



SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE  
ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ܘܢܝܘܫܝܐ ܥܘܠܡܝܐ

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with  
the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

**6 January 2011**

**Re: Comments and Amendments for Draft Resolution on Turkey's 2010 Progress Report**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Syriac Universal Alliance ("SUA") refers to the Draft Motion for a Resolution on Turkey's 2010 Progress Report written by Mrs. Ria Oomen-Ruijten and dated 25 November 2010 ("Draft Motion"). We understand that the deadline for tabling amendments to the Draft Motion is 18 January 2011, and wish to provide our critical comments and proposed amendments to the Draft Motion.

The SUA is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 1999. It is the leading voice of the Aramean (Syriac) people who are indigenous to Southeast Turkey (see "**Attachment 1**"), and thus rightfully seeks the security of their fundamental human rights, undifferentiated from those afforded to other minorities.

The SUA has thoroughly reviewed the Draft Motion as well as the Turkey 2010 Progress Report and commends the efforts made in dealing with minority rights in Turkey. However, we are concerned that the Draft Motion does not mention the plight of the Aramean people in Southeast Turkey.

In the Resolution from 2009, the European Parliament expressly referred to the problems faced by the Arameans with respect to the illegal land expropriation. With great concern this has not been reaffirmed in the Draft Motion, despite the deteriorated situation. In addition, it does not reflect the position taken in Resolution 1704 (2010) by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the illicit appropriation of land and the continued lack of a legal status of the Arameans in Turkey.

In the attached table (see "**Attachment 2**"), the SUA submits comments and recommendations to the Draft Motion. We encourage the European Parliament to take this opportunity and set before its constituents momentous resolutions that will ensure that the problems of the neglected and forgotten Aramean people are seriously considered on equal footing with other minorities in Turkey.

The Syriac Universal Alliance would also be most thankful if the European Union closely monitors the precarious situation of the Aramean (Syriac) people in Turkey and conducts biannual reviews.

We trust that you and your fellow Members of the European Parliament will critically address the urgent issues raised in our letter. Should you wish to discuss any of the points addressed herein, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Mr. Daniel Gabriel, the SUA's Human Rights and UN NGO Director, on [daniel.gabriel@sua-ngo.org](mailto:daniel.gabriel@sua-ngo.org).

Sincerely yours,

**Johny Messo**

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## **Attachment 1: Background information on the SUA and Aramean (Syriac) people**

### **About Syriac Universal Alliance (“SUA”)**

Established in 1983, the Syriac Universal Alliance (“SUA”) is a global umbrella organization representing the various Aramaic (Syriac) national federations in the continents of Europe, America, Australia and the Middle East. The SUA is the widely acknowledged voice of the Aramean (Syriac; *Süryani* in Turkish) people whose interests and needs it aims to serve, defend and promote.

Since 1999, the SUA is the only Aramaic-speaking Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and the Social Council of the United Nations. The SUA is a socio-political and cultural organization that works independently, transparently and on a democratic basis. Among others, the SUA seeks close cooperation with national governments, the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe.

The SUA is dedicated to answer the call to protect and secure the rights, liberty and equality of the Aramean people, safeguard and promote the cultural heritage of its ancestors, ensuring justice, and uniting all its people as a self-determined and internationally recognised Aramean nation.

### **About Syriac (Aramean) people**

*Scholars note that ‘Aramean/Aramaic’ is the original self-designation of the Arameans and the equivalent of the Greek name ‘Syrian/Syriac’ which they adopted since the early fifth century AD. In order to avoid the recurring confusion with the largely Muslim Arab citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic (i.e. Syria), this people either prefers the use of the artificial term ‘Syriacs’ or their ancient self-designation ‘Arameans’ in Western languages.*

The early Arameans were pastoralists who were an inherent and integral part of the Near East in 1550-1200 BC. In pre-Christian times, notably between 1150-700, they played a crucial role in the socio-political arena of the ancient world. As native inhabitants of Upper Mesopotamia (Southeast Turkey, north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq), they were ubiquitous in this area as well as in Lebanon and Lower Mesopotamia (South Iraq).

