



The Voice of the Syriacs



CHAIRMANS MESSAGE

Dear readers,

First of all, with Christmas upon us, we wish merry tidings to the Christians of the world and especially the Christians who are in danger and persecuted in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. We wish them peace and hope that they will live in their homeland in freedom.

In the last three months the Middle East has become steadily more dangerous, particularly for Christians. As the war has intensified, so to have the numbers of Christian refugees increased. In the last three months, hundreds of the Syriac Christians took refuge from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

We, as the European Syriac Union, have cooperated with other political and cultural institutions to protect the Syriacs Christian refugees in Turabdin in Turkey, North Iraq and Lebanon. Therefore, we have established a committee called ``Bethnahrin Solidarity Committee``. As a result, we have launched a campaign to fulfill the material needs of people. This committee was established on 21st of October in Germany.

The case of Syria is now on the world's agenda, but the native people of Syria, the Syriacs, though they are persecuted and killed, have not heard their cry answered or their problem understood. To announce the cry of the Syriac Christians of Syria, we arranged on 9th of October a conference in the European Parliament in Brussels. This conference was lead by Member of European Parliament (MEP) Elmar Brok who is Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the European Syriac Union ESU. Several MEP's from the European Parliament and around 120 people from different countries attended in this conference.

The speakers of this conference were The president of the Syriac council of Syria, Mr. Basam Ishak and the Vice President of the Syriac Union Party, Mr. Said Malke. Both of them explained the situations, the circumstances and moreover the problems the Syriac Christians face in Syria. They also mentioned the demands of the Syriacs in Syria, to be considered together with the other Syrian communities. They need to be treated with equal importance and to solve the problem of the Syriacs as the problems of the Muslims, Kurds, Alleviates and other minorities.

To solve the problems of the Syriacs and the difficulties that they face in the Middle East, we have established a group of parliaments called ``Swiss-Syriacs friends``. This group consists of 13 members of the Swiss parliament, all from different political parties. They will work and help us to announce the voice of the Syriacs and to demand the rights of our people in the Middle Eastern Countries.

Lahdo Hobil
President of European Syriac Union

FOUNDATION OF THE SYRIAC NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SYRIA

On 08.09.2012 organizations, political parties and independent person of the Syriac people have founded the Syriac National Council of Syria.

At the Gonen Hotel in Istanbul the participants of the founding congress elected Mr. Bassam Ishak as the President of the Syriac National Council of Syria.

Please find here the press release:

To the Syrian people... To the People of Revolution

It has been more than a year and half for the start of the Syrian revolution that seeks better future for us and for our children. Killings, displacement, oppression and torture. The process of assassination has not stopped from killing our children and attacking our villages. The criminal gang did not provide a barbaric way of killing and only used, arrests, raids, shelling and bullets, killing and violations, displacement and mortar hatred destroy houses, cities, streets and fields. The ruling gang aircraft fired lava death and destruction. The regime is trying to destroy the pure image the Syrian revolution to divide the components of the Syrian people. The regime is trying to destroy our dream in the presence of any international support.

More than twenty thousand martyrs (civilian and military) including women and children, tens of thousands wounded, imprisoned or move to more secure countries as refugees. But after all this! we still fixed, and our great will was never weakened by the horrible attack of Al-Assad criminal regime. And we've become role model in confrontation and competition to move forward to overthrow the legitimate system of tyranny, terrorism and corruption; and to finally enjoy civil republic of pluralist based on the foundations of justice and equality.

Many factors pushed the Syriac people to arrange his powers to remedy the risk of fragmentation and loss and for activating claim his rights. The sense of responsibility towards the sacrifices of the Syrian people and the difficult conditions experienced by the country pushed us as parties, institutions, and Syriac members to establish the Syriac national council of Syria in order to activate the group work that support Syriac in specific and Syrians in general. However, we will keep on supporting the Syrian revolution in which we are part from beside supporting the

Syrian national council the one we ask to unite the council for better vision of Syria after Assad's regime.

