some of the Assyrian artifacts destroyed by ISIS. (📷 CNN)

(CNN) -- When footage emerged of ISIS destroying the ancient city of Nimrud outside Mosul, the world stood powerless in the face of a group of militants using sledgehammers and electric drills to obliterate centuries-old archaeological gems.

But 17-year-old Nenous Thabit rolled up his sleeves and began work on replicating the sculptures.

For Thabit, an Assyrian Christian, the 3,000-year-old city -- which once formed the capital of an Assyrian empire reaching from Egypt to parts of modern-day Iran and Turkey -- was a source of pride. He considers the artifacts of Nimrud to be the work of his ancestors.

"They waged a war on art and culture, so I decided to fight them with art," he told CNN.

He did so by sculpting immaculate statues that resembled some of the most precious Assyrian artifacts in Nimrud and other ancient areas in and around Mosul.

In 2015, a year after ISIS began its assault on Mosul and nearby towns, the militants bulldozed Nimrud as part of their campaign to destroy symbols they considered to be idolatrous. UNESCO described the act as a war crime.

In a modest apartment in the Kurdish city of Irbil, where Thabit and his family took refuge after fleeing Mosul, the young artist meticulously carved with his sculpting cutter the beard of Lamassu, an Assyrian deity.

"Lamassu is my favorite statue," said Thabit. "It is the strongest creature in the Assyrian heritage. It has the head of a human, the body of a lion, the legs of an ox and the wings of a vulture."

He said it took him about 15 days to complete the piece.



Thabit holds a picture of Ashur, a primary Assyrian deity. (CNN)

According to a website that tracks the damage to artifacts, three Lamassu statues were destroyed by ISIS in Iraq.

The website is run by Christopher Jones, a student in ancient near eastern history at Columbia University in New York. He said that one of the Lamassu statues was destroyed in Nimrud, another was in the Nergal Gate of Nineveh, while the third was in the Mosul Museum.

After the Iraqi army retook Nimrud and nearby areas this week, more details are expected to emerge on the scale of the damage done by ISIS to the relics.



Thabit recreated the pillars where the Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest surviving codes of law in recorded history, was written. (CNN)

Over the past year, Thabit has sculpted 18 Assyrian statues and one mural. He was trained by his father, Thabit Michael, a sculptor himself, who took Thabit with him to his workshop and allowed him to play with clay from the age of seven. Michael said teaching his son did not require a lot of effort. "Nenous is an incredibly fast learner," he told CNN. "I see huge potentials in him".

Since then, and up until last year, sculpting was just a hobby Thabit pursued when he was not in school. But after ISIS attacked his heritage, he started taking the craft very seriously.

"In Iraq, there are people who are killed because they are sculptors; because they are artists. ISIS view them as apostate," he told CNN over the phone.

"So continuing to sculpt is a message that we will not be intimidated by those devils."

He is hoping to attend art school in the Kurdish city of Dohuk next year.

"My dream is to become a prominent artist in Iraq to make my country proud and show the world that we in Iraq love life and cherish our heritage," he said.

IS came with a hit list, left Syria town in a trail of blood

AP SARAH EL DEEB, Associated Press 23 Oct 2017 3 hours ago



BEIRUT (AP) — The Islamic State militants came into the Syrian town with a hit list. By the time they left three weeks later, more than 70 civilians had been killed — shot or beheaded, their bodies dumped in farms and ditches.

The apparent revenge killings in the town of Qaryatayn underscore the ability of the extremists to inflict heavy losses even when they're in retreat — and portend more violence as they fight to hang on to their last strongholds in Syria.

News of the gruesome slayings began to emerge late Sunday, after IS militants were driven out by advancing government troops.

Terrified residents said they watched the slaughter from their windows or in the streets.

One former resident said his surviving family members walked for miles to find cell phone coverage so they could tell him of the deaths of his uncle, two cousins and a fourth relative. Another uncle remains missing.

"They came into town with a hit list," said Abdullah AbdulKarim, adding that 35 of the 50 militants who overran the town late last month were originally from Qaryatayn. He said the militants accused many of their victims of collaborating with the government but many others were also caught in the revenge killing.

"Our curse is from within us," he said, speaking to The Associated Press from northern Syria, where he fled years ago.

Once a predominantly Christian town known for its ancient monastery, Qaryatayn has changed hands between IS and the Syrian government several times during Syria's civil

war. Parts of the 1,500-year-old St. Elian monastery were demolished the first time IS took over the town in 2015 and thousands of its Christian residents fled, fearing the extremist group's brutality.

An AP video, filmed as Syrian government troops recaptured Qaryatayn on Saturday, showed several bodies lying in the streets. In the video, a town resident said IS "monsters" killed more than 100 people, including soldiers and civilians.

"These are people who don't know God, they don't know anything. They killed children and women with knives, they beat women, broke their arms," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear for his own safety.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it had documented the killings of at least 128 people in Qaryatayn, including at least 12 killed by government forces on suspicion of aiding the IS militants.

AbdulKarim and Mohamed Hassan, an activist who runs the Palmyra Network News, put the death toll at 75 civilians, saying many more remain unaccounted for.

"It seems it was mostly revenge," Hassan said.

Another activist network, the Palmyra Coordination Committee, released the names of 67 civilians who were confirmed killed and said the number was likely to rise. It said at least 35 of the dead were found dumped inside a ditch.

Talal Barazi, the governor of Homs province, said IS "terrorized" residents for three weeks, adding that most of the dead were townspeople who were government employees or were affiliated with Syria's ruling Baath party.

He said at least 13 residents remained missing and six bodies had not been identified.

IS militants relied on Qaryatayn's strategic location to defend another of their bastions, the historic city of Palmyra. With Russian backing, Syrian government troops regained control of Qaryatayn in April 2016. But IS, facing major setbacks in Syria and Iraq, launched a new offensive on the town in late September and recaptured it.

AbdulKarim said during the three weeks that IS controlled the town, the militants went door to door looking for people they accused of collaborating with the Syrian government.

He said his uncle, who was a local mayor, and two cousins were shot after they were taken to an undisclosed location.

"They took people to show them bodies dumped in an open area to let them know they were killed, but also to terrorize the public," AbdulKarim said. He said the extremists barred residents from burying their dead.

He said the advancing government troops also killed civilians, but residents were too afraid to report the government killings.

AbdulKarim and the Observatory said the militants took Qaryatayn's police chief, his wife and other security personnel as hostages to negotiate their exit after government troops encircled the town. About 200 militants evacuated the town, before government forces marched in, they said.

Associated Press writer Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria, contributed to this report.

They fled Syria's shattering civil war. Now, Syrian refugees in Jordan fear being forced to return

ISABEL DEBRE

Wed, 19 July 2023 at 10:25 pm GMT-7



**Syrian children play in a refugee camp near Amman, Jordan, on Monday, June 5, 2023.
(AP Photo/Raad Adayleh) Associated Press**

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — As Jordan [hosted regional talks this spring](#) aimed at ending Syria's isolation after more than a decade of civil war, Syrian refugee Suzanne Dabdoob felt a deep pressure in her brain and in her ears, she said, a fear she hadn't felt since arriving to Jordan 10 years ago.

Ahead of the meeting, Syrian President Bashar Assad agreed that 1,000 Syrian refugees living in Jordan would be allowed to safely return home — a test case for the repatriation of far greater numbers. Jordan's top diplomat spoke only of voluntary returns. But panic spread through working-class east Amman, where Dabdoob and many other Syrians have built new lives in multistory, cement-block buildings.

"I would rather die right here than go back to Syria," said Dabdoob, 37, whose home was razed by airstrikes in the Syrian city of Homs.

She fled to Amman with her five children, her accountant husband, who dodged military service, and her sister, who she said is wanted for abandoning her civil service job.

"We are scared that, even indirectly, the Jordanian government will pressure us to leave," she said.

As Middle East countries strained by vast numbers of refugees [restore relations with Assad](#), many Syrians who fled are now terrified by the prospect of returning to a country

shattered by war and controlled by the same authoritarian leader who brutally crushed the 2011 rebellion.



A Syrian refugee camp is seen near Amman, Jordan, on Monday, June 5, 2023, (AP Photo/Raad Adayleh) Associated Press

Even as public hostility and economic misery in neighboring countries has squeezed Syrian refugees, few are clamoring to return. The number of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon has remained roughly the same for the last seven years, according to U.N. figures.

Hoping to speed up their exodus, Lebanon and Turkey have deported hundreds of Syrians since April in what rights groups consider a violation of international law.

Now Jordan, a close American ally generally praised for its acceptance of millions of Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian refugees, [is also changing](#).

The “Jordan Initiative” unveiled in May to encourage cooperation with Assad on refugee returns and illicit drug trafficking capped the country’s painful transformation, advocates say, from one of the world’s most accommodating hosts to one of its biggest proponents for sending refugees home.

“Jordan long has said that refugees are welcome. But now the official rhetoric has moved toward supporting their return,” said Adam Coogle, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch. “It’s a cause for significant concern.”

Human rights groups say it’s still too unsafe for refugees to return to Syria given the risks of arbitrary detention, disappearance and extrajudicial killings there. Even the most fortunate returnees encounter bread lines, a currency collapse and electricity shortages after a dozen years of a conflict that has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half of its pre-war population of 23 million.

“My family tells me there is no more war, sure, but there is also nothing left,” said Mohammed, a 34-year-old carpenter who fled Syria in 2013 and opened a hand-carved wooden furniture shop in Amman identical to his father’s workshop in Damascus.

Giving only his first name for security reasons, Mohammed said he hoped never to return, citing stories of Syrian security forces arresting returnees to squeeze thousands of dollars in bribes out of their families. His two daughters, 4 and 10, know no other home.

“Here, I know what it’s like to live with dignity,” he said.

With its reputation as a humanitarian hub — an oasis of relative stability in a volatile Middle East — the kingdom currently hosts an estimated 1.3 million of the 5.2 million Syrian refugees spread across the region, according to government figures.

While Jordanian security forces have not ramped up deportation raids in recent months, the government has expelled tens of thousands of Syrians over the years, mostly for alleged crimes or for failing to register with the authorities. As soaring unemployment and inflation stokes anti-refugee feeling among Jordanians and the government speaks more openly about returns, that history now alarms the country’s Syrian refugees.

“Almost all of us know someone who was kicked out for a reason we don’t understand,” said Dadoob, whose friend, she said, was shot and killed by government forces in the southern Syrian city of Daraa after being deported in 2016. Jordanian security forces accused him, and many others, of communication with extremist and opposition groups in Syria, according to rights groups.

“With the overreach of security services in Jordan and in the region, there’s a lot of distrust now,” said Samer Kurdi from the Collateral Repair Project, which provides aid to refugees in Amman. “The re-embracing of Assad doesn’t make sense to Syrians here.”

Since Assad attended his first annual Arab League summit in 13 years this spring, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi has described his country’s hopes for refugee returns as an inevitable result of Assad’s rehabilitation.

For Jordan, a large displaced population lingering in the country for generations raises the sobering prospect of the country’s 2.2 million Palestinians.

The experience of those refugees, whose families fled or were pushed out during the war surrounding Israel’s creation in 1948, has taught Jordan that the longer refugees stay, the less likely they are to return, said Hassan Momani, professor of international relations at University of Jordan.

“There’s this fear in Jordan’s collective memory,” he said.

Jordan’s foreign and information ministries declined to comment on the issue of Syrian refugee returns, pointing only to recent public statements.

“We are way above our capacity. We ring the alarm,” Safadi told a conference on Syria in Brussels last month.

Earlier this month, he visited Damascus and held talks with Assad. “What we are sure of is that refugees’ futures lie in their country,” he said.

Few Syrians who fled the war for Jordan appear to agree. Just a small number of Syrian refugees in Jordan are voluntarily returning home: 4,013 people in 2022, down from 5,800 in 2021, according to United Nations figures.

A U.N. refugee agency survey of some 3,000 Syrian refugees across the region in February found that just 1.1% of refugees intend to return to Syria in the next year even as most say they harbor hope to return one day. Among respondents in Jordan, just 0.8% said they intended to return in the coming year.

“This is an important indication that right now, today, conditions are not conducive for returns,” said Dominik Bartsch, the UNHCR representative to Jordan.

Even as the Jordanian government insists that all refugee returns will be optional, the line between voluntary and forced return can be blurry.

After 2016, when Jordan shut its border with Syria following a cross-border suicide attack, authorities refused to let Syrians who had left briefly enter back into Jordan. In other cases, refugees were deported for alleged work violations, and then their relatives who followed them to Syria because of their loss of income were registered as voluntary returnees.

“What we see now, 12 years on, is that most of the Syrians in Jordan who really want to return are elderly,” said Kurdi, the local advocate. “They return to die.”



**Syrian children play in a refugee camp near Amman, Jordan, on Monday, June 5, 2023.
(AP Photo/Raad Adayleh) Associated Press**



**Syrian children play in a refugee camp near Amman, Jordan, on Monday, June 5, 2023.
(AP Photo/Raad Adayleh) Associated Press**

Genocides against the Assyrian Nation 2003 – 2016

Part Three: ISIS Attacks on Assyrians In Iraq 2014 - 2016

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) captured the city of Mosul, Iraq on June 10, 2014. Almost immediately thereafter it began to drive Assyrians out of Mosul and destroy Christian and non-Sunni institutions. There are no Assyrians/Christians remaining in Mosul, all have fled to the north, to Alqosh, Dohuk and other Assyrian villages.

This is a chronological account of the ISIS attacks on Assyrians as reported by Assyrian News Agencies:

June 12, 2014: ISIS captures Mosul, occupies the Assyrian village of Qaraqosh, enters the St. Behnam Monastery
AINA News
ISIS Expands Control, Begins Persecuting Christians in Mosul
Posted 2014-06-12 06:13 GMT



An ISIS flag hangs from a bridge in Mosul. On the left it says "Nineveh Governorate welcomes you" and on the right it says "There is no God but Allah."(AINA)

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as *Da'esh* and ISIL) yesterday took control of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Various agencies are reporting that between 150,000 to 500,000 residents have fled Mosul. Two divisions of the Iraqi army which were stationed in Mosul abandoned their posts and fled, offering no resistance to the invasion. According to reports, the army personnel donned civilian clothing and left Mosul by blending in with the

fleeing residents. Some reports say the Iraqi commanders in Mosul said they were given orders not to fight but to flee, but this has not been confirmed.

AINA contacted a former member of the Iraqi Parliament, whose identity cannot be revealed for his safety, who said "The Mosul provincial government was in collusion with ISIS. The innocent citizens of Mosul are paying the price of the manipulations of Atheel and Osama al-Nujaifi."

Atheel al-Nujaifi is the current governor of the Nineveh Governorate and is a hard-line Sunni. It is reported that he fled Mosul ahead of the ISIS attack.

Today the city of Tikrit, a Sunni stronghold, also fell to ISIS. A source from Tikrit, which AINA contacted via email, said "We are now calling on all international organizations for help because we are terrified by what we are hearing from the street. I wish you could convey our voices to those who can help to end the farce. The people are currently in the hands of a conspiracy between the government and the militias." She added "In Tikrit today, the prisons were opened and looting and pillaging began."

According to reports from Mosul, ISIS has gone on a rampage, looting and burning government buildings, raising its black flag throughout the city and burning churches. According to an AFP report, it stormed the Turkish consulate yesterday and kidnapped 48 people including the head of the diplomatic mission.

World Watch Monitor reported that ISIS have moved into Christian areas near Mosul, and have occupied the Assyrian (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) village of Qaraqosh and entered the St. Behnam Monastery.

ISIS has warned the Christian residents of Mosul, specifically women, to wear the Islamic veil. The warnings have come at checkpoints setup throughout the city by ISIS. The husband of an Assyrian woman was abducted at a checkpoint and threatened with death if his wife did not don the Islamic veil.

The Church of the Holy Spirit was looted by ISIS members, who removed most of its electrical equipment.

Patriarch Sako of the Chaldean Church issued a statement to Fides, saying "We believe that the best solution to all these problems is the creation of a government of national unity in order to strengthen the control of the State and the rule of law in order to protect the Country, its citizens and their property and preserve national unity."

Editor's note: A previous version of this story reported that St. Etchmiadzin Armenian Church was attacked, and showed a picture of the burning church. Information received since then indicates the church was not attacked and the fire shown in the picture was of a car in front of the church. This story was updated on 2014/09/13 to reflect this information.

June 14, 2014: ISIS issues Islamic rules for Mosul

AINA News

Posted 2014-06-14 01:21 GMT

(AINA) -- Two days after taking over Mosul ISIS has published its first set of new rules for the province of Nineveh. The rules are very similar to the ones ISIS instituted for the territories it controls in Syria. Covering two pages, the rules (shown below) cover the usual transgressions. ISIS now controls three cities in Iraq, Mosul, Tikrit and Fallujah, and is marching to Baghdad. It also controls areas of the plains West of Mosul that extend to Syria.



The following is a summary translation of most of the rules. It was made by by Jenan Moussa, a reporter working for the Arabic Al Aan TV in Dubai.

- For those asking who are you? We are soldiers of Islam and took on our responsibility to bring back glory of the Islamic Caliphate.
- Money we took from Safavid government is now public. Only Imam of Muslims can spend it.
- Anyone who steals will have their hand cut off.
- We ask all Muslims to perform prayers on time in the mosques.
- We warn tribal leaders and Sheikhs not to work with the government and be traitors. No drugs, no alcohol and no cigarettes allowed.
- For the police, soldiers and other kafir institutions, you can repent. We opened special places that will allow you to repent.
- Gatherings, carrying flags (other than that of Islamic state) and carrying guns is not allowed. God ordered us to stay united.
- Our position on Shrines and graves is clear. All to be destroyed basically.
- For women: dress decently and wear wide clothes. Only go out if needed.
- People tried secular rulings (republic, Baathist, Safavides) and it pained you. Now is time for an Islamic state.

The document was signed by Imam Abu Bakr El Qurashi.

June 14, 2014: Assyrian, Yezidi and Shabak Villages come under Kurdish Control in North Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-06-14 23:55 GMT

Kurdish flag flies above an Iraqi government building in the Assyrian town of Alqosh, North Iraq. Alqosh, Iraq (AINA) -- Since 2003, security for villages in north Iraq has been provided by a joint police force of Iraqis and Kurds. The Iraqi police were comprised of mostly Arabs with some Assyrians. The Kurdish police were comprised of Kurds. When Mosul fell to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on June 11, Arab members of the Iraqi police stationed in Assyrian villages throughout north Iraq abandoned their positions, leaving only the Kurds and the few Assyrians to protect the villages against ISIS.

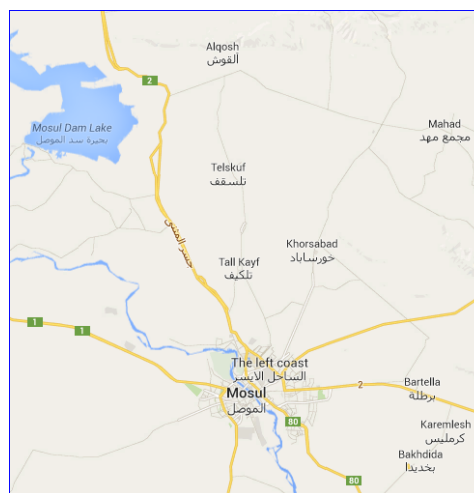
The Kurds seized the opportunity and took control of Assyrian villages, as well as the villages of Yezidis and Shabaks, raising Kurdish flags on government buildings and checkpoints.



Kurdish flags on government buildings (left) and at the checkpoint on the road to the Assyrian town of Alqosh, north Iraq (Right)

The following Assyrian villages are now effectively controlled by Kurds:

- Alqosh
- Qaraqosh
- Bartella
- Karemlash
- Baashiq
- Tel Keppeh
- Telsqop
- Batnaya
- Baghdada
- Ainsifneh/Shekhan
- Sharafya
- Dashqutan
- Karanjo
- Pirozawa



The Shabak village of Sadah and other Shabak villages near Tel Keppeh as well as Shabak villages near Baghdada are now under Kurdish control. Yezidi villages in these same areas are also now under Kurdish control.

In the Assyrian town of Alqosh, the local council, which is under the control of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), voted yesterday to remove the Assyrian chairman, Faiz Abed Jahwareh, and replace him with a Kurdish man who is a member of the KDP. Mr. Jahwareh, who is a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), was widely supported by the town residents and was responsible for the administration of Alqosh and a number of smaller Assyrian and Yezidi villages in the surrounding area.

While welcoming the protection of the Kurdish forces, Assyrians have never-the-less expressed grave concern about possible Kurdish annexation of their villages.

June 16, 2014: Kurds attempt to remove an Assyrian council leader in Alqosh and replace him with a Kurd

AINA News

Assyrian Council Leader Removed By Kurds Reinstated

Posted 2014-06-16 06:38 GMT

Alqosh, Iraq (AINA) -- An Assyrian council leader who was removed from his post (AINA [2014-06-15](#)) and replaced by a Kurd has been reinstated following a demonstration demanding his return by hundreds of Assyrians in the town of Alqosh, Iraq.

The council leader, Mr. Faiz Abed Jahwareh, was replaced two days ago by a Kurdish man who is a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

As the Alqosh town council met this morning, protesters marched outside the building. Attending the council meeting were the heads of the Nineveh council, the Tel Keppeh Council, Bishop Michael Maqdasee of Alqosh and Mr. Jahwareh himself. The pressure from the protesters and the Assyrians attending the council meeting forced the council to reverse its decision and reinstate Mr. Jahwareh to his post.

June 18, 2014: ISIS Cuts Off Water, Electricity, Destroys Churches

AINA News

ISIS Cuts Off Water, Electricity, Destroys Churches

Posted 2014-06-18 22:23 GMT



(AINA) -- Sources in Tikrit and Mosul have told AINA that ISIS has cut off water and electricity to some parts of the cities. The villages surrounding Mosul have also lost their water service, which was provided by the water purification plant in Mosul. In the Assyrian villages of Bartella and Qaraqosh, residents are now buying water at 7,000 Iraqi Dinars per cubic meter (\$6.25). Village leaders are calling for relief, as the residents cannot afford to purchase water at these rates.

The Arabic language website [Alghadeer](#) is reporting that ISIS has destroyed all churches in Mosul. AINA has not independently confirmed this.

In Tikrit internet service is sporadic, less than one our per day, and limited to email and Google. There is no presence of the Iraqi government.

In the Assyrian city of Dohuk there is fear among the residents and anxiety about the "political map" -- as one resident put it. The Assyrians of Dohuk do not want to live under ISIS rule.

According to an Assyrian living in Baghdad, Baghdad is calm at the moment. ISIS is fighting 40 miles north of the city, not closer as reported by media sources. The city's population, which is 90% Shiite, is armed and ready to fight ISIS.

The source said it is unlikely that ISIS would attack Baghdad, as they are greatly outnumbered, but there are many ISIS sleeper cells in Baghdad which may strike and wreak havoc.

June 19, 2014: ISIS destroys statue of the famous Arab poet Abu Tammam

AINA News

ISIS Threatens to Destroy Archaeological Sites

Posted 2014-06-19 22:47 GMT

Mosul (AINA) -- The [Iraq News Network](#) is reporting that ISIS has destroyed a modern statue of the famous Arab poet Abu Tammam. AINA has contacted several residents of Mosul and has confirmed the statue has been destroyed.

ISIS has also threatened to destroy archaeological sites in Iraq, just as they had destroyed 3000 Year-old Assyrian Artifacts in Syria (AINA 2014-05-17).

Looting of Assyrian artifacts was also carried out in Iraq soon after 2003 by Al-Qaeda, which sold the artifacts to finance its operations. The looting occurred at the Baghdad Museum (AINA 2003-04-19) as well as archaeological sites which were left unguarded as a result of the collapse of the government of Saddam Hussein (AINA 2005-02-17).

June 21, 2014: ISIS begins imposing a poll tax (jizya) on Assyrians in Mosul

AINA News

Posted 2014-06-21 17:32 GMT

According to [Alsumaria News](#), an Arabic language website, the High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq has confirmed that ISIS has begun imposing the *jizya*, a poll tax, on Christian citizens in Mosul in an attempt to put pressure on them and displace them from the city. The Commission denounced this and called on the government and the international community to put an end to it.

A member of the Council of High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq, Salama AlKhafaji, stated in an interview that ISIS "is imposing on Christians a minimum payment of \$250, with amount varying depending on the type of work/profession performed by Christian citizens." She further said that "the economic situation in Mosul is extremely difficult, and there are no financial resources or job opportunities except for vegetable shops, any other businesses are non-existent. Citizens are at a loss now as to how to make ends meet; how can they pay those amounts to ISIS?"



Salama AlKhafaji.Baghdad (AINA)

Ms. AlKhafaji denounced "this work", calling on the Iraqi government and the international community to "put an end to this matter."

Sources in the Nineveh province confirmed on Friday that ISIS has begun imposing *jizya* on Christians in Mosul, so as not to kill them or seize their property.

June 21, 2014: AINA News

ISIS in Mosul Orders Unmarried Women to 'Jihad By Sex'

Posted 2014-06-21 21:27 GMT

(AINA) -- On June 12, only two day after capturing Mosul and other territories in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria issued a decree ordering the people to send their unmarried women to "jihad by sex." In the proclamation ISIS threatens to impose Sharia law on all who fail to comply with the decree.

Here's a translation of the decree. AINA cannot confirm the authenticity of this document. *Translated for AINA by Dr. Samir Johna.*

In the Name of Allah the Merciful

Subject: Mandate

OGO

The Islamic State of Iraq and
Syria
The State of Nineveh

In the Name of Allah the Merciful

After liberation of the State of Nineveh, and the welcome shown by the people of the state to their brotherly mujahideen, and after the great conquest, and the defeat of the Safavid [Persian] troops in the State of Nineveh, and its liberation, and Allah willing, it will become the headquarters for the mujahideen. Therefore we request that the people of this state offer their unmarried women so that they can fulfill their duty of jihad by sex to their brotherly mujahideen. Failure to comply with this mandate will result in enforcing the laws of Sharia upon them.

Allah we have notified, Allah bear witness.

Sha'ban 13, 1435,
June, 12, 2014

June 21, 2014: AINA News

ISIS destroys the statue of the Virgin Mary at the Immaculate Church of the

Highest in the neighborhood of AlShafa in Mosul

Posted 2014-06-21 21:27 GMT

ISIS also destroys the statue of Mullah Osman Al-Musali. Shiite Turkmen in the villages of AlKibba and Shraikhan flee after receiving threats from ISIS. ISIS arrests 25 village elders and young men who are Turkmen in the village of AlShamsiyat; their whereabouts is still unknown. ISIS orders Christian, Yazidis and Shiite government employees not to report for work in Mosul

June 23, 2014: AINA News

Iraqi Human Rights Group Report on Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-06-23 23:41 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated June 22, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Nineveh Province

- On 6/21/2014 ISIS destroyed the statue of the Virgin Mary at the Immaculate Church of the Highest in the neighborhood of AlShafa in Mosul, as well as the statues of Mullah Osman Al-Musali and the poet Abu Tamam (AINA [2014-06-19](#)).
- ISIS militants ordered Christian, Yazidis and Shiite government employees not to report for work in Mosul.
- Shiite Turkmen in the villages of AlKibba and Shraikhan fled after receiving threats from ISIS.

Sinjar District

- Militants have threatened to attack the center of Sinjar District with mortars because it received the displaced Shiites from Tel Afar.

Hamdaniya District (Baghdeda)

- On Saturday, 6/21/2014, gunmen attacked the village of AlShamsiyat in the Alhamdania District and arrested 25 village elders and young men who are Turkmen; their whereabouts is still unknown.
- Armed militants raided the village of Qaratapa Arabs to search for a person wanted by them, but they did not find him.
- On Saturday, 06/21/2014, the insurgents raided the village of AlKahara in the Nimrud Municipality in Alhamdania District to search for the Director of the District, Mr. Ahmed Obaid, and one of his relatives from the military leaders named Khaled Kosofi, but they were not found, and as a result the militants bombed their homes.

Utility Services in Hamdaniya, Bartella, Karamles, Bashiqa and other villages

ISIS has severely limited the electric service to Hamdaniya (AINA 2014-06-18). The available electric power is first used for water purification projects and pumping, and what is left is distributed to residents at a rate of just one hour per day.

The water supply in Mosul is under the control of ISIS, it is only available for a few hours per day. This is the sole source of water that feeds Hamdaniya, Bartella and Ba'shiqah municipalities. The number of people who depend on this is more than 350,000. The people have been forced to depend on wells and many of these are not suitable for drinking.

Economic situation

The economic situation in the District suffers from volatility and decline. A number of displaced families visited the Department of Immigration and Displacement for aid. The registered number for this aid reached hundreds by Saturday June 21, 2014 and the number continues to increase.

June 23, 2014: ISIS Rape Christian Mother and Daughter, Kill 4 Christian Women for Not Wearing Veils

AINA News

Posted 2014-06-23 23:55 GMT

- Mosul, Iraq (AINA) -- The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has begun to brutally enforce Islamic laws (AINA [2014-06-14](#)) in Mosul, Iraq, which it overran on June 10.
- Dr. Sallama Al Khafaji, a member of the Iraq High Commission for Human Rights, told AINA that on Saturday, June 21 ISIS began demanding a poll tax (*jizya*) from Christians in Mosul (AINA 2014-06-21). In one instance, ISIS members entered the home of an Assyrian family in Mosul and demanded the poll tax (*jizya*). When the Assyrian family said they did not have the money, three ISIS members raped the mother and daughter in front of the husband and father. The husband and father was so traumatized that he committed suicide.
- "The Christians have told me that they cannot pay this tax," said Dr. Al-Khafaji, "and they say 'what am I to do, shall I kill myself?'"
- According to the Arabic language website [Alghadeer](#), four Christian women were shot and killed by ISIS members because they were not wearing veils. AINA has not confirmed this and this website is known to be administered by Shiites.

June 25, 2014: ISIS limits water from the plants in Mosul to one hour per day. Residents in surrounding areas are forced to dig wells.

AINA News

Latest Report on the Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-06-25 21:23 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated June 24, 2014 on the situation in North Iraq.

- **Mosul**
- There is a job paralysis and a halt in all financial and banking activity as ISIS has forcefully prevented all female employees from working. All members of minority groups have been fired from public service positions.
- **The Nineveh Plain**
- The suffering of the residents of the Nineveh plain has been exacerbated since the fall of Mosul to the militants. Residential neighborhoods receive only one hour per day of electricity while only 10 to 15 megawatts of energy reaches the Nineveh Plains and that is devoted mostly to hospitals and water projects. An agreement with the Government of the region to provide 40 megawatts has not been honored.
- Militants are still in control of Hamdaniya water project and are only allowing 90 minutes of pumping through two pumps. This situation has intensified the suffering of the people

in Hamdaniya, Bartella and Ba'shiqah municipalities, particularly with the sharp rise in temperature.

- In the district of Tel Kepe, all residents receive domestic water for only two or three hours per day. The source of drinking water is under the control of the militants in the area of al-Rashidiya. The people of Tel Kepe also receive one hour of electricity per day and they are unable to use their private generators for lack of fuel. The electricity shortage is expected to worsen in the next few days.

- The accumulation of trash in residential areas is significantly noticeable because most sanitation employees are not working and fuel shortages. Doctors have warned of the possibility of the spread of epidemics as a result of the decomposition and decay of the waste.

- **Mental Health**

- Monitors of this situation have noted a high frequency of anxiety, fear and frustration as a result of the exceptional circumstances that prevailed in the region, the scarcity of electricity and water and the surge in fuel prices. There are reports of high anxiety and unrest which is causing some people to leave the affected areas.

- **Government Assistance**

- The Ministry of Displacement and Migration embarked this morning on distributing aid including food items and furniture to more than 250 displaced families that came to Hamdaniya District.

- **Other Cases**

- We have been informed by reliable sources in the Makhmor District that gunmen told all the Arab service employees and security forces to leave Makhmor District and not attend work, but to return to their Arab villages, even though Makhmour District is still under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

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June 26: Kurds Clash With ISIS Near Assyrian Town East of Mosul, forcing nearly 50,000 Assyrians to flee.

AINA News

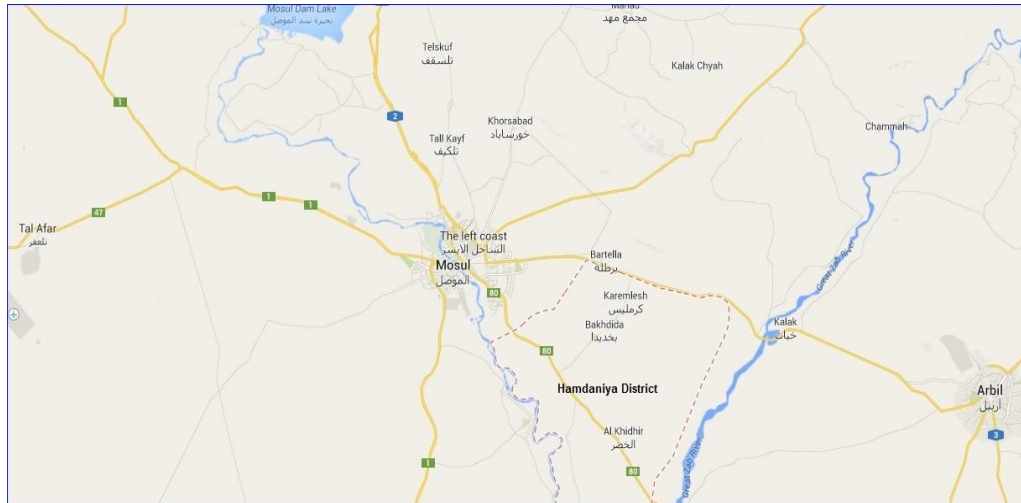
Posted 2014-06-26 00:09 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO), an NGO based in Baghdad, Iraq, reported that today at 2 P.M. Kurdish Peshmerga forces clashed with ISIS forces 5 kilometers west of the Assyrian town of Baghdede in the Hamdaniya district. According to HHRO, the Kurdish forces withdrew as ISIS strongly advanced. There is fear among the population of the Hamdaniya district, which numbers 50,000, of an ISIS onslaught. Many families have begun to leave east toward Arbel and north toward Karamles, Bartella and Dohuk.

The Kurdish forces are making a stand outside of Baghdede and have vowed to stop ISIS, which has sent messages to the Kurdish forces saying that they intend to drive toward Kalak, which is halfway to Arbel.

The [Hammurabi Human Rights Organization](#) (HHRO), an NGO based in Baghdad, Iraq, monitors the human rights situation in Iraq, particularly of minorities such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Yazidis and Shabak. Founded in 2005, HHRO works for human rights observation and documentation, in addition to implementation of humanitarian relief in Iraq.

HHRO works with various Iraqi and international institutions on variety of issues.



HHRO publishes annual reports on Human Rights situations focusing on Minorities. In 2013, HHRO was recognized and awarded as the best NGO by the United States State Department for its major achievements in the most difficult situations for the year 2012 in Baghdad.

June 28, 2014: ISIS kidnaps two nuns and three Assyrian orphans. They are eventually released ([story](#)).

AINA News

Kidnapped Assyrian Nuns Released

Posted 2014-07-14 23:08 GMT



Sister Utoor Joseph (left) and Sister Miskintah, who were kidnapped June 28 in Mosul, have been released (photo: Ishtar TV) (AINA)

The Assyrian website ankawa.com is reporting that five Assyrians, including two nuns, have been released. Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako said via telephone the victims are now in the city of Dohuk (Assyrian *Noohadra*) and in good health. No ransom was paid for their release.



From left: Hala Salim, Sarah Khoshaba and Aram Sabah

The two Chaldean nuns from the Daughters of Mary Order, Sister Miskintah and Sister Utoor Joseph, as well as Hala Salim, Sarah Khoshaba and Aram Sabah were kidnapped on June 28 (AINA 2014-06-30).

Sisters Miskintah and Utoor managed an orphanage for girls in Mosul, in the Khazraj neighborhood near Miskintah Church. After Mosul fell to ISIS, the two nuns brought the orphaned girls to the city of Dohuk for safety. The Nuns had returned late Saturday, June 28 to Mosul, accompanied by Hala, Sarah and Aram, to inspect the monastery and were kidnapped.

It is believed the kidnappers were Muslims

June 28, 2014: ISIS begins confiscating the homes of Christians and non-Sunni Muslims.

AINA News

Report on the Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-06-27 07:23 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated June 26, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

Reliable sources report that gunmen rounded up many of the security agency members of the police and army and others in Sabrine Mosque and asked them to declare what they call "repentance" and surrender their weapons and other military equipment. After doing so, all of the prisoners were tried and sentenced according to Sharia law and executed.

A resident of Mosul who fled with his family to the Nineveh plain reported that ISIS members told him by telephone that his home in Mosul had been confiscated for one of the "princes" of the Militia. He also added that there are many more similar cases.

ISIS has prevented delivery of government food rations to Tel Kepe and other areas not under their control.

Cars with large loudspeakers roamed the streets of Mosul telling people that the judgements that will apply in the city are according to Sharia laws and no other laws will apply.

There has been a significantly pronounced decrease in the movement of women and children within the city. Gunmen have prevented all employees in the city from attending their jobs.

There has been a significant rise in food prices. Fruit and vegetables have become very scarce. ISIS has ordered that no ice blocks are to be sold.

Residents continue to leave the city and are having great difficulty reaching safe areas.

Conditions in the Nineveh Plain

Electric and water service is still severely limited. All districts and municipalities in the Nineveh Plain only obtain about one hour of electricity per day, and these areas suffer from lack of water because of ISIS control of AlRashidiya and AlSlamiya water projects that provide the Northern and Southern Nineveh Plain with potable water.

The villages of AlKibba and Shraikhan within the Tel Kepe district came under attack on the night of June 25 by insurgents who targeted the residents of the village, forcing people to escape on foot. A number of the residents were killed and many men, young and old, were arrested, their fate is still unknown. Residents who fled from Baghdede have not been allowed to enter the Dohuk Province on June 25, forcing these families to stay in the open or to go to other towns in the Nineveh Plain.

ISIS rounds up many of the security agency members of the police and army in Sabrine Mosque and asks them to declare "repentance" and surrender their weapons and other military equipment. After doing so, all of the prisoners are tried and sentenced according to Sharia law and executed. ISIS has prevented delivery of government food rations to Tel Kepe and other areas not under their control ([story](#)).

