



Date: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Shlama al lokhon

Peace be with you.

Madam chair we congratulate you on your position for 16th session of the indigenous peoples' forum.

Our respected friends, members of the permanent form of the indigenous people, delegate of the indigenous people and the people present today.

My name is Shoushan Tower and I'll deliver this statement on behalf Mr Ashur Eskrya Head of Assyrian Aid Society in Iraq.

While we celebrate the tenth anniversary of United Nations declaration on the rights indigenous peoples, sadly, the indigenous peoples of the Middle East, specifically in Iraq are facing increased challenges in respect to their existence. The Assyrians Christians are suffering genocide under the terrorist organization ISIS since August 7, 2014 hence, consequences of the ethnic cleansing and the demographic changes have taken place in Nineveh plains.

In addition, many Assyrian historical sites and cities have been destroyed. It's apparent now that the Indigenous peoples, the Assyrian Christians are unable to go back to their homes caused by political instability, lack of security and basic public services with mass damages to the infrastructure. This situation has not developed despite the Nineveh Plains region has been liberated.

Accordingly, the Iraq parliament designated Nineveh Plains region a disaster area in January 26, 2017 after its liberation from ISIS. Meanwhile, trespassing and confiscating of indigenous people's lands has continued in Iraq. Majority of these lands are owned by the Assyrians that dates back to 1933 at the time of Simelli massacre. The confiscation of the Assyrian lands has continued during the armed struggle between the Kurdistan rebels and the central government in Baghdad in sixties during last century and the forced evacuation of people from their homes in the seventies. There has been a demographic change of the Nineveh Plains conducted by the previous Baghdad government in line with its established Arabization policies until 1991. Although some of the indigenous land is within the boundaries of Kurdistan region, the trespassing, land grabbing has continued and the Assyrian



land’s dossier is being stalled by the regional government. This is in contrary to Article 10 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’

For the Assyrian Christians of Iraq to return to their historical homes, a safe and secure presence must be established. The following is highly recommended.

- 1- Release and rescue Nineveh Plains region from the political tensions between Baghdad central government and the regional government of Erbil.
- 2- Establishment of international protection by monitoring the Nineveh Plains.
- 3- Support the security forces of Nineveh Plains with equipment and training.
- 4- Support the construction of Nineveh Plains region with emphasis on the infrastructure and economics.
- 5- Work-toward finalizing the legal frame in establishing Nineveh Plains Province within the Iraqi government, in line with the previous decision of the Iraqi government in January 2014.
- 6- Insert to include a clause in the Kurdistan regional government to establish a self-ruled area for the Assyrians Christians within the Kurdistan region.

Long live indigenous peoples.