



# The Voice of the Syriacs

**Chairman's Message**

Dear readers,

**M**arch 11 will get an important place in the history of the Suryoye. March 11 is the day on which the Swedish parliament has acknowledged the genocide of 1915 on the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people.

The acknowledgement of the genocide by Sweden as a Western country and a member of the European Union is of great importance, for the Syriacs as well as for the genocide of 1915.

Firstly it is the first time in history that the name of our people (Syriacs-Assyrians-Chaldeans) is officially added to the list of nations who suffered because of the genocide of 1915.

Because, during World War 1, besides 1, 5 million Armenians, also 500.000 Syriacs-Assyrians-Chaldeans and 350.000 Pontus Greeks were murdered by the then Turkish regime.

Up until now, only the name of the Armenians was mentioned during acknowledgements, but the Swedish parliament is now the first to mention all the nations that were killed during the Genocide of 1915 in the official acknowledgement.

Secondly, the name Syriac has come up for discussion during an important decision of a parliament for the first time.

With that, the existence of the Syriacs is also acknowledged, because after World War One, the Syriacs didn't get any acknowledgement as an ethnic group in the newly formed countries such as Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

Because of this, the voice of the Syriacs could not reach the West. It is because of that that until recently, the Syriacs were an unknown group to the Western Countries.

Although lately the name of Syriacs is more and more mentioned by Western representatives, it never got to the point where a parliament could take an official decision about it.

It is a beginning stadium for the Syriacs in international politics.

Iskender Alptekin

## Swedish Parliament recognizes Sayfo

**O**n 11th March, the Swedish Parliament recognized the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean genocide also known as "Sayfo" (sword) perpetrated by the Ottomans during First World War. 500 thousand of Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans were killed during this period. In a motion backed by the five political parties including Social Democrat Party and Left Party, the resolution is adopted after long discussions. The motion included also Armenians and Pontiac Greeks.

With this adopted resolution Sweden is the first country that accepts Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean Genocide. (It is important to stress that important amount of members of this folk living in Sweden since those decades.) Turkish Republic successor of the Ottoman Empire denies vehemently 1914-1915 incidents and qualifying it as "genocide" according to United Nations resolution of 1948.

Today, Turkey works nonstop to persuade international arena and claims that incidents were just unorganized events during the war.

The Sayfo is one of darkest period of the history of Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans. During these tragic years Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans faced great atrocities and massacres most of them were killed others were exiled at the different places. The Sayfo issue has very important gravity among Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans and for the collective memory. Within every habitation of this folk inevitably exist a little or big history about these years.

The Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean folk lost all of the components of their existence and identity, the richness and wealth that were arise during the centuries were all destroyed. Although now a days the trauma of this period is still alive at the memory of the ancients who see and live this genocide. For this, important amount of the oral history material

exist among the population.

In the aftermath of the Sayfo, Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans were murdered, killed and abandoned with their fate. The majority

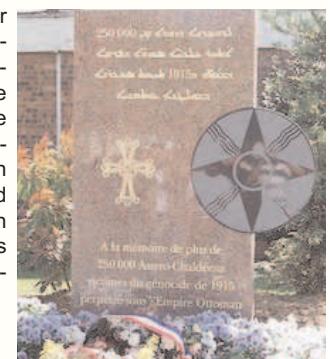
was disappeared and the rest were exiled to save our lives anywhere. As a consequent, today Syriac-Assyrians-Chaldeans are everywhere at the planet. From homeland Mesopotamia to Europe, from Russia to all continent of America the member of this folk are spread to every corner of the earth.

The decision of the Sayfo by the Swedish Parliament has important gravity for the reconnaissance of this at the international arena and also among other countries. Of course the effort and activities that have been realized at this direction also played a valuable point. From this point, the work and efforts are vital for the recognition of Sayfo all over the world.

In December 2007 the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) also recognized the genocides of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans and Pontiac Greeks perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire.