July 01, 2014: AINA News

June 30 Report on the Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-07-01 07:42 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated June 30, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

The disappearance of two nuns, Sister Utoor and Sister Miskintah, who managed the Miskintah Orphanage in Mosul, has been confirmed (AINA [2014-06-30](#)).

Families continue to leave Mosul; most of the displaced are heading north to the Nineveh Plain and to the Dohuk Province.

The growing scarcity of basic supplies and medicine, as well as severe shortage of electricity and water, is becoming a threat to the health and safety of the population.

The status of thousands of civil servants who were removed from the jobs by ISIS remains unclear. These employees were to receive their salary for the month of June last week, but they have not been paid.

Conditions in the Nineveh Plain

Assyrian Families have begun returning to Baghdede (Qaraqosh) with caution as security in the area is still uncertain.

There continues to be a severe shortage of water and electricity. The use of portable generators is declining as fuel supplies diminish.

There has been a substantial increase in unemployment because of the suspension of commerce in the districts of the Nineveh Plain, as caused by the ISIS invasion.

Numerous villages, towns and districts of the Nineveh Plain continue to receive families displaced from the center of Mosul, as well as from the district of Tal Afar.

See [all HHRO reports](#).

- July 3, 2014: ISIS seizes the house of the Chaldean Patriarchate and the house of Dr. Tobia, a member of Hammurabi Human Rights Organization and an Advisor to the Governor of Nineveh on Minority Affairs and General Coordinator with International Organizations ([story](#)).

July 3, 2014: AINA News
July 2 Report on the Situation in North Iraq
Posted 2014-07-03 03:10 GMT



Assyrian refugees from Baghdede

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated June 30, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

ISIS seized the house of Dr. Duraid Hikmat Tobia in Mosul. Dr. Tobia is a member of Hammurabi Human Rights Organization and an Advisor to the Governor of Nineveh on Minority Affairs and General Coordinator with International Organizations. Dr. Tobia had received a telephone call from the militants telling him that his home has been confiscated by them.

ISIS continues to takeover houses belonging to Christians who fled the city.

ISIS seized control of the house of the Chaldean Patriarchate in the city.

Mosul resident continue to leave, most to Dohuk and the Nineveh Plain, with fewer going to Arbel.

The Nineveh Plain

Tension continues in the areas of Baghdede (Hamdaniya District) between the ISIS and Kurdish forces, causing instability and the slow return of the displaced Assyrians, Shabak and Turkmen.

Kurdish forces continue to reinforce their position on the western side of Baghdede.

After the kidnapping of two nuns, Sisters Utoor and Miskintah, two girls and one boy three days ago, nearly all churches and monasteries in Mosul are now empty, the religious staff has left them abandoned for now.

Electricity continues to be in scarce supply. Only 15 megawatts reaches the Nineveh Plain, which is only 3% of the required amount.

ISIS have cut off the water to Tel Kepe, Batnaya and other villages.

Garbage and waste continues to accumulate in towns and villages because municipal waste workers were fired by ISIS.

ISIS occupied a house belonging to the Chaldean Bishopric located in the AlShurta neighborhood in Mosul.

There is a shortage in medical services because medical workers, particularly Shabak and Turkmen, have fled or were fired by ISIS. Only a few Christian doctors and staff remain.

The continuing shortage of water and electricity is preventing residents from returning to Baghdede.

Residents of Baghdede have begun drilling wells to secure water.

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

July 8, 2014: ISIS Removes Cross From Church in Mosul

AINA News

ISIS Removes Cross From Church in Mosul

Posted 2014-07-15 01:31 GMT



St. Ephrem Cathedral is the seat of Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese in Mosul

Mosul (AINA) -- ISIS removed the cross on top of the dome of St. Ephrem Cathedral in the Shoorta neighborhood in Mosul, one week after the church was seized by ISIS members on July 1.

ISIS quickly began imposing Islamic rule (*sharia*) in Mosul soon after it took over the city. It imposed a poll tax on Christians (AINA [2014-06-21](#)), ordered all women to veil themselves (AINA [2014-06-14](#)), closed beauty salons and barber shops (AINA [2014-07-10](#)) and occupied churches.



July 10, 2014: ISIS bars women from walking the streets unless accompanied by a male. Nearly all barber shops and women's salons are closed ([story](#))

AINA News

July 8 Report on the Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-07-10 02:18 GMT



Assyrian refugees in Ankawa

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated July 8, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

- All construction work has come to a complete stop and construction workers are now unemployed.

- There is increased demand for black colored clothing and veils and hijabs.
- Women are not allowed to walk the streets unless accompanied by a male.
- Nearly all barber shops and womens' salons have closed.

The Nineveh Plain

- Water and electricity continue to be severely limited. Residents who have dug wells are unable to purify the water for safe drinking.

- Relief efforts are not adequate. The Christian Solidarity International Commission, International Red Cross, Kana, Caritas and Hammurabi Organization for Human Rights are providing some relief.

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

July 15, 2014: ISIS Stops Rations for Christians and Shiites in Mosul

AINA News

Posted 2014-07-15 01:43 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS has ordered government workers to stop giving rations to Christians and Shiites in Mosul, according to a [report](#) by Younes Thonon for [ankawa.com](#). The official in charge of distributing rations in the Rifaq neighborhood said he had received orders from ISIS to cut the rations.

Mr. Fadel Younis, the official in charge for the Kifaat neighborhood, said that he had received a similar order and a threat from ISIS, and was warned that if he gives rations to Christians and Shiites he will be charged and prosecuted according to *sharia* law.

The Ministry of Commerce had recently decided to give citizens three ration items, including flour, for the month of July.

July 17, 2014: ISIS issues statement ordering Christians to convert or die

AINA News

Posted 2014-07-20 10:16 GMT

(AINA) -- ISIS issued a statement asking all Christians in Mosul to convert to Islam, pay the *jizya*, the poll tax on Christians, or face the sword. ISIS gave July 19 as the deadline to comply with its demands. Most Assyrians of Mosul responded by fleeing the city.

Here is the text of the statement by ISIS, as well as a picture of the statement itself. The statement contains an error. The Koranic verse is erroneously numbered al-Araf 163, it should be al-Araf 164.

Islamic State

Office of the judiciary

Declaration

Praise be to God and glory to Islam in its victory, humiliation to the polytheist in their subjugation, and renderer of his righteousness, and peace and blessings on whoever God lifted the illumination of Islam with his sword, and hereafter:

And when a community among them said: "Why do you preach to a people whom Allah is about to destroy or to punish with a severe torment?" (The preachers) said: "In order to be free from guilt before your Lord (Allah), and perhaps they may fear Allah." al-Araf (163) [sic].

After the heads of Christians and their followers were notified of the date to be present to demonstrate their presence in the Khalifate state in the Wilaya (State) of Nineveh they turned away and failed to come at the appointed time and of which were notified in advance, and it was decided to offer them one of the three:

1. Islam (to become Muslim).
2. Pay Jizya (which is taking tribute for being Christians).
3. If they refuse, there is nothing for them but the sword.

The Prince of the Faithful Caliph Ibrahim -- God Glorify him -- will allow them to evacuate themselves only from the borders of the state Alkhalafah by Saturday, Ramadan 21, 1435 [July 19, 2014] noon hour, and after this date, the only thing between us and them is the sword.

Glory to God, his Prophet and the believers that the hypocrites do not know.

AINA has learned that nearly 15 Assyrian families have converted to Islam to avoid losing their life and wealth. In one instance, a young Assyrian woman fled from her family who had converted, saying she did not want to become a Muslim. She is in safe hiding in North Iraq.

**July 18, 2014: ISIS in Mosul marks Christian homes with the Arabic letter "N" (for the word Nasrani, which means Christian) AINA News Patriarch Issues Urgent Appeal
Posted 2014-07-19 16:52 GMT**

The Arabic letter "n" (inside red circle), signifying "Nasrani" (Christian), on a Christian home in Mosul.(AINA) -- ISIS has begun marking Christian homes with the Arabic letter "n" which stands for the word "Nasrani" which means Christian in Arabic. The word comes from the name "Nestorian," historically attributed to the the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, though it is incorrect. In addition, properties marked by ISIS have also been marked as "property of the Islamic State."

ISIS has also marked Shiite homes with the letter "r", signifying "*rwafidh*" (rejecters).

Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako issued an urgent appeal in a letter on Thursday. The following is the full text of the letter.

Mosul Christians: Whither?

To all who have a living conscience in Iraq and all the world

To the voice of moderate brother Muslims who have a voice in Iraq and all the world

To all who have a concern that Iraq could remain a country for all His Children

To all leaders of thought and opinion

To all who announce the freedom of the human being

To all protectors of the dignity of human beings and of religion

PEACE AND MERCY FROM GOD!

The control exercised by the Islamist Jihadists upon the city of Mosul, and their proclamation of it as an Islamic State, after several days of calm and expectant watching of events, has now come to reflect negatively upon the Christian population of the city and its environs.



The Arabic letter "n" ن (inside red circle), signifying "Nasrani" (Christian), on an Assyrian home in Mosul (AINA)



The Arabic letter "n" (inside red circle), signifying "Nasrani" (Christian), on a Christian home in Mosul

The initial sign was in the kidnapping of the two nuns and 3 orphans who were released after 17 days. At the time, we experienced it as a flash of hope and as a clearing of the sky after the appearance of storm clouds.

Suddenly we have been surprised by the more recent outcomes which are the proclamation of an Islamic state and the announcement calling all Christians and clearly asking them to convert to Islam or to pay the jizya (the tax all non- Muslims must pay while living in the land of Islam) -- without specifying the exact amount. The only alternative is to abandon the city and their houses with only the clothes they are wearing, taking nothing else. Moreover, by Islamic law, upon their departure, their houses are no longer their properties but are instantly confiscated as property of the Islamic state.

In recent days, there has been written the letter 'N' in Arabic on the front wall of Christian homes, signifying 'Nazara' (Christian), and on the front wall of Shiite homes, the letter 'R' signifying 'Rwafidh' (Protestants or rejecters). We do not know what will happen in future days because in an Islamic state the Al -- sharia or Islamic code of law is powerful and has been interpreted to require the issuance of new I.Ds for the population based on religious or sectarian affiliation.



The Arabic letter "n" (inside red circle), signifying "Nasrani" (Christian), on a Christian home in Mosul

This categorization based upon religion or sect afflicts the Muslims as well and contravenes the regulation of Islamic thought which is expressed in the Quran which says, "You have your religion and I have my religion" and yet another place in Quran states, "There is no compulsion in religion". This is exactly the contradiction in the life and history of the Islamic world for more than 1400 years and in the co -- existence with other different religions and nations in the East and in the West.

With all due respect to belief and dogmas, there has been a fraternal life between Christians and Muslims. How much the Christians have shared here in our East specifically from the beginnings of Islam. They shared every sweet and bitter circumstance of life; Christian and Muslim blood has been mixed as it was shed in the defense of their rights and lands. Together they built a civilization, cities, and a heritage. It is truly unjust now to treat Christians by rejecting them and throwing them away, considering them as nothing.

It is clear that the result of all this discrimination legally enforced will be the very dangerous elimination of the possibility of co -- existence between majorities and minorities. It will be very harmful to Muslims themselves both in the near and the distant future.

Should this direction continue to be pursued, Iraq will come face to face with human, civil, and historic catastrophe.

We call with all the force available to us; we call to you fraternally, in a spirit of human brotherhood; we call to you urgently; we call to you impelled by risk and in spite of the risk. We implore in particular our Iraqi brothers asking them to reconsider and reflect upon the strategy they have adopted and demanding that they must respect innocent and weaponless people of all nationalities, religions, and sects.

The Holy Quran has ordered believers to respect the innocent and has never called them to seize the belongings, the possessions, the properties of others by force. The Quran commands refuge for the widow, the orphaned, the poor, and the weaponless and respect "to the seventh neighbor."

We call Christians in the region to act with reason and prudence and to consider and to plan everything in the best way possible. Let them understand what is planned for this region, to practice solidarity in love, to examine the realities together and so be able together to find the paths to build trust in themselves and in their neighbors. Let them stay close to their own Church and surround it; endure the time of trial and pray until the storm will be over.

Louis Raphael Sako

Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Baghdad

July 17, 2014

July 19, 2014: ISIS plunders Assyrians as they Flee Mosul; families march 42 miles

AINA News

Posted 2014-07-20 11:10 GMT

(AINA) -- More than 200 Assyrian families fled in panic from Mosul on July 17 and 18 as the ISIS deadline for converting to Islam approached (AINA [2014-07-20](#)). ISIS had issued a statement asking all Christians in Mosul to convert to Islam, pay the *jizya*, the poll tax on Christians, or face the sword. ISIS gave July 19 as the deadline to comply with its demands. Most Assyrians of Mosul responded by fleeing the city.

ISIS setup checkpoints at the Araby and Shallalat neighborhoods (AlSada and Biawaizah) and robbed and plundered Assyrians who were fleeing the city. ISIS took money from the Assyrians, as well as cars, cell phones, food, money, gold, including fake jewelry, electronic items and even medicines.

Over 85 families who had fled Baghdade (Qarawosh/Hamdaniya) reported being robbed of all of their possessions.

The fleeing Assyrians were terrified and feared for their lives. They made it safely to Dohuk (Assyrian *Noohadra*), where they joined thousands of other Assyrians who had fled earlier from Mosul.

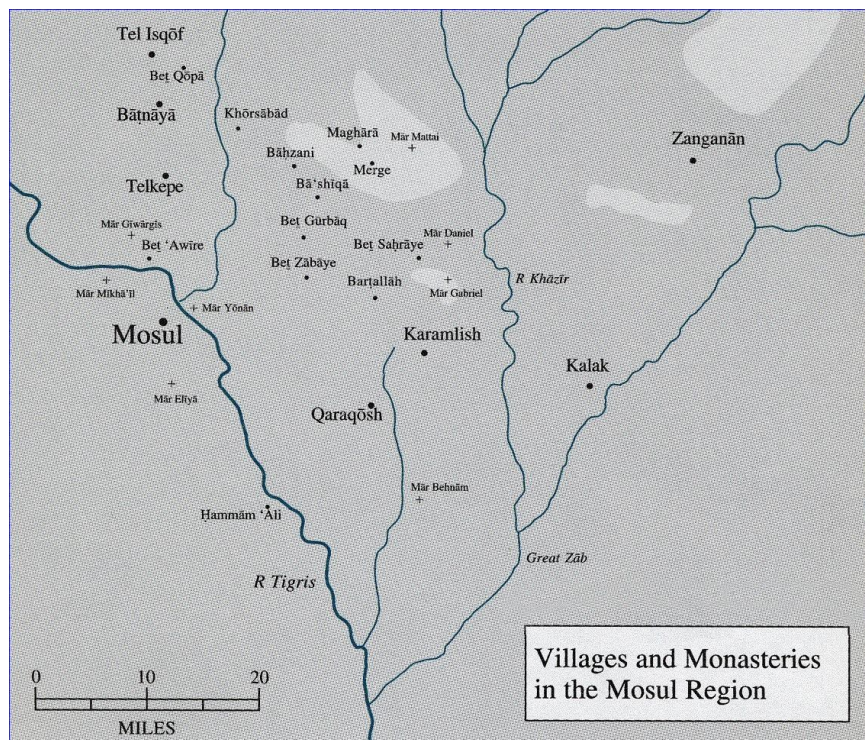
Hundred of Assyrians were forced to walk 70 kilometers (42 miles) to Tel Afar at night from Mosul after ISIS confiscated their automobiles. They carried children on their backs and arrived exhausted and dehydrated.

AINA has learned that nearly 15 Assyrian families have converted to Islam to avoid losing their life and wealth. In one instance, a young Assyrian women fled from her family who had converted, saying she did not want to become a Muslim. She is in safe hiding in North Iraq.

July 22, 2014: ISIS and Kurds clash near Assyrian town, 2000 Assyrian families driven from Mosul

AINA News

Posted 2014-07-23 15:11 GMT



Tel Kepe, upper left, where ISIS and Kurds are fighting(AINA) -- ISIS and Kurdish forces clashed yesterday at about 10 PM on the outskirts of Tel Kepe, an Assyrian town 13 miles north of Mosul. ISIS to take over a medicine factory about 1.5 miles west of Tel Kepe. ISIS were forced to go back after a short battle.

The latest count of the number of Assyrian families driven out of Mosul stands at 2,000.

The following report is from the Christian Aid Program Nohadra Iraq (CAPNI), an aid organization of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Mosul

- All 30 churches and monasteries are under ISIS control
- Crosses have been removed from all of them
- Many of them have been burned, destroyed and looted
- Many are been used as ISIS centers

The following are few examples:

- St. Ephraim Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in Al Shurta district (East side of Mosul): ISIS converted it to a mosque and installed loudspeakers for call to prayers
- Syriac Catholic church in the old part of Mosul was looted and torched

- Mar Gewargis (St. George) monastery was looted
- Mar Thomas (St. Thomas) Syriac Catholic historical and old church was looted after the doors were broken
- Mar Behnam (St. Behnam) Syriac Catholic monastery in the Ancient Assyrian town of Nimrod is controlled by ISIS
- religious Sunni, Shiite and Christian tombs have been destroyed, according to Sharia
- Shiite prayer mosques (*Hussayniya*) have been demolished

All non-Sunni communities have been targeted by ISIS. Christian, Yazidi and Shiite religious sites have been destroyed. Turkish and Shabak Shiites have fled from their homes and villages.

Nearly 80% of the residents of Baghdede (Hamdaniya/Qaraqosh) have returned after fleeing from fighting between ISIS and Kurds. Baghdede, with a population of 50,000, is 97% Assyrian. There is still a severe shortage of electricity and water still cut off. Residents are using wells for water.

All municipal services have stopped.

The same conditions exist for the Assyrian towns of Bartilla, Bashiqa and Bahzany.

July 25, 2014: ISIS destroys the tomb of the Prophet Jonah (story)
ISIS Blows Up Muslim Shrine With Biblical Prophet Jonah's Tomb 'to Dust' Because it Had Become a Place of Apostasy
 By [Leonardo Blair](#), Senior Reporter Friday, July 25, 2014



A revered Muslim shrine in Mosul, Iraq, said to be the burial place of the biblical prophet Jonah known as Yunus in the Koran, was reportedly blown "to dust" by members of the jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Thursday.

"Islamic State completely destroyed the shrine of Nabi Yunus after telling local families to stay away and closing the roads to a distance of 500 meters from the shrine," an official at the Sunni endowment, which manages Sunni religious affairs in Iraq [told AFP](#).

The official who asked not to be identified said the militants took an hour to rig the shrine before levelling it to the ground. He explained that other notable shrines had also been destroyed by ISIS: "But the worst destruction was of Nabi Yunus, which has been turned to dust."

One witness who did not want to be identified said: "They first stopped people from praying in it, they fixed explosive charges around and inside it and then blew it up in front of a large gathering of people."

According to [The Guardian](#), the shrine was built on an archaeological site that dates back to the eighth century BC. Iraq's late dictator Saddam Hussein had renovated it in the 1990s and it was a popular destination for religious travelers from around the world until ISIS became a problem in the region.

Columbia University Near Eastern history PhD student Christopher Jones [described](#) Jonah's tomb as a sacred place "to meditate on the questions raised by the story of Jonah: questions of justice, obedience, providence, fairness and divine mercy."

Fearful residents who witnessed the explosion, however, told the [Associated Press](#) that the jihadists felt the shrine had become a place for apostasy, not prayer.

Sam Hardy, a professor at the American University of Rome gave a possible explanation to [The Washington Post](#) for the destruction of the shrine.

"It indicates they are going for total eradication not just of their enemies but even of the possibility of people living together under their rule," said Hardy.

And according to Jones: "Sometimes the practitioners of a new religion feel compelled to recognize a place as sacred, and develop their own reasons to continue to venerate it... Other times, they choose to demonstrate the superiority of their own religion over other belief systems by destroying their sacred spaces and building their own in their place."

June 10 to July 29, 2014: 45 churches destroyed

AINA News

All 45 Christian Institutions in Mosul Destroyed or Occupied By ISIS

Posted 2014-07-29 15:05 GMT

Since taking over Mosul on June 10, ISIS has destroyed, occupied, converted to mosques, converted to ISIS headquarters or shuttered all 45 Christian institutions in Mosul. The following is the complete list of the Christian institutions in Mosul, grouped by denomination.

Syriac Catholic Church:

1. Syrian Catholic Diocese - Maidan Neighborhood, Mosul
2. The Old Church of the Immaculate - Maidan Neighborhood, Mosul (The church goes back to the eighth century AD)
3. The New Church of the Immaculate - Maidan Neighborhood
4. Church of Mar (Saint) Toma - Khazraj Neighborhood
5. Museum of Mar (Saint) Toma - Khazraj Neighborhood
6. Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation - Muhandiseen Neighborhood
7. Church of the Virgin of Fatima - Faisaliah Neighborhood
8. Our Lady of Deliverance Chapel - Shifaa Neighborhood
9. The House of the Young Sisters of Jesus - Ras Al-Kour Neighborhood
10. Archbishop's Palace Chapel - Dawasa Neighborhood

Syriac Orthodox Church:

1. Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese - Shurta Neighborhood
2. The Antiquarian Church of Saint Ahodeeni - Bab AlJadeed Neighborhood
3. Mar (Saint) Toma Church and cemetery, (the old Bishopric) - Khazraj Neighborhood
4. Church of The Immaculate (Castle) - Maidan Neighborhood

5. Church of The Immaculate - Shifaa Neighborhood
6. Mar (Saint) Aprim Church - Shurta Neighborhood
7. St. Joseph Church - The New Mosul Neighborhood

Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East:

1. Diocese of the Assyrian Church of the East - Noor Neighborhood
2. Assyrian Church of the East, Dawasa Neighborhood
3. Church of the Virgin Mary (old rite) - Wihda Neighborhood



Mar Behnam (St. Behnam) Syriac Catholic monastery in the Ancient Assyrian town of Nimrod is now occupied by ISIS.(AINA)

Chaldean Church of Babylon:

1. Chaldean Diocese - Shurta Neighborhood
2. Miskinta Church - Mayassa Neighborhood
3. The Antiquarian Church of Shimon alSafa - Mayassa Neighborhood
4. Church of Mar (Saint) Buthyoon - Shahr alSouq Neighborhood
5. Church of St. Ephrem, Wady AlAin Neighborhood
6. Church of St. Paul - Majmooaa AlThaqafiya District
7. The Old Church of the Immaculate (with the bombed archdiocese)- Shifaa Neighborhood
8. Church of the Holy Spirit - Bakir Neighborhood
9. Church of the Virgin Mary - Drakziliya Neighborhood
10. Ancient Church of Saint Isaiah and Cemetery - Ras AlKour Neighborhood
11. Mother of Aid Church - Dawasa Neighborhood
12. The Antiquarian Church of St. George- Khazraj Neighborhood
13. St. George Monastery with Cemetery - Arab Neighborhood
14. Monastery of AlNasir (Victory) - Arab Neighborhood
15. Convent of the Chaldean Nuns - Mayassa Neighborhood
16. Monastery of St. Michael - Hawi Church Neighborhood
17. The Antiquarian Monastery of St. Elijah - Ghazlany Neighborhood

Armenian Orthodox Church:

1. Armenian Church - Maidan Neighborhood
2. The New Armenian Church - Wihda Neighborhood

Evangelical Presbyterian Church:

1. Evangelical Presbyterian Church - Mayassa Neighborhood

Latin Church:

1. Latin Church and Monastery of the Dominican Fathers and Convent of Katrina Siena Nuns - Sa'a Neighborhood
2. Convent of the Dominican Sisters, - Mosul AlJadeed Neighborhood
3. Convent of the Dominican Sisters (AlKilma Monastery) - Majmooaa AlThaqafiya District
4. House of Qasada AlRasouliya (Apostolic Aim) (Institute of St. John the Beloved)

Cemeteries:

1. Christian Cemetery in the Ekab Valley which contains a small chapel.

AINA News**Timeline of ISIS in Iraq****Posted 2014-07-29 15:57 GMT****August 2, 2014: ISIS loots 8 million dollars from Assyrian farms****AINA News****ISIS Looted 8 Million Dollars From Assyrian Farms Near Mosul**

Posted 2014-08-03 00:15 GMT

(AINA) -- Two weeks after capturing Mosul, when nearly all 50,000 Assyrian inhabitants of Baghdede (Qaraqosh) had fled the city (AINA [2014-06-26](#)), ISIS systematically looted all of the poultry farms that were owned by Assyrians, and that were abandoned after the Assyrians had fled. ISIS looted 8 million dollars (USD) worth of livestock and equipment from the Assyrian farmers.

Read [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

AINA Has compiled a comprehensive list of the farms, their owners, the items looted and the total value of the looted items.

	Owner	Items Looted	Value (Iraqi Dinars)	Subtotals	Total Dollars (\$1=ID 1166)
	Mousa Majeed Shitu	1 - Poultry halls + plant feed + Fish Lake with all the requirements for the operation of the troughs and fountains and devices	350,000,000		300172
		2 - Chicken number 16000 full bird	100,000,000		85763
		3 - Two Kia Trucks	25,000,000		21441
		4 - 30 tons of barley	12,000,000		10292
		5 - Harvester New Holland	80,000,000		68611
		6 - Equipment + generator + 2 large Khnzirat not belong to the field	10,000,000		8576
				577,000,000	494854
	Noel Yousif Tooma	1 - Poultry field + Barns for breeding calves	200,000,000		171527
		2 - Agricultural Equipment	10,000,000		8576

	3 - wheat intended for Marketing 150 tons	105,000,000		90051
	4 - barley intended for marketing 65 tons	30,000,000		25729
	5 - turkey 3000	30,000,000		25729
			375,000,000	321612
Jawad Habib Skaria	1 - two Poultry halls + plant feed + Barns	300,000,000		257290
	2 - wheat intended for marketing 60 tons	42,000,000		36021
	3 - the amount of 50 tons of barley	25,000,000		21441
	4 - turkey number 5000 full weight ready for marketing	250,000,000		214408
	5 - hatchery for eggs for hatching	50,000,000		42882
			667,000,000	572041
Sabah Zoara Skaria	1 - two halls + factory + Extension	350,000,000		300172
	2 - 21 thousand chickens egg producer	147,000,000		126072
	3 - 100 tons of feed	70,000,000		60034
			567,000,000	486278
Hazem Aboosh Saqat	1 - two halls + plant feed	350,000,000		300172
	2 - 12 thousand chickens	40,000,000		34305
	3 - 40 tons of feed	28,000,000		24014
	4 - wheat intended for marketing 50 tons	35,000,000		30017
	5 - barley intended for marketing 20 tons	8,000,000		6861
			461,000,000	395369
Tawfiq Aboosh Saqat	1 - Poultry Hall + Cow Barns	250,000,000		214408
	2 - 40 fattening calves	40,000,000		34305
	3 - wheat intended for marketing 40 tons	28,000,000		24014
	4 - barley for fattening 30 tons	12,000,000		10292
	5 - 30 tons of yellow corn	9,000,000		7719
			339,000,000	290738

	Firas Behnam Shemo	1 - a small hall for breeding	25,000,000		21441
		2 - 5 thousand chicks	15,000,000		12864
		3 - wheat intended for marketing 20 tons	14,000,000		12007
		4 - barley intended for marketing 10 tons	4,000,000		3431
		5 - 10 tons of feed	7,000,000		6003
				65,000,000	55746
	Hani Habib Jallow	1 - Poultry Hall + factory + Barns	150,000,000		128645
		2 - 5 thousand poultry	25,000,000		21441
		3 - Harvester Forxin	30,000,000		25729
		4 - wheat 20 tons and barley 50 tons intended for marketing	40,000,000		34305
				245,000,000	210120
	Sami Habib Jallow	1 - 3 Halls Poultry + Barns + 2 factory feed	400,000,000		343053
		2 - 10 thousand chickens	50,000,000		42882
		3 - wheat intended for marketing 70 tons	49,000,000		42024
		4 - barley intended for marketing 60 tons	24,000,000		20583
		5 - 10 tons of feed	7,000,000		6003
				530,000,000	454545
0	Raaed Bahnam Shitu	1 - Two Poultry halls + Brick factory	500,000,000	500,000,000	428816
1	Ayoub	1 - Hall + factory feed	200,000,000		171527
		2 - grain intended for Marketing 100 tons	70,000,000		60034
				270,000,000	231561
2	Khalil Mikho	1 - Two Poultry halls + Brick factory	600,000,000		514580
		2 - wheat intended for marketing 50 tons	35,000,000		30017
		3 - barley intended for marketing 20 tons	8,000,000		6861
				643,000,000	551458
3	Fahd Tooma Bahnam	1 - Two complete Poultry halls	250,000,000	250,000,000	214408

4	Badr	1 - Poultry hatchery	250,000,000		214408
		2 - Damaged eggs and chicks dead	30,000,000		25729
				280,000,000	240137
5	Najib Marzeena Shitu	1 - Two Poultry halls	250,000,000	250,000,000	214408
6	Elias Jameel	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000	150,000,000	128645
7	Joaza Ayoub	1 - Three Poultry halls	350,000,000	350,000,000	300172
8	Dhiya Saqat	1 - Two Poultry halls	250,000,000	250,000,000	214408
9	Abdullah Jamil	1 - Two Poultry halls + factory feed	300,000,000	300,000,000	257290
0	Ibrahim Rafo	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000	150,000,000	128645
1	Salim Hadaya	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000	150,000,000	128645
2	Nimrod Babawi	1 - 4 hall with poultry feed factory	450,000,000		385935
		2 - 30 thousand chickens	140,000,000		120069
				590,000,000	506003
3	Saad Estaypho	1 - Poultry Hall + factory feed	200,000,000	200,000,000	171527
4	Farouk Baqtar	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000		128645
		2 - 8 thousand Chicken	30,000,000		25729
		3 - 10 tons of feed	7,000,000		6003
				187,000,000	160377
5	Sharbel Kacho	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000	150,000,000	128645
6	Karoomy Eeso	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000	150,000,000	128645
7	Patrus Bayoon Estaypho	1 - Two Poultry halls + factory feed	300,000,000		257290
		2 - Sheep	50,000,000		42882
		3 - Grains	35,000,000		30017
				385,000,000	330189
8	Faraj Tamas	1 - Poultry Hall	150,000,000		128645

	2 - Cows	100,000,000		85763
			250,000,000	214408
GRAND TOTAL		9,281,000,000	9,281,000,000	\$7,959,691

August 2, 2014: ISIS Captures Yazidi towns, kills 2,000 Yazidis, causes 200,000 to flee

AINA News

Fear After ISIS Captures Three Towns in Iraq, Moves Into Assyrian Town

Posted 2014-08-04 10:02 GMT



- (AINA) -- ISIS made significant gains in Iraq on Saturday and Sunday, capturing the towns of Sinjar, Zumar and Wana, as well as the largest dam in Iraq, north of Mosul. After a fierce battle with Kurds which that lasted for two hours ISIS captured Zumar, inflicting heavy losses on the Kurds. According to a Reuters report, Kurdish troops did not defend the dam but fled with their belongings. In Sinjar, Kurdish troops put up little resistance, according to witnesses.

- After ISIS captured the towns of Sinjar and Zumar it began to brutally terrorize their residents, nearly all of whom are Yazidis. Nearly 40,000 Yazidis have fled from their homes and thousands have been killed. The world leader of the Yazidis, Prince Tahseen Said, has issued a distress call (AINA [2014-08-04](#)).

- There is renewed fear in the Assyrian town of Baghdede (Qaraqosh), 20 kilometers miles east of Mosul, where nearly all of the 50,000 residents fled 10 days ago. About 80% have since returned. ISIS is now building earth barricades 500 meters directly across from

the Kurdish forces stationed 1.5 kilometers east of the city, using five heavy bulldozers. If ISIS and Kurds clash again it is nearly certain that the residents will flee again.

- ISIS troops have now arrived in the Assyrian town of Tel Kepe, 22 kilometers north of Mosul, causing fear among the residents. Some residents of the village of Batnaya, 8 miles north of Tel Kepe, have already begun leaving, heading north to Alqosh and Noohadra (Dohuk). 118 kilometers north of Mosul, in the village of Zakho near the Turkish border, the Assyrians are in a state of heightened anxiety, uncertain of their safety and security.

August 4, 2014: Assyrians flee as ISIS approaches Assyrian villages in the Nineveh Plain

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-04 20:24 GMT

(AINA) -- A video posted on facebook shows a long column of cars of Assyrians driving north to escape from ISIS fighters, who have now entered the Nineveh plain and are approaching Assyrian villages north of Mosul.

Yesterday ISIS entered the village of Tel Kepe (AINA [2014-08-04](#)). Immediately thereafter Assyrians began fleeing from the village of Batnaya, 8 miles to the north.

Here is the transcript of the video (which is in Assyrian):

We are here in the car driving to the village of Sharafia.

There are here in all these cars people who are fleeing from near the village Telesqof and surrounding areas, all the people are fleeing because the fighters of Da'ish [Islamic State] have reached near there.

You see [in] all these cars people that are fleeing, going to the areas near Dohuk.

See all these people who are fleeing -- see the extent of these cars.

See all these people fleeing because we heard the fighters of Da'ish have reached near Telesqof, the village of Telesqof.

God help all of these people.

So if happens that they [IS] take Telesqof, they will also reach Alqosh.

See here on the left, that is Alqosh, it's not that far. This is Alqosh, on the left.

And here on the right, where all the people are fleeing, some from Telesqof, some from around Telesqof, they are all fleeing, going up [north] to save their lives.

August 4, 2014: Leader of Iraq's Yazidis issues distress call, appeals for help against ISIS

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-04 09:12 GMT

(AINA) -- The world leader of the Yazidis, Prince Tahseen Said, has issued a distress call to the world after ISIS captured the towns of Sinjar and Zumar in Iraq and began to brutally terrorize their residents, nearly all of whom are Yazidis. Nearly 40,000 Yazidis have fled from their homes and thousands have been killed.

According to Mirza Ismail, CEO of the Yezidi Human Rights Organization, Kurdish forces fled the Sinjar area and left the Yazidis defenseless, who have only AK47s to use against ISIS. They are getting hit with mortars and other heavy weapons.

In a letter posted on [ankawa.com](#), Prince Said appeals to world leaders to come to the aid of his people. Here is the text of the letter.



**The world leader of the Yazidis, Prince Tahseen Said
(photo: Jihad Nga/New York Times).**

August 3, 2014

Urgent distress call from the Prince of Yazidis

I appeal to Mr. Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan Region, and Mr. Fuad Masum, President of the Federal Republic of Iraq, and the Iraqi Government, and the Iraqi Parliament, and the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region, and the Arab League, and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Mr. Barack Obama President of the United States, and the European Union and international community in general, and organizations and relevant international bodies:

I ask for aid and to lend a hand and help the people of Sinjar areas and its affiliates and villages and complexes which are home to the people of the Yazidi religion. I invite them to assume their humanitarian and nationalistic responsibilities towards them and help them in their plight and the difficult conditions in which they live today

Citizens of this religion are peaceful people who acknowledge all principles and humanitarian values and respect all religions, and never had enmity against any of their countrymen, and in the near past they even had a major humanitarian stand with their fellow residence of Mosul and Tal Afar, and today they desperately need their brethren's help.

This humanitarian appeal I make on my behalf and on behalf of the people of this religion to come to their assistance and help the Yazidi people as soon as possible.

Prince Tahseen Said

Prince of the People of the Yazidi Religion in Iraq and the world

August 5, 2014: ISIS shells Assyrian town, 1 killed; Yazidis in desperate state

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-05 18:14 GMT

(AINA) -- An Assyrian deacon, Lujain Hikmat Nano, was killed by an Islamic State (IS) mortar attack yesterday in the Assyrian town of Tel Kepe, which is 22 kilometers north of Mosul. IS fighters arrived at Tel Kepe yesterday and are now driving north in the Nineveh Plain,

where most of the Assyrian population in north Iraq lives. This has caused fear and panic among Assyrians, who began to flee yesterday (AINA [2014-08-04](#)).



**Deacon Lujain Hikmat Nano of the Assyrian town of Tel Kepe,
Killed by Islamic State mortar fire.**

Most are fleeing north to the Assyrian villages nearer the Turkish border, such as Noohadra (Dohuk), but many destitute Assyrians, who do not have the money to sustain themselves, are fleeing back to Baghdede (Qaraqosh) where they stand a better chance of getting aid.

There are unconfirmed reports that some members of the clergy in Nooharda, fearing the refugees will eventually leave Iraq, are preventing the refugees from entering the town, apparently in an effort to cause them to return to their villages.

Yazidis

Since capturing the predominantly Yazidi towns of Sinjar and Zumar (AINA [2014-08-04](#)), IS has forced nearly 200,000 Yazidis to flee into the mountains with no water or food. According to the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO), an NGO working in north Iraq, more than 50 Yazidi children have died. HHRO has received telephone calls from Yazidi leaders in Sinjar in which they desperately plead for help. The world leader of the Yazidis, Prince Tahseen Said, has issued a distress call (AINA [2014-08-04](#)).

August 6, 2014: Kurds and ISIS clash outside Baghdede; ISIS begins using Yazidis as human shields; All the Assyrians from the villages of Bartella, Bashiqa, Bahzany, Tel Kepe, Batnaya and Telsqof flee

AINA News

Kurds and ISIS Clash Outside Baghdede; ISIS Using Yazidis As Human Shields

Posted 2014-08-06 09:04 GMT

(AINA) -- Kurdish forces and ISIS clashed 6 kilometers outside of Baghdede (Qaraqosh) on Wednesday morning. Mortars fell on the city, killing 1 woman and two boys and injuring 5 children. Nearly all Assyrian residents of Baghdede have fled to Arbel. There is no support from the central government for the Kurdish forces.



Assyrians killed in Baghdede by Islamic State mortar. David Adib Elias Shamis (5, center), Mazen Elias Shamis (9, right)

On June 26 Kurds clashed with ISIS just outside of Baghdede, forcing nearly 50,000 Assyrians to flee. About 80% returned after the fighting stopped, but now they are fleeing again.

All the Assyrians from the villages of Bartella, Bashiqa and Bahzany have fled to the Monastery of Mar Mattai (St. Matthew), Arbel and Noohadra (Dohuk). The Yazidis from these areas have fled to Aqra and Sheikhan.

All the Assyrian inhabitants of the towns of Tel Kepe, Batnaya and Telsqof have fled. In Tel Kepe even the Arab Muslims have fled. Yesterday an Assyrian man was killed in Tel Kepe by mortar fired by ISIS (AINA [2014-08-05](#)). He could not be buried there because of the danger, he was brought to Alqosh and buried there.

