

Newsletter

The Voice of the Syriacs



CHAIRMANS MESSAGE

Dear readers,



Syriac people around the world are watching developments and events in the Middle East countries closely as their brethren continue their presence in the region despite the harsh incidents against them and Christian populations as general. The ongoing trouble and stalemate of political impasse in the Middle East region and the deadlock on the Syrian crisis affect enormously the presence and the future aspirations of the Syriac people. Syria has important place among Syriac people as they leave their steps in every moment of the Syrian history.

International community and regional powers did not achieve any success and consensus in order to end the crisis of Syria which became one of the tragic events in history. Since the beginning of the uprising, on 2011, more than 130.000 people lost their life, hundreds of thousands fled the country and nearly half of the Syrian population is in precarious situation. Humanitarian situation and the conditions of refugees and IDP's is increasingly dramatic as they lack fundamental needs for daily life.

European Syriac Union, ESU with its partner organizations inside Syria and those in Europe territories try all channels to be present, help and coordinate the needs of people inside Syria. In parallel to this, ESU conducted several humanitarian aid campaigns and projects towards Syria with its partners. We will continue our commitment and efforts to the need of Syrian people.

On the other side, nowadays all regards are fixed on Geneva II conference which will seek new route map for Syrian crisis. International community, regional powers and other relevant actors are preparing their positions and alignments regarding this conference. We believe that international community and regional actors can find viable solution to Syria crisis which is becoming extremely dangerous for the Middle East region and poisoning already some countries.

We believe that Syriac people have to find their place in the Geneva II conference. This is very important point for the future of Syriac people in Syria. Ignoring minority groups and non-dominant entities during Geneva II conference will be great error and fundamental missing elements for the peaceful end of this crisis. In order to achieve this point, ESU is working coordinately with its friends and organizations to assure the distinctive presence of Syriac people during the conference.

During the history, Syriac people have been discriminated, killed, massacred and had been subject of the genocides. Despite these painful tragedies, Syriac people continue their core existence and flourish their social and cultural aspirations. The presence of Syriac people in Middle East countries is an important asset. ESU will continue to work and put its all efforts and weights on the presentation of Syriac people to the international platforms and assure and demand their fundamental political, social and cultural rights.

Lahdo Hobil
President of European Syriac Union

Syrian Christians must have political voice at Geneva II



The Syriac National Council of Syria (SNCS), representing 99% of Syrian Christians, should be invited to the Geneva II peace talks on behalf of its constituents. The Christian Coalition for Syria (CCFS), an initiative SNCS in cooperation with Jubilee Campaign and various organisations in Europe and the USA (www.ccfssyria.com), seeks to rally worldwide support for Syrian Christians to gain a voice in the political process.

Also known as Assyrians, Arameans and Chaldeans, the Syrians are the original native inhabitants of Syria and the Middle East and are internationally known as 'Syriacs'. Having embraced Christianity at its birth, they should not be confused with the current majority of the nation of Syria, which is mostly Muslim. Even though Syriac history spans at least six millennia, this ethnic group has never gained constitutional rights in Middle Eastern countries. At the International Peace Conference in Geneva on January 22nd, they are again threatened with exclusion.

Political representation

Peter Bronsveld, director of

Human Rights organisation Jubilee Campaign, thinks it is "absurd" that the interests of Syriacs and other Christians have so far been ignored in negotiations. He said, "As this group comprises twelve percent of the Syrian population, at least twelve to fifteen Syrian Christians should be accepted as members in the Syrian National Coalition. While other opposition groups are given the right to join the conversation about a new Syria, Christians and other minorities are still completely ignored. The Syriacs must be given political representation."

In the coming period the Syriac National Council of Syria, together with Jubilee Campaign and other organisations, will seek to mobilise churches, Christian groups and organisations to get involved and join the coalition. "We are dealing with 2.6 million people that are under immediate threat and need immediate political support from the international Christian community", says Bronsveld. "I am aware that many petitions for Syria are circulating, but our effort focuses specifically on the support of a political party (the Syriac National Council of Syria) that represents the interests

of the majority of Christians in Syria."

Risk of extinction

The founders of the coalition are convinced that, without the support and intervention of the worldwide Christian community, the Syriacs are threatened with extinction or with permanent exile from the land that bears their name. At least 600,000 of the 2.6 million Christians living in Syria before the war are now homeless or have fled abroad. As a result of the conflict, thousands of Christians have been killed—often tortured or were summarily executed because of their faith—including various prominent church leaders who were kidnapped, tortured and killed.

