



Chairman's Message

Dear readers,

If we look back and analyse the year 2008, it is possible to state that it has been a troublesome year for the Syriacs. During the last year, both the Syriacs in Turkey and in Iraq faced some significant problems. In Iraq, their churches have been bombed, their clerics and tens of civilians have been kidnapped and brutally murdered, their right to a democratic representation has been restricted with the new election law and most bitterly of all thousands of Syriacs have been forced to flee out of the city of Mosul. The Syriac people, both in the Diaspora and in Iraq, stood up against this unjust situation and with their protests shouted to the whole world that they want to live in a more secure environment.

On the other hand the situation in Turkey was not so bright either. The cadastral land registry works that have been carried out by the Turkish state in Tur Abdin region have caused some serious problems for the Syriacs. These problems had both legal and political aspects to them. Following the acceptance of Turkey as a candidate state to join the EU, a new hope was developed for the Syriacs who wished to return to their homeland. Accordingly, the Syriacs became very interested in the cadastral land registry works carried out in Tur Abdin. Unfortunately, the land registry process has been problematic in almost all of the Syriac villages. During this process, either the local powers or the constitutional obstacles have caused significant disappointments for the Syriacs who started to return. And most recently, the neighbouring Muslim villages have attempted to seize the lands of the 1600 years old Monastery of Mor Gabriel. However, it has now become clear that the problem is not only caused by the neighbouring Muslim villages, but there are some local tribal leaders (Aghas), heads of village guards and even some MP's in Ankara who are involved in this attempt of occupation of Mor Gabriel Monastery..

Unfortunately, the year 2009 could be another difficult year for the Syriacs. Should the global economic crisis hit Turkey more, it could affect adversely the reforms process of Turkey. And if the instability continues in the Middle East the Christians will be the most suffering group. However negative the current picture may seem to be, the Syriacs will not lose their hope of continuing their lives in Turkey as well as in Iraq. This is because the Syriacs have experienced such dire situations many times throughout their history.

Iskender Alptekin

ESU meets Turkish political parties at Ankara

European Syriac Union made a diplomacy tour to Turkey for the problems faced by Syriacs last days and looking for a solution to the cadastral survey of Mor Gabriel Monastery.

ESU delegation composed from Vice-Chairman Fikri Aygur and Ruling Committee Member Tuma Celik made serial meetings from Monday 17 to 21 November 2008 at Ankara and Istanbul.

ESU delegation meets with governmental party Justice and Development Party (AKP) Vice-president Abdulkadir Aksu and Chairman of Foreign Affairs Commission Sir Murat Mercan separately. At the two meetings ESU representatives highlights the gravity of problems that faced Syriacs and importance of common effort for the solutions. Also they added that Syriacs are very important part of Turkey and their fundamental rights have to be protected. ESU delegation criticized clearly the Ministry of Forestry which sued Mor Gabriel Monastery, one of the Syriac centrum, and they tried to sensible government to find a solution.

Another meeting took place with the first opposition and oldest party Republican People's Party (CHP) Vice-president Yilmaz Ates. ESU delegation said that CHP does not go far for the problems and highlighted that as the oldest party of Turkey CHP has to give more attention to all the ethnic groups for a democratic society. For this, Sir Yilmaz Ates declared that at the future they will be more interested with the problems faced by Syriacs and to this they want to discuss ESU propositions and bring them to the Parliament.

Fourth meeting held with Democratic Society Party (DTP) President Ahmet Turk. At this meeting ESU delegation demand from DTP to be more interested with the problems of Syriacs as it is known DTP tries to defend rights of Kurds at the Parliament under the difficult circumstances.

Also a meeting realized with Ufuk Uras President of Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP) which has only one seat at the Parliament. Sir Uras interested too much with the problems faced by Syriacs and he said that, he wants to be more interested with the Syriacs problems.

Except the Turkish authorities ESU made another meeting with the political representatives of Great Britain and Nederland Ambassadors. At these meetings ESU dele-

gation presented generally problems of Syriacs.