Yazidis

ISIS captured 150 Yazidi families in Iraq and brought them to Syria for unknown reasons. They are being held at Camp Hol.

ISIS captured 500 Yazidi families and brought them to Tel Afar, Iraq, where they are being used as human shields. They have been placed in the *Qalaat Tel Afar* (the old castle), in schools and in homes.

August 7, 2014: Assyrian Patriarch Pleads to the United Nations on Crisis in Iraq

AINA News

Assyrian Church of the East

Posted 2014-08-07 09:33 GMT

(AINA) -- The following letter was sent by His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, The Patriarch of Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, to His Excellency Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations.

The grave situation which our Christian communities in Iraq are suffering constrains me to write to Your Excellency as the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization. I join my fellow patriarchs and hierarchs of Christian Churches of Iraq, and in the Middle East at large, in voicing our serious concern for the peril of our people and faithful. This plea cannot go unheard by the United Nations!

The plight of the ancient Christian communities in Mosul, Iraq, and its environs is a situation by now well known to Your Excellency and to all of the member-states of the United

Nations. At the outset, let me thank you for the letter of July 20, 2014 issued by the Secretary General's office and the follow-up letter issued by the Presidency of the Security Council on July 21, 2014, both of which condemn in categorical and unequivocal terms the atrocities committed against the Christians of Iraq by the militant, fundamentalist and terrorist Islamist group known as 'ISIS' (now, 'IS'). The destruction and havoc which has been reeked by this lawless group upon the Christians, and now other religious minority groups in the country, has been documented and made known to the world.

The plight of our ancient Christian communities in Iraq, particularly the Assyrians and the Chaldean, Syriac and Armenian communities, has caused the forced displacement of thousands of persons. Women, children and the elderly have left their homes and continually on the move--from city to city, and from village to village--seeking safety for their lives. We are informed by our prelates in Iraq that as the present situation and conditions continue to go from bad to worse; people are living in great fear and confusion, without any hope for a brighter and better future. Christianity has been present in the ancient city of Mosul, known formerly as 'Nineveh,' the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire, since the preaching of the very Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ in the first half of the first Christ century. Today, not a Christian is present, and what's more, the ancient churches and relics of our faith have been destroyed before the very eyes of the major countries of the modern civilized West--indeed, before the eyes of the world! This is a great travesty not only against the Christian faith and its adherents, but against the ancient patrimony of civilization of which the city of Mosul (Nineveh) has been a living witness until very recent.

Your Excellency: the United Nations as an international body is well aware of the anti-human and criminal acts perpetrated by the this terrorist group known as 'ISIS' against the Christians of Iraq, and now other against other religious minorities such as the Yezidis, Shabaks, Kurds as well as the Shia and non-compliant Sunni citizens of Iraq. The world, and much less the United Nations, cannot stand by with obvious complacency and apathy towards our plight and allow this destruction of these peoples in Iraq. Mere statements of condemnation by the UN, and even of the major countries of the West, are not sufficient! These statements, though taken with gratitude, are not enough to bring an end to these atrocities and to stop this genocide of a religious nature!

Therefore, Your Excellency, on behalf of the thousands of displaced Christians of Iraq--the children, women and elderly--and on behalf of those who have already paid with their lives and the blood of their necks for their faith: I implore the United Nations to take concrete and statutory action in a plenary session of the member-states of the United Nations against the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity; I implore the Security Council to take a positive vote in favor of these persecuted Christians who are suffering a new and modern genocide. The lives of this persecuted and oppressed people depend upon the moral decisions of the United Nations in favor of protecting human life and the right of each and every person to worship God and follow his/her conscience.

Time is of the essence, Your Excellency! The United Nations must act quickly to halt and remedy this dire and bloody situation for the Christians in Iraq. If no concrete action is taken very soon, then I must say that the United Nations and its member-states will have failed in fulfilling their mandate of preserving life and peace in the world. This would be a grave and inexcusable moral violation, which we all pray and hope is avoided. I am ready to afford my Church's support in meeting and/or being a part of Your Excellency's solution to this crisis. I shall keep Your Excellency in my prayers, as you fulfill your important mandate of moderating

the United Nations. May Almighty God grant His enduring peace throughout the world and among all peoples.



Assyrian refugees sleeping on the streets of Ankawa, Iraq (photo: ankawa.com).

(AINA) -- The push of the Islamic State (IS) from Mosul north into the Nineveh Plain, the last stronghold of Assyrians in Iraq, has created fear and panic in the population, causing a massive exodus from Assyrian villages. The influx of refugees into Ankawa and Noohadra (Dohuk) has overwhelmed the towns. There is a shortage of everything -- shelter, food, water. Displaced Assyrians are sleeping on sidewalks and in open fields.

AINA spoke to several government officials by telephone regarding the crisis in the Nineveh Plain. These same officials have also fled with the rest of the population.

Yesterday at midnight a column of IS vehicles entered Tel Kepe and took control of the city, whose population had already fled north. IS is now marching to Batnaya and Telsqof, which have been abandoned.

All of the population of the city of Alqosh has fled.

The massive exodus of Assyrians was precipitated in part by the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from the Nineveh Plain. With no one left to defend them, Assyrians followed the retreating Kurdish forces.

Baghdede is now nearly completely empty of Assyrians. The exodus began yesterday morning at 2:30 A.M when Kurdish forces announced they were withdrawing. The Bishops ordered all churches to ring their bells to warn the residents to flee and the exodus began.

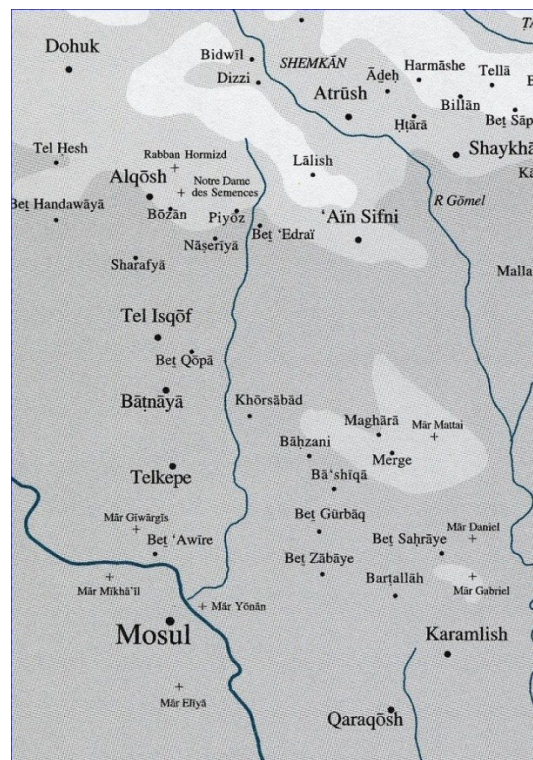
After the Kurdish forces withdrew IS took control of the city and the surrounding areas, including Karamles and Bartella.

Last night and this morning IS robbed Assyrians as they fled Baghdede.

It is estimated that 200,000 Assyrians have fled the Nineveh Plain, heading north to Dohuk, Sarsink and Zakho and east to Ankawa and Arbel. The following is a list of Assyrian villages and towns which are now completely abandoned:

1. Baghdede (Qaraqosh)
2. Karamlis
3. Bartella
4. Bashiqa
5. Tel Kepe

The Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East sent a letter Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, urging action on the crisis in North Iraq (AINA [2014-08-07](#)).



200,000 Assyrians have fled from the Nineveh Plain, the last stronghold of Assyrians in Iraq

August 8, 2014: Iraqi Parliament passes resolution accusing ISIS of genocide

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-07 21:45 GMT

(AINA) -- The Iraqi Parliament passed a resolution today calling the actions of the Islamic State (ISIS) in north Iraq a genocide. The resolution passed by a majority vote and was tabled by Yazizi MP Vian Dakheel, who delivered an impassioned plea yesterday to stop ISIS

from massacring her people in the Sinjar area, which ISIS captured two days ago (AINA [2014-08-06](#)).

The resolution calls the events occurring on North Iraq crimes against humanity and calls on the international community to prosecute ISIS and to hold responsible the states and institutions that support or finance their activities, and establish safe-haven by an international resolution issued by the UN Security Council.

The resolution has eight points:

1. Designate the actions of ISIS against ethnic and religious minorities as crimes against humanity and demand from the international community to prosecute the perpetrators and hold responsible the states and institutions that support or finance their activities.
2. Designate as disaster areas the towns of Sinjar, Baghdade (Qaraqosh/Hamdania), Bartella, Bashiqa, Tel Kepe, Alqosh, Sheikhan, Tal Afar, Tuz, Amerli, Bashir and Taza.
3. Demand the UN and its affiliated humanitarian organizations to work hard for the relief of displaced persons from those areas, according to the UN Charter.
4. Demand from the Government to promptly allocate sums of money from the emergency budget for the purpose of securing the humanitarian needs of the residents of those areas and to compensate the homeless and displaced people for damages.
5. Demand action from the government to deliver urgent humanitarian aid to displaced people from those areas by all available means.
6. Petition Arab and European Parliaments for supporting the Iraqi parliament decision in this regard, and call upon the governments of Arab States and Europe in providing all means of support for displaced people from the affected areas.
7. Demand that the Media and Communications Commission to oblige all media organizations not to broadcast or publish any activities or statements of ISIS.
8. Demand the federal government and regional government to clear the areas from the ISIS and return the displaced and homeless people to their areas.

August 9, 2014: ISIS forces all women in Mosul to wear the veil, including the full head cover. ISIS establishes black markets for goods to raise funds.

AINA News

August 9 Report on the Situation in North Iraq

Posted 2014-08-11 05:14 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 9, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

- On August 9 ISIS began forcing all women to wear the full veil, which covers the face completely. Males members of the family of a woman who does not comply would be flogged according to Sharia law.
- ISIS has established a black market for basic necessities, especially medicine, its financial gain.
- According to reliable sources, some of the young men and boys recruited by ISIS who are receiving training in camps inside the city have started to flee and are in hiding for fear of prosecution by ISIS.

The Nineveh Plain

- ISIS continues to violate human rights in areas under its control.
- There is no accurate information about the number of families that stayed behind and did flee from the areas now dominated by ISIS, though the number is thought to be low.
- Some reassurance was felt from the likelihood that the security situation might soon improve after ISIS positions in the province of Arbel were bombed by the Americans.
- The Yazidis trapped at the foot of the Sinjar mountain have begun to safely leave and are likely to head to the far north, close to the Turkish border. A large amount of relief has been airdropped.
- Communication was lost with many displaced families that are still wandering in the wilderness and remote areas, especially after the batteries of their cell phones were depleted.
- The refugees who traveled to the far north of the Nineveh Plain suffer from the lack of basic services, as well as a shortage of medicines because of limited health care services available in these areas.
- Most of the refugees lack funds needed to buy some special needs.
- Homes in Baghdade and Tel Kepe have been confiscated for the "princes" of ISIS.
- The living conditions for refugees are miserable. In many cases there are more than 100 people living in a space that normally accommodates only 20 people.
- The condition of the refugees in Arbel is worse than that of those that are in the Dohuk and the northern areas because greater numbers of people went to Arbel, and there are huge crowds of displaced people in the area of Ankawa.
- The aid provided by human rights and charitable organizations is severely limited. There is a humanitarian crisis.
- There is great fear of the possibility that ISIS will begin abducting women and enslaving or selling them, as happened in Tal Afar and Sinjar.
- Suicides have occurred in Sinjar as a result of frustration, desperation and fear. One case has been confirmed of a girl committing suicide after she saw ISIS kidnap four of her sisters from her home.

August 10 2014: Assyrian Refugees from Nineveh Plain in Desperate Need

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-10 02:41 GMT

(AINA) -- The massive exodus of nearly 200,000 Assyrians from the Nineveh plain (AINA [2014-08-07](#)), caused by the Islamic State's (ISIS) capture of several Assyrian towns and villages, has overwhelmed the areas to where the refugees have fled. Fleeing ISIS, Assyrians have moved north to Dohuk and east to Arbel.

Assyrians have fled to three areas: Dohuk, Arbel and Sulaymaniyah. They are sleeping in churches, abandoned and condemned buildings, hotels, open fields and parks. The bulk of the refugees are in Dohuk and Arbel, in Ankawa and Shaqlawa around Arbel, and in Zakho, Amadiyya, Aqra, and Nahla, Mangesh, Anouna, Dihe, Dawidiyya, Jalla, Bersify, Barwari Bala, Kani Masi, Feshkhabour, Sarsank, Araden, Tashish, and a number of other villages.

The conditions in Ankawa/Arbel are the worst. In the first four days the Assyrian refugees suffered from the extreme heat -- children, wives and the elderly -- since the majority of

them walked tens of kilometers to Ankawa. They were terrified. The Kurdish forces manning the checkpoints harassed them as they entered. The refugees were Assyrians and Shabaks.

There are no shelters to accommodate the refugees, which numbered at least 10,000. They have spend several nights in the Gardens of the Diocese of the Chaldean Church of St. Joseph, on sidewalks, public parks and in unfinished buildings. The refugees are sleeping in streets and open fields under starlight and sitting under the scorching sunlight on the outskirts of town. The daytime temperature is 40C (104F). There is a shortage of food, water and other basic necessities.



Rami Hanna Shitte, killed by ISIS

Further west, Dohuk (Assyrian Noohadra) has received the majority of refugees, and the city is handling the influx a little better than Ankawa. Refugees have been sheltered in vacant homes in dozens of Assyrian villages, which were prepared years ago for the project of resettlement of Christians in these villages.

The clergy, village leaders and volunteers belonging to these villages welcomed and helped to house thousands of families in these homes. They assigned 3-4 families per house. School buildings were also declared open for use by the order of the provincial government and hundreds of families were sheltered in them.

An equal number of Assyrians have gone far north of the Nineveh Plain and settled in small villages and groves. Their condition is critical. They lack food, water and shelter.

In Baghdede ISIS told 17 Assyrian families who had remained to convert, pay *jizya*, or die. But the families escaped on Friday evening and reached Ankawa. According to one member of these families, ISIS rounded them up and brought them to the mosque located in the al-Askary neighborhood of Baghdede.

ISIS killed a young Assyrian resident of Baghdede, Rami Hanna Shitte. It also raided all liquor stores and destroyed them.

In Karamlis ISIS robbed an elderly Assyrian couple who was late in fleeing, taking two million dinars from them as they left. ISIS is now using three homes and the building of the Kurdistan Democratic Party as their bases. One home is near the Church of Barbaba and the other in the alShuada neighborhood in the town center.

Very little relief is reaching the refugees. Most of the Assyrians who fled have reached their destinations, only Yazidis are still on the roads, taking refuge under the shade of trees.

Officials today began orchestrating the construction of refugee camps in safe areas in the Kurdish region.

Assyrian leaders are requesting immediate shipments of food, water, tents and other emergency relief aid. Longer term, they are requesting action through the UN Security Council, to restore the refugees to their homes and insure their safety.

The flight of Assyrians began when ISIS captured Baghdede (Qaraqosh), Karamlis and Bartella, then moved north of Mosul and captured Tel Kepe, Batnaya and Telsqof, who had already been abandoned. In Baghdede 50,000 Assyria residents fled at 2 AM after church bells warned them that Kurdish forces were withdrawing from the city.

August 11, 2014: ISIS orders all families in Mosul to obtain approval before burying their dead

AINA News

ISIS provides gasoline to Assyrians in Nineveh Plain to facilitate their departure. ISIS continues kidnapping women, with female ISIS members helping. Iraqi general says 70% of Yazidis on Mount Sinjar are dead.

AINA News

August 11 Report on the Situation in North Iraq; Threat of Cholera Outbreak

Posted 2014-08-12 00:18 GMT



Assyrian refugees sleeping in an open field in Ankawa.

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 11, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

ISIS ordered all families to obtain approval before burying their dead. Approval must be obtained from ISIS "princes" and burials must be in accordance with procedures specified by the "princes."

The city saw the remarkable appearance of completely veiled women accompanied by a male family member, and there has not been a sighting of any woman out alone even in markets or for other tasks.

The Nineveh Plain

The number of people who have left the areas of Baghdade and the Nineveh Plain is nearly 200,000; they have fled to Arbel, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. Some have traveled to the Iraqi-Turkish border crossing of Port Ibrahim, hoping to leave their country.

There is no information on the fate of the families and individuals who remained in Baghdede, Tel Kepe, and Karemles. Verified reports indicate that ISIS gathered these families in the Tawheed mosque in Baghdede and ordered them to convert, pay *jizya* or be killed.

ISIS is providing gasoline for a number of families to facilitate their flight. This has occurred in several towns and villages.

According verified reports, there are Yazidis still in flight, walking in forests and barren lands, hoping to meet officials from the offices of the United Nations.

Reliable sources report that the number of women who have been kidnapped by ISIS is increasing on a daily basis, and there are armed women with ISIS whose duty is to inspect the faces of the girls and women and select and isolate the beautiful ones to sell them or forcibly marry them to the ISIS fighters.

General Condition of Refugees

The situation of the refugees is past critical and is now a humanitarian crisis. Aid must be delivered immediately to prevent thousands of deaths. According to an [Iraqi General](#), 70% of the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar are dead.

Water is the most critical component, as there is not enough for the needs of the tens of thousands of refugees, who have already begun using unpurified, stagnant and dirty water. The threat of a cholera outbreak now looms large on the refugees.

While the bulk of the refugees in Dohuk and Ankawa (Arbel) are Assyrian Christians, there are a great number of Yazidis, Turkmen and Shabaks as well.

ISIS "Amnesty" Offer

Assyrian Leaders dismissed an offer of "amnesty" by ISIS, which it made to the few Assyrians who had remained in Mosul and Baghdede. ISIS asked these Assyrians to tell their Christian friends and relatives that ISIS has "pardoned" the Christians and they may return to their homes without fear.

Calling the offer "preposterous," Assyrian leaders asked how such an amnesty can be issued to Iraqi citizens who are guiltless and faultless, saying that amnesty is usually issued for criminals and outlaws and not for law-abiding citizens. The leaders demanded that ISIS admit to committing gruesome crimes against humanity against Assyrians, Yazidis, Turkmen and Shabaks.

August 13, 2014: ISIS forces child patients at the cancer hospital in Mosul to hold ISIS flags and then photographed them for propaganda purposes

AINA News

ISIS completely loots and plunders all homes in the the Assyrian Christian towns of Telsqof and Bashiqa. 100,000 Yazidi refugees are now in the town of Khanak without food, water or shelter ([story](#)).

August 13, 2014: Report on North Iraq; 100,000 Yazidis At Risk

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-13 21:10 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 13, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.



Assyrian refugees in a church courtyard in Ankawa, Iraq.

Mosul

- ISIS forced child patients at the cancer hospital in Mosul to hold ISIS flags and then photographed them for propaganda purposes.

The Nineveh Plain

- The Assyrian Christian towns of Telsqof and Bashiqa have been completely looted and plundered by ISIS. All homes have been emptied of valuables. The looting and theft occurred during daytime hours.

Yazidis

- Reliable sources report that Turkish border guards killed ten Yazidis who had gathered at one of the border points between Iraq and Turkey and were demanding to be allowed to enter Turkish territory to save themselves from attacks by ISIS.
- More than 100,000 Yazidis and other minorities are now in the town of Khanak and their situation is extremely dire. They do not have any food, water and shelter. The village of Hizawa has received a large number of refugees and is also in need of relief aid.
- A paralyzing despair has gripped the Yazidis, who are pleading and begging for their rescue and asking to emigrate from Iraq. The prevailing sentiment among Yazidis is that there is no force that can protect them and that another catastrophe will befall them after a few years even if a safe haven is secured for them now in Iraq.

August 14, 2014: ISIS orders all former Assyrian church guards to surrender their weapons

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-14 18:30 GMT

(AINA) -- The Islamic State (ISIS) has ordered all former church guards in Bahgdede (Qaraqosh), Bartella and Karamles to surrender their weapons. There are no Assyrians remaining in these towns, as they have all fled north to Dohuk and East to Arbel, and the churches are abandoned and unguarded.

ISIS issued its demand via a telephone call to an Assyrian member of the Bartella city council, who fled the city on August 7 (AINA [2014-08-07](#)).

According to the council member, he was contacted via telephone by one of his former Muslim neighbors who is now working for ISIS, who told the council member that ISIS has rigged explosives throughout his house in Bartella, and demanded that all former church guards surrender their weapons. The Muslim neighbor said that if the weapons are not surrendered the house would be destroyed and the council member would be found and killed.

As there are no Assyrians remaining in these towns, including the church guards, it is difficult to understand the practicality of this order. Does ISIS expect the church guards to return to these towns and personally surrender their weapons?

Disarming the Assyrians

Even before ISIS captured Baghdede, an attempt was made by the Iraqi government and the Kurdish forces, working in unison, to disarm the Assyrian population. A letter was sent on July 14 ordering all citizens to surrender their weapons. Here is the letter and its translation.

Announcement

To the people of Baghdeda, Karamles, and Bertella

Those who have medium or heavy weapons or their ammunition must surrender them to the security committee, and if such material is found during a search, the owners will be subjected to the harshest disciplinary actions.

Therefore, we ask all of you to cooperate with the security committee, with our appreciation.

Chair

Security committee

Al-Hamdaniyya [Baghdede/Qaraqosh]

August 17, 2014: Kurdish forces capture Telsqof, advance towards Mosul Dam

August 17, 2014: Kurdish militants train hundreds of Yazidis to fight ISIS

August 18, 2014: ISIS kills more than 200 Yazidi men in the village of Kojo

August 18, 2014 Refugees at great risk

AINA News

August 18 Report on North Iraq -- Refugees At Great Risk

Posted 2014-08-18 08:00 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 18, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Yazidi refugees from Mount Sinjar and Assyrian refugees are still heading to the province of Dohuk and its outskirts, where there is no longer an area not inundated with refugees. The Dohuk province does not have the infrastructure to service the refugees, unlike Ankawa in Arbel, and the threat to the refugees from the lack of food, water and shelter is now critical.

International aid organizations are overwhelmed and cannot provide the required level of relief aid to refugees. There is also gross deficiency in the distribution of aid because of the lack of accurate data on the number refugees and their locations.

Military operations for clearing ISIS from the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar are slow, allowing ISIS to loot and plunder the abandoned homes and villages, as has occurred in Bartella, Telsqof, Bashiqa, Baghdede and other areas.



Assyrian refugees in Ankawa, Iraq

The Department of the Ministry of Displacement and Migration in Dohuk is overwhelmed, delaying the processing refugees for receiving of aid form the Iraqi government.

Large numbers refugees who are government employees have not been paid for months of June and July and do not have money to purchase basic daily necessities.

ISIS killed more than 200 Yazidi men in the village of Kojo, located in the south-east area of the Sinjar district, after the village was besieged for several days. They were given a choice to convert to Islam or be killed. More than 100 Yazidi woman were taken from the village.

Conditions in Mosul hospitals is deteriorating rapidly as ISIS imposes strict rules on female doctors, ordering them to be fully veiled, including the hands, which hampers their work when treating patients.

The conditions of the Assyrian and Yazidi refugees in Ankawa and other areas in the Kurdish region is desperate because of the acute lack of food, water and shelter. There is now great suffering, with refugees losing hope of returning to their homes and becoming depressed.

August 18, 2014: ISIS forcefully circumcises Assyrian Christian men in Mosul, sells 700 Yazidi women

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-18 08:33 GMT

(AINA) -- The [Tunisia Daily](#) is reporting that the Islamic State (ISIS) forcefully circumcised Assyrian men in Mosul, without anesthesia. The report does not specify the number of men that were affected but does state that it was an organized mass circumcision. ISIS has ordered the circumcision of all Christian children and adults who remain in Mosul.

Very few Assyrian Christians stayed in Mosul after ISIS gave them a deadline to convert, pay *jizya*, leave or die (AINA [2014-07-20](#)).

The report also states that ISIS sold 700 Yazidi women for \$150 each in a public slave auction in Mosul.

August 19, 2014: UN launches new aid effort in north Iraq; Mosul dam recaptured

August 20, 2014: ISIS halt Iraqi offensive to recapture Saddam's home town

**August 20, 2014: Pictures show aftermath of ISIS looting, plundering
Assyrian town**

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-21 09:28 GMT



**Assyrians in Telesqof restore the Cross on St. George Church,
which was removed and replaced with the black ISIS flag**

(AINA) -- On August 7 Assyrians fled from their villages in the Nineveh Plain for fear of ISIS. One of these villages, Telesqof, located north of Mosul was completely deserted. ISIS moved into the village, and all other villages, and began looting and plundering.

Two days ago Telesqof was liberated by Kurdish forces. Reporters and residents who returned to the town yesterday were shocked at the level of destruction they saw. Buildings were destroyed, there was rubble in the streets and most homes were looted.

ISIS had removed all crosses from churches and had written graffiti on walls, glorifying itself.

The Assyrians first replaced the crosses on the churches and then began to clean up their town

On August 6 ISIS pushed from Mosul north into the Nineveh Plain, the last stronghold of Assyrians in Iraq, which created fear and panic in the population, causing a massive exodus from Assyrian villages. 200,000 Assyrians fled from the Nineveh Plain and Baghdade, Bartella and Karamles, north to Dohuk and East to Ankawa and Arbel. Ankawa saw its population swell from 30,000 to 100,000.

Pictures of Telesqof: Destroyed houses:





August 20, 2014: Five Middle Eastern Patriarchs visit North Iraq in Solidarity with Christians

AINA Editorial

The Historic Visit of Five Patriarchs to North Iraq

By Peter BetBasoo

Posted 2014-08-26 21:26 GMT

(AINA) -- On Wednesday, August 20 five Patriarchs from the Middle East visited Arbel in north Iraq to show support for the beleaguered Assyrian Christian community (AINA [2014-08-21](#)) and to call attention to the cultural genocide that is being committed against it by the Islamic State (ISIS).



On August 7 ISIS moved into the north of Mosul and caused 200,000 Assyrians to flee in fear from dozens of villages in the Nineveh Plain as well as from Baghdede, Bartella and Karamles. Assyrians fled north to Dohuk and east to Ankawa, just north of Arbel.

The Patriarchs were Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros AlRai, Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem II Karim of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Chaldean Patriarch Louis Rafael Sako, Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorius III Lahham and Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan.

Three of the five Patriarchs that visited North Iraq are Assyrians, Patriarch Karim, Patriarch Sako and Patriarch Younan. The Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, his Holiness Dinkha IV, could not travel to North Iraq because of severe illness.

See [Photo Album](#) of visit.

After visiting with refugees and conducting prayers, including reciting together the Lord's Prayer in Syriac (Aramaic), the language of Jesus Christ, the Patriarchs held a press conference.

Patriarch Karim said "the Syriac, Chaldean, Assyrian people that have been present in these lands for thousands of years before Christ, even the main people that constitute these societies, are being exterminated and expelled. Soon we might not see Syriac, Chaldean or Assyrian people in the region, along with other existing constituents." He also said that Mosul and the towns and villages of the Nineveh plain must be liberated with the aid of foreign powers and Assyrians should be assisted in returning to their homes. He also called for an international protection force for the Assyrians and an autonomous region, the Nineveh Plain, to be administered by Assyrians and protected by an Assyrian force.

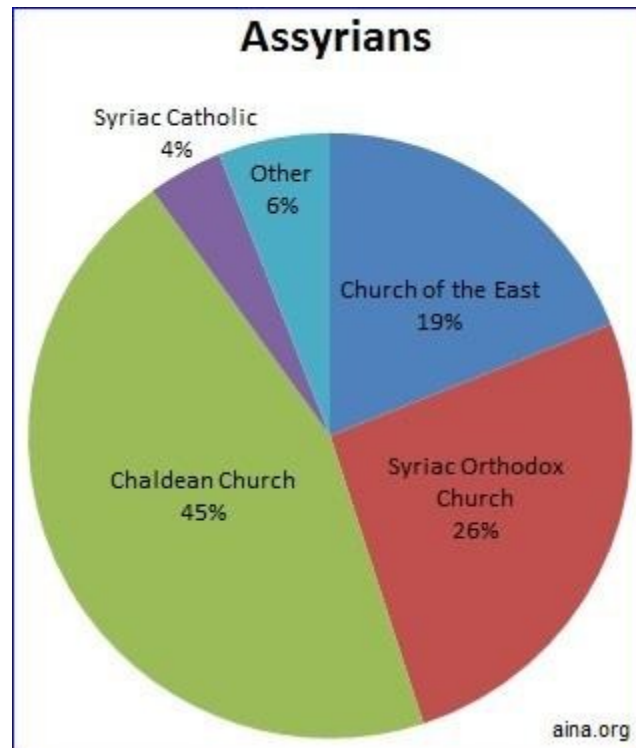
Patriarch Sako said "Today what is required for us is that wherever we are we must have one voice, one stand, one feeling. Today we are required to overcome the ethnic and religious differences. In the end we are one church. As much as we are one church, we will be a stronger church, and we will have a future."



From left: Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem II Karim, Patriarch Louis Rafael Sako, Patriarch Bechara Boutros AlRai, Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan, Patriarch Gregorius III Lahham.

Patriarch Younan said "We must raise our voice loudly and tell the whole world that it is not permissible for the civilized world in the 21st century to accept the extermination of a human group, irrespective of what religion, race or color it belongs to."

Patriarch AlRai said the Patriarchs made their visits to give moral and spiritual support to the Assyrian Christians, to meet with government officials on the refugee crisis and to alert the international community on the Christian genocide occurring in north Iraq.



The unfolding tragedy of the Assyrians in Iraq has galvanized the Assyrian community worldwide, and brought down denominational walls that have existed for centuries. The Assyrians have three large churches: the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, The Syriac Orthodox Church and the Chaldean Church of Babylon (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Over the course of centuries members of these churches came to identify themselves by their denomination ("Chaldean", "Syriac"), and this was encouraged and institutionalized by Muslim authorities for centuries to divide the population. But the Assyrian identity was never lost and

Assyrians have always known their ethnic identity, and have a written and oral history that goes back almost seven millennia.

The Syriac/Aramaic speaking members of these churches are ethnically Assyrian (these churches have non-Assyrian members as well).

These denominational walls have been crumbling for the last 100 years, and most Assyrians no longer use their denomination as their ethnic identity. Assyrians are the indigenous people of North Mesopotamia. Education, knowledge and awareness of their vast history, 6764 years, have brought a national awakening and a keen desire and urgency for the preservation of the Assyrian culture, [language](#) and heritage, which is threatened by global assimilation.

Thus when Patriarch Karim says "our people, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians" it sends a powerful message of hope and unity to Assyrians, the majority of whom live -- for the first time in their history -- in the West, having been driven out of their homelands by continual treatment as second class citizens in Muslim societies and unending genocides (see [here](#) and [here](#)). The Turkish genocide of Assyrians in World War One claimed the lives of 750,000 Assyrians (75%).

In an [interview](#) on Al Mayadeen television, Patriarch Karim said:

We were until a few weeks ago facing a bitter reality, Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians. There was a division, a big division between our political parties and our organizations that work on the political level within these communities but this crisis has united us, just as we are sitting here together [With Patriarch Younan and Patriarch Sako], and we will continue to meet and work together. Our political parties also reached the conclusion that they cannot help their people if they work separately.

Yesterday [August 22] there was a meeting for these political parties and organizations here in Ankawa and God willing this cooperation will continue, and any plan to return these people to their homes and protect them cannot be achieved or succeed if the activists, political or social, do not unite. There will be an alliance of Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians.

Samuel Ozdemir, an Assyrian monk in Brussels, was so moved by the crisis in Iraq, he delivered an [impassioned message](#) to Assyrians around the world, saying that Assyrians should put aside denominational divisions, should procreate, should work across denominations to insure they remain in their ancestral lands, and should be armed to protect themselves and should have their own autonomous region.

Assyrian political organizations have been calling for an Assyrian autonomous region for at least 10 years, and often in the past they cited this kind of the threat (ISIS) to the Assyrian populations as justification. On January 21 the Iraq Council of Ministers approved a plan to establish three new provinces in Iraq (AINA [2014-01-22](#)), one of which would be in north Iraq, in the Nineveh Plain bordering the Kurdish areas. The Nineveh Plain had the largest population of Assyrians until August 7, when ISIS drove nearly all of them out.

Calls to arm the Assyrians in Iraq have come from many circles, including the Vatican (AINA [2014-08-15](#)).

Here are the statements made by the Patriarchs at the press conference.

Patriarch Karim

I would like to start first by thanking Beshara AlRai and gregarious Laham, the rest of us have our flock here, but their presence really made us feel as one, and visited the united church.

The Syriac, Chaldean, Assyrian people that have been present in these lands for thousands of years before Christ, even the main people that constitute these societies, are being exterminated and expelled. Soon we might not see Syriac, Chaldean or Assyrian people in the region, along with other existing constituents.

We cannot withstand anymore the tragedies we witnessed today. As spiritual fathers when we see our children without a place to sleep in, how can we sleep ourselves? Truly all of us had tears in our eyes when we this suffering. We were deeply touched because we could not give them anything, except we asked them to keep their hopes up as we are the sons of the Church, of hope and of the Resurrection.

What is being requested, to summarize, is in my opinion:

1. Assistance in liberating Mosul and the towns and villages of the Nineveh plain. This is something that the major countries can do.
2. Assist in returning the people to their homes and lands as fast as possible
3. Provide international protection for these people, because today we heard from the people and even the Kurdistan regional government that people no longer have confidence in the *peshmerga* [Kurdish forces] or others. Therefore, there must be international protection provided for these people so they can remain in their lands and in their homes.
4. We ask and demand that our people be enabled to protect themselves and to take care of their own affairs in an area of their own, with agreement with the Kurdistan regional government or other arrangements that could be undertaken. Thank you.

Patriarch Sako

This is a historical visit for us, a show of solidarity. It made us feel we are one and we are not forgotten, we are not cut off from each other. The visit and their presence itself is a message.

Our eastern churches are in the middle of a tragedy that has affected the Christians and Yazidis and others. The visit boosted our confidence and increased our hope for the future.

Together we visited the president and PM of Kurdistan and this united message was for us strength.

Today what is required for us is that wherever we are we must have one voice, one stand, one feeling. Today we are required to overcome the ethnic and religious differences. In the end we are one church. As much as we are one church, we will be a stronger church, and we will have a future.

A lot of our people have emigrated and we have become small churches, but together we will become one church, a church of Christ, a church ingrained and rooted in this East.

As the Pope said our churches are the message.

Patriarch Younan

As my brothers Sako and Bshara stated, The subject is the tragedy of our people. I would like to add this point.

Today we cannot only speak about the tragedy and genocide for a Christian constituent or of Yazidi or Shabak constituents. We must raise our voice loudly and tell the whole world that it is not permissible for the civilized world in the 21st century to accept the extermination of a human group, irrespective of what religion, race or color it belongs to.

We know that this genocide or attempted genocide of our people was at the hands of a takfiri group that does not accept the 'other.'

The very dangerous issue about this is that this group developed and was nurtured in communities and with support from countries known in the region that are founded on Wahabism in the Islamic religion and they are trying to evade and not accept their responsibility because they say that Al-Qaeda is their enemy.

Today we spiritual shepherds, we want to join all those who defend human rights and raise our voices to all the international powers, as the Patriarchs said. We would like to remind the west, especially the US, Britain and France, that these Takfiri groups did not become strong

if it were not for their -- at best -- hidden support. Today they are retreating and trying to hide the issue under the rug.

This is our problem, because we today are facing two choices: to be or not to be. This is not because we are Christians or belong to a specific sect, but rather because we are human. human. Thank you.

Patriarch AlRai

We the patriarchs, all the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic, met on August 7 where we decided to make this visit for 3 reasons:

1. Declare our spiritual, moral, humanitarian and material solidarity with the Christians that have been displaced and kicked out of their lands, and we also wanted to meet with the Yezidis and we accomplished that.

So we can tell them first of all that we are with you, we stand with you, your pain is our pain your tragedy is our tragedy. Don't be afraid we are all together, we have a role we will play, you as Christians today are carrying the cross we have to carry it by its worth until the day of resurrection.

And we want to tell you do not think of emigrating, now is the time to stay in your lands and protect your culture and history and roots, you are not in a temporary location, you as Christians are 2,000 years old and the roots of the Christian body goes back to our father Abraham.

You have a big role to play, we are with you and besides you, in your problems, and we will not be watching you, with all our churches that are present with all the Patriarchs, Bishops, and priests.

2. Second goal was that we meet with the government officials, our meetings were very nice and very important we spoke on all issues of our brothers the Christians; we received assurances from the president of KRG prime minister we thank them from all our heart because they opened their doors and welcomed everyone.

3. To make our voice heard by international community from this land to take responsibility, because it is not possible that in the 21st century for a terrorist organization such as ISIS, or as it is called the Islamic State, or others like, it is not possible for them to dominate peoples who are living peacefully at home, to expel them from their homes, to confiscate their properties and to kill and abuse them, while the international community stands idle and watches. This is something we totally reject. We ask that it is not permissible for terrorists organizations to take control of peaceful citizens. Hence, those need protection so they can live in dignity. We demand that they return to their land in dignity, to their properties -- the fruit of their lifework.

(Addressing Sako) As you said, we are of course one church, with of course one destiny, at the humanitarian and spiritual levels, and we wanted to confirm we are all one voice, one body, your wounds are our wounds -- all of us.

We are hopeful that there is good will in the world.

We the patriarchs will move at all levels according to the August 7th statement.

Patriarch Lahham

St. Paul says cry with those who are crying and we came here just like St Paul to be with you, and we cried with you. I want to say we love you all and God loves you all. I call you to pray, we saw women and children praying with us. This tragedy needs prayers and fasting,

I spoke to the Patriarchs, and upon my return to Syria, I will have all our churches in prayer and fasting on a daily basis starting in September for the safety and security of our people and our countries, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Ghaza, Egypt .

And today we the Patriarchs are gathered here and this is a beautiful thing. Between June, July and August we met four times to strategize and define a platform not just for the Christians and Yazidis, but a platform for humanity, because nowadays human dignity is trampled upon. We will work for the dignity of every person, so a new kind of person will be born in the Arab world.

Because if we really love each other in the Arab world, we need today a new birth.

And we say to them in the word of Christ who said to his apostles, people will know you are my students if you love one another. If we love each other, as Arabs, as Muslims, as Christians, as Shiites, as Sunnis, we would have built a world based on love.

Also we will have various meetings together, and alone, we will go to the Vatican, and probably visit other countries such as the US, and others, and tell them that we must act, and this is the role of Christians today, and not fear for ourselves but we must fear for our testimony.