The CCFS calls for the international Christian community to join this initiative by endorsing the recommendations of the coalition. These can be found on the website www.ccfssyria.com.

On January 22nd, the coalition intends to join with an official delegation of the Syriac National Council of Syria and travel with them to Geneva to present the recommendations and statements of support.

HOW SHALL WE LIVE TOGETHER IN THE AL-HASSAKE REGION? PART II

Under this slogan representative of Syrian Arabs, Syrian Kurds and Syriac Christians from Al-Hasaka governorate gathered in July 2013 in Midyat, Southeast Turkey, to forge a new social contract between them and to determine their future together.

In our last newsletter we informed about the first part of the conference, where representatives of the Syrian Kurds and the Syriac Christians held a unique discussion in a transparent manner, related to the historical events in Turkey in 1915 and then proceeded to discuss arrangements on how to live together in the future in the region of Al-Hasaka.

In the second part of the conference the discussion involved the Syrian Arabs. The result of this comprehensive discussion is an amendment contract, which addresses all three parts, the Syrian Arabs, the Syrian Kurds and the Syriac Christians. The objective of this second conference was to

bring Syrian Kurds, Syriac Christians and Syrian Arab Bedouin tribal leaders together to engage in problem solving about political and security issues in the Al-Hassake region.

The two deliverables for the second conference (July 27 – 29) were the following:

1. To produce an indigenous written plan for political power sharing in the Al-Hassake region that can be implemented, monitored and also supported by outside players in the region and beyond.

2. To produce a written framework and plan for security in the region that is based on the rule of law and the security needs of all major ethnic, political and religious groups that can be a blueprint for national security experts in knowing the on-the-ground felt needs and fears of the communities.

The discussion at the conference were given on the subject of Faith-

Based Reconciliation, Political Power Sharing and Regional Security so as to impart fresh ideas and a new paradigm as a basis for discussing political power sharing and regional security. There was a serious of questions, which were a way of providing an orderly framework and guiding the process.

At the conclusion of the conference some participants expressed the critical value to them of spending three days with leaders from the other communities to build relationship, trust and try to problem solve together. Some participants expressed the importance to them of being challenged with an alternative paradigm for living together from that experienced under the Baathist regime. Some expressed a deep sense of hope after the conference. Some expressed concern about militant groups in the region that will seek to destroy the important work that was done in Midyat. Many expressed an intention to go home and build a movement in the Al-Hassake region based on creating reconciliation and unity among the three communities.

An important deliverable of the conference was the beginning of an agreement for regional security that is faith-based, rather than fear based; that is collective, rather than community-based; that is grounded in the basic biblical notion of loving our neighbor.



Middle East Christian Leadership Conference in Brussels

A historic conference organized by the The Middle East Christians Committee (MECHRIC), a federation of NGOs, including Coptic, Maronites, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Melkites and others, was held in Brussels on November 5th to 6th at the Thon Hotel, with one main session held at the European Parliament. Titled "Leadership Emergency Conference" the event included two days working sessions, a political dinner with European Union officials attending, and a general session held at the European Parliament chaired by lawmakers. The conference was organized to assess the present situation and challenges facing the Christians in the Middle East and discuss new strategies to address these challenges, including new international outreach.

The goals of the leadership conference were as follows

- 1) Form a wide consultative council of leaders from various NGOs and delegates to help shape strategies and outreach
- 2) Assess the situation in the region, country by country and listen to reporting from various representatives coming from the Middle East.
- 3) Addressing the most urgent matters first but establishing a list of items to address and consider for forthcoming conferences and seminars.
- 4) The main issues assessed were:
 - a. The severe violence against Christians in Syria, Egypt and Iraq
 - b. The political suppression of Christians in Lebanon and Iran
 - c. The state of the Christian communities in the Greater Middle East including the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey
 - d. The state of the cause of Middle East Christians in international media

e. The position of the main international actors, including the US, Europe, Russia, the UN.

The leaders participating in the Conference represented the MECHRIC Secretariat General, Coptic Solidarity International, The World Maronite Union, members from the Assyrian National Federation/Council, advisors to the Chaldean National Council, and leaders of the Council of Syriac organizations, in addition to a Melkite representation.

reports and information were provided by various representatives from the Middle East. The conditions of following countries were viewed: Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. Other main issues assessed included: the violence against Christians in Syria, Egypt and Iraq; the political suppression of Christians in Lebanon; the state of the Christian communities in the Greater Middle East, including the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey; and the state of the cause of Middle East Christians in international media.