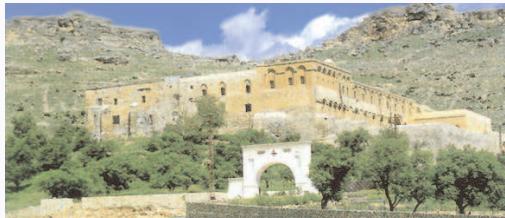
With a letter sent to Swedish Parliamentary ESU welcome and acknowledge the decision in favour of the reconnaissance of the genocide. ESU is one of the main and significant organizations within Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans working for promoting the questions among politics of the countries.

In the future ESU has the intention to take some steps in Switzerland and in United States for the genocide question. At the next issue of our bulletin detailed information and news will be presented.



## Mor Hananyo (Deyrulzafaran) Monastery

The monastery Mor Hananyo established in the 5th century also known as Kurkmo Dayro (in Syriac) or Deir ez-Za'faran (in Arabic) meaning the "Saffron Monastery", is situated some five kilometers east of Mardin (in South eastern Turkey), in a shallow basin half-way up the side of the mountain ridge. This is one of the most known and ancient structure of Upper Mesopotamia, and the religious center of the Syriac Orthodox Community. The origins of this imposing monastery goes back to the 5th century; mosaics remaining from that period have still been present. From 1293 until 1932 it was the official seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East. Tradition associates the monastery's foundation with a certain Shleymun (Solomon), about whom little or nothing is known.



The name "Saffron monastery" is said to derive from the saffron dye used in the building's plaster-work; the correct name, however, is the "Monastery of Mor Hananyo (St. Ananias)" who was the Metropolitan of Kfartuta (793-800). It was he who renovated the monastery buildings after a period of decline in 793. An earlier dedication, to Mor Augen, is still remembered much later by some scribes who refer to it as the monastery of Mor Hananyo and Mor Augen. Further important renovation work was done by an energetic bishop of Mardin, John, who died at the monastery on 12th July 1165. The most ancient buildings of the monastery are the main church, the Church of the Mother of God, and the Beth Kadishe. They are said to have been erected on the ruins of a Roman castle and a pagan temple. The monastery possessed a fine library with valuable manuscripts and books.

### Church Architecture

The various churches and buildings of the monastery still preserve a great deal of the original decoration and sculpture, many of the details of which are of very high artistic quality. Here the well preserved main church, with its impressive proportions and fine carved decoration, dates back to the sixth century, as does the adjacent funerary chamber to the north. Set in a niche in one of the reception rooms is a carved stone panel surrounded by a long decorative Syriac inscription. On the panel, which is very much older than the inscription, there is a cross, set on a step and with a sheep on either side paying reverence. Though not particularly eye-catching, the panel is of great importance since it can be identified as the back of the "Throne of Antioch" which symbolises the apostolicity of the Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East.



Among the many items in the monastery special mention should be made of the sixth century Patriarchal throne, and the wooden doors of the main church which are inlaid with a long inscription giving excerpts from the Psalms in Syriac.

In the vicinity of the monastery, to the north, are three small monasteries, dedicated to the bearer of God (also called "of the dripping water [Noto]"), to Mor Ozziel, and to Mor Jacob of Serug ("the Teacher").

### Manuscripts in the Monastery

A large number of manuscripts covering many subjects is known to have been written at Deir ez-Za'faran, thus providing testimony to the varied intellectual interest of the monks. These are by no means restricted to religious matters; thus, for example, a manuscript copied in 1308-09 contains the Syriac translation of Ptolemy's Tetrabiblon and Severus

Sebokht's Treatise on the Constellations. One of the most luxurious Syriac Manuscripts to survive is the Lectionary of Deir ez-Za'faran, copied in the middle of the thirteenth century by Dioscrous Theodorus, who later became bishop of Hesna d-Ziyad (Kharput). Besides having twenty miniatures inserted in the text, the manuscript is strewn with ornaments in the form of colourful circles, crosses, stars and bands, the last serving as the background for titles and rubrics, Full-page Crosses introduce and close the canon Tables, and the title frontispiece is presented under a gold portion. The miniatures within the interlaced borders in red, blue and yellow follow Byzantine iconographical formulas closely. The background included both architecture and elements of landscape. Moreover,

the physiognomic type of the person is not 'islamicised'. There is a Bible of great historical value and a sacred stone in the monastery, from where the first School of Medicine is thought to have been established.