Their Aramaic mother tongue enjoyed the status of international language of the Near East between ca. 700 BC and ca. 700 AD. Aramaic also features in the Old and New Testaments, was the mother tongue of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and left indelible traces in the Jewish and Muslim literatures (including the Qur’an).

Aramaic has for the most part been the main carrier of the identity of the Arameans, who were one of the first nations to adopt the Gospel in the early centuries of the Christian era. Besides the Syriac (Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant) community, the Chaldeans, Nestorians and Maronites are also the heirs of the Aramaic heritage. For many centuries, their ancient monasteries and churches functioned as intellectual centers and schools.

Prof. S. Moscatti: “The Greeks and Romans knew the Near East mainly through the Arameans, for it was they who united and canalized the sources of its culture, bringing together Babylonian, Persian and Hebrew elements and transmitting them to Christianity, and with Christianity to the West. From the West, at a later date, the Arameans [sc. Syriac Orthodox & Nestorians] were to bring to the East Greek culture, especially philosophy, which became known to the Arabs through the medium of Aramaic.”

Prof. E. Kraeling: Without the Aramaic language, “the expansion of Christianity in the Orient would have been unthinkable.” This is *inter alia* “the historical debt which the world owes the Arameans.”

Today, the Christian Arameans are a stateless and forgotten people who, as a result of ethnic cleansing, land theft and recurring persecutions, were forced to flee from the land of their ancestors. In Southeast Turkey, for example, only 2.500 Arameans remain and in the entire country approximately 25,000. In fact, the number of Arameans in Europe substantially exceeds the number of Arameans left in their homelands.

This people and its ancient language are in serious danger of extinction today. Therefore, their future survival remains contingent on international recognition as an indigenous people and as one of the ethno-religious and linguistic minorities of Turkey. In order to achieve this, the Aramean (Syriac) people need your full support.

## Attachment 2: Draft Motion for Resolution 2010, Comments and Recommended Amendments

In the below table, the SUA very summarily submits its comments and amendments to the Draft Motion. We merely touch on a few of the issues largely relating to property rights, negligence and discrimination. In the *SUA's Turkey Report 2010*, which we are delighted to share at your request, we offer a detailed discussion of other neglected key issues that similarly concern the Aramean people in Turkey.

Our point of departure is the European Parliament Resolution on Turkey's 2009 Progress Report ("Resolution 2009") which expressly referred to the problems faced by the Arameans. With respect to the Draft Motion for the Resolution on Turkey's 2010 Progress Report, the SUA proposes Amendments to Articles 16, 18, 29; New Articles 20, 21, 23, 35; and Comments to Article 40.