Our presence without our testimony and our role and our message will not suffice. I hope we will work for our presence, our role, our message.

Muslims and Christians must understand to build a better world in our countries. Secondly, it is possible to stay together, Muslims and Christians, to build a better world in our countries. Thirdly, we want to stay together to build a better world, which is our world that God loves.

And I say to my sons, my brothers, my loved ones, thank you Mar Ephrem and Mar Sako and Mar Younan, you are of the shepherds of this land.

We say to our sons and daughters in Iraq, you are on the path of the Cross and it is extremely cruel, but don't forget your name and label in history. You are the children of the Resurrection.

And we say from this platform: Iraq you have a new resurrection, the Arab world you have a new resurrection.

A partial video of the press conference is shown below.

August 20, 2014: Helicopters drop leaflets over Mosul urging residents to fight ISIS

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-21 22:14 GMT

(AINA) -- Helicopters dropped leaflets over Mosul yesterday, urging the population to stand against ISIS and support Iraqi security forces. There are conflicting reports on who dropped the leaflets. Some say it was Iraqi air force helicopters, others says it was American helicopters.

Leaflet dropped over Mosul urging residents to fight ISIS.



Here is a full translation of the leaflet:

In the name of Allah the most merciful

You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves. And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah - indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.

Truthful is the great Allah

To our people of Mosul the Hadbaa'

To the dear people of Mosul the Hadbaa'

Iraq and all of you, the people of the great Mosul, have been plagued by a an ignorant and penitential tide and by gangs that gathered from all corners of the world to invade your city. They planted the seeds of destroying your sanctities, widening the schism between you, destroying your heritage, looting your resources, and starving your children with an outside support is now clear to every one.

The time has come, oh true Iraqis, that we all stand together on the land of your immaculate city one hand against this suspicious tide, we cut its roots, and make our land graveyard for those infidels.

God Bless, God is Our Best Ally

Iraqi Ministry of Defence

ISIS captured Mosul on June 10 and immediately began enforcing Sharia law, destroying churches and causing all Assyrian Christian residents to flee the city.

August 21, 2014: ISIS loots Assyrian homes, vandalizes churches in Mosul

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-22 20:45 GMT

Mosul (AINA) -- ISIS began looting Assyrian homes in Mosul yesterday in the neighborhoods of Jamiaa, Muhandiseen, Thaqafa, Noor, and Zuhoor. The homes had been previously marked with "property of the Islamic State" and the Arabic letter noon (meaning Christian) and had their doors locked with chains.

Witnesses report that ISIS entered the Cathedral of St. Ephrem in the Shurta neighborhood and destroyed a cross made with red glass; it also hung a huge black flag of the Islamic State on the wall of the building to cover a large cross on the facade of the cathedral. The cathedral is now being used as headquarters for ISIS.

ISIS was helped by members of its own police force, which it has created by recruiting young Muslims from the neighborhoods of Hathar, Qayyarah, Shirqat, Baaj, and Rabia, and paying each one 500,000 Iraqi diners per month.

ISIS entered the Syriac Catholic Diocese and smashed icons and statues of the Virgin Mary, and set fire to pictures of patriarchs and bishops.

The number of Assyrian families remaining in Mosul is estimated at 25.

Commerce in Mosul has come to a near complete halt and most markets are closed.

Yesterday the the Iraqi government dropped leaflets over Mosul, encouraging residents to help the Iraqi army and stand up against ISIS (AINA [2014-08-21](#)). The reaction from the residents to the leaflets has been positive.

ankawa.com contributed to this report.

August 22, 2014: Iraq voids real estate sales in ISIS controlled areas

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-25 06:24 GMT

(AINA) -- The Iraq Ministry of Justice issued a statement on August 22 declaring that all real estate sales in Mosul and all areas under ISIS control since June 10, the day that ISIS captured the city, are null and void and will not be recognized.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Justice, Haidar al-Saadi, said in an interview for Alsumaria News that "the Ministry of Justice had previously issued a directive to all real estate departments in areas occupied by ISIS terrorists not to register the transfer of ownership of real estate of the displaced, to protect the rights of those who reside in these areas and minorities." He further stated that "the Justice Minister Hassan al-Shammari has directed all real estate departments to close real estate records and not to transfer ownership of real estate in areas that fall under the control of terrorist groups."

According to Mr. al-Saadi, the ministry issued the decree to insure the city's population, in particular the Christians, Yezidis and the Sabians, has its real estate protected against coerced transactions.

Ms. Pascale Warda, President of Hammurabi Human Rights Organization and former Minister of Immigration and Migration, confirmed that some Iraqis are exploiting the current conditions of the Christians and buying their properties below market value. In an interview with Nergal News Network, she said that "such despicable trends indicate that, one way or another, the perpetrators are carrying out the objectives of the terrorists and insurgents by taking advantage of the emergency circumstances experienced by the Iraqi minorities."

Ms. Warda praised the decision of the Ministry of Justice.

Many Assyrian families were forced to sell their properties in Mosul, Tel Kepe and Baghdade under pressure and duress.

August 21, 2014: Report on North Iraq -- 5 Refugees Dying Per Day

AINA News

Posted 2014-08-22 21:33 GMT



Assyrian refugees in Ankawa, Iraq

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 21, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Status of Refugees

- In Arbel there are now 5 refugee deaths per day, going back to August 7.
- The number of refugees has overwhelmed the relief agencies. There is scarcity of food and shelter. Distribution channels are slow and ineffective.
- Refugees are anxious about the military operations against ISIS in their towns and villages, and they fear for their property, especially in light of the fact that many of their former Muslim neighbors have participated in looting and plundering.
- The number of Assyrian Christian families seeking asylum has risen as hundreds of families who are now in Turkey are waiting in front of United Nations offices in Ankara to register and apply for emigration.
- The vast majority of the refugees are pressuring religious and political leaders to find a way for a rapid mass exodus out of Iraq, because of all the suffering, hardship and difficulty they are experiencing. Large numbers of families are still sleeping on sidewalks and parks and there is the fear this situation and their plight will extend into winter.
- There is anger, frustration and tension among the refugees as they are being moved from the halls and courtyards of churches into United Nations camps.
- The Ministry of Displacement and Migration is extremely slow in giving grants to refugees. Thousands of families in Dohuk have yet to receive grants. In the words of one refugee, "they move on the back of a turtle."
- The condition of Yazidi refugees is becoming critical for lack of camps to house them, forcing hundreds of families to shelter in unfinished buildings in the city of Dohuk.

Mosul

- There is rising discontent with ISIS in Mosul.
- Female doctors have gone on strike to protest ISIS interference in the treatment of patients, especially during childbirth or treatment of some gynecological illnesses.

See [all HHRO reports](#).

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

August 24, 2014: Report on North Iraq -- Religious Shrines Destroyed **AINA News** **Posted 2014-08-24 18:28 GMT**

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization* has issued its latest report, dated August 24, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

Mosul

Residents contacted via telephone say life in the city is unbearable and discontent with ISIS is very high. Residents have expressed readiness to join any resistance that can liberate Mosul from the terrorists.

Thousands of students remains in limbo regarding the 2014-2015 school year, especially with ISIS orders that contradict entirely normal academic operations.

ISIS is delivering messages to some non-minority residents who fled from Mosul that they can return to the city, declare repentance and receive pardon so they can resume their daily lives. Upon returning, they are arrested and imprisoned. Attorney Najla Omari was arrested using this ruse, as well as tens of others.

ISIS has ordered some government departments to open, but sends its inspectors to ensure the staff is adhering to *Sharia* dress code imposed by them, and to severely punish the offenders, especially the women, who must wear the full veil from head to foot.

The Nineveh Plain

ISIS left the city of Telsqof in near total destruction. Homes and public buildings were looted and vandalized. All farm equipment was stolen. Muslim residents from surrounding villages assisted ISIS in the looting of Assyrian homes and business.

ISIS bombed the Yazidi shrines in Bashiqa, as well as shrines of the Kakaeya Sufi sect. All are destroyed.

Information from Yazidi families indicates that ISIS has placed captured nearly 15,000 Yazidis and placed them in schools and hospitals in Tal Afar and surrounding areas. They separated the men from the women. The captured Yazidis are starving. The Yazidi women are guarded by ISIS women. The prisoners are scattered in south Sinjar, Ghazlani camp and at the airport in AlGayara.

Relatives of Yazidi prisoners say they received a call from a captive woman from the village of Kojo who witnessed Yazidi men being killed, and the women being taken to Tal Afar.

See [all HHRO reports](#).

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

August 25, 2014: ISIS abduct 3 year-old Assyrian girl from fleeing family; 3 starve to death

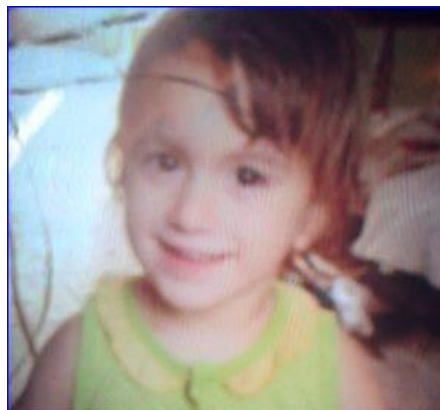
AINA News

Mother of 3 Year-old Assyrian Girl Kidnapped By ISIS: 'She Will Die If She Does Not See Me'

Posted 2014-08-28 23:15 GMT



**The mother of Christina
the 3 year-old Assyrian girl kidnapped by ISIS,
shortly after arriving in Ankawa from Baghdede**



Christina Khader Ebada

(AINA) The mother of Christina Khader Ebada, a 3 year-old Assyrian girl who was abducted from her family by ISIS as they were leaving Baghdede (AINA [2014-08-25](#)), was interviewed by Ishtar TV, an Assyrian network based in Arbel. The interview was conducted after Christina's family reached Ankawa, just north of Arbel, where 70,000 Assyrians refugees have come in flight from ISIS.

According to a relative of the family, Christina's mother is physically handicapped and her father is blind.

Here is the text of the interview. The video may be seen [here](#) (in Assyrian), with Christina's mother speaking at 00:43 seconds.

In the video Christina's mother says:

My son Yas came with his friend, I don't name his name, this friend, a friend of my son, said go and bring my father and mother and get all of the these families that are left in Baghdede and go to Arbel, to get them out.

A man came and knocked on our door and said come Baddu [her husband], Barkho [a friend] has come for us so that we can leave. We sat in the car, a coaster [bus], and they took us to the primary care center. They put us there, and after, after we sat for half an hour, and we said why did you bring us here? They said the they will take steps to examine us. They brought a doctor to treat whatever we may have.

And then after one half hour, they told all the women to get up and move ahead of everyone. We carried our bags, which had clothes and ID cards. They said if you have gold get it out; they took the gold, not from me but from some other people, gold and money and the IDs of all of them, and threw away their clothes, and they said we will bring them to you later and said go to that big bus.

We went and sat in the big bus, and then one man came aboard, I was carrying my child in my arms, I sat in the bus and he came and took her from me, snatched her from me, and left the bus. I followed him inside [the building], and my little girl was crying inside the center. An old man, one of those ISIS people, who was apparently their leader then carried her.

He said [she is speaking in Arabic now] "is this your daughter?" I said yes. He said "she is crying for you." I told him give her back to me, poor girl, what is she guilty of? She is breast feeding from me. For the sake of Allah, for the sake of Muhammad, what do you worship? Give me this little one, she is breast feeding from me. She will die if she does not see me. I am her mother.

He said "shut up. if you speak another word I will let them slaughter you. I will call them now to slaughter you." He drew his machine gun and said "go quickly to the car. If you come close to this little girl you will be slaughtered, we shall slaughter you. Come now, go!"

[now speaking in Assyrian] We got on the bus and left.

I appeal in the name of humanity and the United Nations. This thing that is taking place here in Iraq, to kidnap this little girl who is innocent, and these crimes they are committing, stealing money, they did not leave us anything, what is this? We appeal to human rights groups to help us, to look at us. This is not a humane situation. We can't live like this all our lives. We have not attacked them. What have we done to them?

I want you to return my daughter to me.

The following is another interview of Christina's mother, conducted on August 29 by Helen Donnelly, an Assyrian film maker doing a documentary on Assyrian refugees. The video is subtitled and shows Christina's mother, father and older brother.

Since entering Iraq and capturing Mosul on June 10, ISIS has driven all Assyrians from that city. There are no Assyrians/Christians remaining in Mosul. ISIS has also destroyed or occupied all 45 Christian institutions in Mosul (AINA [2014-07-29](#)). It has targeted all non-Sunni Muslim groups -- Shabaks, Yazidis and Turkmen.

On August 7 ISIS moved north of Mosul into the Nineveh Plain, a predominantly Assyrian area, causing fear and panic and forcing 200,000 Assyrian to flee from dozens of Assyrian villages and towns, as well as from Baghdede (Qaraqosh), Bartella and Karamles.

August 25, 2014: Kurds advance on ISIS in Iraq

August 25, 2014: U.N. human rights chief condemns Islamic State crimes in Iraq

August 26, 2014: UN Commission urges UN peacekeeping force for Nineveh Plain in North Iraq

August 27, 2014: Syriac Patriarch calls Islamic State actions 'attempted genocide'

AINA News

August 28 Report on North Iraq -- Looting, Homeless Children and Epidemics

Posted 2014-08-28 21:58 GMT



**An Assyrian mother fans her child at a refugee camp in Ankawa
The temperature was 115F (46C)**

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 28, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

- Many homeless children have begun to appear in Mosul. A 4 month old infant was found in a garbage dump.
- ISIS seized all homes in Mosul belonging to Nineveh Province judges and some of these homes were granted to ISIS leaders for housing, others were closed and marked with "reserved for the State of the Islamic Caliphate."
- ISIS is trying to recruit residents of Arab villages for looting the homes of Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain. Many have been recruited but many Arab residents of these villages have refused and have condemned the looting and any persons engaged in the activity.
- Seven people were kidnapped by ISIS in Baghdede, among whom were young girls.

- There are daily, organized robberies taking place in Baghdede, including looting of all auto parts stores, vehicles, tires, batteries, as well as large scale looting of home furniture.
- The majority of refugees have now spent their money and they are now begging in the streets, particularly women.
- The risk of disease and epidemic is extremely high in refugees camps, especially in halls and houses that are packed over capacity with refugees. Overcrowding is seen in church halls, schools and other areas.

August 29, 2014: Kurdish fighters recapture 7 villages in North Iraq

August 29, 2014: ISIS beheads Kurdish fighter

August 29, 2014: ISIS Forced Elderly Assyrian Couple to March Out of Baghdede

AINA News

By Leah Sorith

Posted 2014-08-29 22:15 GMT



Najib and Dalal, an elderly Assyrian couple expelled from their home in Baghdede by ISIS and now sleeping on the top of floor of a mall in Arbel.

(AINA) -- 75 year-old Najib and his wife Dalal (Delilah), 72, were too old and ill to leave their town Baghdede when it fell to ISIS on August 7, when the majority of the population fled the town of over 50,000 Christians, the largest Christian city in Iraq. But two days ago they were forced to leave by ISIS gunmen.

Najib, an elderly and sickly man, had no strength to escape and would have preferred to stay in his hometown to his last days, but ISIS forced him to leave the town when he and his wife were brought across the river and left to manage on their own.

It was a long journey that lasted from 10:00 AM until midnight.

They walked for hours under the Iraqi sun, where the hot air dries the bone and temperatures often reach 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). Najib was barely able to stand on his feet.

ISIS stole the couple's ID cards and all their money. They did not even have any food or water for the long trek to Arbel. At the outset, Dalal barely managed to pull her ailing husband, trying to distance themselves from ISIS. They leaned on each other until Dalal passed out. A

man, another Assyrian refugee, carried Najib on his back for a few hours, then a nun who was driving a primitive wagon carried Najib until they reached the Kurdish check point at which time he was transferred from there by an ambulance to Arbel.

Today I met the elderly couple and they were in the top floor of a vacant shopping center in the city of Arbel. Najib was sick and weak and could not do anything except lie down on the bed in one room with his wife, where they shared it with three other families. Najib could not even get up and go to the bathroom since he developed bruises and sores on his back and his legs after he was pulled on the road. These sores appear like gangrene in one foot, and he needs immediate medical care and medication.

One of the local Christians asked that this floor, empty of shops, be provided as the Mall for the refugees. He is one of the many local people who help the refugees as best they can. A lot of the refugees ask a lot of help from churches who are doing everything in their power to provide the basic necessities of food, water and medicine.

I came to Arbel yesterday afternoon and there were many tears on my face today, people are very worried and bewildered.

Leah Sorith is the envoy of Danmission, a Danish Foundation working to help and support the displaced people in northern Iraq through the Chaldean Church.

Translated by Rashwan Essam AlDakak. Edited by AINA. Original story on ankawa.com.

August 30, 2014: Iraq Sunni rebels ready to fight Islamic State

August 30, 2014: 850,000 people displaced in 1 Month by ISIS

AINA News

August 30 Report on North Iraq -- Suicides, Squatters, Escapes

Posted 2014-08-31 03:28 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated August 30, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

A joint delegation representing the Ministry of Human Rights in the federal government and the Hammurabi Organization succeeded in recording many of the abuses suffered by refugees from of Mosul, the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar, and who are now Arbel.

The delegation was briefed on the situation and the needs of the refugees, who have called for immediate liberalization of their villages from ISIS, the immediate delivery of wages and and social benefits of employees, the reissuing of lost identification cards and official documents, and financial compensation for material and other losses.

The delegation included Mr. Mujeeb Abdullah, head of monitoring at the Ministry of Human Rights and Ghazwan Yahya, Rafidh Nazim, Azhar Hamed Elias, the delegation included Hammurabi Organization Louis Marcus Vice President of the Organization and William Warda, Public Relations Officer.



Assyrian refugees in Ankawa, Iraq

Mosul

- Most homes of university professors who fled Mosul are completely controlled by ISIS and were looted of all valuables, including furniture.
- New families are appearing in many of Mosul's neighborhoods. ISIS are bringing Iraqi and non-Iraqi families from other cities and towns and placing them in the empty homes of the Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks and Turkoman.
- There is a transfer of bodies in open cars every morning in Mosul, indicating a campaign to cleanse certain groups from the city. There is a high probability of the existence of mass graves for the bodies of citizens who are executed.
- A large, crowded market has sprung up, and it is cynically called "Daash Market." There is much furniture and household items for sale, as well antiques, old cultural heritage goods and a large selection of mobile phones. All of the merchandise is stolen from homes abandoned by fleeing residents.
- Families continue to suffer from lack of official documents after ISIS stripped them of everything. HHRO has appealed to the government to facilitate the issuance of new documents.
- Concern is escalating among the refugees that they will not return to their homes before winter. Nearly all of the refugees do not have winter clothing to protect them from the cold and snow.
- A number of women and girls who had been sold by ISIS were able to escape and some of them have arrived in the city of Dohuk. ISIS has abducted hundreds of women and girls and sold them in Mosul and in the Syrian city of Raqqa.
- Many suicides have been recorded among the refugees, especially among the ones who were stranded in remote areas and who lacked food, water and shelter. HHRO confirmed the suicide of a Yazidi in Dohuk on August 29.

See [all HHRO reports](#).

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

August 31, 2014: Iraq breaks Islamic State siege of Amerli

September 1, 2014: Thousands of Refugees Apply for New Passports in North Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-01 08:34 GMT

(AINA) -- On Saturday, August 30 the Iraqi passport office in Arbel announced it would start accepting applications to issue new passports for refugees from the Nineveh Plain and other areas who fled from ISIS. Within an hour thousands of people came to the office, which was overwhelmed and could not process most of the requests.

The new passports to be issued will be class (A) category, applicable in all parts of Iraq.

The office issued instructions and a list of documents to be submitted by the refugees wishing to obtain a passport. The documents included a letter from the Department of Immigration and Migration, official documents consisting of civil status ID card, Iraqi nationality (citizenship) certificate, financial statements, 3 personal photos with a white background, housing ID card, as well as a passport application form.

200,000 Assyrians fled their homes in the Nineveh Plain when ISIS moved to north of Mosul, as well as from Baghdede, Bartella and Karamles. 150,000 Yazidis fled from Sinjar and

Zumar. ISIS stole all money and personal belongings from residents as they fled, including government identification papers.



Refugees stand in line in Arbel to apply for a new passport (photo: ankawa.com)

Many refugees complained that they could not provide the documents required to obtain a new passport, as they had been confiscated by ISIS or left behind in their homes.

September 3, 2014: ISIS executions in Tikrit, Iraq

September 4, 2014: Mass executions by ISIS

September 5, 2014: ISIS sexually assaults new recruits

September 6, 2014: ISIS detaining large number of residents in Mosul; looting of homes continues; ISIS holding Yazidi women; 25 Christians held by ISIS; Hundreds of Yazidi families held by ISIS; ISIS forcing Yazidi girls to marry its fighters

AINA News

September 6 Report on North Iraq -- Forced Marriages and Conversions, Looting

Posted 2014-09-07 03:03 GMT

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated September 6, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

- In Mosul there has been a sharp increase in the number of persons detained at the Badush prison in the last ten days, resulting from increased arrests of people resisting ISIS. Arrests are made by ISIS mostly in night raids.

- Looting and pillaging continue in the Nineveh Plain, and especially in the cities of Baghdede and Tel Kepe. Trucks roam the neighborhoods and select houses to be raided and transport the furniture to unknown locations. Organized gangs from surrounding villages conduct the looting under the supervision of ISIS.

- ISIS are holding a number of Yazidi women in one of the villages near Tal Afar in a prison built for this purpose. The conditions are extremely harsh. The women are given one Loaf of bread per day and are forced to use contaminated water for drinking. The women are also being forced to marry ISIS members.



Assyrian refugee child in Ankawa, Iraq

- 25 Christians who were being held by ISIS in the Sayeda Zaineb mosque in Sinjar were transferred two days ago to nearby homes west of the mosque. ISIS gunmen forced two other Christians to convert to Islam and they are being held in a house separate from the other detained Christians.

- Two Christian families, residence of Baghdede, who were detained by ISIS in Mosul were released. It is not known why ISIS released these two families.

- Hundreds of families are still being held in the Yazidi village of Kasir Mihrab in the Tel Afar District. ISIS are preparing to transfer these families to an unknown location.

- ISIS have forced Yazidi girls to marry in the village of Kojo in the Sinjar District and are planning to conduct a collective wedding in the next few days.

See [all HHRO reports](#).

Translated from Arabic by AINA.

September 6, 2014: ISIS beats, kills Assyrian man for refusing to convert

September 8, 2014: ISIS takes hostage 100 children in Iraq's Nineveh Province

September 8, 2014: U.S. launches new airstrikes in Iraq

September 8, 2014: ISIS forbids the use of Kurdish language in Mosul

September 8, 2014: Kurds pushing ISIS back

September 8, 2014: U.S. air strikes wipe out Islamic State patrol

September 10, 2014: Defense of Christians Summit, dedicated to aiding the Christians in north Iraq, was held in Washington

AINA News

Defense of Christians Summit Opens in Washington

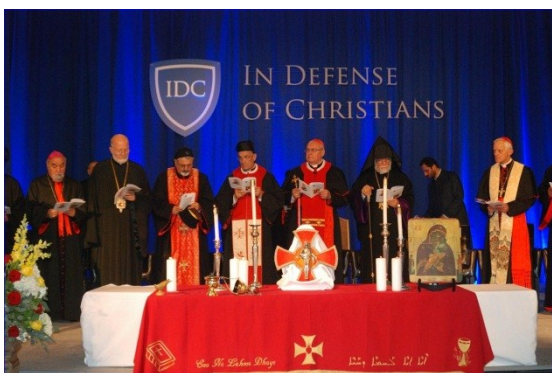
Posted 2014-09-10 07:23 GMT

(AINA) -- A three day conference dedicated to aiding the Christians in north Iraq opened yesterday. Titled [In Defense of Christians](#) (IDC), the conference will bring together lawmakers, Eastern and Western churches, community leaders and various Christian groups to address the issue of the genocide being perpetrated against the Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) in north Iraq by ISIS and other Christians in the Middle East.

Since taking over Mosul in June 10, ISIS has moved into Assyrian areas in the Nineveh Plain. 200,000 Assyrians have fled their homes and are now living in church courtyards, refugees camps, abandoned and unfinished buildings, open fields and sidewalks -- in Ankawa, Arbel and Dohuk and its surrounding areas.

See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#).

The conference opened on Tuesday night with an ecumenical prayer service conducted by clergy from Eastern and Western churches.



Clergy from Eastern and Western churches



**Andrew Doran, the executive director
of In Defense of Christians**

(AINA photo). Washington

The clergy included Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Patriarch Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros Rai, His Beatitude Patriarch John X, His Beatitude Gregory III, His Beatitude Moran Mor Ignatius Youssef III Younan, His Holiness Catholicos Aram I, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Bishop Angaelos, His Excellency Mar Ibrahim N. Ibrahim, Dr. Jim Garlow.

The service was conducted in Syriac (Aramaic), Greek, Arabic, Latin and English.

After the prayer service, Andrew Doran, the executive director of In Defense of Christians, welcomed the attendees, saying "we all share the goal to preserve and protect the Christians of the Middle East. Whatever steps will further this end IDC stands ready to support."

Mr. Doran said some have asked why Christianity is vital to the Middle east and why America should help the Christians of the Middle East, and he said "Christian institutions provide social service, health care and education for millions throughout the region [Middle East]...Christians are not only the lawyers, doctors and businessmen in their communities, they are also the servants...their very presence is the source of pluralism that has a moderating influence throughout the region."

The next speaker, Toufic Baaklini, the president of IDC, said IDC enables people to unite and work for the survival of the Christians of the Middle East, protecting them and helping them to remain rooted in the Middle East.



**Toufic Baaklini, the president
of In Defense of Christians**



**John Ashcroft, former U.S.
Attorney General**

(AINA photos)

"Our brothers and sisters are suffering terribly," he said. "Our duty, the moral duty of the hundreds of you that are here today from all over the world, is to stand together under the banner of our common cause, the cause of faith, existence and tranquility."

The next speaker was John Ashcroft, former U.S. Attorney General, Governor and U.S. Senator.

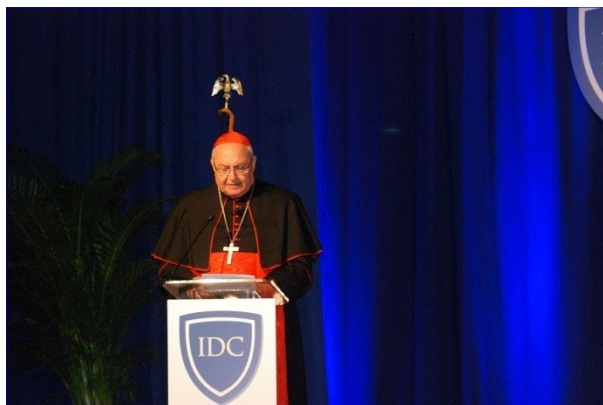
Mr. Ashcroft began by saying "it is inspiring to be here this evening...your attendance here today is a testimony to the fact that we don't have to be uniform in order to have unity."

"Liberty is sourced in God," said Mr. Ashcroft. "Governments don't grant liberty, God endowed us with liberty at the creation...It always astounds me to think that there are those who want to impose one religion or another on people. Spirituality isn't the stuff of imposition, it's the stuff of inspiration."

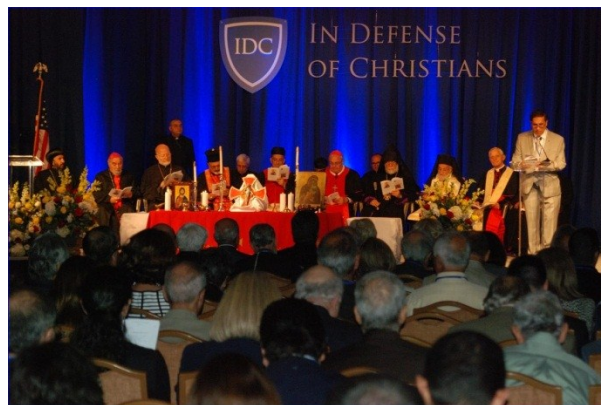
"We are here because there are those who are the victims of individuals around the world, who are victimized because people seek to impose on them their idea of some construct of God, some construct of morality, some construct of human existence"

"Liberty is the value which God endowed us at creation...democracy is a process, liberty is an outcome."

The next speaker was Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Oriental Institute.



Cardinal Leonardo Sandri



Clergy from Eastern and Western churches

(AINA photo)

Cardinal Sandri said "it is very significant that the meeting is taking place between people of different Christian denominations and people of religion who believe as Christ the value of the freedom of the human person."

Cardinal Sandri condemned the atrocities committed by Muslims against Christians, including expulsions of thousands, crucifixions, forced conversions, payment of jizya, abductions and the destruction of places of worship.

A letter from the Vatican Secretary of State was read to the audience. The letter expressed support for the IDC summit and stated that the Holy Father has expressed great concern for the Christians of the Middle East, and he renews the rights of Christians be upheld so "...they may live with respect, freely professing their faith, without harm to their dignities, without being deprived of the necessities of life, and without being robbed of their future."



(AINA photos)

September 11, 2014: US House Hearing focuses on Christian persecution in Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-11 23:57 GMT



(AINA) -- A hearing on the plight of Christians in Iraq and Syria was convened yesterday at the U.S. House of Representatives. The hearing, titled *Genocidal Attacks Against Christian and Other Religious Minorities in Syria and Iraq*, was sponsored by Chris Smith, U.S. Representative for New Jersey's 4th congressional district, and was attended by other members of the House.

Congressman Smith began the hearing by saying "As images of beheaded American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff are seared into our consciousness, we would do well to honor their memories by recalling that they saw it as their mission to alert the world to the horrors committed by the fanatical Islamist terrorist group ISIS in Syria and Iraq: Children forced to view crucifixions and beheadings, women bartered, sold and raped, prisoners lined up on their knees to be shot -- this is ISIS' legacy," Smith said. "Today Christians and other religious minorities, such as Yezidis, Shabaks, and Turkmen Shiites are not just facing a long winter without homes. They are not just hungry and thirsty and wandering from village to village in Northern Iraq and Kurdistan. They are facing annihilation--genocide--by fanatics who see anyone who does not subscribe to its draconian and violent interpretation of Islam as fair game for enslavement, forced conversion or death." ([full statement](#)).

Testifying at the hearing were:

- The Honorable Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State
- The Honorable Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State
- The Honorable Nancy Lindborg, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development
- The Honorable Peter Galbraith, (Former Advisor to the Kurdistan Regional Government)

- Her Excellency Pascale Esho Warda, President, Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (Former Minister of Immigration and Refugees in the Iraqi Government)
- Thomas Farr, Ph.D., Director, Religious Freedom Project, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University
- Johnny Oram, President, Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce of California, in lieu of Bishop Ibrahim N. Ibrahim, Bishop Emeritus, Chaldean Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle



Pascale Warda



Johnny Oram
(name tag is misplaced)
(AINA photos)



Peter Galbraith

In her [testimony](#) Pascale Warda, a Chaldean Assyrian, outlined the genocide directed against Assyrian Christians in Iraq and made the following recommendations:

Short term:

- Provide humanitarian aid to the refugees. Aid is inadequate. There is a lack of shelter, food, water, medicine and clothing.
- Clear ISIS from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain so that the displaced residents may return to their homes ahead of winter. They will not return if ISIS is still in Mosul.
- Designate the Nineveh Plain as a safe haven and provide an international force for protection to stabilize the region, regardless of whether Iraqi or Kurdish forces are there, so that residents may return to their homes. The Nineveh Plain has been neglected by both Kurds and Baghdad. This long term safe haven would be similar to the one provided for the Kurds in 1991.
- Financially compensate all displaced persons for their property and income losses.

Long term:

- Establish an autonomous region for each the Assyrian Christians and the Yazidis, to be administered by them.
- Create Assyrian Christian and Yazidi manned units within Iraqi police, military, security and other institutions and station these in Assyrian and Yazidi areas, so that they will defend themselves and their villages.
- Gain international recognition for the genocide against Assyrian Christians, which has been ongoing since 1915.

In his [testimony](#), Johnny Oram, speaking on behalf of Patriarch Louis Sako, said:

Senator Carl Levin visited Erbil on September 3 and had the opportunity to meet with Assyrian/Chaldean and Yazidi religious leaders in which they provided a summary which is consistent to the recent statement issued by Patriarch Sako of what their immediate requests and needs are. They are primarily:

1. The international community must immediately intervene to provide direct humanitarian aid to the displaced Christians and other minorities in the regions of Erbil and Dohuk.

2. Christian and other minority villages in the Nineveh Plains must immediately be liberated and the community must have safe passage to return.

3. The Christian and other minority villages in the Nineveh Plains must be protected by an international force under the supervision of the United Nations.

In his [testimony](#), Peter Galbraith said:

In the past perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity have tried to cover up their crimes. ISIS advertises its atrocities in slickly produced videos," Galbraith said. "We know what is happening. The question is what will the United States and its allies do about it." He urged that the West recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against Iraq's Christians and the Yazidis, and is killing, causing serious bodily and mental harm, and inflicting intolerable physical conditions "with the announced intent of destroying the Christian and Yazidi religious groups in their entirety.

In his [testimony](#), Thomas Farr said:

Tomorrow we mark the 13th anniversary of the Islamist terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. What we are facing in Iraq and Syria today has deeply troubling similarities to 9/11, both in its origins and its threat to American national security. There is, of course, at least one major difference between now and then. While Christians in the Middle East were under mounting pressure in 2001, today their very existence is at risk. We are witnessing the disappearance of Christians and Christianity from Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East -- a religious/cultural genocide with terrible humanitarian, moral, and strategic consequences for Christians, for the region, and for us all.

In his [testimony](#), Tom Malinowski said:

The U.S. government is very focused on ending ISIL's reign of terror and ensuring protection and access to humanitarian assistance for all its victims. We are particularly appalled by ISIL's targeted and systematic efforts to drive out and potentially eradicate entire religious communities from their historic homelands in the Ninewa plains area and Sinjar district. Among ISIL's clear ambitions is the destruction of Iraq's rich religious heritage and ethnic diversity and absolute subjugation of all people within its reach. The Iraqi people need and deserve a government that not only represents all of their voices but also provides basic government services and security.

In her [testimony](#), Anne Richard said:

Now, most members of religious minority communities have fled Ninewa. In the Kurdish region, they joined hundreds of thousands other displaced Iraqis, including approximately 100,000 Christians, who escaped the brutal occupation of Mosul and nearby communities. UNHCR estimates that the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq now host more than one million people, a mix of displaced Iraqis (850,000) and Syrian refugees (215,000).

In his [testimony](#), Thomas Staal said:

The daily atrocities committed by ISIL against the Iraqi people -- including the violence targeting ethnic minorities and religious groups -- is claiming and destroying countless lives, tearing at the fabric of society, and further enflaming sectarian violence. Furthermore, ISIL's abhorrent treatment of women and children is unconscionable. These circumstances demand--and are receiving--our focused attention and utmost effort.

September 11, 2014: Five Christian Patriarchs meet with President Obama at the White House

September 13, 2014: Assyrian Bishop testifies on ISIS threat at Senate Human Rights Caucus

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-13 05:14 GMT



Bishop Mar Paulus Benjamin from the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, Chicago diocese.

Washington (AINA) -- Two U.S. Senators launched the Senate Human Rights Caucus on Wednesday with an inaugural discussion on the Islamic State (ISIS), which has killed thousands of Yazidis, Shiites in Iraq and driven 200,000 Assyrians from their homes.

The Caucus was launched by Senators Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.).

Testimony was given by the following:

- Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
- Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
- Pascale Warda with the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization
- Manal Omar from the United States Institute of Peace
- Bishop Mar Paulus Benjamin from the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East
- Sarah Margon from Human Rights Watch

"The strength of ISIS in the Middle East is based on the fear and abuse of innocents," Senator Kirk said. "The Senate Human Rights Caucus will be a voice for the voiceless and oppressed around the world by bringing in the top experts and champions of those putting their lives on the line for democracy and freedom. My partner Senator Coons and I are grateful to Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski for being here to launch this event, in addition to other panelists for helping to bring awareness to the atrocities that ISIS continues to unleash in the Middle East."

"America is at its best when we lead with our values and a foreign policy that prioritizes human rights," said Senator Coons. "Too often, those suffering under tyranny and oppression are forced to suffer in silence. The Senate Human Rights Caucus will amplify the voices of victims around the world and ensure that our policy responses reflect our highest values. I'm proud to co-chair this bipartisan caucus with Senator Kirk and look forward to working together to protect the rights and dignity of all."

Here is the full testimony of Bishop Paulus Benjamin:

Senator Mark Kirk,

Senator Chris Coons,

Brothers and sisters, honored guests, friends:

I come before you today to tell you of the horrors and difficulties my people, the Christians of Iraq, are undergoing.

We are an ancient people and we have suffered much. Whether we are called Assyrian, Chaldean, or Syriacs, we are one. We are a Christian people that still speak and pray in the language of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our language and heritage are precious to us, both as Christians, and as Assyrians. We are a proud people who have endured and suffered for centuries. Yet we have still maintained our existence, both as Christians and as Assyrians or Chaldeans or Syriacs.

100 years ago we suffered our genocide and the world has today forgotten it. You cannot let this happen again. It is wrong. It is immoral. It is unacceptable.

What I have seen in Iraq should concern all of you here. It is a human tragedy that seems to be forgotten. But it cannot be forgotten. You, as human beings, as Americans, as Christians or Jews or Muslims, or even as non-believers, must reach deep into yourselves and be outraged and unaccepting of what has happened to this ancient people, who under the framework of democracy, has become almost extinct in the land of its ancestors.

Our people were driven out of their towns and villages in the Nineveh Plain, the land we have lived on for thousands of years. We were forced to abandon our villages and our churches and monasteries. Our people, with their old and young, their sick and their elderly, were forced out of their homes. Their properties were taken. Their homes robbed and looted. The crosses from the churches were taken and our churches desecrated. Over 1200 manuscripts, written hundreds of years ago, were burned.

Not only did this movement, headed by the Islamic State, want us out, but it has tried, under the very eyes of the world and the United States, erase our memory from our land, and leave our people stranded in the streets of poor towns and villages, on their way out, having lost all they have. Thousands are now displaced without sufficient food, shelter, or necessities.

Something must be done and it must be done now. As winter approaches, our people's condition grows more dire.