Batman Çağdaş a local newspaper at the Batman city shows tragic situation of the old historic settlements, churches and monasteries in the region. According to the newspaper old churches, monasteries and houses are lies in the ruins through lack of care. Always loyal to the newspaper article continue like that; from the medieval age Mor Kuryakos Monastery which belongs to the Syriac in Besiri-Ayranci village is known as the monastery and the school for the monks. But for the moment, monastery is far from it's historic statue. The villagers constructed their home at the court of the monastery and they closed all entrances. The more tragic is that the villagers confessed their acts they said have profited from the situation. Another syriac church in the region face the same fate. Syriac church at the Yenipinar village is ruined by the villagers. The villagers took all the stones of the church and now they use it as the depot and hayloft.

A detailed report published by ESU gives many possibilities to understand situation of the Syriac in Turkey. Report declared that; 'we see the social discrimination from an ethnic or religious point of view, political pursuits by direct or structured force, violations of human rights, lack of basic freedom, a wrong third world aid policy, economic policy and the wars in the region as important factors unleashing the migration. Thus, Syriac population has been reduced.' Report continue with the reel events that faced by the syriac during 2008 and at the conclusion said that 'The Turkish Republic during the year 2008 has not shown any progress towards the Syriacs in regards to their ethnic, cultural, religious and language rights. The Syriacs are still not categorized as a non-Muslim minority in Turkey. The Syriacs still have no official right of teaching and having press in their own language. The Syriac clergymen still have no official status in Turkey'.

Finally, according to the national media services expansion that AKP will bring to the Alevi community will be expanded to the Syriacs also. AKP deputy Reha Camuroglu said to the media that, they will start with the Alevi demand and request and they will continue with the Syriac and other groups. Camuroglu said that "minorities are defined with Lausanne but we are hearing some problems from the Syriacs and as a democratic state we have to make consideration of all the groups"

The Chaldean Syrian Assyrian Popular Council (CSAPC) Dohuk/ Iraq

Reality and Objectives

Under the slogan "Claiming our national rights is a democratic struggle to support the brotherly struggle and reconstruction of the new Iraq", the proceedings of the Ankawa Popular Conference began in the Sub-District of Ankawa in Erbil, Iraq in 12-13 March 2007.

The conference was attended by more than 1200 independent personalities from our Chaldean, Syriac Assyrian (CSA) people. It was also attended by the representative of the British Consulate and the Italian Consulate respectively as well as the finance minister of the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) Mr. Sargis Aghajan and representatives from our national, Kurdish and government institutions in the KRG in addition to the participation of our people's institutions from the various areas at home and from abroad.

The conference was a step forward to gather and unify the efforts of our (CSA) people and join its ranks to realize all the legitimate rights of our people including autonomy in its historical areas where it lives at present.

The proceedings of the conference ended successfully through the emergence of the Popular Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Council (PCSAC), and the announcement of a final manifesto and the forwarding of two memorandums to the Iraq Constitution Amendment Committee (ICAC) and to the Committee of Kurdistan Constitution Drafting (CKCD) in addition to the issuance of a number of recommendations and decisions of concern to our people and its national rights.

The autonomy project has thus become a demand by the masses of our people; for our people does not only regard the issue of autonomy a decisive question, but rather the last opportunity for it to be ever able to live in freedom and dignity in its homeland Iraq side by side with his Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, Armenian brothers and other Iraqi sects.

The (PCSAC) has undertaken today the task of following up and realizing this common demand in direct coordination with the parties represented in the council, that have likewise officially adopted this demand, particularly when the council started in a concrete way with its mission and activities at its headquarters in the city of Duhok. The council has come to have at present numerous offices both at home and abroad. And thanks to the efforts made by those offices and committees, the council, that comprises devoted and independent members of our people and political parties, has eventually changed into an effective national and political institution with a strong popular support.