On the first visit of any Syriac Orthodox Patriarch to England, in the winter of 1874-75, Mor Ignatius Pathros IV took the opportunity to have a printing press sent back to the monastery, and once it had been installed it was put to good use in the printing of a number of liturgical and other books in Syriac.

### Scholars from the Monastery

Of the many Syriac scholars and authors who have been monks at Deir ez-Za'faran, three stand out for their exceptional learning. The first is a prolific author of the eighth-ninth century, Iwannis of Dara; before he was appointed Metropolitan of Dara in 825 he had been a monk at the monastery, and it was presumably there that he had access to an extremely well-stocked library, the fruits of which can be seen in his writings, the other two both belong to modern times. Although born at Mosul (in 1887), the Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Barsaum (1933-57) studied and became a monk at the monastery; he possessed an incomparable knowledge of Syriac literature, the fruits of which can be seen in his

invaluable History of Syriac literature. Although this book was written in Arabic, it was translated into Syriac by another monk of the monastery, Metropolitan Mor Philoxenos Yuhanon Dolabani (1947-69). Mor Dolabani was also a scholar in his own right, being the author of numerous important works in Syriac, Arabic and Turkish. Among these are detailed catalogues, made at the beginning of the 20th century, of the rich manuscript holdings both of this monastery and of St. Mark's in Jerusalem.

The monastery in its long history has produced 21 Patriarch's, 7 Maphriyono's and 111 Episcopos. This ancient monastery have the tombs of 52 Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs which makes its a very important place for the Syrian Christians. The last of the canonical patriarchs entombed in this monastery is Moran Mor Ignatius Pathros IV who died on 8 October 1894. This monastery continued to be the church headquarters till the time of Patriarch St. Ignatius Elias III who passed away in 1932 during a visit to Kerala (India). The seat of the Patriarchate since then was moved to Homs and then to Damascus.

Mor Philoxenos Saliba Özmen, ordained on 9 February 2003 as the Metropolitan for the diocese of Mardin is now residing in the Mor Hananyo monastery which was the headquarters of the Patriarchate of Antioch & all the East for about eight centuries.

Deyrulzafaran Monastery website: [www.deyrulzafaran.org](http://www.deyrulzafaran.org)

source: [www.syrianchurch.org](http://www.syrianchurch.org)

## ESU Letter to Swedish Politicians

**ESU** central committee sent a acknowledgement letter to the Swedish

Parliament Speaker Mr. Per Westerberg and to opposition parties parliamentaries and to other deputees who support Genocide resolution. Here below the letter.

On 11th March 2010 your parliament, by a majority of the votes, passed a resolution to acknowledge the 1915 genocide committed against the



Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans, the Armenians and the Pontic Greeks.

With this resolution Sweden has become the first nation state to recognize the Genocide (Sayfo) of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans, 95 year later. We, as the executive committee of the ESU, would like to thank you for your exertions in the passing of

this resolution and express our gratitude to the Swedish state as a whole.

Sweden, who has become the first nation state to hear our people's voice after 95 years, will have its name engraved in our nation's history with golden letters. I believe this resolution will help bring peace and security to the people of the Middle East.

Further, I believe this resolution will also greatly help Turkey to attain a democratic system. Because, this historical issue between the Turkish state and the Armenians, the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans and the Pontic Greeks, has continuously caused problems between the peoples and the religions of the region.