All of our churches and organizations and parties are united in making our stand as a people, the very natives of Iraq, and not losing our place in an Iraq that is democratic and fair and safe. Toward this end, it is important that all of us support the following:

1. A safe haven in the Nineveh Plain area and its surroundings;
2. Security that is made up of our people and supported by the international community, namely the United Nations;
3. Compensation for the Christian families that have lost their homes and properties and are left stranded in the streets. This should come from the authorities in Iraq -- who were not able to protect the Christians -- as well as from other governments and NGOs;

4. A strong role for the United Nations in Iraq, as well as the United States and other nations, to supervise the fair treatment of vulnerable minorities and peoples in Iraq.

Short of this, we will see an exodus of our people, much like witnessed a 100 years ago. This time, however, it will be the last time, and we will see an end to the last Christians who speak Aramaic. I ask you and plead with you to not let this happen.

September 10, 2014

Washington, DC

In his [testimony](#) Tom Malinowski said:

We should remember that at bottom, human rights provide a way of arranging human society so that all people have a chance to pursue their ambitions within rules that require fair play and prohibit coercion. When such rules break down, the people who rise tend to be those most willing and able to impose their will violently.

According to a joint [statement](#) issued by Senators Kirk and Coon:

In order to raise awareness on specific violations and issues, the Caucus will hold monthly staff-level briefings on key topics, as well as periodic Member-level events to boost awareness and spearhead solutions to worldwide injustices and abuses. In bringing Congressional-level attention to global human rights issues that the public may be unaware of, the Caucus will be able to provide a voice to the voiceless and work to provide a lifeline to those suffering at the hand of repressive regimes.

September 14, 2014: Tens of thousands of Assyrian and Yazidi children at risk in North Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-14 10:04 GMT



Assyrian child refugee living in an open shelter in Ankawa.

(AINA) -- 200,00 Assyrians and 150,000 Yazidis who were driven from their villages by ISIS are now facing the dangers of cold weather as winter approaches. Already temperatures in north Iraq are very low at night, requiring extra blankets and space heaters for warmth.

See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#).

Since capturing Mosul on June 10 ISIS has driven 200,000 Assyrians and 150,000 Yazidis from their homes, killed thousands of Yazidis and Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs), destroyed all churches in Mosul and looted and plundered entire towns and villages that were abandoned by the fleeing Assyrians and Yazidis.

The refugees are now living in church courtyards, refugees camps, abandoned and unfinished buildings, open fields and sidewalks -- in Ankawa, Arbel and Dohuk and its surrounding areas.

In an interview on the MidPoint program on Newsmax TV, the president of the [Iraqi Christian Relief Council](#), Julianna Taimoorazy, is warning that up to 200,000 children are at risk from exposure to cold weather.

September 14, 2014: Some Assyrians who fled their town say they wish to leave Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-14 23:39 GMT



Assyrian residents from the town of Telsqof, now living as refugees in Ankawa, Iraq, interviewed by World Council of Churches.

(AINA) -- Some Assyrians who were forced by ISIS to flee from Telsqof, an Assyrian town north of Mosul, say they do not wish to return but leave Iraq. In an interview conducted by the World Council of Churches and posted on youtube, residents of Telsqof say they have no future and would like to leave Iraq. A resident shows cell phone pictures of their homes which have been destroyed and asks how can we return to our homes.

In the interview the residents say ISIS looted, destroyed or booby trapped their homes with explosives. All of the residents fled the town.

ISIS moved into the Nineveh Plain on August 7, causing 200,000 Assyrians to flee their villages (AINA [2014-08-07](#)). On August 17 Telesqof and other villages in the area were liberated by Kurdish forces (AINA [2014-08-17](#)).

See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#).

On August 20 residents returned to Telsqof and were shocked at the level of destruction they saw (AINA [2014-08-21](#)). Buildings were destroyed, there was rubble in the streets and most homes were looted. ISIS had removed all crosses from churches and had written graffiti on walls, glorifying itself.

The Assyrians first replaced the crosses on the churches and then began to clean up their town.

September 15, 2014: ISIS issues new curriculum in Iraq
September 15, 2014: Yazidi member of Iraq's Parliament calls for arming Yazidis and Assyrians
AINA News
Posted 2014-09-15 07:56 GMT



From left: Patriarch Louis Sako, Abdullateef Hemeyem, Vian Dakheel.

(AINA) -- Vian Dakheel, the Yazidi member of Iraq's Parliament, whose impassioned speech in the Parliament brought attention to the plight of the Yazidis (AINA [2014-08-06](#)), called on the international community to arm Yazidis and Assyrian Christians to enable them to defend themselves, and repeated her demand for international military strikes on ISIS, and the deployment of an international protection force to be able the Yazidis and Assyrians to return to their homes.

Dakheel made her remarks at a session devoted to the future of Iraq at a conference on religious and cultural dialogue, held in Antwerp, Belgium, on September 9. The session was headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy, Mario Baccini, and attended by His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church of Babylon, Mr. Jawad al-Khoei (Iraqi Shi'ite) from Al-Khoei Foundation, Nineveh Provincial Council member Anwar Hidayat, Minister of Religions and Endowment of the Kurdish Regional Government, Professor Joseph Jacob and Sheikh Abdul Latif Mohammed (Iraqi Sunni).

Dakheel said "We want the powerful governments to free our victims and kidnapped women, we want to go back to our homes but only with international protection because the treachery was perpetrated by the closest people to us."

Asked about concerns that arming minorities might lead to more chaos and murder in Iraq, she said "Give arms to the peaceful and not to criminals and terrorists and not to ISIS. Give weapons to the pacifists to defend themselves. Give to the peaceful Yazidis, peaceful Christians. Give it to the Kurds. Have you ever of a Kurd blowing himself up? Have you ever heard of a Yazidi killing anyone? Have you ever heard of a Christian raping anyone? Give it to us to defend ourselves. We always defended ourselves but we have no weapons now, while our attackers possess arms."

Dakheel demanded international military strikes to eliminate ISIS, and said "We support the existence of an international coalition to give ISIS a strong military strike because if the great powers do not intervene and strike ISIS we cannot free ourselves from this deadly monster which today is in Iraq, but tomorrow will be in the whole region and will extend to your countries. We need to come together because Iraq and the Kurdistan region alone will not be able to stand alone against this terrorist organization."

She concluded her speech by turning to Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad (a Sunni), saying "You do not accept American strikes on ISIS until you achieve your political rights...you want to get your rights at the expense of our blood."

The city of Antwerp hosted the Conference of Religions and Cultures for the period from September 7-9. Organized by the Foundation of Saint Egidio (Egidio Sant') on the occasion of the centenary of the First World War, and under the slogan (peace is the future). The conference was attended by representatives of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others. Topics included religions and violence, believers and secularists in the world, the search for peace, the martyrs of our time, religions and human dignity, Christian unity and peace, immigration, conflict and the media.



September 15, 2014: 12 Assyrians who were held by ISIS escape by faking conversion

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-15 19:42 GMT

(AINA) -- 12 Assyrians from the town of Bartella who had been held by ISIS escaped by falsely converting to Islam, which allowed them to leave the town. The Assyrians had accidentally remained in Bartella after everyone else had fled when ISIS captured the town.



Twelve Assyrians from Bartella, Iraq who escaped from ISIS.

Eleven of the Assyrians, including a toddler, were brought to Kirkuk where they were met by Father Qais. Ms. Samia Yusuf Iskandar was brought to Arbel. Their names are:

1. Sabri Gewargis Abdulmassih
2. Nabeel Salem Simon
3. Tony Sabri Gewargis
4. Milad Sabri Gewargis
5. Khalid Sabri Gewargis
6. Marvin Sabri Gewargis
7. Saad Nafi Abdullah
8. Suhaila Moshe
9. Bushra Farooq Benham
10. Salem Matti Gewargis
11. Joseph Gog Kako
12. Samia Yusuf Iskandar

The 12 Assyrians were interviewed by local media. Here is the account of their escape.

The reason they did not leave Bartella was because they were sleeping on their roof and did not know the whole town had left. When they awoke and went to the streets they were confronted by ISIS, who ordered them to return to their homes and not leave. ISIS told them they were in contact with their priests and they would let them know of any developments.

The Assyrians said for the first three days they were given food by ISIS but for the next 17 days after they were given nothing. They survived from whatever they had in the house.

ISIS stole all their money and their papers. They were brought to an Islamic court in Mosul where they "converted" and were given an Islamic state ID and then returned to Bartella. They said they saw one Assyrian who had not converted and was badly beaten, his hands were tied behind his back and he was driven off in a truck. They assumed that he was killed.

A brother to one of the women, from Zahko, gave her the telephone number of a Muslim man who is against ISIS and told her that he had helped another family escape.

They took two taxis to Mosul where they called the Muslim man; he brought them into his house for one night. He said that the journey to Kirkuk would cost them 650,000 IQD (\$540) but if they did not have the money he would still bring them to Kirkuk. They left for Kirkuk at 6 AM. The driver told them to say that they were going to a family funeral in Kirkuk and to say that they were from Mosul, not Bartella, and they would be returning immediately after the funeral. They went through 16 ISIS checkpoints where they were asked the same questions each time, and some ISIS guards asked for an exact address in Mosul as a double check.

At the last ISIS check point their papers were taken away from them and after one kilometer the Peshmerga welcomed them into Kirkuk.

September 15, 2014: Assyrian delegate calls for safe haven, UN protection for Assyrians and other minorities in Iraq
AINA News

Posted 2014-09-15 20:41 GMT

Dr. Surood Muqadasi addressed the Dutch Parliament on the need for a safe haven and international protection for Assyrians in North Iraq (photo: ankawa.com).(AINA) -- Addressing the Dutch Parliament, Dr. Surood Muqadasi called on the international community to provide a safe haven in the Nineveh Plain of Iraq for Assyrians and other minorities, under the supervision of international forces. He also called for military action against ISIS, as well as the formation of security forces composed of Assyrians, Yazidis and other minorities, to enable them to protect themselves.



Dr. Muqadasi, an Assyrian, was part of a parliamentary delegation from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), headed by Parliament Speaker Dr. Yusuf Mohamed. The delegation included Yazidi representative Shamo Sheikh Namo, Turkmen representative ... and Soran Omar, head of the Human Rights Commission in the KRG parliament.

The Delegation met with Dutch officials and Dutch Foreign Minister Mr. Frans Timmermans to discuss the suffering of the various ethnic groups in the Nineveh Plain.

This session included questions from members of the Dutch parliament about the safe haven and the details of its implementation, as well as questions about creating an autonomous region in the Nineveh Plain, which the Iraqi Parliament agreed to do.

Here is Dr. Muqadasi speech:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you the issues and worries of our Christian community that concern you too.

My homeland Iraq, that has witnessed decades of dictatorship and violation of human rights of all the components of its citizens and caused instability in the whole area, was supposed to be a different country in the aftermath of the last regime change in 2003.

In return for such unstable conditions, Iraq has been paying a dear price at a time when ethnic, religious, and small linguistic groups and small minorities representing various components of the Iraqi people such as the Chaldo - Assyrian Christian community, the Yezidis, Shabeks, Turkomen, Armenians, and the Kakai experienced tremendous tragedies because they are the most vulnerable group within the Iraqi society, and because they lack in various means of self defense compared with the majority.

The Chaldo-Assyrian Christians, for example, who are the oldest indigenous people in the area, had a population of more than 1.5 millions until 2003. This figure dropped dramatically and in an alarming way to just less than 500 thousand people, a figure which continues to drop, particularly following the events of the 10th of last June causing this and other small components to face a serious challenge that threatens their existence in their ancestral land.

From the first days of this last change this component was subject to continuous direct targeting of their individuals, religious leaders and churches, in addition to various forms of demographic change in their historical lands affecting their direct characteristics and changing their cultural, civilization, and religious identity in the absence of any development projects, and a deterioration in the basic services in most of those areas as well as lack of job opportunities. This was accompanied by absence of any effective political, social, legal, and security solutions by the central government.

In my capacity as a member of Parliament in Iraqi Kurdistan Region and one of the five members of the Quota representing the Chaldo-Assyrian Christian community in Iraq, I find myself obliged to speak about the prevailing conditions in Kurdistan Region independently of what has been going on in the country as a whole.

The recent events, however, especially in the aftermath of the control by ISI S of large areas of many Iraqi provinces since 10 June 2014, including the province of Nineveh and the area of the Plain of Nineveh, the historical home of the Christian Chaldo-Assyrian people, Yezidis, Shabeks, and Turkomen, the area that represents a model for a mini-Iraq in all its rich culture, civilization, and religion, have led to heinous acts of terrorism by ISIS and caused the displacement of more than one million minority groups. And following acts of ethnic and religious cleansing, and crimes that amount to crimes against humanity and genocide, especially the killing of thousands of Yezidis and abduction of hundreds of Yezidis women in Sinjar,

All the areas in the Plain of Nineveh became empty of their indigenous people for the first time in history for more than 1700 years. The church bells of Nineveh went silent and no more heard, For the first time and across 7,000 years of Nineveh emptied of its indigenous population, the chaldo-assyrian were they build their Assyrian Babylonian civilization.

The area of Nineveh plain has witnessed some very serious developments after being under control of ISIS, these events has made the minorities living in the area lose confidence in the political process in the country. They now think it difficult to go back to their original places even when they are liberated from the grip of the armed militants. It also raised voices calling for providing safe haven for these minorities under international supervision for a certain transitional period until improvement in the security situation, Otherwise, they will have no other choice than the bitter immigration, which threatens to empty the whole area of its indigenous people leaving a negative impact on the neighboring countries and Europe.

It remains important for KRG and the federal government to have a real political will. They have to overlook their disputes, and take effective steps and measures for addressing the general conditions of all Iraqis and the vulnerable minorities in particular in terms of preserving their existence and protecting them from all acts of violence, killing, cleansing and displacement as well as guarantee their inclusion in the political, economic, and public life through real and effective partnership. They have to address the bad conditions that prevail in the historical areas of these minorities in terms building, reconstruction and the provision of services and job opportunities. Laws and regulations have to be passed to guarantee the rights of those communities against discrimination. The legislation for example that concerned with preserving rights of minorities, that the KR parliament is to pass during the coming period , it is hoped that the law will address essential rather than superficial issues directly relevant to the conditions of those minorities including political and administrative rights, especially with reference to the right of these minorities in administering their own affairs in their historical and areas and lands in a manner that would preserve their special character, cultural, civilization and identity.

It also remains important to pass laws and take measures that would secure the addressing of the consequences of policies and decisions made by the last regime and afterwards which still continue to date in terms of violations and demographic changes made in many areas of the Chaldo-Assyrian Christian.

If it were important for the international community to support the federal government in general and particularly the KRG in their fighting against the border-crossing terrorist groups that threaten not only the KR and Iraq alone, but also the regional and international peace and security, then what is also of more importance for those states is to support and push the federal and regional governments to protect the existence of the Christians in all the Middle East, and the Yezidi, and Mandai communities that represent the oldest ethnicities and religions in the area.

And among the factors for the survival of these minorities and defending them is for them to have self- defense forces on the ground in their areas. They have to be provided with the necessary means of self defense in terms of equipment, rehabilitation, and training, especially as they already possess the technical, security, and military potentials, as well as the potential for building and reconstruction. This is going to make an effective contribution in the reconstruction of the whole area as well as Iraq.

Finally my message which is the message of my people is that we want to continue living in our homeland, to preserve our habits, culture, identity and the most important is to preserve our holy language, the language spoken by Jesus Christ and for achieving these goals we need your support and the factor of time is important and immediate steps are necessary.

Thank you for listening.



A Christian home in the Noor neighborhood in Mosul.

September 16, 2014: ISIS using using Yazidis as human shields Against U.S. airstrikes

September 16, 2014: ISIS using Christian homes in Mosul as factories for explosive devices

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-16 20:14 GMT

(AINA) -- A number of Mosul residents have said that ISIS has turned Christians homes into factories for improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and car bombs. In interviews with ankawa.com, residents confirmed that ISIS are now searching for Christians homes containing hiding places and shelters, since they are expecting ground forces backed by the Iraqi government to begin clearing operations in the city.

A resident said ISIS is using a Christian home in the Hadbaa neighborhood for manufacturing IEDs. He sees them on a daily basis as they bring welding machines to the house and install various extensions to cars. Another resident said that many ISIS terrorists are using a house belonging to a Christian who used to work in the Nineveh Province as their headquarters, engaging in welding and blacksmith projects. He sees many cars that come on and go, including pickup trucks full of mortar rounds and explosives with exposed wires.

September 16, 2014: ISIS orders all Christian, Shiite business assets to be delivered to the Islamic State

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-16 22:36 GMT

(AINA) -- The Arabic language Alsumaria News is [reporting](#) that ISIS has ordered all Sunni businesses with Christian and Shiite partners to deliver the non-Sunni share of the business to the Islamic State. ISIS gave a two day deadline to comply with the order, else all assets would be confiscated.

According to the report, ISIS has a complete list of of businesses with Christian and Shiite partners.

ISIS is now charging tariffs on all goods entering the Nineveh Province. Goods deemed offensive to Islam are seized and destroyed.

In other news, ISIS has removed all clothes from department stores in Mosul and imposed the Afghan style of clothing on the city. ISIS has also segregated male and female students at the University of Mosul, changed the curriculum and renamed the Fine Arts college to "Text Decoration."

September 16, 2014: 75% of Assyrians return to their town in North Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-09-16 23:31 GMT

(AINA) -- More than 75% of the residents of Alqosh, an Assyrian town 37 miles north of Mosul, have returned to their town after fleeing from the threat of ISIS on August 7. On September 12 the residents celebrated the festival Mar Qardakh, the patron saint of Alqosh, at the Saint Qardakh the Martyr Church. The Holy Mass was led by Bishop Michael Muqadissi of

the Alqosh Archdiocese and was attended by hundreds of people from the town. After the mass, the people walked around the Church in a procession lead by children and deacons.



Alqosh, Iraq

Improvements in security in the Nineveh Plain has allowed the residents of Alqosh to return. Iraqi and Kurdish forces, with the aid of U.S. airstrikes, have recaptured several villages in the Nineveh Plain and are pushing toward Mosul.

Life in Alqosh is slowly returning to normal, but the economy has been disrupted. Civil service employees have not received their salaries for the last three months.

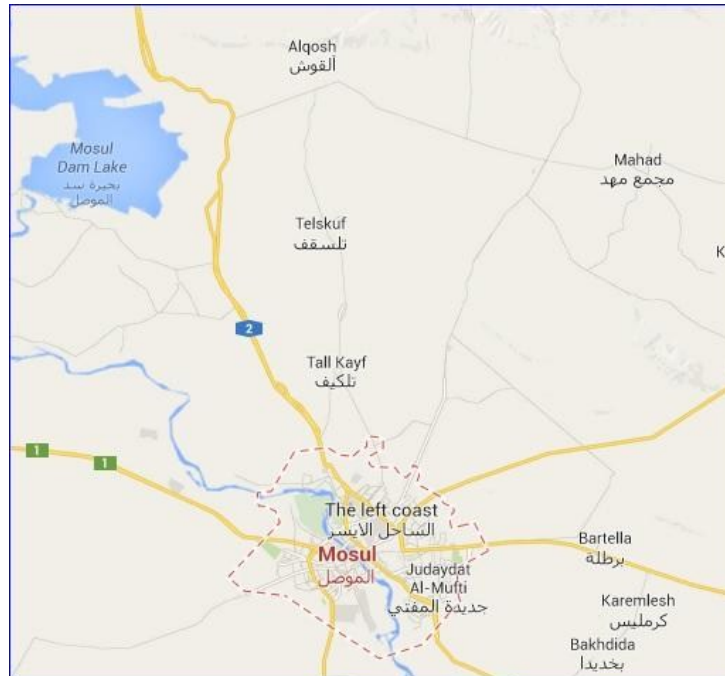
In terms of services, Alqosh did not experience interruptions in water or electricity, unlike other towns and villages nearer to Mosul, whose water and electric service was cut off by ISIS. A number of doctors and dentists also returned and began seeing patients in their private clinics. Stores, pharmacies and markets are open.

Faez Juhoory, District Director of Alqosh, who never left the town, said that most Alqosh families have returned to the town after the restoration of security, thanks to the Kurdish forces stationed south of the district.

Mr. Juhoory confirmed that basic municipal services are at the same level as before. A group of Alqosh youth, in the early days after the people fled, took on the task of keeping the town clean and watering trees and seedlings, using the municipality's equipment. After the return of some of the municipal employees and contractors, only those who worked were paid daily wages. Funds were donated by the sons of Alqosh in the Diaspora.

After fleeing Alqosh, most families took refuge in the Assyrian city of Noohadra (Dohuk), which is further north, and the villages and towns surrounding it, and others traveled to Turkey.





Reporting by Revan Hakim.

September 16, 2014: U.S. airstrikes against ISIS

September 16, 2014: Iraq forces, Peshmerga inflict heavy losses on ISIS

September 16, 2014: Kurds retake Christian villages from ISIS

September 16, 2014: Kurdish Peshmerga kills top ISIS military commander

September 16, 2014: ISIS erases Assyrian culture, Christian teachings from schools

September 30, 2014: ISIS selling Iraq's artifacts in black market

Syndicated News

ISIS Selling Iraq's Artifacts in Black Market

<http://english.alarabiya.net>

Posted 2014-09-30 23:14 GMT

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has taken over large swathes of land in Iraq and Syria, is selling ancient Iraqi artifacts in the black market to finance its military operations in the region, Iraqi and Western officials said. Speaking at a conference at the U.N. cultural agency UNESCO in Paris, France's ambassador to UNESCO Philippe Lalliot warned that Iraq's cultural heritage is in "great danger." The Paris conference hosted a number of international experts and diplomats to discuss ways to save Iraq's treasures. "When tens of thousands of people are dying, should we be worried about cultural cleansing? Yes, because heritage unites and culture provides dialogue that fanatical groups want to destroy," Lalliot said. Qais Hussein Rasheed, head of the Baghdad Museum, said organized groups were working in coordination with ISIS. "It's an international artefacts' mafia," he told reporters. "They identify the items and say what they can sell," he said. Since some of these items were more than 2,000 years old it was difficult to know exactly their value. Citing local officials still in ISIS-controlled areas, Rasheed said the biggest example of looting so far had taken place at the 9th century B.C. grand palace at Kalhu of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II. "Assyrian tablets were stolen and

found in European cities," he said. "Some of these items are cut up and sold piecemeal," he said, referring to a tablet of a winged bull. Another Iraqi official, who declined to give his name, said artefacts were also being dug up and neighboring states such as Jordan and Turkey needed to do more to stop such items crossing their borders, according to Reuters. "Things are getting across our borders and into auction houses abroad," he said. "Unfortunately many of the proceeds of these artefacts will be used to finance terrorism." A Western diplomat said it was too early to assess exactly how much from Iraq had crossed the borders. "We've seen hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Syrian pieces pop up after their sites were looted, so it's not unreasonable to expect the same for Iraq," he said. B

October 10, 2014: Report on North Iraq -- Yazidis Still Trapped on Sinjar, Patients Expelled From Hospitals

AINA News

Posted 2014-10-08 20:38 GMT



Assyrian refugees in Ankawa, Iraq

(AINA) -- The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization has issued its latest report, dated October 4, 2014, on the situation in North Iraq.

- ISIS has forced government and private hospitals in Mosul, as well as health centers in cities and other towns it controls, into releasing patients staying there. Observers believe the move is aimed at emptying health institutions to make room for wounded ISIS fighters.
- The number of checkpoints and patrols by ISIS has risen dramatically in Mosul and in the suburbs.
- A Christian family of five arrived in Arbel from Mosul and reported that ISIS forced them to change their Iraqi identity cards to the so-called "Islamic State" IDs.
- The number of patients visiting health clinics and centers in the Dohuk Province has risen to more than 550 patients per day versus 150 patients per day before June 10, 2014.
- ISIS continues to burn Yazidi houses in villages and towns occupied by the them. ISIS targeted a number of Yazidi villages surrounding Mount Sinjar, where they stormed the

village of Kahbal with eight armored vehicles and burned the houses. This was done during the day and there were military aircraft over the area.

- Fierce fighting took place on Friday, October 3, 2014, between ISIS and Yazidis in the village of Cabara, southwest of Sinjar. The battle resulted in the death of ten terrorists and three Yazidis.

- Yazidi fighters have appealed to the Iraqi government to accelerate air support and delivery of weapons and gear, warning that they may not hold out long in areas they are defending if the supplies to help their resistance do not reach them in time.

- The siege on Mount Sinjar from continues. There are more than 500 families remaining there and they have nearly exhausted the relief aid. The situation for these families is critical especially because for the past 5 days the open passage which transported aid to mount Sinjar has been closed.

January 28, 2015: ISIS destroys the walls of ancient Nineveh

Syndicated News

ISIS Bombed Historic Walls of Nineveh in Iraq

<http://www.plenglish.com>

Posted 2015-01-28 20:02 GMT



Jihadists resumed bombings against historic sites in Nineveh and destroyed remains of the ancient wall of Mosul, specialized sources reported today; while politicians accused the United States of hampering the counterterrorist fight. A historian living in Mosul, the second largest in Iraq, told the publication Shafaq News that militants of the Islamic State (IS) destroyed on Tuesday night much of the historic city wall located on Tahrir neighborhood on the left coast of Mosul. Using a great amount of explosives, 'Takfirists' (Sunni Islamic terrorists) blew pieces of the wall considered the most important historical monument of the Iraqi province and the whole region, dating back to the civilization of the Assyrian kings in the eighth century BC. Since the beginning of the attacks in June 2014, Jihadists of DAESH, the Arabic acronym of IS, have reduced to ruins numerous archaeological, historical and religious sites of great historical value in Mosul. An operation launched last night in the area of Al-Rashidiyah resulted in the abduction of people accused of collaborating with Kurdish Peshmerga military forces, after the

Iraqi Deputy Hakim Al-Zamili had said that the army and police have informants within the aforementioned city.



Meanwhile, the leader of the Shiite political party in Iraq Assaib Ahl Al-Haq, Qais Al-Khazali, accused the United States of hindering the release of areas occupied by the Islamists, and that international coalition aircrafts launched aids that have delayed the military actions of the Army. According to Al-Khazali, "DAESH terrorists could be wiped out in a few months, but the US government is trying to delay this process". He added that there are testimonies and evidence of the support of US planes to Takfirists in the city of Muqadiyah, which delayed its release. The politician predicted that the next fight will be in the northern province of Salaheddin to avenge the martyrs of Spyker airbase, near Tikrit, where last year about a thousand 700 Shiites of the Army and hundreds of civilians were killed by fundamentalists.

February 04, 2015: Iraq's Assyrian Christians Take Up Arms to Fight Islamic State

Syndicated News

By Nour Malas

Wall Street Journal

Posted 2015-02-04 04:16 GMT

Hundreds of Christian men are picking up rifles for the first time at a former U.S. military facility in the hills of northeast Iraq and training to reclaim their towns from Islamic State militants who stormed the country last year.

Fresh recruits to a new Iraqi Christian militia said their families were abandoned to militants by government forces last summer and they seek to create a force that will keep their towns and villages safe even after Islamic State is defeated. "I want to defend our own lands, with our own force," said Nasser Abdullah, 26 years old, who is helping lead younger recruits in training.

Sunni neighbors in nearby villages, the recruits said, supported the Sunni extremists of Islamic State as militants seized one Christian village after another in the Nineveh plains, where Iraqi Christians and other minorities live.

As Islamic State fighters advanced, Kurdish forces assigned to the region fled under attack, leaving exposed vulnerable communities.

"Those who betrayed us won't be allowed to live among us," said Firas Metr, a 27-year-old electrician and recruit with no military experience. "We need to protect ourselves, now and in the future."



MANILA TRAINING CENTER, Iraq



New recruits begin training

New recruits begin training for an Iraqi Christian militia on a former U.S. military installation outside the city of Kirkuk (PHOTO: MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

Some 30,000 Christians have since fled the Nineveh plains. Just one Christian town there, Al Qosh, and three smaller villages remain free. Across Iraq, more than 150,000 Christians have been displaced since Islamic State began its rampage, according to Iraqi Christian community leaders.

More than 2,000 men have signed up to fight, but it wasn't clear whether they could afford to train them all. Organizers hope the U.S. will help.

The U.S. National Defense Authorization Act, approved in December, names local security forces in Iraq as potential beneficiaries of as much as \$1.6 billion to train and equip fighters against Islamic State. Those funds should support "local forces that are committed to protecting highly vulnerable ethnic and religious minority communities in the Nineveh Plain and elsewhere," said a statement accompanying the act.

Iraqi Christians, particularly Chaldean Catholics of ethnic Assyrian origin, have long ties with U.S. lawmakers through its large expatriate community.

Former Democratic Sen. Carl Levin, who retired in December, helped include specific reference to the Nineveh area, which they hope will yield U.S. funding.

U.S. officials familiar with the effort said the idea has been to include minority groups that could use assistance, especially after the siege of Yazidi families by Islamic State militants last summer in Iraq.

Mr. Levin said this week he hoped the training program was successful but didn't know enough about it to comment further.

On a recent Sunday, roughly 300 Christian recruits, toting duffel bags, left on a dozen buses bound for a training camp outside the city of Kirkuk. They sang and danced with the air of students en route to summer camp.

"I'm excited to retake our villages, but the only way to do this and protect our people is by taking up weapons and fighting," said Fadi, a 19-year-old fighter (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

Local Christian politicians have tried for a decade to arm and train a Christian regional guard but faced resistance from Iraqi authorities.

An Iraqi Christian with a cross tattoo is among hundreds of recruits training to fight Islamic State militants (PHOTO: MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).



Fadi, a 19-year-old fighter

While under attack by Islamic State's predecessor, al Qaeda in Iraq, the Assyrian Christians got permission and funding for local watchmen but never the armed militias they hoped for. This month, that will change.

"This is a fight to take back and come back to our land," said Yonadam Kanna, a parliamentarian with the Assyrian Democratic Movement, the political party leading the training. "It's as though our roots of thousands of years have been pulled out of the ground."

Snubbed by the central government in Baghdad, party officials pressed their demands over the past weeks with the Kurdistan Regional Government, whose semiautonomous region in the north abuts the Nineveh plains. The Kurds offered the training facility outside Kirkuk, a base once run by the U.S. military to train Kurdish regional guards, Kurdish and Christian officials said.

Iraqi Christian recruits listen to instruction from an officer at a training camp outside the city of Kirkuk. The men hail from the Nineveh Plains in the country's north, where Islamic State militants took over many villages last summer (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

About 500 recruits, mostly Assyrians, will be trained this month but it is uncertain who will fund and equip them in the long term. Christians here are divided about having their own militia. Patriarch Louis Sako, head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, which many Assyrians follow, has said he disapproves.

The new militia is seen by some Iraqis as more evidence of how the country is fractured along sectarian and tribal lines, despite efforts by various sides to wage a unified battle against Islamic State.

Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi came into power last year under pressure to heal the rifts dividing Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs and Kurds, which worsened under his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. Mashaan al-Jabouri, a Sunni member of parliament, said a weak Shiite-led government hasn't been able to overcome the distrust among these groups.

Mr. Abdullah, one of the Christian recruit leaders, was serving with the Peshmerga, the Kurdish regional force, in the Nineveh plains when Islamic State seized the city of Mosul in June. The Peshmerga guard land, including Christian towns, in northern territory contested between Kurdish and Iraqi authorities.



"We need help from the international community to get heavy weapons to defend our land," said Michael, a 28-year-old fighter (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

Mr. Abdullah said when he heard Peshmerga comrades had fled as Islamic State militants took Mosul, he recalled thinking: "I wouldn't want to defend a place that isn't mine either." He quit the next day.

Months later, Mr. Abdullah signed up for a Christian militia that served as a trial run for the current effort. About 100 local men took up arms last summer to guard villages still free from Islamic State.

At the training camp outside Kirkuk, Mr. Abdullah joined other ranking militiamen to coach the recruits. "They are excited, but they are nervous for sure," said Steven Yousef, 21 years old, as rows of men awaited their first roll call. Most have never seen an Islamic State militant, he said, or fired a gun.

As many as half of Iraq's Christians are estimated to have fled over the past decade, and a second wave is bound for Istanbul, Beirut, and Amman, Christian community leaders said.

Residents of the Nineveh plains, home to such minority groups as Yazidis and ethnic Shabak, have for years felt vulnerable, living in the middle of a struggle between Iraqi and Kurdish authorities over control of the region.

"No one has protected the minorities, and no one will in the future," said Kaldo Oghanna, an Assyrian party official who swapped his suit for military fatigues to oversee the first week of training.

Assyrian party officials--who call their fledgling force a battalion--say their goal is to retake Christian towns from Islamic State and police them independently until the dust settles.

In Erbil, a Peshmerga spokesman said he understood from meetings with Christian officials that the militia would eventually work under the Peshmerga.

Mr. Oghanna said there was no such agreement. Other party officials said they were open to incorporating trained units into a future national guard, but had doubts about its eventual deployment. Recruits said they wanted independence to protect their communities after expelling Islamic State.



An officer yells orders at Iraqi Christians recruited for a militia intended to fight Islamic State militants



Gorgis, a 21-year-old fighter

The men are training to recapture and defend Christian-dominated towns and villages in Iraq (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

"As we've seen in the past five months nobody will protect us," said Gorgis, a 21-year-old fighter. "We don't want to repeat that but we cannot count on the protection of others so we must control our towns ourselves" (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

Without financial support from the Iraqi, Kurdish or U.S. governments, the Christian militia has so far operated on donations, mostly from Assyrians abroad. Every recruit will get a rifle, Mr. Oghanna said, though the ones used in training are lent by Kurdish camp authorities, along with machine guns and mortars.

Several Americans were helping train the young men. They said they had served in the U.S. military and were volunteering through a nonprofit organization they declined to name.

They wouldn't talk about their mission or background, saying they needed to protect their identities from Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL.

One of the American trainers, 28 years old, said U.S. officials in Erbil were briefed on the Christian militia but weren't involved. U.S. officials didn't respond to requests for comment.

"The Americans want to stay away from this because their view is, if you train the Christians, you're starting some crazy religious war," he said. "Well, ISIS beat you to it."

Ali A. Nabhan contributed to this article.



Recruits to a Christian militia in Iraq practice drills at a military facility in the desert outside the city of Kirkuk. They are training to fight Islamic State militants (MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL).

February 20, 2015: ISIS burns musical instruments, calling drums 'un-Islamic'

February 24, 2015: ISIS burns 8000 rare books and manuscripts in Mosul

Syndicated News

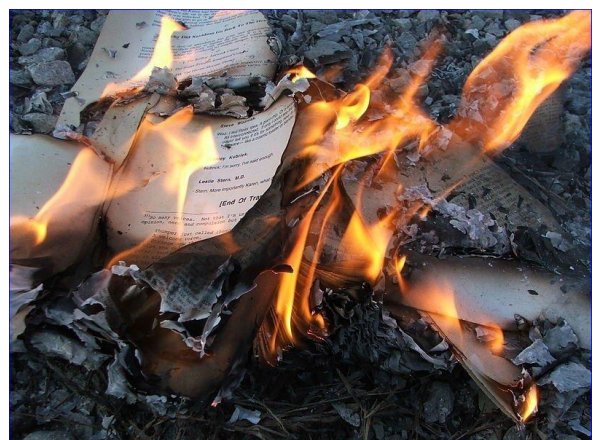
By Riyadh Mohammed

<http://www.thefiscaltimes.com>

Posted 2015-02-24 21:20 GMT

While the world was watching the Academy Awards ceremony, the people of Mosul were watching a different show. They were horrified to see ISIS members burn the Mosul public library. Among the many thousands of books it housed, more than 8,000 rare old books and manuscripts were burned.

"ISIS militants bombed the Mosul Public Library. They used improvised explosive devices," said Ghanim al-Ta'an, the director of the library. Notables in Mosul tried to persuade ISIS members to spare the library, but they failed. The former assistant director of the library Qusai All Faraj said that the Mosul Public Library was established in 1921, the same year that saw the birth of the modern Iraq. Among its lost collections were manuscripts from the eighteenth century,



Syriac books printed in Iraq's first printing house in the nineteenth century, books from the Ottoman era, Iraqi newspapers from the early twentieth century and some old antiques like an astrolabe and sand glass used by ancient Arabs. The library had hosted the personal libraries of more than 100 notable families from Mosul over the last century. During the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the library was looted and destroyed by mobs. However, the people living nearby managed to save most of its collections and rich families bought back the stolen books and they were returned to the library, All Faraj added. "900 years ago, the books of the Arab philosopher Averroes were collected before his eyes...and burned. One of his students started crying while witnessing the burning. Averroes told him... the ideas have wings...but I cry today over our situation," said Rayan al-Hadidi, an activist and a blogger from Mosul. Al-Hadidi said that a state of anger and sorrow are dominating Mosul now. Even the library's website was suspended. "What a pity! We used to go to the library in the 1970s. It was one of the greatest landmarks of Mosul. I still remember the special pieces of paper where the books' names were listed alphabetically," said Akil Kata who left Mosul to exile years ago. On the same day the library was destroyed, ISIS abolished another old church in Mosul: the church of Mary the Virgin. The Mosul University Theater was burned as well, according to eyewitnesses. In al-Anbar province, Western Iraq, the ISIS campaign of burning books has managed to destroy 100,000 titles, according to local officials. Last December, ISIS burned Mosul University's central library. Iraq, the cradle of civilization, the birthplace of agriculture and writing and the home of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Arab civilizations had never witnessed such an assault on its rich cultural heritage since the Mongol era in the Middle Ages. Last week, a debate in Washington and Baghdad became heated over when, how and who will liberate Mosul. A plan was announced to liberate the city in April or May by more than 20,000 US trained Iraqi soldiers. Either way, and supposing everything will go well and ISIS will be defeated easily which is never the case in reality, that means the people of Mosul will still have to wait for another two to three months. Until then, Mosul will probably have not a single sign of its rich history left standing.

February 26, 2015: ISIS destroys Assyrian artifacts in the Museum of Mosul

Syndicated News

New IS Video Shows Militants Smashing Ancient Assyrian Artifacts

By Sinan Salaheddin

Posted 2015-02-26 21:54 GMT

(AP) -- The Islamic State group released a video on Thursday showing militants using sledgehammers to smash ancient artifacts in Iraq's northern city of Mosul, describing the relics as idols that must be removed.