On November 5th, the president of the Conference Mr. Adel Guindy opened the first session with a minute of silence for the Christians who were killed in the Middle East at the hands of terrorists and oppressors. After he made some remarks on the importance of the conference, Dr. Walid Phares, the international NGO advisor from Washington DC took the floor to introduce the history of MECHRIC and its evolution to the participants. To assess the situation in the region, country by country

In the evening, the participants of the MECHRIC conference held a political dinner at the Silken Berlaymont with more than 12 political and diplomatic guests. After Dr. Walid Phares gave a speech on MECHRIC remarks followed by MEP Jaime Mayor-Oreja, First Vice-President of the EPP Group and president of the European Ideas Network (EIN), Mr. Patrice Bergamini, Head of division for regional policies on the Southern Mediterranean of the EEAS, representing Baroness Ashton, Foreign

Minister of the political European Union, Mr. Vladimir Chizhov, ambassador of the Russian Federation Mission to the EU, Mr. Spyros Attas,

Ambassador of Cyprus to the EU and Mr. Jean Louis Bosteels, representing the Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem. Among the guest were many EU diplomats, officials, Think Tanks and NGO, who attended the event.

On November 6th, the second and final day of the conference, the delegation discussed a strategic assessment and the output of the MECHRIC conference through regional and international conferences, especially on how to address the UN, US, EU, Russia, Vatican and other interna-

tional actors on the issue of the Middle East Christian persecution and political suppression. On this second day the delegations at the conference were invited by the European People's Party (EPP Group), via its think tank EIN, to the European Parliament (EP) for a special briefings session.

The conference at the EPP was led by Mr. Jan Olbrycht, Vice-Chair of the EPP and Mr. Jaime Mayor Oreja, First Vice-President of the EPP Group and president of the European Ideas Network (EIN), as well as Guillermo Cazan Martinez, the co-secretary general of the Transatlantic Group on Terrorism, and the EIN executive director. The presence of other MEPs, including human rights spe-

cialists MEP Kalam Tunne from Estonia, and MEP Patrao Neves from Portugal revealed the wider interest of the EP on the situation of the Christians in the Middle East.

A message by Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former U.N. Secretary General, to the MECHRIC leadership conference, was read at the parliament. In this message Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali said: „Christians constitute indigenous national minorities in the Middle East societies. Their history and positive contributions, over thousands of years, are intimately associated with the history, civilizations and in the renaissance of their nations.” To read the full press release, please visit the website of MECHRIC: www.mechric.org

Motion for Abducted Bishops in Turkey and Sweden

Syriac member of Turkish Parliament Erol Dora introduced a motion to the Turkish Parliament regarding abduction of two bishops in Syria, their fate and possible involvement of Turkey in this issue. Another motion was also presented in Swedish Parliament, Riksdag, for the same issue. Bishops of Aleppo Ibrahim Hanna and Boulos Yaziji were abducted on 22 Avril, 2013 near Aleppo in Syria.

Peace and Democracy Party, BDP member Erol Dora stated that, following the different news circulating on Turkish press regarding the abduction of two bishops and their fate, we prepared our motion to be answered by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The ongoing abduc-

tion of two our bishops is crucial issue for the Syriac people and Christians as well in Syria and in the Middle East region. Thus, we have passed to act on this issue in order to be informed whether Turkish authorities show willingness to share their latest information with public opinion.

Within the motion Erol Dora made clear questions to be answered by Prime Minister R. T. Erdogan as follows.

Does state authorities have or keep tangible proofs of this incident?

Do you have information about their fate or news about their death?

Is it true that the Turkish authorities jailed the suspected assassin of two bishops in Istanbul and if it is the case

did authorities interrogate him relating this issue?

What are the conclusions of the authorities?

Erol Dora also asked the reason of continued silence of Turkish

authorities on the subject or whether they will to inform public opinion about the issue. Erol Dora also asked some other questions to Justice Ministry Bekir Bozdogan on the same issue.

On the other hand, the issue of two abducted bishops had also been questioned in the Swedish Parliament. The presented motion asked whether Sweden Foreign Affairs has any steps or consultations with different parties in order to clarify the shadowy situation of the bishops.

Since the uprising on 2011 in Syria, Syriac people, Christians and other vulnerable groups had suffered greatly. Christians in Syria had been touched, killed and their worships had been destroyed. The extremist islamists groups in Syria are the main cause of the problems faced by Christians.