Accordingly, with this resolution of your parliament, we hope that Turkey will face its own past and will try to compensate the damages it caused to different nations historically living within its borders.

Therefore, we strongly believe that this resolution passed by the Swedish Parliament, not only enhances the democratic values of Sweden, but also will serve towards an official recognition by the world community of the sufferings and the pain inflicted on the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian people in 1915, as well as to contribute to the democratization procedure of Turkey.

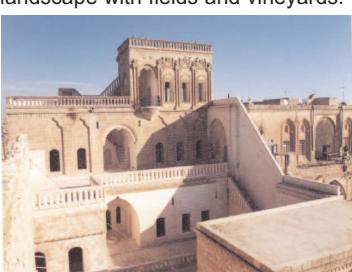
We hope this resolution passed by the Swedish parliament will become a precedent to all other democratic states to follow and will encourage them to justly recognize the Sayfo Genocide of 1915.

ESU welcomes historical decision of Sweden concerning Genocide resolution.



## The heart of Turabdin, Midyat

**M**idyat is the "chief" town of Turabdin in south-eastern Turkey and has been an Episcopal because the Syrian Orthodox church was founded here in 1478 and since then Midyat has been the metropolitan diocese. It lies at an altitude of about 1000 m above sea level in an undulating landscape with fields and vineyards.



Turabdin means Mountain of the Servants of God, in reference to the monks who have lived in the nearly eighty monasteries found in this region in the 4th century. The town used to be the only settlement in Turkey big enough to be called a town which had a majority of Christian inhabitants, with eight churches and two mosques.

At the edge of the town, to the southeast, stands the oldest Church, Mor Akhsnoyo (the Syriac for Philoxenos). This church was completely ruined, too. It was reconstructed in the 1960s. Mor Sharbel, a building of huge proportions, is the southernmost of the two prominent churches on the hill. At the highest point of the town rises the largest church of all, the Protestant Church, built in 1900.



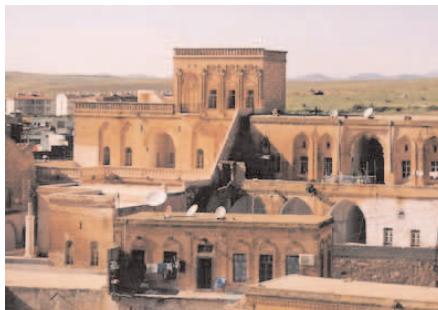
Then it was connected with the nearby town of Estel, which increased its Muslim population.

The name Matiate dates back to the ninth century B.C as a "cave settlement" in an Assyrian inscription. Midyat had been attacked and destroyed, the last attack was during the First World War, when a third of the inhabitants were killed and many houses were destroyed. The town had to wait until the 1930s for a recovery: houses and churches were reconstructed and the Christian population began to grow again.

Today there are about a hundred Christian families there, some of them having moved in from the villages. Midyat has the city of Mardin to the west, Hasankeyf to the north, Cizre to the east and Nusaybin to the south. Seven kilometres east of Mardin is the Syriac Monastery of Deyrulzafaran, which is a religious community in which monks still worship.

Most Families belonged to the Syrian Orthodox Church but some of them were Syrian Catholics or Protestants. Midyat is known for its silversmiths, whose objects are called "telkari", not only for the trade, but also for the fabrication of filigree silver." Stone carving, filigree work, weaving, woodwork and the art of the goldsmith are also still carried out, but

Five church towers and two minarets give the town a distinctive silhouette. The bishop's church, Mor Shmuni, attained its present appearance at the end of the nineteenth century. A yard around the church also gives access to the church school and the offices of the bishop. Nearest to the centre is the highly decorated Church of Mor Barsawmo, which was rebuilt, on its ancient foundations and to a traditional design, in 1943.