The destructions are part of a campaign by the IS extremists who have destroyed a number of shrines -- including Muslim holy sites -- in order to eliminate



what they view as heresy. They are also believed to have sold ancient artifacts on the black market in order to finance their bloody campaign across the region.

The five-minute video shows a group of bearded men inside the Mosul Museum using hammers and drills to destroy several large statues, which are then shown chipped and in pieces. The video then shows a black-clad man at a nearby archaeological site inside Mosul, drilling through and destroying a winged-bull Assyrian protective deity that dates back to the 7th century B.C.

In New York, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the U.N.'s cultural agency, UNESCO, is examining the video. "The destruction of cultural heritage is reprehensible and criminal," Dujarric said, adding that it robs current and future generations of the history of their past.

The video was posted on social media accounts affiliated with the Islamic State group and though it could not be independently verified it appeared authentic, based on AP's knowledge of the Mosul Museum.

Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city and the surrounding Nineveh province fell to the militants during their blitz last June after Iraqi security forces melted away.

In their push, the extremists captured large swaths of land in both Iraq and neighboring Syria, declared a self-styled caliphate on territories that are under their control, killing members of religious minorities, driving others from their homes, enslaving women and destroying houses of worship.

The region under IS control in Iraq has nearly 1,800 of Iraq's 12,000 registered archaeological sites and the militants appear to be out to cleanse it of any non-Islamic ideas, including library books, archaeological relics, and even Islamic sites considered idolatrous.

"Oh Muslims, these artifacts that are behind me were idols and gods worshipped by people who lived centuries ago instead of Allah," a bearded man tells the camera as he stands in front of the partially demolished winged-bull.

"The so-called Assyrians and Akkadians and others looked to gods for war, agriculture and rain to whom they offered sacrifices," he added, referring to groups that left their mark on Mesopotamia for more than 5,000 years in what is now Iraq, eastern Syria and southern Turkey.

"Our prophet ordered us to remove all these statues as his followers did when they conquered nations," the man in the video adds. The video bore the logo of the IS group's media arm and was posted on a Twitter account used by the group.

A professor at the Archaeology College in Mosul confirmed to the Associated Press that the two sites depicted in the video are the city museum and a site known as Nirgal Gate, one of several gates to the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh.

"I'm totally shocked," Amir al-Jumaili told the AP over the phone from outside of Mosul. "It's a catastrophe. With the destruction of these artifacts, we can no longer be proud of Mosul's civilization."

He said that very few of the museum pieces are not genuine.

Among the most important sites under the militants' control are four ancient cities -- Nineveh, Kalhu, Dur Sharrukin and Ashur -- which were at different times the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire.

The Assyrians first arose around 2500 B.C. and at one point ruled over a realm stretching from the Mediterranean coast to what is present-day Iran. Also in danger is the UNESCO World

Heritage Site Hatra, which is thought to have been built in the 3rd or 2nd century B.C. by the Seleucid Empire. It flourished during the 1st and 2nd centuries as a religious and trading center.

UNESCO's director general said she was "deeply shocked" at the footage showing the destruction and has asked the president of the U.N. Security Council to convene an emergency meeting "on the protection of Iraq's cultural heritage as an integral element for the country's security."

"I condemn this as a deliberate attack against Iraq's millennial history and culture, and as an inflammatory incitement to violence and hatred," Irina Bokova said.

She added that large statues from the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hatra and "unique artifacts" from archaeological sites in the Ninevah governorate, among many other pieces, have been destroyed or defaced.

The damage to Iraqi artifacts in Mosul is the latest episode in incidents that have targeted the nation's heritage.

In January, Islamic State militants ransacked the Central Library of Mosul, smashing the locks and taking around 2,000 books -- leaving only Islamic texts. Days later, militants broke into University of Mosul's library. They made a bonfire out of hundreds of books on science and culture, destroying them in front of students.

The day after Baghdad fell to U.S. troops in April 2003, looters burst into the Iraqi National Museum in the Iraqi capital, making off with scores of priceless artifacts and leaving the floor littered with shattered pottery. The U.S. was widely criticized at the time for failing to protect the site.

Associated Press writers Cara Anna and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

March 06, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud

Syndicated News

Iraq Officials Denounce Islamic State's Destruction of Ancient Assyrian Site

By Tamer El-Ghobashy

Wall Street Journal

Posted 2015-03-06 19:58 GMT

The Assyrian city of Nimrud before its destruction by ISIS. BAGHDAD -- Iraq officials and lawmakers denounced Friday the destruction of the remnants of a 3,000 year old city by Islamic State militants, with one parliamentarian calling for urgent international military intervention to save the trove of archaeological treasures. Iraq's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said Thursday the militants had "bulldozed" the ancient city of Nimrud using heavy military equipment. Islamic State didn't immediately claim responsibility. The announcement comes a week after Islamic State released a video showing their fighters destroying ancient Assyrian artifacts in a museum in Mosul, about 18 miles (30 kilometers) from Nimrud. "The current situation is linked to a military solution only," Qassim al-Sudani, a ministry spokesman said Friday. "This is the responsibility of the whole world after [Islamic State] has proved that it fights the past as much as it fights the present." "The international coalition should have conducted airborne operations in Nineveh province to stop ISIS from committing such crime," said Haneen al-Quadoo, a parliamentarian from Nineveh province, where Nimrud is located.



He was referring to a U.S.-backed force that has conducted limited airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria since last August. The U.S. has reserved such air power to instances where major infrastructure has been threatened or in cases of extreme humanitarian need, which has included protecting Iraq's small religious minority groups. "[Islamic State] aims to wipe out civilization in this country," Mr. al-Quadoo added. On Friday, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization labeled the alleged demolition of the site a war crime. "We cannot remain silent," said Irina Bokova, head of Unesco. "The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage constitutes a war crime. I call on all political and religious leaders in the region to stand up and remind everyone that there is absolutely no political or religious justification for the destruction of humanity's cultural heritage." Prosecutors in the International Criminal Court have supported a call by Iraqi authorities for an emergency session of the Security Council to address the incident. The city, founded more than 3,300 years ago, served as the capital of the Assyrian empire and contains a trove of artifacts from the early Mesopotamian civilization. Faced with recent losses on the battlefield, Islamic State has stressed its attacks on Iraq's antiquities, which they consider idolatrous and are a cornerstone of the nation's identity. The group, which targets Iraqi and Syrian religious minorities and fellow Sunnis it labels apostates, has called the artifacts relics of an age of idolatry. In a video broadcast last week, militants claimed to have ransacked Mosul Museum, taking sledgehammers to Assyrian artifacts it called "idols that were worshiped in the previous ages." The video was condemned world-wide and provoked Iraqi officials to reopen the closed Iraq National Museum in Baghdad in a move they described as directly defiant of Islamic State's "crimes" in Mosul. Mr. al-Sudani said Iraq's preservationists are incapable of protecting the historical artifacts as long as militants remain in control of Mosul. He pleaded for international support. "We have no way to reach there to protect the archaeological pieces," Mr. Sudani said. "What ISIS did in Nimrud city is considered as a big loss to humanity in general. It is the loss of a national treasure." Iraqi military officials have considered the liberation of Mosul a priority since it fell to Islamic State last June in a sweeping offensive that put large regions of Iraq under militant control. The military, supported by Shiite militias and Iranian advisers, has undertaken the largest campaign to date to uproot the militants from Tikrit in an operation that officials have said will serve as a model and test of Iraq's ability to take on the insurgency in the much larger city of Mosul. "At stake is the survival of the Iraqi culture and society," the U.N.'s Ms. Bokova said.

Ghassan Adnan contributed to this article.

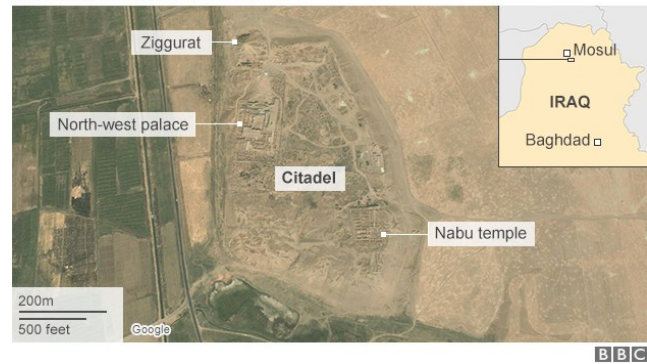
March 07, 2015: Brick By Brick, Person By Person, ISIS is Erasing Assyrians From Their Homelands

AINA News

Posted 2015-03-07 01:22 GMT



Ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5

Renya Benjamin, an Assyrian from Canada, visiting the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud in 2012.(AINA) -- Yesterday ISIS destroyed the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, a city dating back to 1400 B.C. and was one of the capitals of Assyria. A week before that ISIS destroyed the Museum of Mosul, which contained priceless Assyrian artifacts. A week before that ISIS attacked 35 Assyrian villages in Khabur Syria, driving 3,000 Assyrians away, never to return. 6 months before that ISIS drove 200,000 Assyrians out of their homes in the Nineveh Plain in north Iraq, and they still have not returned, and most likely never will.

- See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

As they were being released, ISIS told the Assyrians from Syria to never return to their villages, else they would be killed. They are in Hasaka with only the clothes on their backs, all of their possessions lost forever, unreachable in their ISIS occupied village.

But the destruction of ancient Assyrian cities and artifacts in Iraq and Syria is the most devastating -- because of its symbolism. In destroying Assyrian archaeological and historical sites, ISIS is striking at the very root of Assyrian civilization, erasing all traces of their heritage and extirpating them from their lands.

Renya Benjamin, an Assyrian woman from Hamilton, Canada, visited Nimrud in 2012. Upon hearing about the destruction of this irreplaceable world cultural heritage site, the city of her ancestors, she said:

Nimrud, Assyria. My favourite place in the world was destroyed by ISIS today. I will forever be thankful to the Assyrians of Baghdede [Qaraqosh] for taking me to visit this majestic place in 2012. And I will forever be devastated in knowing that my children will never experience the same pride I felt walking on the cuneiform etched tiled floor and touching the majestic Lamassu that my king once touched, 3000 years ago.

According to Renya, during her visit one of the local Arab tribal men who was a guard told her how happy he was that she came, as these were her ancestral artifacts. The men from the same tribe protected the site during the fall of Saddam when looters tried to access it.

Robert DeKelaita, an Assyrian immigration attorney in Chicago, said:

The responsibility for what has happened to the archeological treasures of Assyria, of Iraq and of the world really, lies with the 'great' nations that advocate human rights and democracy, and only slightly with savages who have no knowledge of civilization or history or science. The standard we should hold the great nations with is much greater than the standard with we hold the savages; barbarians who cannot see the destruction they have caused others is their own destruction.

The Assyrian people today are stronger and more united. Where their ancient manuscripts have been burned, they have taken their ancient language to the internet, allowing it a greater chance at immortality. Where their ancient artifacts, those great winged bulls and the walls of Nineveh, have been destroyed, they have reached deeper into their history and are much more determined to establish, before themselves and the world, a greater continuity with Nineveh and Irbil and Nimrud. And the atrocities committed against them, through the intentional acts of savages, and the negligence of the West, will one day be the subject of proper condemnation and judgment. As stated in Mathew, 12:41, The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it..."

Afram Barryakoub, the president of the [Assyrian Federation of Sweden](#), said:

The Assyrian nation has gone through many difficult times, we have been subjected to genocide, massacres and all forms of oppression. The destruction of Assyrian artifacts and the ancient city of Nimrod will leave yet another scar in the Assyrian national soul. But we remain determined and we will be victorious in the end.



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5.

Dr. Nicholas Al-Jeloo, an Assyrian from Australia, associate of the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne and an affiliate with the Syriac Language Research Centre at Whitley College, said:

As we sit and watch from our computer and TV screens in the West, the final strongholds of Assyrian culture and national existence in their Mesopotamian homeland are falling one by one at the hands of fundamentalist extremists and religious fascists. The Nineveh Plain and now Khabur have collapsed, leaving behind thousands of refugees. With the dispersal of these refugees in the Diaspora and their inevitable assimilation into host cultures, the world will lose part of its intangible heritage -- their unique language and culture. This humanitarian disaster has additionally been coupled with the destruction of tangible cultural assets -- among them ancient sites, works of art, manuscripts, churches and archaeological artifacts that belong not just to Assyrians, Iraqis and Syrians, but to the entire world.

The Assyrians are not just being persecuted but are facing total extinction on all fronts. Preventing this is now in the hands of governments and citizens across the world. No tradition or religion is worth the extinction of an entire ethnicity, and no criminal gang should be allowed to destroy any part of what is essentially the world's cultural heritage and historical legacy. I am sure that there are millions of people who would share this conviction -- the right of Assyrians to survive as a distinct ethnicity. If we can unite on this principle across cultures and continents, ours can be the generation that chooses to maintain the beauty of the world's cultural and religious diversity, that changes attitudes towards minorities irrevocably and that stands between the endangered Assyrians and their extinction.

Assyrian leaders have raised the alarm over the disappearance of Assyrians from the Middle East, a land which they have inhabited since 4750 B.C.

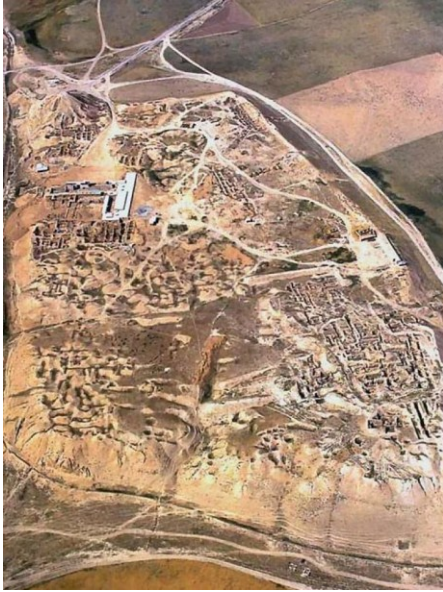
In a speech (AINA [2015-03-05](#)) delivered in Paris, Joseph Yacoub, honorary Professor of Political Science at the Catholic University of Lyon, said:

With the destruction of historical monuments that date back more than 3000 years of history and the demolition of churches and sanctuaries by a band of nihilist obscurantists, the memory of a people and traces of a civilization, Mesopotamia, one of the cradles of humanity, that holds a tangible and intangible world heritage, is being erased.

The Assyrian Universal Alliance, a global Assyrian umbrella organization, called for international intervention to protect the Assyrians following the latest ISIS attacks on Assyrians in Syria (AINA [2015-03-05](#)).



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5.



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5.



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5.

1 Comments from Joselph McFarlane 2015-06-08 01:06 GMT

Yes it is a real shame beyond words what is going on over there. As being an artist it brings tears and sickness in my heart with the greatest pain that this is being allowed to happen to people and ancient places. I just do not know what even to say. I have gathered many pics of all these sites plus books I can find as well. Yes Its very heart breaking and you were at least lucky to visit this site before it was terribly destroyed.
J M

March 07, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient city of Hatra

Syndicated News

ISIS Destroying Another Ancient Archaeological Site in Iraq

By Sameer N. Yacoub and Vivian Salama

Posted 2015-03-07 19:04 GMT

(AP) -- Islamic State militants continued their campaign targeting cultural heritage sites in territories they control in northern Iraq, looting and damaging the ancient city of Hatra just one day after bulldozing the historic city of Nimrud, according to Iraqi government officials and local residents. The destruction in Hatra comes as the militant Islamic group fended off an Iraqi army offensive in Saddam Hussein's hometown and fought pitched battles in eastern Syria in an area populated by predominantly Christian villages. Iraqi officials in the northern city of Mosul said Saturday that Islamic State militants have begun demolishing Hatra, a move UNESCO described as "cultural cleansing." An official with the ministry of tourism and antiquities' archaeological division in Mosul told The Associated Press that multiple residents living near Hatra heard two large explosions Saturday morning, then reported seeing bulldozers begin

demolishing the site. He spoke anonymously for fear of reprisal. Saeed Mamuzini, a Kurdish official from Mosul, told the AP that the militants had begun carrying away artifacts from Hatra as early as Thursday and on Saturday, began to destroy the 2,000-year-old city. Hatra, located 110 kilometers (68 miles) southwest of the city of Mosul, was a large fortified city during the Parthian Empire and capital of the first Arab kingdom. A UNESCO world heritage site, Hatra is said to have withstood invasions by the Romans in A.D. 116 and 198 thanks to its high, thick walls reinforced by towers.



The ancient Parthian city of Hatra in Iraq.

The ancient trading center spanned 6 kilometers (4 miles) in circumference and was supported by more than 160 towers. At its heart are a series of temples with a grand temple at the center -- a structure supported by columns that once rose to 100 feet. "The destruction of Hatra marks a turning point in the appalling strategy of cultural cleansing underway in Iraq," said Irina Bokova, the director-general of UNESCO, and Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, director general of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in a joint statement. "With this latest act of barbarism against Hatra, (the IS group) shows the contempt in which it holds the history and heritage of Arab people." Meanwhile in Syria, Islamic State militants attacked a string of predominantly Christian villages on Saturday, touching off heavy clashes with Kurdish militiamen and their local allies, activists said. The attack began around dawn and targeted at least three villages near the town of Tal Tamr along the Khabur River in Hassakeh province. The Islamic State group kidnapped more than 220 Assyrian Christians from the same area last month after overrunning several farming communities on the southern bank of the river. The fighting Saturday was focused in villages on the northern bank of the river as the militants press to capture Tal Tamr, a strategic crossroads some 35 kilometers (20 miles) from the city of Hassakeh, said Osama Edwards, director of the Assyrian Network for Human Rights. "The battles are now very intensive, very violent," said Edwards, who is based in Sweden. "Tal Tamr is the main goal of the Islamic State, to give them the corridor to the eastern border to Iraq." The Islamic State group currently controls about a third of Iraq and Syria. The Sunni extremist group has been campaigning to purge ancient relics they say promote idolatry that violates their fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law. A video they released last week shows them smashing artifacts in the Mosul museum and in January, the group burned hundreds of books from the Mosul library and Mosul University, including many rare manuscripts. The majority of

the artifacts destroyed in the Mosul Museum attack were from Hatra. On Friday, the group looted artifacts from Nimrud, a 3,000-year-old city in Iraq, and bulldozed it in a move United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon declared "a war crime." Iraqi Tourism and Antiquities Minister Adel Shirshab told the AP Saturday that many feared Hatra would suffer the same fate as Nimrud. "This is not unusual (behavior) for Daesh," Shirshab said, using the Arabic acronym for the group. A statement on the ministry's Facebook page Saturday said the government is investigating reports of the attack on Hatra, noting that the global community should hasten its response to the crisis in Iraq in order to prevent these types of atrocities. Baghdad-based archaeology researcher Junaid Amer Habib said that the destruction of the archaeological sites and artifacts could be "a cover up operation" to disguise efforts to smuggle and sell precious antiquities. "These looted artifacts could be a main source of cash for the IS group which lacks cash," Habib added. "The money generated from such an operation will provide the militants with weapons and salaries." Habib said the international community should regulate the illegal trade of precious antiquities on the black market in order to prevent the sale of Iraqi artifacts by the IS group. Last year, the militants destroyed the mosque believed to be the burial place of the Prophet Younis, or Jonah, as well as the Mosque of the Prophet Jirjis -- both revered ancient shrines in Mosul. They also threatened to destroy Mosul's 850-year old Crooked Minaret, but residents surrounded the structure, preventing the militants from approaching. A U.S.-led coalition has been striking the Islamic State group since August and is preparing a large-scale operation to retake the city of Mosul. But U.S. and Iraqi officials have been cautious about setting a timeline for preparing Iraq's embattled military for the campaign. Meanwhile a combined force of Iraqi government troops and Iranian-backed Shiite militias have begun a push to dislodge the Islamic State group from Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Baghdad. U.S. Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during a current tour of the Middle East that he expected the Tikrit campaign to be successful. Dempsey was asked by reporters traveling with him overnight Friday from Washington to Bahrain whether he believes IS will be pushed out of Tikrit. "Yeah, I do," he said. "The numbers are overwhelming."

Associated Press writers Ryan Lucas in Beirut, Robert Burns in Manama, Bahrain and Salar Salim in Irbil, Iraq contributed to this report.

March 11, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient Assyrian city of Khorsabad

Syndicated News

Islamic State Ransacks Assyrian Capital As Iraq Appeals for Help

By Dominic Evans

Posted 2015-03-11 19:58 GMT

(Reuters) -- Islamic State militants have desecrated another ancient Iraqi capital, the government said on Wednesday, razing parts of the 2,700-year-old city of Khorsabad famed for its colossal statues of human-headed winged bulls. Officials have said for several days they were checking reports of damage at Khorsabad following attacks on the cities of Nineveh, Nimrud and Hatra by the Islamist radicals who control much of northern Iraq. On Wednesday the head of Iraq's antiquities board and the country's antiquities minister both confirmed that damage had been inflicted in recent days at Khorsabad, although neither was able to give details. "The city walls were razed, and some elements of the temples, but we don't know the exact extent (of the damage)," antiquities director Qais Rasheed told Reuters. "Looting took place, and then the razing". Islamic State rules a self-declared caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria which contain

some of the richest archaeological treasures on earth, where ancient Assyrian empires built their capitals, Graeco-Roman civilisation flourished and Muslim and Christian sects co-existed for centuries.



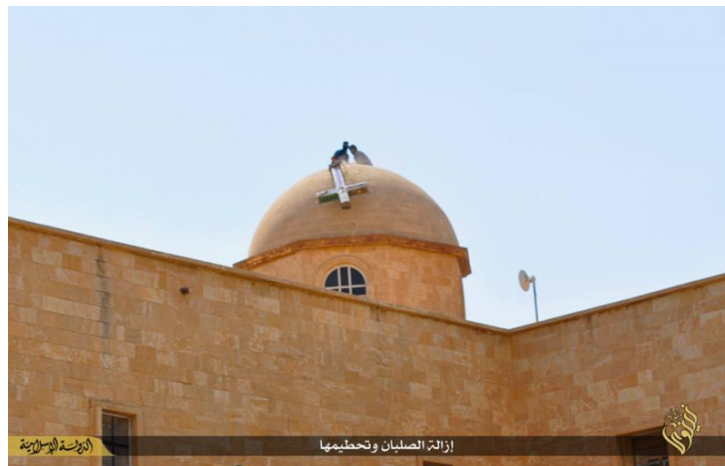
Gate of Sargon II's citadel, Khorsabad.

The group, which rejects all but its own narrow interpretation of early Sunni Muslim theology as heresy, has systematically destroyed historic temples, shrines, manuscripts statues and carvings. Officials say it has also looted widely, selling artefacts to help fund its rule. The United Nations has condemned Islamic State's actions as a war crime and an attack on humanity's common heritage, but the global outrage has not slowed the destruction. Iraq has asked a U.S.-led coalition which is supporting Baghdad's fightback against Islamic State with air strikes to deploy its aerial power to defend the country's heritage. U.S. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said in Baghdad on Monday the military priority was focused on populated areas ruled by Islamic State, as opposed to some of the remote antiquities sites. SEEKING SATELLITE IMAGES Rasheed said Iraq had asked for, but not received, satellite imagery from Hatra and Khorsabad so it could assess the scale of the damage. "They say they are working on getting pictures. How? Is it hard for the Americans to get satellite photos?" Huge stone carvings of winged bulls with bearded human faces were shipped from Khorsabad and other Assyrian cities in Iraq to France, Germany, Britain and the United States in the 19th century. But Rasheed said those huge statues, each weighing several tonnes, were just a fraction of the Khorsabad treasures. "The French and English excavated at Khorsabad and the excavations only got 10 percent of the city - it's a big city, a capital," he said of the three square km site. He was speaking on the sidelines of a meeting with foreign ambassadors and the United Nations to set out the scale of the damage wreaked by Islamic State and press for a stronger international response. Rasheed said in the northern province of Nineveh alone there were 1,700 archaeological sites under Islamic State control, as well as Iraq's third largest museum at Mosul, ransacked by the insurgents according to video footage released two weeks ago. "We ask the whole world, and primarily the international coalition, to activate its capabilities, because every day that passes, we have new losses," Tourism and Antiquities Minister Adel Shirshab, who also addressed the meeting, told Reuters. Rasheed said Iraq was also seeking help in returning looted items. "There are many stolen artefacts, in auction houses in America and Europe. The diplomatic corps can play a role in helping Iraq return them," he said. James Ratcliffe of Art

Loss Register, which runs a database of lost or stolen works of art, said he had seen little sign of anything of significant value reaching U.S. or British markets. "I'm sure lower value stuff is getting through but higher value items are not," he said, adding there were likely to be networks in the region working to get materials out. "In Syria, Turkey and Lebanon there will be groups who are engaging in the trade of antiquities for profit in an organised fashion."

Additional reporting by Isabel Coles in Arbil; Editing by Gareth Jones.

March 16, 2015: ISIS destroys St. George Monastery in Mosul
AINA News
ISIS Destroys Assyrian Churches, Hostages Still Being Held
Posted 2015-03-16 23:28 GMT



ISIS members destroying the St. George Chaldean Catholic Monastery in Mosul, Iraq
(photo: ISIS twitter)

(AINA) -- ISIS has posted pictures, on its twitter accounts, of its members destroying the St. George Monastery in Mosul. The pictures show ISIS members using sledgehammers to smash crosses and icons, and removing the cross from the dome and replacing it with the black ISIS flag.

- See [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- See [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)

ISIS captured Mosul on June 10, 2014 and immediately destroyed or occupied all 45 Assyrian churches and other religious institutions in the city.

- See [Church Bombings in Iraq Since 2004](#)

ISIS also destroyed Assyrian archaeological sites, including the walls of Nineveh and the cities of Nimrud and Khorsabad.

In Syria ISIS attacked 35 Assyrian villages in the Hasaka region, capturing at least 300 Assyrians and destroying at least 5 churches, including the church in Tel Hurmiz, one of the oldest churches in Syria, the Mar Bisho church in Tel Shamiran, the church in Qabr Shamiy and the church in Tel Baloua.

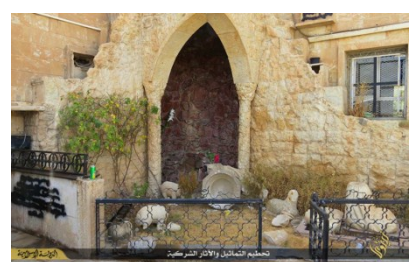
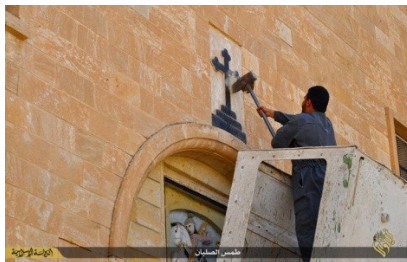
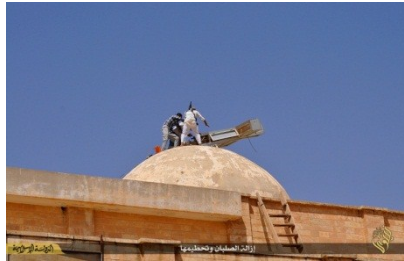
After two days of heavy clashes Assyrian and Kurdish forces regained the Assyrian villages of Tel Mighas and Tel Misas. The Church of St. George in Tel Maghas was ransacked

by ISIS, who burned the bibles and broke its cross. This church has been liberated and is now under the control of Assyrian and Kurdish fighters.

Hostages still being held

ISIS is still holding 52 Assyrian families, nearly 300 people, who were captured in the initial attacks on February 23. No progress has been made in the negotiations for their release in the last three days.

St. George Chaldean Catholic Monastery, Mosul Iraq



ISIS members destroying the St. George Chaldean Catholic Monastery in Mosul, Iraq
(photo: ISIS twitter)

March 19, 2015: ISIS destroys 4th-century Assyrian Catholic Monastery in Iraq

Indicated News

By Gianluca Mezzofiore

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk>

Posted 2015-03-19 19:46 GMT

Pictures attributed to the Islamic State (Isis) show the 4th century Assyrian St. Behnam monastery being blown up.



St. Behnam Assyrian Catholic Monastery

Islamic State (Isis) militants have allegedly blown up parts of the ancient monastery of Mar Behnam near the predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh, south-east of Mosul, according to pictures from IS media shared on twitter and a Kurdish media report. The photos, released by IS members, show the 4th-century monastery's tomb complex of Mar (Saint) Behnam and Mart (Saint) Sarah reduced to rubble. Dr Nicholas al-Jeloo, an expert on Assyrian monasteries in Iraq from the University of Melbourne, visited the monastery, previously run by the Syriac Catholic Church, in January 2010 and confirmed the authenticity of the pictures to IBTimes UK. "I didn't want to see the pictures. This is terrible. I'm in shock," he said. The monastery was founded in the 4th century and built on the tomb of Berhnam and his sister Sarah, who were converted to Christianity by St Matthew. They were the children of a local Assyrian ruler named Sennacherib, a pagan, who grew angry and killed them both along with 40 soldiers who had supported them when they refused to convert back to paganism. The king later also converted to Christianity on his deathbed. "This story intimately connects us to the ancient Assyrian heritage," Al-Jeloo said.

The monastery is known for its carvings and features, including "very intricate inscriptions in Syriac, in Armenian and in Uygur, a Turkic language from Western China" said Al-Jeloo. "The place is a major site of pilgrimage, at the very origins of Christianity in the region, and it links us to our ancient Assyrian heritage - being only a stone's throw from the ruins of Nimrud, also destroyed by Isis. The only way I could describe it is as a work of art. It was one of the most richly carved monastery complexes in northern Mesopotamia up until today," he said. The structure of the church that we have now dates back to the 14th century, with a lot of later additions and restoration works over the years.

Like all the churches in that area, it was founded by the Assyrian Church of the East, but later in the 7th century it became part of the Syriac Orthodox Church. When the majority of people in the nearby town of Qaraqosh converted to the Catholic church in the 19th century, the church changed hands to the Syriac Catholic Church. "IS is destroying the rich cultural fabric of the area, the multilayered, multilingual, multi-ethnic aspects of society," Al-Jeloo said. "It's not just our heritage, it's the heritage of the world. It is part of our history, and now it's gone." The monastery also had a huge collection of manuscripts dating back centuries. "Luckily, all of them have been digitised," he said. Most of the buildings and the facade of the monastery have been restored during Saddam Hussein era in the 1980s.

Expelling the monks IS fighters stormed the monastery in July 2014 and expelled its resident monks. A member of the Syriac clergy quoted the militants as saying to the monastery's residents: "You have no place here any more, you have to leave immediately." The monks asked to be allowed to save some of the monastery's relics but the IS militants refused, according to the BBC. They walked for several miles before being rescued by Kurdish fighters. The latest incident comes after an IS-linked Twitter account posted pictures of what appears to be jihadists smashing crosses and defacing holy statues, Christian murals and paintings at St George Chaldean Catholic monastery near Mosul. The monastery, located on the Ba'werah neighbourhood on a hill north of Mosul on the other side of the Tigris river, was founded by the Assyrian Church of the East in the 10th century but rebuilt as a seminary by the Chaldean Catholic Church in 1846. Earlier in March, IS militants reportedly bulldozed the 2,000-year-old city of Hatra and the Nimrud archaeological site near Mosul. On 26 February, the jihadist group published a video showing militants destroying artefacts in a Mosul museum and at the Nergal Gate to ancient Nineveh.

May 26, 2015: ISIS Burn Assyrian Woman, 80, in North Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2015-05-26 21:59 GMT

(AINA) -- According to a report by the BasNews agency, ISIS burned an 80 year-old Assyrian woman to death in a village southeast of Mosul. Citing Sa'ed Mamuzini, a representative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) office in Mosul, BasNews stated in its report that the woman, who was from Karamlis, was burned for failing to comply with Islamic Sharia law.

Lying about 10 miles northeast of Baghdade (Qaraqosh), once the largest Assyrian city with a population of 50,000 Assyrians, Karamlis is one of dozens of Assyrian villages in the Nineveh Plains surrounding Mosul, which was partially overrun by ISIS on August 7 of 2014, causing 200,000 Assyrian to flee their villages (AINA [2014-08-07](#)). Nearly all have not returned and are living as refugees in Ankawa and Dohuk.

December, 26, 2015: ISIS Bombs Assyrian Homes, Monastery in Iraq, Cemeteries Vandalized

AINA News

Posted 2015-12-26 10:21 GMT



Vandalized Assyrian cemetery in Kirkuk, Iraq.

(AINA) -- Two days ago ISIS bombed ten Assyrian homes and a monastery in the Assyrian village of Tel Kepe in north Iraq. The blasts injured several people. The monastery belonged to Assyrian nuns. According to residents, ISIS threatened to bomb Assyrian homes in other villages in the area.

On November 27 a cemetery in Kirkuk used by the Assyrian Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox church was vandalized. Graves were opened, tombstone and crosses were destroyed. Another Assyrian cemetery in west Kirkuk was also vandalized. The identity of the perpetrators is unknown.

Christian and Muslim officials condemned the attacks on the cemeteries. Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako condemned the destruction of the cemeteries and said "We live in difficult conditions, but we will not accept injustice and systemic radical thinking against Christians..."

Related: [Timeline of ISIS in Iraq](#)

In August of 2015 ISIS drove into the Nineveh Plains in north Iraq, forcing nearly 200,000 Assyrians to flee from their homes and villages. Most have not returned.



Vandalized Assyrian cemetery in Kirkuk, Iraq.

January 20, 2016: ISIS Destroys Oldest Assyrian Monastery in Iraq
Syndicated News
By Martha Mendoza, Maya Alleruzzo and Bram Janssen
Posted 2016-01-21 05:23 GMT



St. Elijah's Monastery, one of the earliest Christian settlements, and the oldest in Iraq, near Mosul, Dec. 10, 2009.

Satellite images have been used to confirm that militants with the Islamic State group destroyed a 1,400-year-old stone sanctuary (Eros Hoagland -- New York Times). IRBIL, Iraq (AP) -- The oldest Christian monastery in Iraq has been reduced to a field of rubble, yet another victim of the Islamic State group's relentless destruction of ancient cultural sites.

For 1,400 years the compound survived assaults by nature and man, standing as a place of worship recently for U.S. troops. In earlier centuries, generations of monks tucked candles in the niches and prayed in the cool chapel. The Greek letters chi and rho, representing the first two letters of Christ's name, were carved near the entrance.

Now satellite photos obtained exclusively by The Associated Press confirm the worst fears of church authorities and preservationists -- St. Elijah's Monastery of Mosul has been completely wiped out.

In his office in exile in Irbil, Iraq, the Rev. Paul Thabit Habib, 39, stared quietly at before- and after-images of the monastery that once perched on a hillside above his hometown of Mosul. Shaken, he flipped back to his own photos for comparison.

"I can't describe my sadness," he said in Arabic. "Our Christian history in Mosul is being barbarically leveled. We see it as an attempt to expel us from Iraq, eliminating and finishing our existence in this land."

The Islamic State group, which broke from al-Qaida and now controls large parts of Iraq and Syria, has killed thousands of civilians and forced out hundreds of thousands of Christians, threatening a religion that has endured in the region for 2,000 years. Along the way, its fighters have destroyed buildings and ruined historical and culturally significant structures they consider contrary to their interpretation of Islam.

Those who knew the monastery wondered about its fate after the extremists swept through in June 2014 and largely cut communications to the area.

Now, St. Elijah's has joined a growing list of more than 100 demolished religious and historic sites, including mosques, tombs, shrines and churches in Syria and Iraq. The extremists

have defaced or ruined ancient monuments in Nineveh, Palmyra and Hatra. Museums and libraries have been looted, books burned, artwork crushed -- or trafficked.



U.S. Army soldiers tour St. Elijah's Monastery on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq, in 2008.

"A big part of tangible history has been destroyed," said Rev. Manuel Yousif Boji. A Chaldean Catholic pastor in Southfield, Michigan, he remembers attending Mass at St. Elijah's almost 60 years ago while a seminarian in Mosul.

"These persecutions have happened to our church more than once, but we believe in the power of truth, the power of God," said Boji. He is part of the Detroit area's Chaldean community, which became the largest outside Iraq after the sectarian bloodshed that followed the U.S. invasion in 2003. Iraq's Christian population has dropped from 1.3 million then to 300,000 now, church authorities say.

The destruction of the monastery is a blow for U.S. troops and advisers who served in Iraq and had tried to protect and honor the site, a hopeful endeavor in a violent place and time.

Suzanne Bott, who spent more than two years restoring St. Elijah's Monastery as a U.S. State Department cultural adviser in Iraq, teared up when the AP showed her the images.

"Oh no way. It's just razed completely," said Bott. "What we lose is a very tangible reminder of the roots of a religion."

Army reserve Col. Mary Proffit remembered a sunrise service in St. Elijah where, as a Catholic lay minister, she served communion.

"I let that moment sink in, the candlelight, the first rays of sunshine. We were worshipping in a place where people had been worshipping God for 1,400 years," said Proffit, who was deployed there in 2004 and again in 2009.

"I would imagine that many people are feeling like, 'What were the last 10 years for if these guys can go in and destroy everything?'" said Proffit, a library manager in Glenoma, Washington.

This month, at the request of AP, satellite imagery firm DigitalGlobe tasked a high resolution camera passing over the site to grab photos, and then pulled earlier images of the same spot from their archive of pictures taken globally every day. Imagery analyst Stephen Wood, CEO of Allsource Analysis, reviewed the pictures for AP and identified the date of destruction between Aug. 27 and Sept. 28, 2014. Before it was razed, images show a partially restored, 27,000-square-foot religious building. Although the roof was largely missing, it had 26 distinctive rooms including a sanctuary and chapel. One month later, "the stone walls have been literally pulverized," said Wood.



In this photo from Nov. 7, 2008, a U.S. Army chaplain leads soldiers on a tour of St. Elijah's Monastery on Forward Operating Base Marez on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq. The monastery was apparently destroyed by ISIS in 2014 (Maya Alleruzzo/AP).



Soldiers celebrate a Catholic Easter Mass at St. Elijah's Monastery on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq in 2010

"Bulldozers, heavy equipment, sledgehammers, possibly explosives turned those stone walls into this field of gray-white dust. They destroyed it completely," he said. "There's nothing to rebuild."

The monastery, called Dair Mar Elia, is named for the Assyrian Christian monk -- St. Elijah -- who built it between 582 and 590 A.C. It was a holy site for Iraqi Christians for centuries, part of the Mideast's Chaldean Catholic community.

