



# Assyria Council of Europe

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Press Release for Immediate Release

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## Situation of Iraqi Assyrian<sup>1</sup> Christians Discussed in Nürnberg

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Brussels - On Friday 18<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2008 the Solidarity Group for Tur Abdin & North Iraq organized a conference in Nürnberg, Germany on the plight of Iraqi Christians and the challenges faced by the international community. The *Assyria Council of Europe (ACE)* was represented in this conference by Ms. Attiya Gamri who gave a presentation about the situation of Assyrians in Iraq and what is needed to alleviate their situation. In her speech, Ms. Gamri made it clear that Assyrians in Iraq are entitled to the same rights and duties as other Iraqi citizens and that if they are not granted these rights then Iraq and especially the Nineveh Plains area will lose its native Assyrian population as has occurred in places such as Tur Abdin. Mr. Ninos Warda also gave a talk on behalf of ACE and discussed the lobbying process within the EU and ACE's role in it and the importance of action taken by the EU and its member states. Mr. Warda emphasized that the situation of the Assyrians in Iraq requires a professional lobby to be instituted in Brussels so that awareness of this issue is raised at the EU level so that the EU can be in a better and informed position to help ensure that the rights of all peoples in Iraq are effectively protected as according to the Iraqi constitution.

Father Horst Oberkampff of Bad Saulgau gave a fascinating presentation with pictures from his visit to North Iraq in September/October 2007 and touched upon the distressing conditions that the Christians were living in. Furthermore, Mr. Shlemon Yonan from Berlin, head of the Central Union of the Assyrians, also gave a talk explaining what he saw about the situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria from his recent visit there. In addition, Father Thomas Prieto Peral from Munich also talked about his recent visit to Tur Abdin and presented some wonderful pictures of the small Assyrian community there.

There was general consensus throughout the conference that the situation of Iraqi Christians is regrettably dire and that steps must be taken to try and alleviate their situation. In a phrase that could adequately sum up the feeling throughout the conference, His Eminence Mor F. Saliba Özmen, Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Mardin and Diyarbekir stated that "We are the Assyrian Christians of Iraq and the Christians of Iraq are us." Similarly, His Eminence Mor P. Augin Aydin, Syriac Orthodox Bishop for the Netherlands also emphasized that although suffering and persecution is regrettable it strengthens a community's faith, national unity and resolve.

Other people who participated in the conference were Father Ernst Ludwig Vatter of Stuttgart and Father Emmanuel Yukhanna of the Church of the East in Wiesbaden.

Members of the Solidarity Group for Tur Abdin & North Iraq, the organizers of this event, include Ms. Janet Abraham from Munich, Dr. Shabo Talay of Erlangen, Father Thomas Prieto Peral of Munich and Father Horst Oberkampff from Bad Saulgau.



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<sup>1</sup> The Assyrians are also commonly known as ChaldoAssyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs or Mandeans.