



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

**SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE**

ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܐܠܝܐܢܐ

Tuesday, 15 March 2011

**Re: Congratulations upon Election as 77<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the Maronite Syriac Church of Antioch**

To His Beatitude and Eminence Mor Bechara Rahi,  
the 77<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole Levant:

It is with great pleasure that we have received the joyful news today that You have been elected as *His Beatitude and Eminence the seventy-seventh Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole Levant*.

On behalf of the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA) and all its Syriac (Aramaic) National Federations in Europe, the USA and Australia, we wish to congratulate You heartily on this significant post. *(See the Appendix for more information about SUA, the only Aramaic-speaking NGO at the United Nations.)*

We are certain that the Maronite synod took the right decision in electing You to this office as a strong, educated and spiritual leader in succeeding Mor Nasrallah Butros Sfeir, to whom we herewith also express our sincerest gratitude for his unforgettable services over the last 25 years.

One of our goals is to contribute to bringing the heirs of the ancient and rich Syriac (Aramaic) cultural heritage closer toward each other in the next decades. To that end, we hope to officially visit the beautiful country of Lebanon again this summer and we are already looking forward to meeting You.

Again we wish to sincerely congratulate You as the 77<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the Maronite Syriac Church of Antioch. We pray and hope that God grants You much heavenly wisdom, strength and blessings during Your Patriarchal Term!

On behalf of my fellow board members and all our Member Federations and Associations, I once again wish to congratulate You with Your new Post and remain faithfully Yours in Christ our Lord,

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*Represented in the USA, the UK, Australia, Turkey, Lebanon, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.*

## Attachment: Background information on SUA & 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.