In 1743, tragedy struck when as many as 150 monks who refused to convert to Islam were massacred under orders of a Persian general, and the monastery was damaged. For the next two centuries it remained a place of pilgrimage, even after it was incorporated into an Iraqi military training base and later a U.S. base.

Suzanne Bott leads a tour at St. Elijah's monastery in 2009. Bott spent more than two years surveying and restoring the site as a U.S. State Department cultural adviser in Iraq.

Then in 2003 St. Elijah's shuddered again -- this time a wall was smashed by a tank turret blown off in battle. Iraqi troops had already moved in, dumping garbage in the ancient cistern. The U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division took control, with troops painting over ancient murals and scrawling their division's "Screaming Eagle," along with "Chad wuz here" and "I love Debbie," on the walls.

A U.S. military chaplain, recognizing St. Elijah's significance, kicked the troops out and the Army's subsequent preservation initiative became a pet project for a series of chaplains who toured thousands of soldiers through the ruin.

"It was a sacred place. We literally bent down physically to enter, an acquiescence to the reality that there was something greater going on inside," remembered military chaplain Jeffrey Whorton. A Catholic priest who now works at Ft. Bragg, he had to collect himself after viewing the damage. "I don't know why this is affecting me so much," he said.



Saint Elijah's Monastery, Mosul, Iraq, a 1500 year-old Assyrian monastery that was destroyed by ISIS.

The U.S. military's efforts drew attention from international media outlets including the AP in 2008. Today those chronicles, from YouTube videos captured on the cell phones of visiting soldiers to AP's own high resolution, detailed photographs, take on new importance as archives of what was lost.

One piece published in Smithsonian Magazine was written by American journalist James Foley, six years before he was killed by Islamic State militants.

St. Elijah's was being saved, Foley wrote in 2008, "for future generations of Iraqis who will hopefully soon have the security to appreciate it."

March 12, 2016: ISIS Burns Hundreds of Christian Books in Mosul

April 12, 2016: ISIS Destroys Assyrian Archaeological Gate in Mosul

Syndicated News

By Sozbin Celeng

Posted 2016-04-12 06:23 GMT

Militant fighters of the Islamic State (ISIS) have reportedly destroyed another archaeological icon in the Iraqi city of Mosul, using military equipment, local sources reported on Tuesday. Local activists confirmed that ISIS demolished the Gate of God [Eia] which dates back to the 7th century BC, the time of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Speaking to ARA News in Mosul, media activist Zuheir Mousilly said that since its control over the city of Mosul in 2014, ISIS have destroyed much of Iraqi historic sites and monuments, including the Assyrian city of Nimrud, the Winged Bulls, and the Mosul National Museum, after stealing the removable pieces for smuggling. The expert on the Iraqi Antiquities Affairs Yasser Hatami condemned the destruction of the historic gate "Mishqi", blaming Iraqi authorities for the incident for their inability to protect it [Mishqi gate]. The historic Mishqi gate, which was discovered in 1968, is considered one of the ancient gates in eastern Nineveh province. "ISIS views tombs they destroy as sacrilegious and a return to paganism," Syrian antiquities chief Abdul Maamoun Abdulkarim

told ARA News in an earlier report. Last year, ISIS extremists bombed the renowned Yazidi ancient minaret of the Shingal district (120 km west of the city of Mosul), in northern Iraq.



The Mishqi Gate seen guarding the ancient city of Nineveh.

(📷 Lachicaphoto/Creative Commons)



Assyrian king Sennacherib who reigned at the peak of the Assyrian power around 700 B.C.

In April, 2015, the terror group blew up the church of Virgin Mary in the Assyrian village of Tel Nasri near the town of Tel Temir (50 km west of Hasakah) in northeastern Syria. Also, the radical group blew up two monuments in the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria in June, 2015, according to local sources.

April 26, 2016: Mosul's Iconic 'Clock Church' Destroyed By ISIS

June 17, 2016: The Assyrian Center of Learning Destroyed By ISIS in Iraq

Syndicated News

By Christopher Jones

<http://www.apollo-magazine.com>

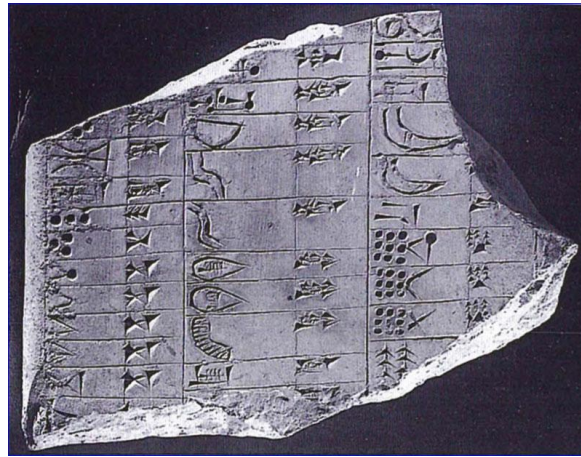
Posted 2016-06-17 22:18 GMT

When ISIS fighters detonated explosives inside the gate of the Temple of Nabu at Nimrud earlier this month, they destroyed more than a reconstructed ancient temple. They attacked one of the Assyrian empire's greatest centers of learning. The temple was originally constructed by the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (ruled from 883--859 BC) to stand alongside the new palace he had built for himself on top of the citadel at Nimrud (this palace was also destroyed by ISIS last year).

The patron god of writing and scribes, Nabu was originally worshipped in the southern Mesopotamian city of Borsippa where he was venerated as the son of the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Ashurnasirpal acknowledged the cultural debt by naming the new temple Ezida, meaning 'the true house', the same name given to the temple of Nabu in Borsippa. Little remains of Ashurnasirpal's temple, for the later king Adad-Nirari III (ruled 811--783 BC) carried out a massive project to rebuild the temple in 798 BC.



A screenshot from the ISIS video showing the Temple of Nabu prior to being destroyed



One of the tablets from the Temple of Nabu in Nimrud, which features Neo-Assyrian cuneiform side by side with attempts at reconstructing older cuneiform signs. P. 208 of *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed*, by Joan Oates.



Screenshot from ISIS video showing the destroyed 'mermen' statues of the seven sages at the Fish Gate, Temple of Nabu, Nimrud, Iraq.

The new temple featured two equal-sized sanctuaries for Nabu and his divine consort Tashmetum. The main entrance, known as the Fish Gate, was flanked by two gold-plated statues of mermen who represented the mythical Seven Sages who had brought knowledge to the earth in primeval times. Inside the gates the temple of Nabu functioned as a centre of learning and scholarship, as evidenced by a library, which British excavators uncovered there in the 1950s. The names appended to documents in the archives reveal that families of scholars worked at the temple for generations, passing their profession from father to son.

What forms did their scholarship take? Out of around 300 tablets found in the library 30 per cent concerned the interpretation of omens. Lunar and solar eclipses as well as astronomical observations of the stars, moon, and Venus were all thought to contain messages from the gods. Other texts explain the meanings of deformed births, or the patterns made by crawling ants or flocks of birds. Still others contained illustrated instructions for how to read the livers of slaughtered animals. Scholars from the temple routinely wrote to the royal court to keep the king informed of the latest omens. Another 30 per cent were incantation texts, usually related to medical issues. It was hoped that ritual repetition of the formulas could cure various conditions such as epilepsy, toothaches, and baldness. Possibly more useful was a catalogue of medicinal plants also found in the library. The rest of the tablets include a list of proverbs, prayers to various gods, and inscriptions prepared by the scribes to record the official histories of the Assyrian kings.

Possibly the most fascinating documents from the temple archive are several tablets featuring charts which show cuneiform signs from the scribe's own time alongside attempts to reconstruct the earliest cuneiform signs used two thousand years earlier. The signs do not closely resemble what we know of the earliest cuneiform, but it was an admirable effort and one that showed a serious attempt by the scribes to understand their own past.

An ISIS video showed footage of the Fish Gate at the Temple of Nabu in Nimrud, along with the 'mermen' statues representing the Seven Sages that flanked the entrance. Day-to-day life in the temple often featured mundane tasks and petty bureaucratic disputes. One letter speaks of the growth of fungus in the inner courtyard and in some of the storehouses and attempts by the priests to remove it. Another letter to the king complained that a priest named Pulu was making unauthorised changes to the temple furnishings and modifying some of the rituals. 'No one can do [anything]; there is an order to remain silent', wrote the traditionally-minded complainant, adding 'But they have changed the old rites!' Another letter, possibly from the same author, found fault with an upcoming ceremony involving a visit to the temple by a statue of the goddess Ishtar because 'it is not ancient -- your father introduced it.'

The tablets from the Nabu Temple archive are now housed in the British Museum in London and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. The mermen which once guarded the entrance to the temple were still standing there, albeit broken and missing their gold plating, when ISIS blew up the Fish Gate. Video footage shows broken pieces of the statues lying amongst the rubble. The symbolic significance of destroying the entrance to what was once a center of ancient learning is obvious.

October 10, 2016: ISIS bomb St. Barbara Assyrian church in Karemlis in Iraq

Syndicated News

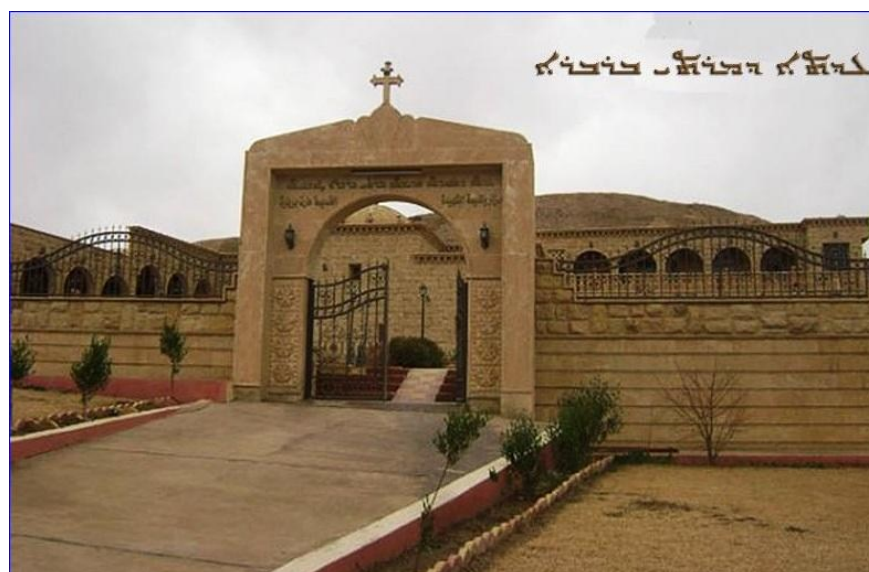
By Raman Yousef

ARA News

Posted 2016-10-10 07:36 GMT

Extremists of the Islamic State (ISIS) bombed an Assyrian Church in Iraq's northwestern Nineveh governorate on Sunday. The radical group has bombed the Barbara Fouq Attal Church in the Assyrian town of Karemlis near Mosul city. "Daesh [ISIS] jihadis detonated a number of explosive devices inside the church on Sunday afternoon," human rights activist Ghazi Shamoun told ARA News. "The church was destroyed completely." The Assyrian town of Karemlis and

other Christian areas have been evacuated completely subsequent to the ISIS invasion of Nineveh governorate in June, 2014. Thousands of Christian families fled their hometowns and took shelter in Iraqi Kurdistan Region.



St. Barbara Assyrian church in Karemlis, Iraq was bombed by ISIS on Sunday, October 10, 2016

Related: [Church Bombings in Iraq Since 2004](#)

Related: [Timeline of ISIS in Iraq](#)

Related: [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS](#)

"The terrorist group has destroyed dozens of Assyrian churches and archeological sites in Nineveh in a bid to eliminate the historical identity of the area," Shamoun said. History Under Attack Zuheir Mousilly, a media activist based in Nineveh, told ARA News that since its control over the city of Mosul in 2014, ISIS has destroyed much of Iraqi historic sites and monuments, including the Assyrian city of Nimrud, the Winged Bulls, and the Mosul National Museum, after stealing the removable pieces for smuggling. Last April, ISIS demolished the Gate of God [Eia] which dates back to the 7th century BC, the time of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Karemlis (center) is in the Nineveh Plains north and east of Mosul, the last stronghold of Assyrians in Iraq. The expert on the Iraqi Antiquities Affairs Yasser Hatami condemned the destruction of the historic gate, blaming Iraqi authorities for the incident for their inability to protect those archeological sites. "ISIS views those sites as sacrilegious and a return to paganism," Syrian antiquities chief Abdul Maamoun Abdulkarim told ARA News in an earlier interview. Last year, ISIS extremists bombed the renowned Yezidi ancient minaret of the Shingal district (120 km west of the city of Mosul), in northern Iraq. In April 2015, the terror group blew up the church of Virgin Mary in the Assyrian village of Tel Nasri near the town of Tel Temir (50 km west of Hasakah) in northeastern Syria. Also, the radical group blew up two monuments in the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria in June, 2015, according to local sources. Around 1000 archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq have been attacked by ISIS and other Islamist groups, according to reports.

Appendix A

Attacks on Assyrians in Dora, Baghdad

Posted 2015-11-03 01:05 GMT

(AINA) -- Dora, an Assyrian neighborhood south of Baghdad, was targeted by Islamists beginning in 2004. The attacks caused nearly all of the 20,000 Assyrians who lived there to flee and never return. Only a few hundred Assyrians remain there.

- 2004-10-16 [Five Churches Targeted in Bomb Blasts Across Baghdad](#)
- 2004-11-08 [Three Killed in Church Bombing in Baghdad](#)
- 2005-09-07 [Fire Consumes Over 500 Assyrian Shops in Baghdad Suburb](#)
- 2006-10-23 [Iraqi Militias Conducting Ethnic Cleansing Campaign Against](#)

[Baghdad's Christians](#)

- 2007-03-18 [Muslims Forcing Christian Assyrians in Baghdad Neighborhood to Pay 'Protection Tax'](#)

[More on Muslims Forcing Christian Assyrians in Baghdad to Pay 'Protection Tax'](#)

- 2007-05-08 [Iraqi Christians Flee Baghdad](#)
- 2007-05-18 [The Situation of Christians in Iraq is Dire](#)
- 2007-05-18 [Told to Convert or Die, 21 Assyrian Families Seek Shelter in](#)

[Baghdad Churches](#)

- 2007-05-18 [Muslims Burn Assyrian Church in Baghdad](#)
- 2007-05-21 [Baghdad Assyrian District Emptied; Churches, Monasteries](#)

[Abandoned](#)

- 2007-06-04 [Two Assyrian Churches Looted in Baghdad](#)
- 2009-07-12 [6 Baghdad Churches Bombed](#)
- 2009-07-12 [Bombers Target Baghdad Churches -- Again](#)
- 2013-12-25 [Bombs Targeting Christians Kill 35 in Iraq](#)
- 2013-12-25 [Christmas Day Bombings Target Christians in Iraq, 38 Killed](#)
- 2013-12-26 [Video Shows Carnage of Christmas Day Bombing At Assyrian](#)

[Market in Baghdad](#)

- 2014-12-22 [Iraq Crisis: The Last Assyrians of Dora](#)

Appendix B

Attacks on Assyrians in Syria By ISIS and Other Muslim Groups

Posted 2015-02-27 03:57 GMT

The following is a list of attacks against Assyrians in Syria by ISIS and other Muslim Groups.

See also: [List of Assyrian and Other Churches Destroyed in Syria](#)

- 2017-07-23 [Assyrian Man Kidnapped, Killed in Syria](#)
- 2016-06-19 [Suicide Bomber Targets Assyrian Event in Syria, 3 Killed](#)
- 2016-05-22 [ISIS Attack Assyrian District in Syria, Five Killed](#)
- 2016-04-11 [IS Group Killed 21 Christians in Al-Qaryatain, Says Patriarch](#)
- 2016-03-28 [ISIS Release Assyrian Girl in Syria](#)
- 2016-02-22 [ISIS Release 43 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2016-01-29 [ISIS Release 22 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2016-01-24 [Twin Blasts Target Assyrian Shops in Qamishli, Syria](#)
- 2016-01-14 [ISIS Release 16 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Including 8 Children](#)
- 2015-12-30 [Assyrian Restaurants Bombed in Qamishli, Syria](#)
- 2015-12-25 [ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Mostly Women and Children](#)
- 2015-12-12 [Funeral Held for Assyrians Killed By ISIS Bombing in Syria](#)
- 2015-12-11 [Three Car Bombs Explode in Assyrian Town in Syria, 50 Killed](#)
- 2015-12-09 [ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-24 [ISIS Release 10 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-07 [ISIS Release 37 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-11-04 [Bodies of Three Assyrians Killed Fighting ISIS Recovered](#)
- 2015-10-14 [ISIS Release 50 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria](#)
- 2015-10-08 [ISIS Execute Three Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-09-16 [4 Assyrians Killed in Hasaka Car Bombing](#)
- 2015-09-04 [ISIS Release 15 Assyrians Captured in Qaryatain, Syria](#)
- 2015-08-21 [ISIS Destroys 5th Century Assyrian Monastery in Syria](#)
- 2015-08-11 [ISIS Release 22 Assyrian Hostages in Syria](#)
- 2015-08-07 [ISIS Captures 250 Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-06-18 [Video Shows Massive Destruction in Liberated Assyrian Village in Syria](#)
- 2015-06-17 [ISIS Release Assyrian Hostage in Syria](#)
- 2015-05-28 [ISIS Destroys Churches, Loots Houses in Syria](#)
- 2015-05-26 [ISIS Release Two Assyrian Hostages in Syria, All 35 Assyrian Villages Liberated](#)
- 2015-05-01 [ISIS Demands \\$23 Million for Assyrian Hostages, Vigil Held in Australia](#)
- 2015-04-29 [ISIS Bombs Assyrian, Armenian Churches in Syria](#)
- 2015-04-23 [Assyrian Military Leader Killed in Syria](#)
- 2015-04-05 [ISIS Destroys Assyrian Church in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-25 [Unconvincing ISIS Video Shows Assyrian Captive Converting to Islam](#)
- 2015-03-16 [Assyrians Demonstrate in Istanbul](#)

- 2015-03-14 [A Letter to Obama From an Assyrian American Student](#)
- 2015-03-10 [Release of 52 Assyrian Families Captured By ISIS Delayed](#)
- 2015-03-09 [Assyrians Hold Demonstrations As ISIS Continues Attacks on Assyrians](#)
- 2015-03-07 [ISIS Crosses River in New Attacks on Assyrian Villages in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-04 [Assyrian Hostage Released By ISIS: We Cannot Go Back to Our Homes](#)
- 2015-03-03 [Assyrians Demonstrate in Cities Around the World](#)
- 2015-03-03 [ISIS Releases 4 More Assyrians, Including 6 Year-old Mariana](#)
- 2015-03-01 [19 Assyrians Released By ISIS But Hundreds Remain Captured](#)
- 2015-03-01 [Assyrians Protest ISIS Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- 2015-03-01 [Conflicting Reports on Release of Some of the Assyrians Held By ISIS](#)
- 2015-02-27 [Negotiations for the Release of Assyrians Captured By ISIS Still Ongoing](#)
- 2015-02-26 [Up to 373 Assyrians Captured By ISIS, Executions Have Begun](#)
- 2015-02-26 [Assyrians Captured By ISIS Now At 150, Negotiations for Their Release in Progress](#)
- 2015-02-24 [Assyrian Hostages in Syria Are 'Safe', Says ISIS Member](#)
- 2015-02-23 [ISIS Attacks Assyrian Villages in Syria, 4 Killed, Dozens Captured, Churches Burned](#)
- 2014-05-01 [ISIS Destroys 3000 Year-old Assyrian Artifacts in Syria](#)
- 2015-01-23 [Two Assyrians Killed in Syria](#)
- 2014-10-02 [Three Assyrians Kidnapped in Syria](#)
- 2014-07-31 [Assyrians Leaving Hassakah, Syria for Fear of ISIS](#)
- 2014-06-01 [Assyrian Boy Killed By Sniper in Syria](#)
- 2013-10-30 [Al-Qa'ida Desecrates Church in Syria](#)
- 2013-09-24 [Syrian Christian Converts to Islam At Hands of Al-Qaeda](#)
- 2013-09-23 [Syrian Jihadist Rebels Murder Assyrian Man for Being Christian](#)
- 2013-08-09 [Syrian Rebels Destroy Orthodox Church in Al-Thawrah](#)
- 2013-08-04 [Syrian Rebels to Assyrians: Convert to Islam to Keep Your Jobs](#)
- 2013-07-30 [Assyrian Village in Syria Attacked By Muslims](#)
- 2013-04-22 [Syrian Bishops Kidnapped By Rebels](#)
- 2013-04-18 [Islamist Ultimatum to Syrian Christians: Convert, Leave, or Die](#)
- 2013-04-07 [500 Assyrians From Syria Flee to Turkey in Last 3 Days](#)
- 2013-04-03 [Assyrian Man Kidnapped and Killed in Syria](#)
- 2013-01-31 [Bus Attacked in Syria, Several Killed and Wounded](#)
- 2013-01-18 [25,000 Christians Besieged By Muslim Rebels in Hasaka, Syria](#)
- 2012-11-20 [Third Attack in New Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo, Scores Injured and Killed](#)
- 2012-05-12 [Jihadists Seize Christian Village in Syria, Expel Its Residents](#)

Appendix C

Timeline of ISIS in Iraq

AINA News

Posted 2014-07-29 16:57 GMT

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) captured the city of Mosul, Iraq on June 10. Almost immediately thereafter it began to drive Assyrians out of Mosul and destroy Christian and non-Sunni institutions.

- There are no Assyrians/Christians remaining in Mosul, all have fled to the north, to Alqosh, Dohuk and other Assyrian villages.
- All Christian institutions in Mosul (churches, monasteries and cemeteries), numbering 45, have been destroyed, occupied, converted to mosques, converted to ISIS headquarters or shuttered ([story](#)).
- All non-Sunni Muslim groups in Mosul -- Shabaks, Yazidis and Turkmen -- have been targeted by ISIS. Most have fled.
- Water and electricity to the Nineveh Plain have been cut off by ISIS.
- Mosul is now governed under Sharia law.
- 200,000 Assyrian have fled from Baghdade (Qaraqosh), Bartella, Karamles and dozens of Assyrian villages and towns in the Nineveh Plain north of Mosul.
- 150,000 Yazidis have fled from Sinjar and Zumar. 40,000 trapped on Shingal mountain. Thousands have died from exposure. Thousands have been killed by ISIS.

See also: [Incipient Genocide: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq](#)

See also: [Church Bombings in Iraq Since 2004](#)

See also: [Attacks on Assyrians in Dora, Baghdad](#)

The following is a summary of the events that have unfolded in North Iraq.

- October 10, 2016: ISIS bomb St. Barbara Assyrian church in Karemlis ([story](#)).
- June 17, 2016: The Assyrian Center of Learning Destroyed By ISIS in Iraq ([story](#)).
- April 26, 2016: Mosul's Iconic 'Clock Church' Destroyed By ISIS ([story](#)).
- April 12, 2016: ISIS Destroys Assyrian Archaeological Gate in Mosul ([story](#)).
- March 12, 2016: ISIS Burns Hundreds of Christian Books in Mosul ([story](#)).
- January 20, 2016: ISIS Destroys Oldest Assyrian Monastery in Iraq ([story](#)).
- December, 26, 2015: ISIS Bombs Assyrian Homes, Monastery in Iraq, Cemeteries Vandalized ([story](#)).
- May 26, 2015: ISIS Burn Assyrian Woman, 80, in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- March 19, 2015: ISIS destroys 4th-century Assyrian Catholic Monastery in Iraq ([story](#)).
- March 16, 2015: ISIS destroys St. George Monastery in Mosul ([story](#)).
- March 11, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient Assyrian city of Khorsabad ([story](#)).
- March 07, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient city of Hatra ([story](#)).
- March 06, 2015: ISIS destroys ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud ([story](#)).
- February 26, 2015: ISIS destroys Assyrian artifacts in the Museum of Mosul ([story](#)).

- February 24, 2015: ISIS burns 8000 rare books and manuscripts in Mosul ([story](#)).
- February 20, 2015: ISIS burns musical instruments, calling drums 'un-Islamic' ([story](#)).
- January 28, 2015: ISIS destroys the walls of ancient Nineveh ([story](#)).
- September 30, 2014: ISIS selling Iraq's artifacts in black market ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: ISIS erases Assyrian culture, Christian teachings from schools ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: Kurdish Peshmerga kill top ISIS military commander ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: Kurds retake Christian villages from ISIS ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: Iraq forces, Peshmerga inflict heavy losses on ISIS ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: U.S. airstrikes against ISIS ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: 75% of Assyrians return to their town in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: ISIS orders all Christian, Shiite business assets to be delivered to the Islamic State ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: ISIS using Christian homes in Mosul as factories for explosive devices ([story](#)).
- September 16, 2014: ISIS using Yazidis as human shields Against U.S. airstrikes ([story](#)).
- September 15, 2014: Assyrian delegate calls for safe haven, UN protection for Assyrians and other minorities in Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 15, 2014: 12 Assyrians who were held by ISIS escape by faking conversion ([story](#)).
- September 15, 2014: Yazidi member of Iraq's Parliament calls for arming Yazidis and Assyrians ([story](#)).
- September 15, 2014: ISIS issues new curriculum in Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 14, 2014: Some Assyrians who fled their town say they wish to leave Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 14, 2014: Tens of thousands of Assyrian and Yazidi children at risk in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 13, 2014: Assyrian Bishop testifies on ISIS threat at Senate Human Rights Caucus ([story](#)).
- September 11, 2014: Five Christian Patriarchs meet with President Obama at the White House ([story](#)).
- September 11, 2014: US House Hearing focuses on Christian persecution in Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 10, 2014: Defense of Christians Summit, dedicated to aiding the Christians in north Iraq, was held in Washington ([story](#)).
- September 8, 2014: U.S. air strikes wipe out Islamic State patrol ([story](#)).
- September 8, 2014: Kurds pushing ISIS back ([story](#)).
- September 8, 2014: ISIS forbids the use of Kurdish language in Mosul ([story](#)).
- September 8, 2014: U.S. launches new airstrikes in Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 8, 2014: ISIS takes hostage 100 children in Iraq's Nineveh Province ([story](#)).
- September 6, 2014: ISIS beats, kills Assyrian man for refusing to convert ([story](#)).

- September 6, 2014: ISIS detaining large number of residents in Mosul; looting of homes continues; ISIS holding Yazidi women; 25 Christians held by ISIS; Hundreds of Yazidi families held by ISIS; ISIS forcing Yazidi girls to marry its fighters ([story](#)).
- September 5, 2014: ISIS sexually assaults new recruits ([story](#)).
- September 4, 2014: Mass executions by ISIS ([story](#)).
- September 3, 2014: ISIS exuections in Tikrit, Iraq ([story](#)).
- September 1, 2014: Thousands of Refugees Apply for New Passports in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 31, 2014: Iraq breaks Islamic State siege of Amerli ([story](#)).
- August 30, 2014: 850,000 people displaced in 1 Month by ISIS ([story](#)).
- August 30, 2014: Iraq Sunni rebels ready to fight Islamic State ([story](#)).
- August 29, 2014: ISIS Forced Elderly Assyrian Couple to March Out of Baghdede ([story](#)).
- August 29, 2014: ISIS beheads Kurdish fighter ([story](#)).
- August 29, 2014: Kurdish fighters recapture 7 villages in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 27, 2014: Syriac Patriarch calls Islamic State actions 'attempted genocide' ([story](#)).
- August 27, 2014: Iraqi Christians weigh taking up arms against the Islamic State ([story](#)).
- August 26, 2014: UN Commission urges UN peacekeeping force for Nineveh Plain in North Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 25, 2014: U.N. human rights chief condemns Islamic State crimes in Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 25, 2014: Kurds advance on ISIS in Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 25, 2014: ISIS abduct 3 year-old Assyrian girl from fleeing family; 3 starve to death ([story](#)).
- August 22, 2014: Iraq voids real estate sales in ISIS controlled areas ([story](#)).
- August 21, 2014: ISIS loots Assyrian homes, vandalizes churches in Mosul ([story](#)).
- August 20, 2014: Helicopters drop leaflets over Mosul urging residents to fight ISIS ([story](#)).
- August 20, 2014: Five Middle Eastern Patriarchs visit North Iraq in Solidarity with Christians ([story](#)).
- August 20, 2014: Pictures show aftermath of ISIS looting, plundering Assyrian town ([story](#)).
- August 20, 2014: ISIS halt Iraqi offensive to recapture Saddam's home town ([story](#)).
- August 19, 2014: UN launches new aid effort in north Iraq; Mosul dam recaptured ([story](#)).
- August 18, 2014: ISIS forcefully circumcises Assyrian Christian men in Mosul, sells 700 Yazidi women ([story](#)).
- August 18, 2014: ISIS kills more than 200 Yazidi men in the village of Kojo ([story](#)).
- August 17, 2014: Kurdish militants train hundreds of Yazidis to fight ISIS ([story](#)).
- August 17, 2014: Kurdish forces capture Telsqof, advance towards Mosul Dam ([story](#)).

- August 14, 2014: ISIS orders all former Assyrian church guards to surrender their weapons ([story](#)).
- August 13, 2014: ISIS forces child patients at the cancer hospital in Mosul to hold ISIS flags and then photographed them for propaganda purposes. ISIS completely loots and plunders all homes in the the Assyrian Christian towns of Telsqof and Bashiqa. 100,000 Yazidi refugees are now in the town of Khanak without food, water or shelter ([story](#)).
- August 11, 2014: ISIS orders all families in Mosul to obtain approval before burying their dead. ISIS provides gasoline to Assyrians in Nineveh Plain to facilitate their departure. ISIS continues kidnapping women, with female ISIS members helping ([story](#)). Iraqi general says 70% of Yazidis on Mount Sinjar are dead ([story](#)).
- August 10, 2014: Assyrian Refugees From Nineveh Plain in Desperate Need ([story](#)).
- August 9, 2014: ISIS forces all women in Mosul to wear the veil, including the full head cover. ISIS establishes black markets for goods to raise funds. ([story](#)).
- August 8, 2014: Iraqi Parliament passes resolution accusing ISIS of genocide ([story](#)).
- August 8, 2014: ISIS captures Baghdede Bartella and Karamlis and moves north into the Nineveh Plain, causing 200,000 Assyrians to flee their towns and villages ([story](#)).
- August 7, 2014: Assyrian Patriarch Pleads to the United Nations on Crisis in Iraq ([story](#)).
- August 6, 2014: Kurds and ISIS clash outside Baghdede; ISIS begins using Yazidis as human shields; All the Assyrians from the villages of Bartella, Bashiqa, Bahzany, Tel Kepe, Batnaya and Telsqof flee ([story](#)).
- August 5, 2014: ISIS shells assyrian town, 1 killed; Yazidis in desperate state ([story](#)).
- August 4, 2014: Leader of Iraq's Yazidis issues distress call, appeals for help against ISIS ([story](#)).
- August 4, 2014: Assyrians flee as ISIS approaches Assyrian villages in the Nineveh Plain ([story](#)).
- August 2, 2014: ISIS Captures Yazidi towns, kills 2,000 Yazidis, causes 200,000 to flee ([story](#)).
- August 2, 2014: ISIS loots 8 million dollars from Assyrian farms ([story](#)).
- July 29, 2014: ISIS destroys or occupies all 45 Christian institutions in Mosul ([story](#)).
- July 25, 2014: ISIS destroys the tomb of the Prophet Jonah ([story](#)).
- July 22, 2014: ISIS and Kurds clash near Assyrian town, 2000 Assyrian families driven from Mosul ([story](#)).
- July 19, 2014: ISIS plunders Assyrians as they Flee Mosul; families march 42 miles ([story](#)).
- July 18, 2014: ISIS in Mosul marks Christian homes with the Arabic letter "N" (for the word Nasrani, which means Christian) ([story](#)).
- July 17, 2014: ISIS issues statement ordering Christians to convert or die ([story](#)).
- July 15, 2014: ISIS Stops Rations for Christians and Shiites in Mosul ([story](#)).
- July 10, 2014: ISIS bars women from walking the streets unless accompanied by a male. Nearly all barber shops and womens' salons are closed ([story](#)).
- July 8, 2014: ISIS Removes Cross From Church in Mosul ([story](#)).

- July 3, 2014: ISIS seizes the house of the Chaldean Patriarchate and the house of Dr. Tobia, a member of Hammurabi Human Rights Organization and an Advisor to the Governor of Nineveh on Minority Affairs and General Coordinator with International Organizations ([story](#)).
- June 28, 2014: ISIS kidnaps two nuns and three Assyrian orphans. They are eventually released ([story](#)).
- ISIS begins confiscating the homes of Christians and non-Sunni Muslims. ISIS rounds up many of the security agency members of the police and army in Sabrine Mosque and asks them to declare "repentance" and surrender their weapons and other military equipment. After doing so, all of the prisoners are tried and sentenced according to Sharia law and executed. ISIS has prevented delivery of government food rations to Tel Kepe and other areas not under their control ([story](#)).
- June 26, 2014: Kurds Clash With ISIS Near Assyrian Town East of Mosul, forcing nearly 50,000 Assyrians to flee ([story](#)).
- June 25, 2014: ISIS limits water from the plants in Mosul to one hour per day. Residents in surrounding areas are forced to dig wells ([story](#)).
- June 23, 2014: ISIS Rape Christian Mother and Daughter, Kill 4 Christian Women for Not Wearing Veil ([story](#)).
- June 21, 2014: ISIS begins imposing a poll tax (jizya) on Assyrians in Mosul ([story](#)), orders unmarried women to 'Jihad by sex' ([story](#)), destroys the statue of the Virgin Mary at the Immaculate Church of the Highest in the neighborhood of AlShafa in Mosul, as well as the statue of Mullah Osman Al-Musali. Shiite Turkmen in the villages of AlKibba and Shraikhan flee after receiving threats from ISIS. ISIS arrests 25 village elders and young men who are Turkmen in the village of AlShamsiyat; their whereabouts is still unknown. ([story](#)) ISIS orders Christian, Yazidis and Shiite government employees not to report for work in Mosul ([story](#)).
- June 19, 2014: ISIS destroys statue of the famous Arab poet Abu Tammam ([story](#)).
- June 18, 2014: ISIS Cuts Off Water, Electricity, Destroys Churches ([story](#)).
- June 15, 2014: Kurds attempt to remove an Assyrian council leader in Alqosh and replace him with a Kurd ([story](#)).
- June 14, 2014: Assyrian, Yezidi and Shabak Villages come under Kurdish Control ([story](#)).
- June 12, 2014: ISIS issues Islamic rules for Mosul ([story](#)).
- June 10, 2014: ISIS captures Mosul, occupies the Assyrian village of Qaraqosh, enters the St. Behnam Monastery ([story](#)).

Appendix D: Related Articles

Pictures of The Massacre At Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church

Posted 2010-11-29 04:17 GMT

(AINA) -- 58 Catholic Assyrians were killed by Islamic State of Iraq, affiliated with Al-Qaeda, on October 31, inside Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad. Here are some pictures.



The victims of the massacre.



Assyrians inspect the damage at Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



Assyrians hold on November 14, 2010 in Stockholm pictures of some of the 53 people who were killed in the October 31 Baghdad church massacre victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Jonathan Hackstrand/AP/Getty Images)



An Assyrian priest leads the Sunday mass at Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church in central Baghdad on November 14, 2010, two weeks after more than 50 fellow worshippers were killed by Al-Qaeda gunmen during prayers victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Sabah Arari/AFP/Getty Images)



Iraqi Assyrian Catholic Sister Basma speaks to refugee children during a Catechism lesson at a Christian school on the outskirts of Beirut. The school has 400 Iraqi Assyrian refugee children victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Joseph Eid/AFP/Getty Images)



Assyrian children lean against the wall of Baghdad's Anglican Church on September 29 (Sabah Arari/AFP/Getty Images)



khkawa.com



Assyrian women mourn outside a church in Baghdad during a funeral service on November 2, 2010 for the victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



Assyrians hold pictures of their killed love ones at St Joseph Chaldean Church in Baghdad during a memorial service for the victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



A blood-stained stole is seen amid books at the priest's room of the Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad after the October 31 church attack victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



An Iraqi woman walks past a member of the Iraqi special forces standing guard outside the Virgin Mary church in Baghdad on November 7, 2010 victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



Assyrians light candles in the shape of a cross next to the names of the church massacre victims during a Sunday mass at the Syriac Catholic church victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



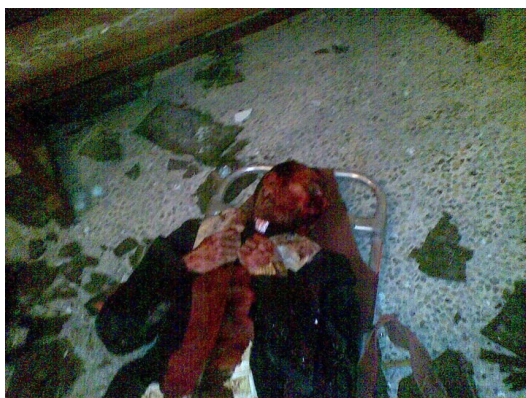
Assyrian woman pray at the Syriac Catholic Church victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)



Zoltani Youkhana (center) breaks into tears during a demonstration calling on the American and Iraqi governments to protect Iraqi Assyrians during a rally on November 8, 2010 in Chicago victims of the October 31 Baghdad church massacre (Scott Olson/AFP/Getty Images)



A shrine to Assyrians killed in the Baghdad church massacre at Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad (Ali Al-Saadi/AFP/Getty Images).







Opinion Editorial

Jonah, the Whale, the Assyrians, Christianity and Islam

By Ashur Shirsha

Posted 2010-11-29 04:21 GMT

(AINA) -- The story is familiar to readers of the Bible. God instructs Jonah to go preach to the people of Nineveh, capital of Assyria. Jonah refuses and boards a ship bound for Tarshish. But it is very hard to run away or hide from God. God sends a great storm and Jonah is cast overboard, where he is swallowed by a whale and delivered three days later to Nineveh. There he preaches, and his message is accepted. The Assyrians repent.

That was in the 7th century BC.

In the 6th century AD a great plague hits the Assyrians in north Mesopotamia (present day north Iraq). Assyrians are Christians at this time, and have been so since 33 AD, when Thomas converted them only four months after the Crucifixion. Assyrians were the first converts to Christianity outside of the Apostles and Disciples.

Prayers are offered to God to help with the plague. The Assyrian church, recalling Jonah's visit to Assyria almost exactly 1000 years earlier, asks Assyrians to hold a fast for salvation, and the Assyrians do, and the plague subsides. Thus began Jonah's fast.