The total number of the council members is 41 of whom 31 are independent and another 10 members represent the political parties of our (CSA) people. It is worthwhile mentioning that participants in the Ankawa Popular Conference had voted during the election process, that was carried out on a provincial basis and according to the population density, for the election of 31 candidates who were to occupy the seats allocated to the independent members representing all the Iraqi governorates where our people live as well as the diaspora. The seats were distributed as follows:

Nineveh: 6, Duhok: 5, Erbil: 4, Baghdad : 3, Sulaymania: 1, Kirkuk : 1,

Basrah : 1

Besides, 5 seats were allocated to the members of the preparatory committee of the conference and another 5 were given to the diaspora for the present term of the council. As for the 10 seats allocated to the political parties of our people, 7 seats have already been occupied by our national parties who decided to join and be represented in the council. The remaining 3 seats are still vacant in addition to the seat allocated to Basrah that is also vacant for security reasons. The political parties that have joined the council are as follows:

1. Beth Nahrein National Party,
2. Beth Nahrein Democratic Party,
3. The Chaldean Democratic Manbar (Pulpit),

4. The Syriac Gathering Independent Movement,
5. The Chaldean National Council,
6. The Assyrian National Party and
7. The Chaldean Culture Society

Even the presidency body of the council has likewise been elected in a democratic way following the first meeting of the council in the village of Karamles on 15 May 2007 that was attended by the independent members numbering 31. The meeting was also attended by a judicial supervisory committee head by Judge Ali Asghar Abdul-Razak Hassan, Court of First Instance Judge of the District of al-Hamdania. And hence, the council enjoys a judicial and legal characteristic that is acknowledged by our people on both the Iraqi and Kurdistan Region levels.

Based on the above, the council today is more than ever keen about adhering to its basic demands in terms of the unity of our people and the establishment of an autonomy area in the historical places where our people live currently and to provide for this autonomy area constitutionally according to the formula stated in its political agenda as follows:

1. Our (CSA) people that lives in the Plain of Nineveh has a legal right to form an autonomous area.
2. The boundaries of the autonomous area are to be defined within the areas that are inter-connected in the Plain of Nineveh as well as the areas in Duhok Governorate that have a majority of (CSA) population .
3. Inhabitants of the villages and towns lying in Kurdistan Region that are not part of the autonomous area, have the legal right to join the autonomous area, should they ever so decide by majority vote.
4. Syriac language (modern Aramaic) shall be deemed the official language for the autonomous area side by side with Arabic and Kurdish.
5. The autonomous area shall have a parliament that is elected by our (CSA) people. The parliament in turn will elect a First Minister who shall be in charge of the administration of the autonomous area.
6. The state minister shall form a government whose members should be from the autonomous area and be endorsed by the parliament of the area.
7. The parliament of the autonomous area shall prepare a constitution for the area that is going to be valid following endorsement by the majority of the population of the area through a referendum.
8. The government of the autonomous area shall enjoy full authorities with the exception of the fields of development and economy, water resources and petroleum activities, whereby the autonomy area shall share these fields with the government to which it is connected.
9. The autonomous area government shall have the authority to appoint its own police force which shall have its own logos according to a special legislation.
10. The autonomous area government can establish its own special courts of justice to arbitrate in matters related to our (CSA) people, particularly in terms of the civil status, such as marriage and divorce... etc.
11. The parliament of the autonomous area shall endorse a flag and a logo for the autonomous area to be flown on the public buildings inside the area side by side with the flag and logo of Iraq and Kurdistan Province
12. A separate and fixed budget shall be allocated to the government of the autonomous area for the administration of the government of the area.
13. Non-CSA inhabitants of the autonomous area shall be treated on equal footing with all the population of the area, including the freedom of doctrine and religion.
14. Issues of special national and religious concern to our people who live outside the autonomous area shall be directly addressed by the central institutions of the autonomous area, and they shall have the full right to voting, participation and nomination for the election of the autonomous area parliament.
15. Our (CSA) people all over the world (holding an Iraqi citizenship) have the full right to voting and nomination during the parliamentary elections of the autonomous area, as is the case with the Iraqi members of parliament and the Kurdistan National Council.

“There is a future for the Syrians in Turkey”

An interview made with Mr. Ayad Mossad, formal chairman of the “Middle East Christians Union of Nederland” and writer at the Genneshrin Newspaper about year 2009.