Consequently, we ask the Arab League and the United Nations and influential countries in the international community to be committed legally and morally by the international law in order to overthrow the Assad regime and we ask for the military intervention to overthrow the criminal regime of Al-Assad who is killing Syrian people.

We look forward to a Constitution that guarantees public liberties, separation of



authorities, equal citizenship and full national partnership. A constitution that admits and situation of national diversity, including constitutional recognition of the existence of the national identity of the Syriac people. Constitution in accordance with international conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and keep pace with modern developments, and meets the requirements of society with all its components so that this constitution is based on administrative decentralization.

We look forward to peaceful life for all the components of the Syrian people for the various national and religious affiliations in the future Syrian republic of pluralism and democracy. We also look forward to preserve the rights of our Syriac people and to be equal as Syriacs - Assyrians by rights and duties with the rest of Syria, Arabs and Kurds, Circassians, and others, in addition to the rights of the different religions and sects of Christians and Muslims and others. Believing that this pluralism and this diversity is an essential factor culture and civilization of Syria.

WE ask our brothers in the Free Syrian army whom we support and defend to control all irresponsible actions that take place in some cases in which it alter its

real and great image and to stop anyone who intend to give a bad image or bad reputation for to wonderful revolution.

As result for all what we mentioned, we ask our Syriac people to support the Syrian revolution

And we ask all other Christians to be good example of Jesus' message which rejected injustice and called for justice and rights. You should not allow the regime to succeed in his trap that relies on strife and conspiracies. The huge number of Syriacs who migrated during the reign of this regime after the great ignorance

and injustice of the Syriac clearly shows the great lie about protecting Christians by the regime. The regime intended to make demographic change for the syriacs and to abolish their culture and political institutions as well.

The last but not the least, we ask our Syriac people to stick to their land and to keep their presence in Syria the land of their ancestors and civilization. We ask you to be strong like great rock that never moves or shakes.

WE are ready for all kinds of collaboration to rescue Syria from its crisis.

Finally, we believe that we all together are going to drop that Tyrant and we will build home of peace and dignity where all Syrians enjoy their rights without any ethnic, national or ideological discrimination.

Glory and eternity to martyrs of the Syrian Revolution

We pray for God to heal all the wounded and to liberate all the detainees

Freedom for civil and democratic Syrian republic.

**Syriac National Council of Syria
Istanbul September 8.2012**

OPPORTUNITY OR DISASTER? CHRISTIANS AND THE ARAB SPRING

European Syriac Union, ESU with the collaboration of European People's Party held an impressive conference concerning Christians in the Middle East and with focus to Syria country. Member of European Parliament Sir Elmar Brok hosted the event and Syriac people from different countries were present during the conference.

The conference was attended by the members of the EU Parliament and speeches were related to the current ongoing political deadlock at Syria. More than a year Syria is paralyzed by the turmoil of Arab Spring and following all demands Bashar Al-Assad refusing to step down. Syria crisis made more than 30.000 casualties; hundreds of thousands flow of refugees around neighbor countries namely; Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

Member of Syrian National Council and Chairman of Syriac Syrian National Council Bassam Ishak said that the new era must begin in Syria for all components of the society and forming a way to a modern, democratic and free system with dignity to human beings. Bassam Ishak said that "the new constitution of



Syria will be the balance of the rights for all minorities and other sub-cultures in the Syria. The process of making new constitution is very important and vital in order to establish adequate political order in the country. We are ready to work and put our efforts to flourish once again this ancient civilization. Syriac people and in general Christians are not with the Assad regime and they support this rightful revolution. We want to change this dictatorial system with democratic one."

Vice-President of Syriac Union Party in Syria, Said Malki declared that they desire Syria of before 1960s and added that "before 1960s Syrian society was

very harmonious and all different cultures and beliefs were present side by side. With the arrival of Al-Assad family all beauties of the society had been faded and dictatorial system was imposed to the whole society. We want to see the end of this regime in order to continue our lives with dignity and respect of each other."

