

# **We rember innocent souls and martyrs of Sayfo 1915 Genocide**

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Since the year of 2015, with the proposal of Syriac Orthodox Patriarch HH Aphrem II Karim with the large consultations of various parties, organisations and institutions, Syriac people commemorate Sayfo Remembrance Day on 15 June. European Syriac Union, ESU welcomed initiative and accordingly activities are underway in this period of the year.

Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people are ancient and native component of Mesopotamian civilization. During the history, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people contribute greatly to the social, cultural, economic and intellectual life of the region under different powers. On the other side, with different periods, they had been target of killings, massacres, exodus and harassments by different rulers and dominant forces. In this regard, the genocide of 1915 is the tipping point of their suffering and annihilation. Due to their Christian and different ethnic identity, they had been victim of genocide along with the Armenian and Pontiac Greek people during the years of 1914-15. Syriac people call these years as “Sayfo” which means “Sword” in Syriac language. Sayfo took place in the eastern parts of Ottoman Empire namely in the regions of Turabdin, Hakkari and Urmia, present day in Iran. During the genocide, nearly 500 thousands of Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians had been massacred by Ottoman powers and their local allies namely, Kurdish and other tribes.

Ten of thousands of people, most of them women and children, had been forced to convert to Islam while thousands had been forced to exile their homes and historical places; others had been perished during the deportation due to the malnutrition, thirstiness, hunger and diseases. Intellectuals, writers, composers, public figures, religious leaders and well-known civil personalities had been eliminated as the first phase of the genocide. Hundreds of historical, cultural and social monuments namely churches, monasteries, education centers had been destroyed in order to eradicate all traces of Syriac people from the region.

Churches and other religious centers converted to mosques or they had been used for other inappropriate means. Ethnic cleansing took place in all Syriac towns, villages, districts and properties and goods of Syriac people had been seized.

During the genocide under Ottoman Empire rule, Syriac people had been deprived from their societal dynamics, economic resources and they had been at the threshold of total annihilation. The survivors of the genocide, Sayfo, had lived under harsh conditions and they had lived fearful life. The psychological and spiritual trauma of genocide continues to affect generations constantly until today.

Despite numerous reports, facts and findings by witnesses and observers from inside and outside of the Empire, Turkish authorities constantly continue to deny genocide and moreover work against this reality. As the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish state continues to deny the genocide of Syriacs, Armenians and Pontiac Greeks. Plus until today, Turkey does not recognize officially identity of Syriac people. On the other side, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, genocidal mentality, ethnic and religious cleansing continues to target Christian minorities in the Mesopotamia and Middle East.

We firmly believe that, the denialist mentality and genocidal politics harm the very fundamental values and understandings of the humanity. As the core and principal responsibility of international democratic laws and principles is to prevent atrocities, massacres and genocides, we want justice to take place for the perpetrators of this crime against humanity. We believe that, there is no time restriction or limitation for the crimes against humanity and genocides.

As we commemorate the innocent souls and martyrs of the Sayfo Genocide 1915, we remember all the victims of the 1915 genocide and we will continue our struggle to honor the history and victims of the Sayfo until official recognition by the perpetrators and international community. We kindly call our people for the full participation to the events, activities and commemorations.