As you know 2008 was a hard year from every aspect. And now a days Middle East one more time lives difficult days. Starting from this point, what is your opinion about the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations?

Despite of the US declaration of the possibility to create a Democratic Palestinian state to be accepted as a solution for the conflict, yet we have witnessed a division among the Palestinians them selves. This is a weak spot and the declaration of Hamas as a terrorist movement, paved the way for Israel to attack it and perhaps destroy it in the near future. The Palestinians are polarized but they have no experience in reading the political statement or making the right decisions to achieve their rights.

What will be the future of Great Middle East Project with the Obama administration?



I do believe in the project it self, however, we witnessed some difficulties to reach its goal namely democratization of the region. If Mr. Obama focuses on the human rights aspect of the project, he might achieve more than the current administration. There are many aspects of this project, but as far as I am concerned,

the new administration can focus on one aspect followed by the others. At the end we will see results.

During US Presidential election around the world there was great expectations from new elected President Barack Obama. What will be the priorities of the new President more specifically regarding to the Middle East and Iraq?

The elected president Mr. Obama is a revolution itself. Black person will become a president of the majority of a white nation and above all US has succeeded to overcome its complex with the history of slavery. Mr. Obama entered the race for the election carrying the slogan of "CHANGE we can". These are great expectations and challenging by it self. From 20 January he will inaugurated and then all the world leaders are going to watch his deeds..... Will he change the world, or the world will change him or his words? This is the great challenge

2008 was also a tragic year for the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac people in the Iraq. For the 2009, what is waiting for them in the Iraq?

Yes it was a year of tragic for the Christians in Iraq. I really hope that they will learn from the current tragedy and unify their vision. Fleeing their homeland or migration to the West is no solution for them. If they can reach this point, there is a great possibility to create an autonomy for themselves.

Related to the Iraqi problems, our people face great atrocities everyday. What do you think about project of autonomy safe region in the Iraq?

Yes indeed, you are facing great problems, even you are not involved in the past or current conflicts, however, you must learn of the history and try to work hard to avoid the division among the different groups and develop a sense of national awareness

And stand behind one common goal, then you will reach this point of autonomy.

Autonomy project can be a solution for the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac people in the Iraq?

It can and can not be. The autonomy project only for the Christians can be a dangerous one. We have to count on the others because we are not alone. If we reach this point then there is a possibility to see it as a solution. Of course, we wish to recognize it as a solution, but it can be achieved on the long run and the others can accept it.

At the other hand, may for the first time Syrians of Turabdin was the subject of discussions in Turkey. They faced also big problems with cadastral survey during last year. What is waiting them in the future? And what are the obligations of Turkey for the Syrians?

This is a huge question concerning Turkey and the Syrians in Turabdin. Nevertheless there is an opening from the intellectuals who are struggling to recognize the rights of the Syrians. Turkey is going forward but very slowly because it is also facing huge questions with the Kurds and other minority groups in the country. However, our problems are not limited to the cadastral but with welfare of the Syrians qua culture, religion, human rights, education etc...

There is a future for the Syrians in Turkey, because the country has to deal with the reality of today and can not go on ignoring the heavy burden of the past... It is a matter of time and good diplomacy towards the country.

Syriacs of Europe last year point out their togetherness and cooperation at the several incidents. What is your point of view about this?

Yes, there is a very positive development towards their unifications. Their language and deeds have been changed and they use the diplomatic language and seek only the cooperation with the others. That paves the way to grow into the international politics which demand so much knowledge and skills... However, we should admit that those are the first steps toward that stage, and when they reach it, they will be real politicians and I personally witness such development.

ESU and Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Council delegation meet European representatives

A delegation composed by ESU members (Mr. Fikri Aygur & Mr. Suleyman Gultekin) and the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Council of Iraq members (Mr. Gabriel Marko, Mr. Kamel Zozo & Mr. Isa Yousif) had meetings at the European Commission and the European Parliament.



The aim of the meeting was to inform the different European representatives about the situation of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq which is worsening and to draw their attention about the needs of these indigenous Christians people.