ESU is actively working with different actors and institutions concerning Syria political deadlock and its consequences to the Christians and Syriac people. Christians consist nearly 12% of the Syrian population and majority of them have Syriac origins.

FOUNDATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP "SWISS – SURYOYE (SYRIACS)"

Through initiative of the European Syriac Union – Switzerland, a parliamentary group for Syriac people has been established.

The parliamentary group "Swiss – Suryoye (Syriacs)" has been founded on 26 th September 2012 in the Swiss parliament. 12 politicians from different parties and fractions have joined together to support Syriac people. These politicians are aware of what the Syrians have witnessed in the Middle East. This sensitive awareness has brought them together, to be a political voice for for Syriac people. Responsible for the parliamentary group "Swiss – Suryoye" are the co-presidents Mr. Walter Müller and Mr. Martin Candinas, which have been elected by the other members during the foundation of the group.

The goal of this Parliamentary group is, to support the Syrians. This group is a union of politicians, which will be the voice of the Syrians in the Swiss parliament

As a group, members of the Swiss parliament from different parties and fractions, the interests and the request of Syrians will be represented.

The main objectives of the group are:
Information about the cultural, commu-



nity and social situation of the Syrians in their native countries (Turkey, Syria, Irak, Iran and Lebanon),
Sensibilisation measures for the support of Syrians (for example the lawsuit of the monastery Mor Gabriel in Turkey),
Commitment for religious freedom and

human rights in the native countries of the Syrians (Turkey, Syria, Irak, Iran & Lebanon),

Contribution of the interests of the Syrians (in their native countries and in Switzerland),
Support of cultural and social integration of the Syrians in Switzerland.

On 13 th Decmeber 2012 the group has organized his first event; a press conference and an information meeting for the members of the parliamentary group about the situation of Syrians in Syria.

At the press conference the representative of the Syriac Union Party of Syria, Mr. Issa Hanna informed about the latest situation in Syria, the developments within the Syrians and their demands for ethnical and religious right.

On behalf of the parlimantary group one of the co-presidents read a press release, which calls for support the Syrians in Syria to be accepted as one of the main components of Syrias people.

SCANDALS CONTINUE TO HIT SYRIACS IN TURKEY



Last year several media organisations had reported the false descriptions about Syriac people in the manual books for secondary schools in Turkey. The books of history of 10th grade students were discriminative vis-à-vis Syriac people and other Christian groups as well.

For the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, the Christian minorities were defined at the history books and short historical/background information were fulfilled. Meanwhile, the historical information was discriminative, bias and erroneous. The history books shows Syriac people as traitor vis-à-vis Turkish state, the allies of western powers and foreigners in the Turkey to fulfill the wills of Western states.

Following this incident, ESU sent a letter to Turkish officials and described the disappointment of Syriac people, their expectations for democratic and modern principles and made a clear call to Turkish officials to correct this great and unjust attitude. On the hand, ESU informed the European Union counterparts about the incident in order to push Turkey to change its' long lived attitude against minority groups in Turkey. On the other hand, Syriac deputy Erol Dora brought this issue to the agenda of Turkish Parliament and he made private meeting with the Ministry of Education. Also the Southeast (Turabdin) Syriac Cultural and Solidarity Association in Turkey played active role during this period.

Concerning this incident, EU Turkey Rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten stated "education plays a pivotal role in this process. In last year's report, I urged the

Turkish Government to pay special attention to educational materials in schools, which should reflect the religious plurality of Turkish society, and to the need for unbiased learning materials."

Despite the active action from Syriac organizations within Turkey and in diaspora, from well-known personalities, European calls, and despite the declarations from Turkish officials the scandal continues even in this years' history books. The Turkish government and authorities did not show any effort and will to the change this attitude.

