

الجمعية الاشورية الخيرية العراق
ASSYRIAN AID SOCIETY – IRAQ



Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Submitted on behalf of Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq

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Item 3C – Culture

Delivered by Mona Malik
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Esteemed Chair,

Honorable indigenous brothers and sisters and the indigenous people of this land)

Shlama Loukhon/Good Morning!

1. My name is Mona Malik and I am representing the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq, a humanitarian organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Assyrian culture and heritage: Assyrians being one of the indigenous people of Iraq and the Middle East.

Recommendations:

2. In order to preserve what remains of the Assyrian culture and heritage and to ensure its prosperity, The Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq anticipate that the Central government will establish a department for Assyrian culture similar to the one in Northern Iraq (KRG):

a. More specifically, to take necessary steps to further facilitate the documentation of this culture by establishing academic institutions and cultural organizations. These organizations should be dedicated to the preservation of the rich traditions of the Assyrians, the descendants of the cultures inhabiting the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, aka, *The Cradle of Civilization*. There needs to be dedicated funding for preserving traditional music, the Aramaic language, artisans native to the different regions and farming.

b. Furthermore, to maintain the rich cultural diversity that has been the pillar of Iraq's vibrant society and we, the Assyrians, are vital to the framework of the country's structure.

It is important to draw attention to the urgent matter of possible extinction of an Oral heritage that has survived over 6000 thousand years. When language is lost, the things that represent a way of being and thinking is lost, that human reality is forever vanished. Because of continuing conflict in the area, Assyrians have been

evacuated from entire regions of settled villages. This displacement uprooted the people from their native home causing the possible near extinction of a whole way of cultural expression.

The loss of historical perspective is another urgent concern due to the lack of documentation of oral narrative.

One recent incident subsequent to a visit in a small Assyrian village by one of our members revealed details regarding an Assyrian evacuation earlier in the 20th century. During the mass exodus of WWI, thousands of Assyrians died while fleeing from the Middle East toward a safe haven in Russia. The families would quickly bury their dead by placing a large rock-slab, *parsha*, on the dead. The rock-slab had a large cross, scratched on the surface and placed upside down facing the ground so that the pursuers would not be able to trace their trail by the sign of the cross revealing their track. To this day the Assyrians of a small village of Kanda near Tbilisi, Georgia remember their lost loved ones under the inverted rock by toasting their glass and saying in Assyrian “al khouba d’sleewa dmeekha al patou” which means “to the love of the cross laying face down.”

Siting other repercussions like the possible extinction of artisans native to the area, for example the Baz tribe, known as master masons and blacksmiths. Now there are no more Baznayee fabricating these products and the vocabulary of that craft has vanished.

Another example are the people of Giramon who are master weavers of traditional clothing like you see here...and some still practice the craft but because of the low demand and machine made imports we are witnessing a steady decrease of the craft. Artisans such as weavers, blacksmiths and masons as well as farming and hunting are threatened.

Like endangered species, languages and even entire cultures can slip silently into extinction. Artifacts may remain: broken shards, tombs, engraved monuments, but the rich patterns of life, the sound of human voices, the hopes and fears that inspired generations fade slowly into anonymous silence.” Lets work together to prevent the possibility of such a tragedy. Thank you.