The Rogation of the Ninevites, as it is known, is observed by all Assyrian church denominations as well as most other Eastern churches (Maronite, Ethiopian, Coptic, Eritrean). It is a three day fast, from February 14 to 16, where no food or drink is consumed. In Assyrian tradition, on the third night, just before going to sleep, young men and woman eat a handful of parched barley and salt (called *pokhoon*). If the man or woman dreams of a person offering them water that will be the person they may possibly marry.

In the 21st century a different kind of plague has hit the Assyrians: genocide -- a relentless campaign to exterminate the Assyrians ([report](#)), and all other Christians, from the Middle East. It has recently begun again in Iraq with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, but it has been ongoing since the advent of Islam in 630 AD.

Thirty genocides, large and small, have been committed against Assyrians by Muslims since 630 AD (see [here](#)). The [Turkish genocide of Assyrians](#), Armenians and Greeks in World War One claimed the lives of 750,000 Assyrians (75%), as well as 1.5 million Armenians and 500,000 Greeks.

We can calculate the average time between genocides committed against Assyrians in the interval 661 AD to 1992 AD, and that is $(1992-661)/30=45$ years. Every 45 years on average there has been genocide against Assyrians by Muslims. It is even worse in the modern period. From 1842 to 1992 there were 13 genocides; the average interval for that period is $(1992-1842)/13=11.5$ years.

What should Christians do about this continuing holocaust? How should the Christian world address the immediate problem of Assyrians in Iraq today?



58 Catholic Assyrians were massacred On October 31 in Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic church in Baghdad. This was the latest incident. A genocide has been ongoing in Iraq since June 26, 2004, when the first church was bombed. 66 churches have [been bombed](#) since then, and thousands of Assyrians killed. Nearly 50% of Assyrians have fled to Syria and Jordan ([report](#)).

Click [here](#) for pictures from inside Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Church. **WARNING: violent, graphic images.**

The mood of the Assyrians in Iraq is now of flight. If they could, Assyrians would leave Iraq today *en masse*. Should this be allowed to happen? Should the oldest Christian community be allowed to disappear from its cradle? Should Assyrians, who have lived continuously in their ancestral lands since 4750 BC, be allowed to leave to perhaps never return again?

The Assyrians accepted the word of God, as delivered by Jonah, 700 years before the coming of Christ. Assyrians were the first to accept Christ. Jonah's message was of repentance and it was heeded. Christ's message was of love and it was heeded. The Assyrian church endeavored in the most remarkable [missionary enterprise](#) in Christian history, reaching to [China](#), Mongolia, Korea, Japan and the Philippines. The [Mongolian alphabet](#) is based on Aramaic. The Buddhist ecclesiastical structure is modeled on the Assyrian Church of the East. "Torah Borah" is Aramaic for "arid mountain."

The Assyrians accepted Jonah and his message from God, and for this God made them "the work of my hands" [Isaiah 19:23-25] and the "rod of my anger" [Isaiah 10:5]. He also assigned to them a task to be completed upon the Second Advent: *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* [Matthew 12:41]

Christendom must stand united in defense of Christians, and in particular the Assyrians of Iraq. Let it begin with a simple gesture: let all Christian churches observe the Rogation of the Ninevites this year, in solidarity with their Christian brethren, the Assyrians of Iraq, who are on the frontline of the clash of Islam with Christianity.

When the Muslims entered Our Lady of Deliverance church in Baghdad on October 31, they shot at the Cross until it disintegrated; they immediately shot Father Tha'ir; one of them approached Father Wasim, standing behind the pulpit, and in response to Father Wasim's request that he join him in prayer he detonated his suicide belt, killing Father Wasim and many others; they shot the parishioners while taunting them that they will go to hell as infidels; they shouted "Alahu akbar!" as they detonated their suicide belts; they demanded the release of two Christian women in Egypt whom they mistakenly believed to have converted to Islam and who were being held against their will by Egyptian Christians. The Muslims who committed the massacre were thinking purely in religious terms. They acted in defense of Islam and (in their minds) of two persecuted Muslim women in another country.

It is time for Christians to unite and come to the defense of Assyrians and Christendom, and to stop the Islamic onslaught.

Ashur Shirsha, an Assyrian from Iraq, is a contributing columnist to AINA.

Views and opinions expressed in guest editorials do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of AINA.

[Guest Editorial Policy](#)

August 27, 2014: Iraqi Christians weigh taking up arms against the Islamic State

Syndicated News

By Rania Abouzeid

National Geographic

Posted 2014-08-27 20:15 GMT



After an Islamic State (IS) advance into Kurdish-controlled territory, some 500 Christian families in Erbil took shelter at the Mar Tshmony church, where a mother gives her son a reassuring kiss (photo: Vianney La Caer, Lightrocket Via Getty Images).

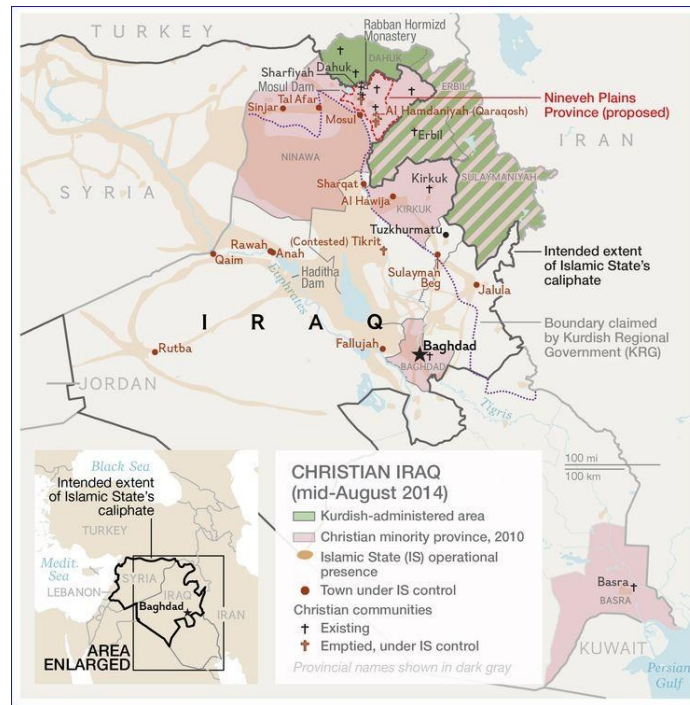
Dohuk, Iraq -- Of all the many ancient peoples who once lived in the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates, Iraq's Assyrian Christians pride themselves on having persisted in their traditional homeland for millennia, even as other civilizations thrived then disappeared, as languages and cultures died out, as ethnic groups melted into the ways and genetic pools of their conquerors. But today Iraq's Assyrians, and its Christians in general, fear that their place in this multiethnic, multisectarian mosaic society is shrinking, under severe threat from the ultraconservative Islamist group the Islamic State (IS). It isn't the first time that Iraq's Christians have faced such a foe. The IS's earlier incarnation, al Qaeda in Iraq--a group that formed after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003--also menaced Christians, and others, prompting tens of thousands to flee into exile. Now, the particularly harsh nature of the IS's assault on Christians, Yazidis, Shiite Muslims, and others who do not share allegiance to the IS's brand of ultraconservative Sunni Islam has led some of Iraq's Christians to take the unusual step of shedding their historical passivity and consider taking up arms to defend and eventually govern themselves. The Assyrian Patriotic Party, one of several Assyrian political organizations, has armed and dispatched a symbolic, rather than an active, force of some 40 members to join the Kurdish Peshmerga fighting the IS in the northwest of Iraq, according to party official Henry Sarkis. The Peshmerga are the official forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government. It is the first such action by Iraqi Christians since some Christians fought briefly alongside the Kurds against Saddam Hussein. Sarkis, 44, is the newly appointed branch chief of the party's office in Dohuk, a northern governorate in the semiautonomous Kurdish region that borders Syria and Turkey. The 40 men constitute what Sarkis calls the "first wave," and the unit has adopted the name Dukha, an Assyrian word that means "sacrifice."



Carved into a mountainside, the seventh-century Rabban Hormizd monastery overlooks the Nineveh Plains

Christians have lived in the area continuously since the first century, but in the past decade more than two-thirds of Iraq's estimated 1.5 million have fled (photo: J.B. Russell, Panos). "We keep talking about Jesus and peace, and now we've reached the point where it's not enough," he said in an interview at his party's headquarters in Dohuk. "The age of waiting for the Peshmerga to take back territory while we sit is over. We took the decision that, with our limited abilities, we will try to participate." The party bought weapons with money donated by members in the diaspora, Sarkis said, and is looking to raise more funds through donations to increase its stockpile. Sarkis's men are mainly behind the front line, around the town of Sharfiyah, not so much fighting alongside the Peshmerga as holding territory the Kurdish forces have gained or are pushing forward from. A Perilous Shift Still, it marks a significant shift in the attitude of Iraq's Christians, a shift that's fraught with peril. Since 2003, Iraq's Christian community has been viewed by other Iraqis as a passive victim of the country's many conflicts, not an active aggressor. Taking up arms will make the Christians direct participants, armed targets who pose military rather than just ideological opposition to ultraconservative Islamist groups. Sarkis acknowledges this but said his party is prepared to accept the consequences. "We're being killed in our homes, so why not defend ourselves? Then even if we die, we die with dignity," he said. "We didn't want to reach this point--we just want to live in our areas." Before 2003, Iraq held about 1.5 million Christians. The number today is fewer than 500,000, say community leaders, the majority having been driven out by war and all the trouble it inflicts and breeds, including corruption and insecurity.

According to the CIA's World Factbook, Shiites now make up 60 to 65 percent of Iraq's population, Sunnis 32 to 37 percent, and Christians just 0.8 percent. Most remaining Christians live on the Nineveh Plains, an area that is also home to other ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq, including the Yazidis and the Turkomans. Fall of Mosul On June 10, Mosul, the capital of the Nineveh governorate, in northern Iraq, fell to IS-led militants in a blitzkrieg advance. The IS was ruthless with its enemies, uploading videos of mass executions of soldiers and security forces they'd captured. The Iraqi Army melted away, rather than try to repel the incursion. Weeks later, the Kurdish Peshmerga also retreated from some areas in the face of an IS-led onslaught.



**Juan Jose Valdws, Daniela Santamarina, Ng Staff. Source:
Institute For The Study Of Wars; Atlas Of Global Christianity 1910-2010,
Center For The Study Of Christianity, 2009.**

Kurdish troops are now fighting, with the aid of limited U.S. air strikes, to regain territory. The IS gave Mosul's estimated 8,000 to 10,000 Christians three options: convert to Islam, pay a tax, or die. Instead they fled en masse to villages on the Nineveh Plains, as well as farther north into the Kurdish heartland. As few as 40 Christians remain in Mosul, according to Duraid Tobiya, 53, an Assyrian from the city and an adviser on minority affairs to the governor of Nineveh. He said that the few who stayed were too sick, too old, or too poor to leave--so much so that the IS exempted them from paying the jizya, a tax on non-Muslims. "I'm from Mosul--this is the first time I've been displaced," Tobiya said. "I lived through everything else that happened in Mosul, but it's all very different from what's happening now." This time, he said, he had no faith in either the Iraqi Army or the Kurdish Peshmerga to protect Christians and other minorities, such as the Yazidis and Turkomans, against a much more dangerous foe, because both forces initially abrogated their duties. Iraq's Christians, like all of the country's sectarian communities, do not speak with one voice. There are numerous political parties with varying platforms. The solution as Tobiya saw it, was one of two options: "either mass emigration or an internationally protected safe zone. We have no other options. We are against emigration, because we are not only the sons of this country but its original inhabitants." All dozen or so Christians interviewed by National Geographic adamantly shared the demand for a safe zone, akin to the two no-fly zones the West established in 1992 to protect Kurds in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south from the forces of former leader Saddam Hussein. But 1992 was a long time ago in terms of Western resources and commitment to the region--especially at a time when President Barack Obama's administration is trying to pivot away from the troubles of the Middle East. Still, Tobiya and others insisted it's a viable option. "We must protect ourselves--and also have international protection," he said.



**Refused entry to the humanitarian aid center in Al Hamdaniyah (Qaraqosh),
A Christian refugee expresses his frustration to a Peshmerga soldier.
(photo: Vianney Le Caer, Pacific Press/Lightrocket Via Getty).**

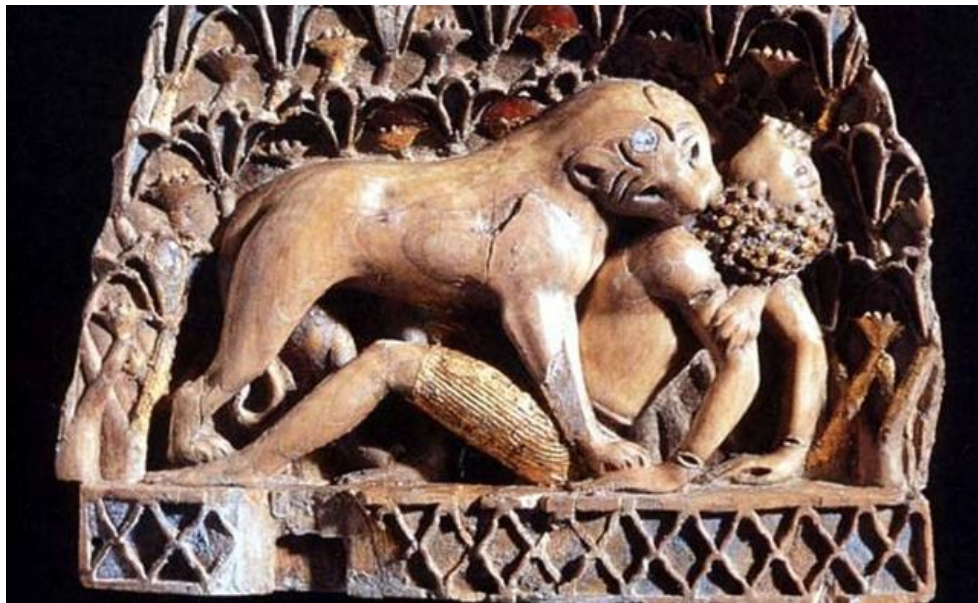
Long-term Plans In another part of Dohuk, behind the high concrete walls of the Assyrian Democratic Movement's headquarters, the local branch leader, Farid Yacoub, 42, says his party too is moving to arm its men. It is registering volunteers, having gathered more than 2,000 names from the Dohuk governorate alone. But unlike Assyrian Patriotic Party leaders, Yacoub is recruiting men to protect Christian areas after they've been won back from the IS and its allies. The intention is not to participate in the battle to reclaim those areas. "We have lots who are volunteering, who want to fight, but we don't have the means to arm them," he said. The party doesn't want Christian villages such as Al Hamdaniyah (Qaraqosh) to be controlled or protected by the Peshmerga after they've been reclaimed. "Our people don't trust them any more," Yacoub said. There's a bigger issue here. Nineveh has long been caught in a conflict between the central government in Baghdad and the semiautonomous Kurdish region in the north. Some Christians on the Nineveh Plains have pushed to govern themselves, but Kurdistan also has claims on their territory and wants to absorb it into its zone. Earlier this year, long before the country descended into the current level of mayhem and fragmentation, Baghdad "agreed in principle" to turn the Nineveh Plains, as well as two other areas, Fallujah and Tuzkhurmatu, into provinces. This would enable the Christians to manage their own affairs and secure an independent share of the national budget. The Assyrian Democratic Movement doesn't want the Nineveh Plains to be part of Kurdistan, but Sarkis said his Assyrian Patriotic Party does. Sarkis's men are working with the Peshmerga, independent of the national government's recent call for volunteers to fight the IS. "Let's be honest," he said. "When the [Shiite-led] government asked for volunteers, it's because the war is sectarian, between Shiites and Sunnis. They didn't volunteer to protect Christians. They did so to fight Sunnis." Yacoub, on the other hand, is not working with the Peshmerga and said his men are waiting for the central government to train and arm them, though with the proviso that they return to their areas. "Our men said they were worried because they didn't want to defend areas other than theirs. We want to defend areas where our people are, specifically the Nineveh Plains," Yacoub said. "We're nationalists, but the circumstances that Iraq is living through now necessitate that we have a safe place, a place for us." Turning to Lebanon's Christians Of all the dwindling Christian communities in the Middle East in recent times, only the Lebanese have picked up arms during civil turmoil. Lebanese Christians battled not only

Muslims but also each other during their country's brutal 15-year civil war, which ended in 1990. Duraid Tobiya, the adviser to the Nineveh governor, is also a member of Yacoub's Assyrian Democratic Movement. He said that since the fall of Mosul, his party had received a delegation from the Lebanese Forces, a militia turned political party, and had also sent representatives to Lebanon twice to meet with the party. He didn't elaborate about the nature of the meetings, saying only that "we want to benefit from their experience. We explained our situation, and they explained their experience in Lebanon." He added, "We might proceed with some things, apply them on the ground." Antoinette Geagea, a spokesperson for the Lebanese Forces in Beirut, confirmed the meetings. She said they were part of a series her party had undertaken with Christian spiritual and political leaders from Nineveh and Kurdistan, as well as Kurdish parties, in the wake of the fall of Mosul. "There are many different views among Iraq's Christians," she said. "The Lebanese Forces told them that they must unite. We told them that if you all agree on a position, we will stand with you and help you." That help could be political, in the form of lobbying international and regional players, or humanitarian. Or "if they want to protect themselves, we will put our experience at their disposal," Geagea said. "We told them they must decide on the best solution to help Christians stay in their country." "We're Still Here" Yaqoob Yaqo, one of the Assyrian Democratic Movement's members of parliament in Kurdistan, said that more than a hundred thousand Christians fled in the wake of the IS advances into their areas. "The problem is that even if [the IS] withdraws, a hundred thousand won't return." He rattled off a long list of massacres and episodes of persecution directed against his people, but despite that litany, he wasn't downbeat. "We're still here," he said, adding that his community has lived in these lands for 6,700 years, persisting after the fall of the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C. and practicing as Christians for the past 2,000 years. "I feel strong when I think about our history, that all of these great powers couldn't uproot us from here," he said. "We're still here, but we want our own security."

All Things Assyrian
The Nimrud Ivories
By Ray Moseley
<http://english.alarabiya.net>
Posted 2011-06-07 17:01 GMT

Almost 3,000 years ago, the rulers and wealthy elite of the powerful Assyrian empire adorned their chairs, stools and other furniture--even their chariots along with horses' halters and blinkers--with exquisitely decorated pieces of elephant ivory produced mostly by expert Levantine craftsmen.

With the collapse of the empire in 612 BC, and the sacking and burning of royal palaces by conquering Babylonians and Medes, the ivory disappeared under the rubble--not to be seen again until archaeologists began excavating it in the mid-19th century.



The British Museum in London has recently saved for the nation a horde of the so-called Nimrud ivories--1,000 intact pieces, 5,000 fragments--after a public fund-raising campaign that netted £1.17 million. That was about a third of the value of the ivories, and another third of the collection was donated by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq. The remaining third is expected to be returned to Iraq.

The Nimrud ivories, named for the Assyrian capital where they were found in modern Iraq, are regarded by the museum as probably the most important British archeological find in the Middle East.

"Every aspect of the decoration of the ivories reveals just wonderful craftsmanship," Nigel Tallis, the museum's Middle East curator, told about 300 museum members in a lecture. "Even now a full analysis of the significance of the collection has barely begun. Its acquisition by the museum is a cause for celebration."

The first group of ivories, dating from the 9th and 8th centuries BC, was excavated by the archaeologist Austin Henry Layard in 1845 at Nimrud, just south of Mosul on the Tigris River.

They came from the ruins of the palace of Shalmaneser III, who ruled from 859 to 824 B.C., and more came to light a few years later.

But it was not until 1949-63 that the next discoveries were made by a team led by the celebrated archeologist Max Mallowan, second husband of the crime novelist Agatha Christie. Many of the ivories had been thrown into wells after having been stripped of colored glass, semi-precious stones and gold leaf that adorned them. A few of the ivories retain fragments of glass inlays.

Christie herself went on the expedition and helped photograph and preserve many of the ivories. In her autobiography, she wrote that she cleaned them using a fine knitting needle, an orange stick and a pot of face cream. Mallowan also credited her with coming up with the idea of placing newly excavated pieces under damp towels to prevent cracking.

"Oh what a beautiful spot it was," the novelist wrote. "The Tigris just a mile away, and on the great mound of the Acropolis, big stone Assyrian heads poked out of the soil. In one place there was the enormous wing of a great genie."

It was this aspect of the story--a woman writing novels in the morning and helping recover buried treasure in the afternoon--that caught the imagination of the British public and probably accounted in part for the enthusiastic response to the museum's fund appeal.

Tallis is particularly intrigued by the craftsmanship that went into incising and decorating some tiny pieces of ivory, no more than 1.5 or 2 centimeters (0.6 or 0.8 of an inch) high. The craftsmen, he said, must have been very young and probably were unable to go on working after their eyesight became damaged by the delicate task of incising such minute pieces.

The ivories depict bulls, lions, griffins, wild goats, serpents, fighting heroes, flowers and geometric designs. A few were decorated in Assyria, but most came from the Levant and are believed to have been brought to Nimrud as war booty or imported as luxury goods. There is also an Egyptian influence in some of the pieces, for example those representing the sphinx and those using imitation hieroglyphs that have no apparent meaning.

The ivory came from Syrian elephants, endemic in the Middle East in ancient times, but by the 8th century BC they had been hunted to extinction and later ivory may have been imported from India.

The collection was long ago divided between Iraq and Britain, and those that were assigned to Britain were put in storage at the British Museum but not displayed. Many of the ivories at the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad were looted or damaged after the American-led invasion in 2003, when US troops failed to secure the museum's contents. Some were also stored in a Baghdad bank vault but were damaged by water when the building was shelled.

Tallis said it is highly likely that there are more ivories buried in the Iraqi soil and awaiting discovery.

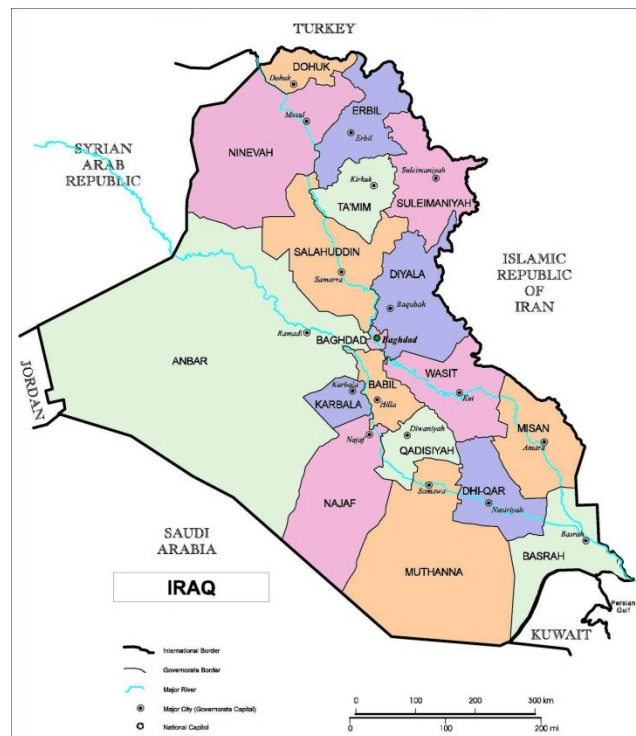
The British Museum has recently put some of its collection on permanent display and intends to make others available for traveling exhibitions.

AINA Editorial

Will a Province for Assyrians Stop Their Exodus From Iraq?

By Peter BetBasoo and Nuri Kino

Posted 2014-01-22 18:38 GMT



(AINA) -- On January 21 the Iraq Council of Ministers approved a plan to establish three new provinces in Iraq. One province would be in Fallujah, in central Iraq; a second would be in north Iraq, in Tuz Khormato; the third would also be in north Iraq, in the Nineveh Plain bordering the Kurdish areas. The Nineveh Plain has the largest population of Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) in Iraq.

Sargon Slewa, the Minister of Environment and a member of the Iraqi Parliament and of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, one of the largest political parties that represents Assyrians and other Christians in Iraq, requested the establishment of a province in the Nineveh Plain, pursuant to a study of the needs of Christians, as outlined in Iraqi Cabinet meeting 54 in 2011.

The Council of Ministers instructed the State Minister for Provincial Affairs to prepare a study of these projects and submit a report to the Council.

AINA asked internationally renowned journalist and Middle Eastern Expert Nuri Kino to interview Sargon Slewa regarding this important development for Iraq's beleaguered and besieged Assyrian Community.

Nuri Kino: What have you accomplished with this legislation?

Sargon Slewa: One of the main goals and reason for Assyrians to stay in Iraq is to have self administration. This legislation lays the foundation for achieving that goal.

Nuri Kino: Can you tell us where in the process you are?

Sargon Slewa: Recognizing the Nineveh Plain as province by the by the Council of Ministers.

Nuri Kino: How many percent of the inhabitants of the plains are Assyrians-Syriac-Chaldeans?

Sargon Slewa: Almost 40 percent. But still it depends on the borders of the province and which districts will be included.

Nuri Kino: Practically speaking, what does that mean? Will the Nineveh Plain have its own police force? Its own government? Its own budget?

Sargon Slewa: The Ministry of Provincial Affairs will conduct studies and make preparations establish this province, which would have whatever is needed in security, economy and government.

Nuri Kino: What role will the Assyrians play? On what level was the decision made? The Iraqi government? The Parliament? Will there be a voting?

Sargon Slewa: This decision was taken at the governmental level. There are special considerations for the Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs. This decision was taken to insure the continued existence of our community in the region. There is much work to be done, but this was the main step and the most difficult hurdle.

Nuri Kino: What does this mean for countries dealing with Iraq?



Sargon Slewa

Sargon Slewa: The international community must pay good attention to this issue, and in light of announcements to receive Christians refugees in Western countries.

Nuri Kino: Tell me about your feelings. What are you feeling and thinking right now?

Sargon Slewa: It is one of the greatest moments of my life. I feel like I want to sleep, like when you have finished an exhausting and satisfying task and you are tired and need a nap.

Reactions From the Assyrian Diaspora

Assyrians outside of Iraq greeted this news with cautious optimism.

Afram Barryakoub, the president of the [Assyrian Federation of Sweden](#), said:

If implemented this could change the reality on the ground for Assyrians and put them in a position to have a say on their future in Iraq, hopefully reversing the emigration to the West.

Attiya Gamri, an Assyrian member of the Provincial Parliament in North Holland, said:

I am very glad the Iraqi Parliament decided this. The Arab and Kurdish political parties will get the chance to show the world they can realize an Iraq with different ethnicities and different religions. In no any other country in the Middle East is this realized; they have the opportunity to show the Assyrians in Iraq and in the Diaspora that they want and will respect national minorities by giving them the same rights as they have. The Arabs and Kurds can show the world that this can be achieved in the Middle East. I hope this will be the first step toward respect politically for the Assyrians in Iraq. What the Assyrians are asking is not something new or different from what the Kurds and Arabs already have.

Dr. Matay Arsan, president of the [Assyria Foundation Netherlands](#), said:

The rest of Iraq should not fear to allow the Christian Assyrians to have a self-administrative region in the Nineveh Plains. They contributed to Iraq's great history and legacy enormously and this could give them the opportunity to do that again. The Iraqi Arabs and Kurds should realize that allowing the Assyrians to protect themselves and receive a part of Iraq's budget would only prove that they, Kurds and Arabs, care for Iraq and its stability.

Robert DeKelaita, executive member of the [Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America](#), said:

We congratulate our people on this first step toward a practical solution for our people and their most difficult plight over the last 10 years in the form of the recognition of the Nineveh Plain province. We thank all of those who participated, whether publicly or privately, in making this dream come true. It is a very first step to be sure. But a very critical first step. We are grateful to all of our parties on the ground, both political and non-political, for their untiring efforts and advocacy. Let it be very clear that we in the Diaspora, in particular through the medium of the [Nineveh Council of America](#) and all of the organizations and individuals that support it, intend to give our full support to the positive growth of this province in the interest of our people and all of Iraq.

Speaking from Australia, Hermiz Shahan, Deputy Secretary of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, said:

I would like to thank Mr Nuri al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers on this rightful decision. My most heartfelt appreciation and congratulations goes to all the thirteen political organisations that gathered in 2010 in the City of Erbil upon request from the Assyrian Universal Alliance and with one voice agreed on the demand on the establishment of a province for the Assyrian people in Nineveh Plain. We also appreciate the efforts of all diaspora Assyrian organisations that pushed for this cause. I believe the next step is to make sure that the borders and the law of this new province will be made in a way that will serve and protect the rights and purpose of the establishment of Nineveh Plain for the Assyrian people in Iraq. I would also recommend that another conference by the coalition of our political organisations and parties in Iraq to be called inviting all interested parties to affirm that the demands of this nation will be served.

Will the Assyrian Exodus From Iraq Stop?

Since 2004 Iraq's Assyrians have experienced a low-grade genocide ([report](#)), with [73 churches bombed](#), hundreds killed and more than half the Assyrian population forced into exile in Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. It is estimated that half of the Assyrians who were in Iraq in 2004 have fled the country ([report](#)).

The decision to create a province in the Nineveh Plain comes on the heels of a decision made two weeks ago by The Iraqi National Assembly to recognize Assyrian and Turkmen as

official languages. Arabic and Kurdish are also official languages. This decision allows public and private schools at all levels to teach in Assyrian and any other officially recognized language. Government documents are required to be provided in Arabic and Kurdish only.

The decision to make the Assyrian language official also instructs the Minister of Education to open literacy centers for teaching Assyrian. The Ministry of Education has sent a letter to churches to urge people to register for the literacy programs. The government will pay students to attend classes twice a week and issue a certificate of completion.

Many Assyrian observers say these steps are too little and too late. Given the drastic exodus of Assyrians from Iraq and the general mood of the Assyrians, who see no future in a country torn apart by Sunni-Shiite bloodletting and lack of economic opportunities, the Assyrians continue to leave. Recently the Chaldean Church [said](#) that six Assyrian families leave Iraq daily. For the first time in their history, there are more Assyrians living outside of Iraq.

Observers also point out that many such decisions have been made in the past but never been implemented, and are adopting a wait and see attitude.

Mosul's children return to school after ISIS defeat: 'We are not giving up on learning'



LENA MASRI

ABC News September 20, 2017

Three years ago when Raiiya Saed was in the third grade, [ISIS](#) militants took over her neighborhood in West Mosul and closed the school. But at home, the Iraqi girl kept on reading and writing.

In her diary, she wrote about life under ISIS -- about other children who were starving while living under siege and about the restrictions the [terrorist](#) group imposed on her family's way of life.

"I was seeing children who were dying from hunger and couldn't even get milk to drink," Raiiya, 11, told ABC News by phone in her native Arabic. "I wanted to play with my friends, but I couldn't. I wanted to go to the market and wear colorful clothes, but I couldn't. We needed a lot of things and were prevented from the simplest things under ISIS."

When her city was under ISIS control, she had to cover her hair and wear the required black "abaya," a robe-like dress, she said. She rarely left the house because it was too dangerous outside.

But today, she goes to school in her uniform: a white shirt with a blue skirt.

"I am very happy," said Raiiya, who started the sixth grade after her school reopened. "After three years without school, I want to learn so that I can rebuild my country."

AINA News
The Treasures of Nimrud in Pictures
Posted 2015-03-07 02:09 GMT



The treasures excavated from Nimrud in 1989 by an expedition of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage.(AINA) -- The Royal Tombs of Nimrud were first discovered in April of 1989 by an expedition of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage. The Tomb was located in the North-West Palace of the Ancient city of Kalkhu (modern city of Nimrud). The city of Kalkhu was a capital of the Assyrian Empire for over 150 years until King Sargon moved the capital to Dur-Sharukin (modern Khorshabad) in 717 B.C. The city is located 4 miles south-west of the Christian monastery of Mar Behnam. The first dig of this ancient site was conducted by a British mission over 150 years ago, which uncovered many reliefs. Many Ancient Assyrian Tombs have been found in the past, however the goods had all been plundered and stolen. Two remaining tombs exist; one in Berlin and one in its original location in the city of Ashur. The sarcophagus in the tomb chamber contained hundreds of items including jewelry, vessels, ornaments, seals and other goods. The items displayed Syrian and Phoenician iconography in addition to central Assyrian Art. The treasures Belonged to:

- Yaba, Queen of Tiglathpileser III, king of Assyria 744-727
- Banitu, Queen of Shalmanasser V, king of Assyria 726-722
- Atalia, Queen of Sargon II, king of Assyria 721-705

Yesterday ISIS destroyed the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, a city dating back to 1400 B.C. and was one of the capitals of Assyria. A week before that ISIS destroyed the Museum of Mosul, which contained priceless Assyrian artifacts.



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, which was destroyed by ISIS on March 5.

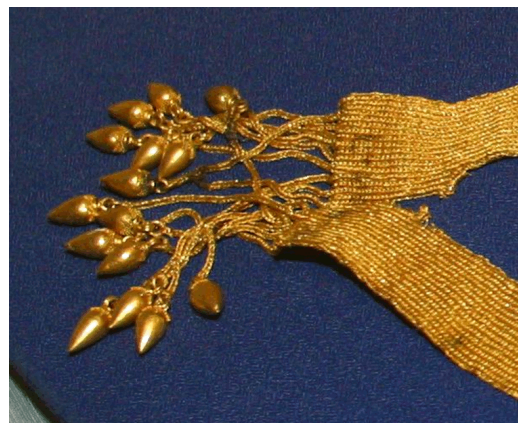
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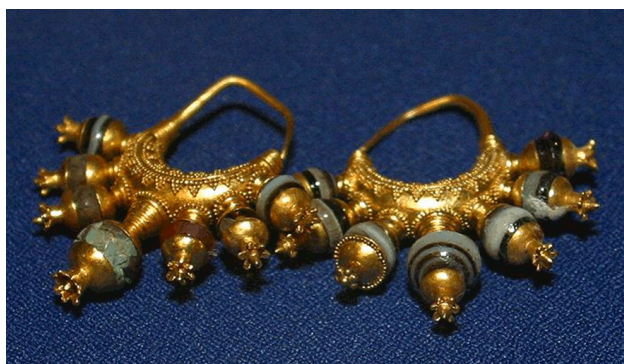
- [Attacks on Assyrians in Syria](#)
- [Timeline of ISIS in North Iraq](#)
- [The Nimrud Ivories](#)
- [Nimrud treasures saved](#)

Digital reconstruction of Nimrud

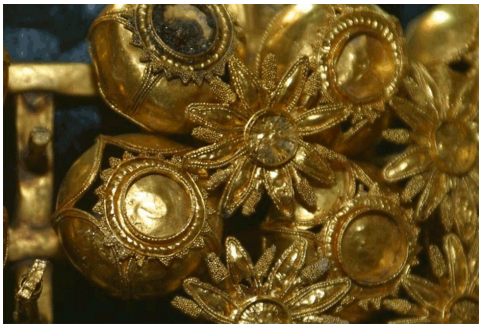
The treasures excavated from Nimrud in 1989 by an expedition of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage











A Reply to “Veils of Humiliation”

By: A disillusioned Woman

The author states:

" If you speak out these revolting and disgusting male chauvinists will say you are a femnazi. Yes, the church dictates that women have no right to claim to be equal to men."

Indeed, these chauvinists do not merely label women as ‘femnazis’—more often, they dismiss them as lesbians. In the eyes of these religiously authoritarian men, any woman who asserts her equality must, by default, be a lesbian. They cling to the belief that women have no right to be equal because men hold themselves in such absurdly high regard. Thus, a woman who dares to think or feel that she stands on equal footing with men must, in their eyes, be a lesbian.

I recall an educated man once discussing the gender of the word *Roukha* (Spirit) in the Assyrian language. He explained: *"Spirit is a feminine noun, but when referring to God's spirit, we must not acknowledge its femininity—God forbid (Khesli)!"* It is telling, is it not? That even attributing femininity to the divine spirit is considered blasphemous in the minds of these ignoble men!

The author confesses:

" In fact, looking back, I feel that I have never been happy in my life. What was there to be happy about? Being a woman was always a problem and a hindrance, no thanks to horrible disgusting men...."

I must admit, I share the author’s sentiment. I was once a naïve young girl who believed in love—only to discover that love, too, is a lie. When a man says, *"I love you,"* what he truly means is *"I desire you."* For men, love and sex are interchangeable. That is the extent of their emotional capacity; their small minds cannot grasp the depths of true love, only the pangs of physical desire—what the author so aptly refers to as their oversized *Dunboultha*. As a result, I fell victim to selfish love, cunning deceit, and relentless lies. I recognized the truth only when it was too late—when the damage had been done. And so, I suffered. I suffer still.

But what shattered me even further was realizing that even *God’s* love is a deception. A carefully crafted illusion, conjured by manipulative men to subjugate entire populations and rule over them. They say:

"God has chosen your rulers (though they are, in reality, self-appointed), and thus you must obey them. Do not envy the rich (who, in truth, exploit and rob you), for your treasures lie in heaven (which does not exist). Your kind and loving Father (who, if he exists, is indifferent and cruel) has prepared a place for you and will bestow great riches upon you."

But when one dares to question this absurdity and asks, *"How do you know this to be true?"* the answer is always the same:

"It is written in the word of God."

And when you ask, *"Who wrote the word of God?"* they reply,

"God's chosen people."

Then, when you inquire further, *"And who says they are chosen by God?"* they simply answer,

"They wrote it in their book, which is the word of God!"

Is there a more laughable, more self-referential, and utterly nonsensical argument? When I was young, I accepted these claims without question. But as I grew, I came to see them for what they truly are: a cycle of illogical reasoning, an outrageous and unfounded belief system. And yet, across the ages, countless billions have been coerced into submission. Any who dared to challenge or question this farce were silenced—accused of being possessed by devils for simply seeking the truth.

Tragically, many even educated people still cling to these beliefs, not out of conviction, but out of desperation. They endure such suffering that they *need* to believe—it is their last, fragile lifeline. Fear of death forces some people to 'want' to believe in the afterlife: a world of spirits, angels, and fairies. They need to believe there is a god residing in heaven where they, too, will happily live ever after. Otherwise they cannot stand the pains and hardships of the real world. It is the human tragedy...

For this reason, I am truly grateful that your journal exists—a platform where the disillusioned and humiliated can finally speak their truth and share the stories of their suffering.