



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

SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE

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Wednesday, 30 March 2011

**To His Excellency Turhan Ayvaz,
Governor of the Mardin Province**

Re: Congratulations on Installation of New Governorship in the Mardin Province

Dear Mr. Ayvaz,

On behalf of the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA) and all its Member Federations in Europe, the USA and Australia, it gives us great pleasure to extend our warmest congratulations on Your installation as the newly appointed Governor of Mardin (*see Appendix 1 for more information about the SUA, the only Aramaic-speaking NGO at the United Nations*).

We trust that You are already well aware of the ancient and rich cultural history of Mardin. In particular of the native Aramean or Syriac (*Süryani* in Turkish) civilization and population who have managed to maintain an ongoing presence in Southeast Turkey for more than 3,000 years (*see Appendix 2 for more about their ancient existence in the region*).

The SUA has met before with Your predecessor, Mr. Hasan Duruer, and is grateful for his past service. We are determined to work closely with You, especially on the intercultural dialogue in the Mardin region to which the Aramaic cultural heritage is an integral part. Like Yourself, we are committed to promote a harmonious society respectful of human rights and we intend to support sustainable social and economic development in the region. We are confident that both of us envision the same goals for the benefit of this ancient region, its cultural heritage, its heirs and present-day citizens.

We are of the view that one should focus on taking advantage of opportunities and creating solutions for Turkey that benefit all of its society and citizens. We are in the process of devising a plan on how Turkey can best promote and protect the future existence of the Aramean (Syriac) people in the Tur-Abdin and Mardin areas, and we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss our proposed plan with Your Excellency later this year.

Once again we congratulate you wholeheartedly and wish you every success in Your new duties and we look forward to our fruitful cooperation in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

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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 recognized 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-linguistic and religious minorities of Turkey. In order to achieve this, the Aramean (Syriac) people need your support.

Attachment 2: Scholars on the Ancient Aramean (Syriac) Presence in Southeast Turkey

Our basic premise is that the history of the Aramean (Syriac) people and their Aramaic language in Southeast Turkey spans more than 3,000 years and, accordingly, are indigenous to this region. While the Syriac Universal Alliance respects Turkey's territorial integrity, we also believe that this Republic ought to consider our people as an enrichment. And in keeping with international law, standards and values, the Turkish Government ought to assist the Aramean people in safeguarding, developing and promoting their Aramaic cultural heritage.

There exists a variety of conclusive evidence to substantiate the historical claim of the Arameans and their 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."¹ 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."²

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."³

"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."⁴

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."⁵

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

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

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

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

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