Article	Comments	Recommended Amendments
Article 16	This Article is a toned down version of Article 24 in Resolution 2009. Last year, stronger language was used in deploring the Turkish Government in failing to align its policy with international standards. For the record, Turkey is far from the resolution requirement "actively to foster a climate of full respect for minorities." Paltry acts in giving non-Muslim groups their rights must not direct attention of the European Parliament away from the core problems. For instance, returning the Greek Orthodox orphanage is commendable, yet the edifice of discrimination against Christians clearly remains unchanged.	The wording from Article 24 ought to be reiterated in this Article 16. Insert at the end of Article 16 the following words:  <u>"and reiterates that the Government actively to foster a climate of full respect for minorities, in particular its non-Muslim minorities, and to ensure that cases of hostility and violence are brought before the courts."</u>
Article 18	The Article does not expressly require Turkey to permit religious groups to function without any undue constraints in line with the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR. Religious freedom does not come with any caveats for EU countries, neither should Turkey try and carve out this basic freedom by failing to enact proper Foundation Laws. This is pertinent to Christian Greeks, Armenians and Arameans who lack the benefit of religious freedom often propounded as being a fundamental human right in Turkey.	For the sake of clarity, insert in line 2, after the term "Alevi", the next phrase: <u>"Greek, Armenian, Aramean and other Christian communities."</u>  Insert at the end of this Article the phrase: <u>"and the failure to enable these ethno-religious communities to function without undue constraints, in line with the ECHR and the case law of the ECtHR."</u>
<b>New Article 20</b>	In Article 23 of Resolution 2009, the European Parliament referred to the problems of illegal land expropriation faced by the Arameans. Peculiarly, this has <i>not</i> been reaffirmed in 2010.  Thankfully, in 2010 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe ("PACE") recognised the hardships faced by the Arameans in Articles 19.6 and 19.7 of Resolution 1704. The PACE and the European Parliament defend and promote the same core values. It sensibly follows, then, that there ought to be uniformity and consistency by the European Union and the Council of Europe in emphasising and carrying out their values. Failing to do this is certainly not in the interest of, and even conveys the wrong message to, Turkey and the European community at large.	The circumstances have not improved for the Arameans, but rather deteriorated. Thus insert new Article 20 as follows:  <u>"20. Reiterate its concerns about the difficulties encountered by Arameans in relation to their property ownership and calls upon the government to ensure that the Saint Gabriel monastery, founded in 397 AD, is not deprived of its lands, and that it is protected in its entirety and equally expresses concern about the continuation of the unlawful appropriation of significant amounts of land historically and legally belonging to a multitude of ancient Aramean monasteries, churches and proprietors in Southeast Turkey."</u>

<p><b>New Article 21</b></p>	<p>Again, the spirit, principles and standards embodied in the PACE Resolution 1704 ought to be stressed similarly in Resolution 2010 relating to Turkey, thereby confirming and defending the non-negotiable position on the core values of the European community at large.</p>	<p>Insert new Article 21 as follows:</p> <p><u>“21. Urges the Turkish government to recognise, promote and protect the Aramean people as a minority, which is indigenous to Southeast Turkey, in conformity with the Lausanne Treaty and related international conventions which guarantee their fundamental human rights and dignity; this shall include, but shall not be limited to, officially developing their education and carrying out religious services in their Aramaic mother tongue.”</u></p>
<p><b>New Article 23</b></p>	<p>Upon reading Article 21, lay readers may assume that the Kurds are the native population of Southeast Turkey, which truly is not the case. It is an undisputable fact that the Aramean (Syriac) people are indigenous to this region, millennia before the Arabs, Kurds and Turks arrived (see below for scholarly references).</p> <p>Whilst we commend the European Parliament for noticing the issue of the Kurds, it should not come at the expense of marginalising or even ignoring the actual indigenous Aramean people who face possible extinction from their lands. Resolution 2010 ought to consider the socio-economic status of the Arameans, especially with the purpose to attract those Arameans who were forced to flee their ancestral lands, and ensure that assistance from the EU reaches them too. Turkey has received €2,256 billion worth of financial aid from the EU since 2007. These subsidies were granted for the realisation of approximately 132 projects. Hardly any of this money has been invested in the Arameans and their endangered Aramaic cultural heritage (tangible and intangible). Cf. below, Article 40.</p>	<p>Insert new Article 23 as follows:</p> <p><u>“23. Calls upon Turkey to pay particular attention to the socio-economic situation of the Arameans of Southeast Turkey and to carry out active and real measures to ensure that they are receiving adequate EU financial assistance with respect to improving their socio-economic standards and are not being discriminated against on ethno-religious and linguistic grounds.”</u></p>
<p><b>New Article 35</b></p>	<p>In Article 37 of Resolution 2009 the European Parliament referred to the rights of the Aramean (sc. Maronite) community in Cyprus. In the Draft Motion this reference is conspicuously omitted. The circumstances have not changed for the Aramean Christians. Recently, on 25 December 2010, the Turkish Cypriot side interrupted and cancelled the services of the Greek Orthodox Ayios Synesiou church in occupied Rizokarpasso. Hence the previous Article 37 ought to be reiterated and reinforced in Resolution 2010.</p>	<p>Insert new Article 35 as follows:</p> <p><u>“33. Reiterates that Turkey should ensure that the ethno-religious minorities in Cyprus are allowed freely to exercise their religious rights; stresses that, in the case of the Aramean Christian community, freedoms should also be accorded to all four Maronite villages.”</u></p>
<p>Article 40</p>	<p>The intention of this Article is no doubt sincere. Yet the SUA wishes to stress the next points.</p> <p>Again, the EU has invested over €2,256 billion in Turkey. The Arameans, their cultural heritage and their homeland have hardly, if at all,</p>	<p>No proposed amendments. However, see the newly suggested Article 23, above.</p>