Midyat is popular for the stone carving and decoration of the houses and public buildings in particular. The ancient houses there are cool in summer and warm in winter, but none of their windows ever come face-to-face with those of a neighbour house. Midyat is also a melting pot of religions, languages and traditions, where Muslims and Christians are able to live next door to each other in a tolerance.

## 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.

#### Contact:

Phone: 0032 2 523 4181  
Internet: www.esu.cc  
e-mail: contact@esu.cc

#### Address:

European Syriac Union  
Rue Bara 152  
1070 Brussels  
Belgium

#### Chairman: Mr. Iskender Alptekin

e-mail: iskender.alptekin@esu.cc

#### Deputy. Chairm: Mr. Fikri Aygur

e-mail: fikri.aygur@esu.cc

#### Secretary: Ms. Rima Tuzun

e-mail: rima.tuezuen@esu.cc

#### Treasurer: Mr. Nail Akcay

e-mail: nail.akcay@esu.cc

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## HNB celebrates 8 March Woman Day

**B**ethnahrin Woman Union (HNB) carries out several activities through 8 March Woman Day around Europe. HNB is working to promoting and advancing the role of woman within Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people.



On 24th February the first activity held on in Will, Switzerland. Martin Frolich from the Youth section of Christian Party (CVP) also from the same party Aydin Elitok and representative of HNB in Switzerland Ayfer Gabriel were presented among other 450 participants.

All participants made a discourse about importance of woman within the society especially among Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people. Also the importance of participation to the political life is stressed for the young people and vitality to preserving values of Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean folk. The main point was the role of woman in the society and working to promoting this position.

At the same time, the singers from Wiesbaden were attempted to the soiree also singer Bashar Yuhanun was presented with his songs from Syria.

The second activity had been realized in Sweden on 06 March. Around one hundred people were presented. Singer Alexandra and Rami Adam with their songs were also at the place. Poet George Shemun read a poem for this night. Talita Sabo representative of HNB in Sweden made a speech about the role of Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean woman within the organization and the national struggle.

At this night cultural activities also were performed by the Bethnahrin Culture Association Folklore Group. The group performed a sketch about 8 March Woman Day among Syriac-Assyrian Chaldeans.



Last activity carries out at Hamburg, Germany. The activity was organized by the HNB and Mor Dimet Church Woman Committee.

The moderator of the seminar accomplished by the Nura Kaplan and Muna Akin read a poem about the role of woman within the society. Representative of HNB Athra Abrohom made a speech about the role of woman in the history.

Bethnahrin Woman Union (HNB) is a Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean organization which is trying to promoting and ameliorates the current position of woman within the society. HNB carries out loads of cultural, politic and social activities for this direction and co-ordinately with other institutions.

Bethnahrin Woman Union (HNB) is linked to ESU and working together also on some issues. Among other activities of the organisation HNB maintains important work and made some action at the activities of ESU within the capacities of the organisation.



## Public release from the Patriarch

**The Supreme Head of the Syriac Orthodox Church**

Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I made a public statement concerning ongoing tragedies of Christian Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans are facing in Iraq.



His Holiness tried to draw the attentions over the attacks took place against Christians in Iraq and urges that the whole national and international actors should try to do their utmost to stop attack and killing the Christians.

Public statement started with the question that asked to the public opinion as "is there any plan to flee all Christian Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans from whole of Iraq?" Adding that, we are watching with great pain and sorrow the events in whole Iraq to the

barbaric attacks, killings and murdering practices.

Furthermore the statement highlighted that ongoing events in Mosul are terrifying and barbarous and continue "with these terrible acts they are trying to do the same thing as the 1915 genocide and some critics also done towards the Iraqi authorities about misinformation to the public."

At the end of the statement an appeal made to the whole international actors, United Arab Emirates, Arab authorities and to the Unite Nations, to prevent these attacks to the undefended Iraqi Christians.

Following the collapse of the regime in Iraq, Christian Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people had been repeatedly victim and powerless of those attacks.