On the other hand, Mor Gabriel Monastery, which is struggling with various unjust cases, gets another refusal concerning land disputes with Turkish state. Despite the local court favorable decision, historical documents, tax fees and experts, Turkish Supreme Court had decided against Mor Gabriel Monastery.

Mor Gabriel Monastery which goes back to 1600 years has significant importance within Syriac church and also within universal Christianity. During the history the Monastery served as theology school and as institute of Syriac language and played cornerstone in the protection of Syriac culture, literature and belief. Today, the Monastery has very special and distinguished place among Syriac people and the Monastery is accepted as "Second Jerusalem" for Syrians around the world.

The AKP (Justice and Development Party), did not shows any intent and will to solve the problem of the Monastery and it continue to deny the existence of Syriac people.

The policy of Turkish state vis-à-vis minorities has been always discriminative. Especially non-Muslim minority groups are targeted to discriminative and assimilationist policies. They had been constantly target of harassments, attacks and genocides. Their presence also constantly dwindled by hundreds of thousands because of their treatment.

Concerning the Mor Gabriel Monastery decision, Stefan Füle, the commissioner responsible for the Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, stated his disappointment and concerns several times and he highlighted that the Commission follows the is very closely.

Mor Gabriel Monastery authorities described their disappointment about the long juridical process and they declared their intention to follow their rights at the European Courts of Human Rights.

Syriac people around the world follow closely the legal cases and continue to support Mor Gabriel Monastery in this period. As we stated earlier, the Monastery legal cases are the democracy tests for Turkey.

ESU also will continue to monitor the situation concerning Mor Gabriel Monastery in the European level and create public opinion around this issue in order to give all rights and lands back to the Monastery.

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CDU-DELBRÜCK/GERMANY ON THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA AND TURKEY

On September 30th, the local committee of the Christian Democratic Union, CDU in Delbrück held an event concerning the situation of Christians in Syria and Turkey.

Leading political and religious personalities were present to the important event among them H.E. Mor Julius Hanna Aydin bishop of Germany and Elmar Brok member of CDU and also European Parliamentarian respectively.

MEP Elmar Brok informed participants about latest situation of Christians in Turkey and Syria and demanded from the members of state parliament of NRW Daniel Sieveke and Volker Jung to unite power to show stronger posi-



tion against Turkish government in order to advance the situation of Christians in Turkey.

Member of state parliament of NRW, Daniel Sieveke, initiator of petition for Mor Gabriel Monastery highlighted in his speech concerning upon preparations for creating a memorial for Seyfo in Paderborn.

On the other side, Syriac representatives also informed about the current situation of Christians in Syria. ESU representative Rima Tüzün asked in her speech for more support of Syriacs as identity in Syria's transition process.

200 pupils, church priests, members of church councils from Syriac-orthodox and Greek-orthodox church were present at the event.

ESU MEETING WITH ERIKA STEINBACH MEMBER OF GERMAN PARLIAMENT

On December 14th, Erika Steinbach member of German Bundestag received ESU team consisting from Rima Tüzün, head of foreign affairs and Tuma Çelik, ESU-Turkey representative and initiator of petition for Mor Gabriel Monastery entitled "**beraber büyüyük bu ülkede**" translated as "together we grow up in this country"

Bundestag member Erika Steinbach has been active supporter and present on the issue of Mor Gabriel Monastery and she declared her stance with different occasion's and releases.

Member of German parliament Erika Steinbach hold the Chair of the Working Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of the CDU / CSU Parliamentary Group, is well known for her engagement for Syriac Christians in South-East Turkey and more precisely for supporting Mor Gabriel Monastery.



During the meeting two parties discussed the latest situation of Syriacs in Turkey as well as the current situation of Syriacs in Syria.

*Dear readers,
As the ESU Administration, we wish you a Merry Christmas and may the year of 2013 bring you all achievements and success.*