Christians in Syria constitute 10% of the total population and they are dispersed in the whole Syrian territory. Their contributions to the social, cultural life has been fundamental and they conserve authentic face of Christianity in Syria.



Syriac recognized as official Language in Iraq

Syriac language has been recognized as official language in Iraq. Syriac language is one of the oldest language spoken by Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian, CSA, people in Iraq.

The Official Languages Act was passed by the House of Representatives on Tuesday, January 7 with the efforts and works of more than years during difficult moments that passed Iraqis all together. Christians and other vulnerable groups suffered enormously following the chute of Saddam regime in 2003.

Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people faced killings, attacks, beheadings and kidnappings during last decade and mass exodus took place in order to find more stable lifes. Churches had been attacked, university students had been killed, women had

been forced to concert or veil their heads. The suffering of CSA people left behind unreparable consequences in the memory and in the future aspirations. As vulnerable minority group in Iraq, CSA people rise their voices to end these atrocities and injustices against them in several occasions and in European countries.

CSA people in Iraq had been fundamental asset in Iraqi social, cultural and political life. Their contributions to the Iraqi social fabric are crucial and they preserve their authentic and distinctive traditions, values and costumes. In order to continue their core existence, CSA people demand the creation of autonomous région in Nineveh plein. The establishment of autonomous region will play core and vital element in the aspirations

of CSA people in Iraq.

Syriac language is one of the oldest language in the Middle East region and in the world. CSA people uses different dialects in Iraq and it is used in daily life. To date, Syriac had been also spoken by Jesus Christ. Preservation of Syriac is important asset in Iraq for cultural and linguistic heritage. On the other hand, Syriac language had been classified as "endangered language" by UNESCO.

CSA people and their social, cultural and linguistic traditions, values and assets are fundamental elements of Iraqi social fabric.

European Syriac Union, ESU welcome this important decision by Iraqi authorities and urge all relevant parties to follow the application of this decision.



MS 577
Syriac Sertâ book script. Mt. Sinai, Egypt, ca. 11th c.

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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Humanitarian assistance for Syria

The European Syriac Union calls the world public to support Syriac Christians and other minority groups in Syria. Following please find their call:

The European Syriac Union, ESU is an international NGO based in Brussels acting as European umbrella of the institutions of Syriac people. ESU goals mainly are representing and promoting Syriac (Chaldean-Assyrian-Aramean) people around Europe and in Middle Eastern countries. ESU consists of 12 member institutions in eight different European countries. As European Syriac Union we are working closely with organizations and institutions in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

Since the uprising started in 2011 in Syria, the chaos has resulted in more than 120.000 losses of life's and among them 11.000 children. Millions emigrated or fled their homes. Weapons of all sorts have been used by the warring parties and population had been victim of attack of chemical weapons.

Syriac people have been affected dramatically. Our settlements like Maaloula, Wadi Nasara (Christian Valley), Saadad, Al-Attiya and Al-Hassaka province became war zone with the lost of innocent civilians of all ages. More than 70 churches and monasteries have been destroyed by the warring parties, clergymen have been killed and nuns and bishops have been kidnapped. Syriacs who have not fled their homes have been kid-

napped, tortured and murdered. There is also evidence of genocide that has been committed and mass graves have been found. The goal of radical Islamist groups is to annihilate Syriac Christians from Syria. Those who still live in Syria are left to their fate and must cope with daily challenges without the international community's compassion or community service.



European Syriac Union is very concerned about the situation in Syria particularly of the harsh winter. The need is becoming greater and more urgent. Everything from food, clothes, hygienic necessities, medicine and even when it comes to housing and sheltering there is a big lack.

European Syriac Union started an intensive humanitarian assistance to the Syriac Christians and other minority groups in Syria. In 2012, ESU purchased 4000 winter blankets and distributed them to the IDP's and vulnerable families. In 2013, ESU managed to collect over 80 tons of food kits, which have been distributed with the support of the Syriac Red Cross in Syria, the Syriac Cultural Association of Syria and the Syriac Women's Union in Syria.

ESU is currently distributing hygiene kits to IDP's and vulnerable families in Syria. ESU started a new initiative to provide winter kits to the IDP's and vulnerable families in Syria.

We hope that you want to extend your helping hand in this winter time and give your gift to your needy brothers and sisters in Syria. All gifts are needed large or small.

We will be grateful to your contribution.



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please contact us:
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