Assyrian Aid Society



الجمعية الآشورية الخيرية

שעלה אולה ל מלה העהד באה

"Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council since 2011"

PERMANENT FORUM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES – 13th Session Submitted on behalf of Assyrian Aid Society-Irag

Item 3 - Open dialogue (Governments, indigenous peoples' organizations, United Nations agencies).

Delivered by Nora Michael nc.michael@yahoo.com.au

Dear Chairperson, brothers and sisters, children of indigenous peoples, ladies and gentlemen, greetings. Shlama lokhon oo Bshena hdeeretoon l'aha jmeta,

مقدير مرة مرا رفهة مريقيه منبغه مرفعما مخلا

I am making this statement on behalf of Assyrian Aid Society, Iraq.

Articles 3 and 4 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples call for self-determination of indigenous peoples. Self-determination is vital for Assyrians in Iraq, and is particularly relevant to this year's discussion of good governance, as a lack thereof permits humans rights violations of indigenous people to occur.

Our wish is to establish incentives that encourage our people to remain in Iraq where our language, culture and nationality can be best preserved. We hope that international and regional organizations will join us in our endeavor.

A significant threat to the existence of Assyrians in Iraq, as the indigenous people of Iraq, is their immigration from Iraq and internal displacement within Iraq. Internal displacement is a result of a number of factors, including civil unrest, religious intolerance and extremism.

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Intolerance and extremism targeted at indigenous people harms their human rights, equal opportunities and self-determination, causing indigenous people to leave their homeland. This has been the unfortunate reality for the Assyrians in Iraq. Contrary to Article 6 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the former regime in Iraq prevented Assyrians from openly identifying with their national belonging. We were not given the right to our nationality.

Since 2003, more than 800,000 Assyrians have emigrated out of Iraq. Consequently, we recommend that the relevant authorities in Iraq do the following:

- 1. Provide a suitable environment to which Assyrians can return, in cooperation with the national and regional governments in Iraq.
- 2. Conduct a census of the numbers of Assyrians that have dispersed, as well as areas/regions/countries to which they have dispersed.
- 3. Ensure that future relocation of Assyrians is well documented.

The Iraqi government recently acted positively in recognizing the value of the Assyrian heritage by amending the Official Languages Act. This Act now recognizes the Syriac language (which is modern day Assyrian) as one of the official languages in Iraq in areas consisting of a high density of people of Syriac origin. We, at the Assyrian Aid Society, endorse this law as a positive example of good governance, which promote the human rights of indigenous Assyrians to have a nationality. We hope that this law will serve a great purpose to people of Syriac, also known as Assyrian, origin. We recommend that this law lead to the support of newspapers and media publications, as well as the establishment of radio and television stations in the Syriac language. Thus, allowing Assyrians in Iraq to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. We recommend that such endeavors will be subsidized by the Iraqi government to protect and revive the Assyrian language in her motherland, Iraq.

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We applaud the decision of the Iraqi government to agree in principle to the introduction of new provinces in many areas of Iraq, including the Province of Nineveh Plain. Nineveh, being the former capital city of the Assyrian Empire, was located in the region currently known as the Nineveh Plain. We hope that the introduction of the Nineveh Province, which is predominantly inhabited by Assyrians, will promote democracy and self-determination for our people within this province. We look forward to the prompt formation of these measures.

We hope that our recommendations will be adopted and implemented, which can only further Iraq's diversity and enrich its ancient culture. This positive action will be compliant with Iraq's approval of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Long Live Indigenous Peoples