



SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE

ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ܘܢܝܘܝܐ ܥܘܠܡܝܐ

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

PRESS RELEASE

Date

1 November 2010

For further information please contact

Daniel Gabriel

E-mail

daniel.gabriel@sua-ngo.org

IRAQI MASSACRE IN SYRIAC CHURCH: 52 KILLED AND SCORES INJURED

London, UK – The Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA), the recognised United Nations NGO representing the Aramean (Syriac) people worldwide, sharply condemns the latest and most horrific massacre in the Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad where 52 Christian Arameans and Iraqi police were slaughtered by Al Qaeda linked forces.

The Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Church became the sacred place in which more than 100 Syriac Catholics took refuge during the Sunday mass. What resulted was a bloodbath in which 52 Aramean (Syriac) worshippers and police were killed and 67 are reported to be injured. Reports suggest that the dead included at least 10 policemen, two priests and five to eight of the attackers. This is the largest number of targeted Iraqi Christians to be killed by Islamic militants. The Islamic State of Iraq, which took responsibility for the horror, is a well known al Qaeda affiliated group.

The Islamic group subsequently posted a statement on Islamist websites saying that it would "exterminate Iraqi Christians" if two Christian women in Egypt (who were forcibly converted to Islam) were not freed. This is common practice for Islamists who often connect external events in order to trigger local violence against the native Christians.

The attack on the Aramean (Syriac) Christians was aimed at driving the innocent and embattled Christian people out of Iraq, said the Iraqi Human Rights Minister Wijdan Michael. While Iraqi Christians once numbered 1.5 million, some reports have them at approximately 600,000 today. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recently documented the disproportion of the Christian refugees when showing that they made up a staggering 40% of all Iraqi refugees yet only made up 4% of Iraq's population before the eruption of the war in 2003. The Christian Aramean communities in Iraq, including the Chaldeans, Syriac Orthodox, Nestorians (sometimes called Assyrians) and Syriac Catholics, have long been targeted with daily intimidations, deaths, rapes, kidnappings, bombings and threats leading to a global diaspora of Arameans who were forced to flee their homeland.

Mr Daniel Gabriel, the SUA Human Rights and UN NGO Director states that "I am trying to hold back the emotion resulting from this massacre. This is completely intolerable. The murders of the Christian Aramean hostages seem to have been partly triggered by a completely unprofessional rescue mission carried out by over-zealous Iraqi police forces. It took place while American forces watched on. The central issue, however, is that attacks on Christians is a systemic and inherent problem in Iraq. This has been prevalent in the past and will continue for years to come if action is not taken immediately. Iraqi society itself must change and the Iraqi Government must stop the rhetoric and focus on meaningful actions to stop the pouring of Christian blood."

Head Office:

Syriac Universal Alliance
Klockarvägen 104
151 61 Södertälje, Sweden

+46 855 032 810
info@sua-ngo.org
www.sua-ngo.org

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

Mr Johnny Messo, President of the Syriac Universal Alliance notes: "I call on the Iraqi Government, Iraqi Security Forces and American Soldiers to take all actions possible to protect the Christian Aramean people in Iraq. There are reports that the Iraqi police were informed many days before the incident by the local Aramean (Syriac) priest that the Church was under threat. Yet nothing was done to protect the members of the Church. I ask the Iraqi Government to investigate the entire matter, particularly the negligence of the local police and security forces. I also ask the Arab League, all Islamic Countries and Islamic Leaders in the Middle East to publicly condemn the ongoing violence in Iraq which targets the Christian Aramean communities. We realize that the solution to all this violence cannot be implemented overnight, but concrete steps towards eroding the sectarian violence against the Christian Aramean people must form part of any short and long term working plan in Iraq."

The Syriac Universal Alliance urgently calls upon the general public, media outlets and all those concerned with protecting human rights, to help the Aramean (Syriac) people. The Christian Aramean communities in Iraq are facing the worst possible threat and there is no time to waste.

Syriac Universal Alliance¹

¹ Please see Appendix 1 for further information on the SUA and the Aramean (Syriac) people.

APPENDIX 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 Syriac (Aramaic) national federations in the continents of Europe, America, Australia and the Middle East. The SUA is the widely acknowledged voice of the Aramean (Syriac) 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 ~~separatist~~ ^{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 (Syriac) 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 Aramean (Syriac) 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 of Syria, this people at present 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-1201550 0 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, ~~eastern~~ ^{eastern} Syria and northern Iraq), they were ubiquitous in this area as well as in Lebanon and South-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 centres and schools. Many intellectuals have also expressed the importance of the Aramean people and Aramaic language:

Prof. S. Moscati: "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 largely forgotten people who, as a result of ethnic cleansing, land theft, occupation and recurring persecutions, were forced to flee from the land of their ancestors. In Southeast Turkey, for example, only 2.500 Arameans (Syriacs) 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 with hundreds of thousands in exile in countries like USA, Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Syria, India, Lebanon and Sweden.

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