The delegation explained, among other

topics, that attacks are rising against all minorities and especially against the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians people; that the indigenous Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians and other minorities continue to flee Iraq and taking into account that no actions are being undertaken to overcome this tragedy, the only viable solution is to settle an autonomous area for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq.

The delegation clearly stated and insisted that this request for autonomy is not against the Iraqi people neither against the Iraqi constitution but is only aimed to stop the flee of these indigenous Christians people with millenia-old history and culture.



The Voice of the Syriacs

IMPRINT

Information bulletin about the social position of the Syriacs in and outside the Middle East. It appears periodically, published by the European Syriac Union (ESU) in Brussels-Belgium.

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ESU ANNUEL MEETING IN BRUSSELS

ESU held on his 4th annual meeting at the Brussels. With the participation nearly 100 members from the different countries ESU members find also the planification and programmes for the next year. Rima Tuzun opened the meeting at the Mor Yuhanon Church Hall and also she made a brief about journey.

Then ESU Chairman Iskender Alptekin gave the speech to the members. During his speech he highlighted important events at the year 2008 and he said that was very difficult year for all the Syriacs. Alptekin continue like this "international politic were very active this year, Russia and Georgia conflict, election of Barack Obama and may



most important one was the financial and economic crisis".

In the Iraq and also out of Iraq our people show their demand to the autonomy and autonomy became first discussion among people said Alptekin and added that "with the return back to the Turadin also the problems are occurred, the main problem was the cadastral survey also Tur Izlo Forest Fire"

Despite all the problems our people designated their courage and they stay in the home land. Turkey also said that they will take problems of Syriacs seriously to the consideration declared Alptekin and finished his speech "next year we must work very hard, the Syriacs issue is at the international arena our friends have to be well prepared".



After that V i c e Chairman Fikri Aygur also made a presentation of all the activities during year of 2008. Aygur said that we had a full year with the activities, every activity of ESU is well prepared and organized, we do not want any sort of damage to our people and we know that we do not have right to the mistakes.

ESU activities led to the Syriacs to be an international subject of the discussions said Aygur and continue as "organisation is very important issue to ESU. We officialised ESU Sweden. And we have now ESU Youth Organisation and as you know youth is vital point for us and we continue to work on, during last year we met our church leaders, we

are trying to have a dialog with church representatives".

Aygur point out also important activities of last year; meeting with the Lebanon Prime Minister Fouad Sinyora, Brussels Manifestation, diplomatic attack to the release of monk Daniel Savci from Turabdin, cadastral survey problems at Turabdin and participation to the Mor Gabriel Manifestation in Sweden.



During the meeting also two guests from Nederland made their speeches and visions about next year. Ayad Mossad, formal chairman of the Institutes of the Northern Christianity, said that "2008 was very difficult year not only at the politic but also at the economy. We have to walk the world so we can understand the events". There are big expectations about Great Middle East Project, the aim is to bring democracy to Middle East declared Mossad and continue; at the other hand Turkey wants join European Union but now it is far from EU. This also affects Syriacs because when Turkey is far from EU, we can not speak about fundamental rights. I watched Manifestation for Mor Gabriel Monastery and what happen to Mor Gabriel also occurred at the Egypt and in the Iraq. We see clearly there are powers who do not want Christians in the region.

Another guest Prof. Dr. Hermann Teule made his speech about his working visit to the Iraq and also discussed various opinions about autonomy project. Teule said that at the Kurdish region there are many Christians and 100 – 120 new villages are constructed to the new immigrants around Nineveh. Before several years also Hermann Teule made a visit to the region and all villages were empty. Teule added also that it is important to mention great efforts of Sarkis Aghacan and he said that establishment of Autonomy Council was good idea because most of the habitants want autonomy.

Finally at the meeting ESU members present their programmes and activities for the year of 2009. At the agenda, meeting with the different parties and groups and institutions, officialisation of ESU at the countries, cultural event and activities, festivals.

Also ESU took all the opinions, critics and visions about activities and works that carry out.



Dear readers;
We wish you a Merry Christmas and all success and happiness at the year of 2009.
ESU Administration.