	<p>benefited from this aid. In July 2010, Turkey announced that it will invest no less than \$150 million in the Palestinian Authority. While we understand Turkey's concern for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, we ask why Turkey interferes with such foreign affairs while it has not shown equal determination to solve its own domestic issues? And why is Turkey able to readily invest 150 million dollars in Palestine and translate its words into action, whereas it continues to neglect its own native citizens and society in its very own backyard?</p> <p>Thus it is most reasonable that the European Parliament urges Turkey to invest structurally in its indigenous Aramean (Syriac) people and its south-eastern area, above all in improving the security, infrastructure and facilities for normal life circumstances there that may draw Aramean refugees from the Diaspora back to the land of their ancestors.</p>	
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### **Indigenous Status of the Aramean (Syriac) civilization in Southeast Turkey: Scholarly Testimonies**

The history of the Aramean (Syriac) people and their Aramaic (Syriac) language in Southeast Turkey spans more than 3,000 years and, accordingly, they are indigenous to this region. For this reason, the Syriac Universal Alliance believes that Turks ought to consider them as an enrichment to their state. And in keeping with international law, standards and values, the Turkish Government ought to assist the neglected and forgotten Aramean people in safeguarding, developing and promoting their endangered Aramaic cultural heritage.

There exists a variety of conclusive evidence to substantiate the historical claim of the Arameans and their Aramaic language in Tur 'Abdin, which is Aramaic for "the mountain of the servants [of God]" and an erstwhile densely populated Christian region in Southeast Turkey. A few examples may be cited to illustrate this point.

"In the early Byzantine period and the first centuries of Islam, Tūr 'Abdīn was probably inhabited almost entirely by Christian Arameans. Later, more and more Muslims (mainly Kurds) settled there."<sup>1</sup> The increase of the Kurdish population occurred in the last few centuries, especially the previous one.

"The area around the Tūr 'Abdīn remained a main centre of speakers of Aramaic through centuries, and it is no hazard that Nusaybin and Mardin, to the south of the mountain, and Amida, to its north, were later important centres of the earliest Christian literature in Aramaic."<sup>2</sup>

Regarding Beth Zamani, an Aramean city-state in the early first millennium B.C., it is widely known that "its capital city was then Amida, modern Diyarbakır."<sup>3</sup>

"Tur 'Abdin has a history of one and a half millennia before the conversion of its Aramean inhabitants to Christianity and is mentioned in several Assyrian records, such as Adadnirari I (1305-1274) and Salmanassar I (1274-1244), in which wine regions, especially the good wine of the Mount Izala, a name still used for the southern part of Tur 'Abdin, is mentioned."<sup>4</sup>

Palmer rightly deduced from the Assyrian annals: "Not only are several of the village names still in use, even these types of farming and the same skill in metalwork are characteristic of the ancient Aramaic stock of Christians who are the hereditary inhabitants of the [Tur 'Abdin] plateau."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W.P. Heinrichs, "Tūr 'Abdīn," in P.J. Bearman *et al.* (eds.), in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* Vol. X (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 666.

<sup>2</sup> E. Lipiński, "The Linguistic Geography of Syria in Iron Age II (c. 1000-600 B.C.)," in *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (2000), 136.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Peeters, 2000), p. 136; on Beth Zamani, see pp. 135-161.

<sup>4</sup> R. Macuch, "Tur 'Abdin Through the Ages," in *Abr-Nahrain* 29 (1991), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> A.N. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur 'Abdin* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 15.