



Assyria Council of Europe

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Press Release for Immediate Release

European Parliament Conference Highlights Assyrian Suffering in Iraq

Brussels - On Wednesday 11 June 2008 more than 100 guests attended a conference at the European Parliament in Brussels on the situation of the Assyrians in Iraq. The event was organized by the Assyria Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Peoples Party-European Democrats, the biggest bloc in the European Parliament, and touched on crucial issues and questions regarding the plight and future survival of Iraq's indigenous people. Subjects discussed included the plight of Assyrian IDPs throughout Iraq, Art. 125 of the Iraqi Constitution and the protection of minorities, territorial and extra-territorial federalism, the situation of other Iraqi minorities, and EU aid to Iraq. The general consensus throughout the conference was that the situation of the Assyrians in Iraq is precarious and more must be done by the international community, including the EU, to protect the Assyrians.

His Eminence the Ambassador of Iraq to Brussels, Mr. Mohammed Al-Doreky, made it clear that it saddens him when Assyrians leave Iraq and that as the indigenous people of the land they have a right to remain on their ancestral homeland. In a very thought-provoking analysis, Dr. Willy Fautre of Human Rights Without Frontiers also discussed whether territorial federalism alone in Iraq will suffice to protect its minorities or whether there needs to be some kind of extra-territorial federalism also to ensure the survival and protection of minorities wherever they reside in the country. Mrs. Pascale Warda of the Hammorabi Human Rights Organization and the former Minister of Migration and Displacement, was adamant that the Iraqi government must do more to ensure the protection of the Assyrian Christian community and reminded all the participants that since 2003 at least 44 churches have been bombed throughout the country.

In addition to a good number of MEPs present at the conference, there were also representatives of various NGOs, journalists and representatives of other Iraqi minority communities. Furthermore, His Beatitude the Bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Belgium, Severios Hazail Soumi, together with the Syriac Orthodox Church Bishop of Mosul, Severios Hawa, was also present at the event. In particular, His Beatitude Hazail Soumi asked the panelists why a safe haven in Iraq isn't being created for the Christians whereas in the 1990's steps were taken to protect the persecuted Kurdish and Shiite communities of Iraq. Mr. Ninos Warda, ACE Project Director stated that, 'This event has been a profound success because it has raised the profile of the suffering of the Assyrians in Iraq in an institution which has on many occasions released resolutions expressing its concern for the suffering of these people.'

It should be noted that the Assyrian community in Iraq is made up of various denominations including the Syriac and Chaldean Catholic churches, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church and also Protestant churches.