

What is your retrospective view to the Brussel conference regarding the Niniveh Plain

2017-08-17



Good evening Mr. Rhawi, how you feel now?

I am very tired but most of all I am happy for my people in Iraq, they have parties like these who are ready to take responsibility for their people.

Seven parties were present in Brussels and cooperated very good for the benefit of their people and they signed on position paper with very clear demands and which are totally in line with the Iraqi constitution.

Therefore, I feel great confidence after the conference, all parties agreed on one position and that makes me very hopeful for the future.

May you introduce yourself and tell us, what kind of positions you have inside your organization?

I am married with 3 children and soon becoming 48 years. I live in Sweden since 1976.

I am Head of Foreign Affairs for European Syriac Union, ESU. ESU is established and has its seat in Brussels and have federations in several European countries.

What kind of goals you have followed up in Iraq during your visits?

My organization has been active since 2004 and we are advocating for the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people for very long time, we have many sister-organizations in Iraq.

We have for long time warned EU and USA about the sectarian extremists in the Middle East and in particular in Iraq and Syria.

The situation for the CSA people (the Christians of Iraq) Pre ISIS was not good and of course it went from bad to worse.

Our primary goal was to unite the CSA parties in one position paper for our future in Iraq, and that work

is an ongoing work for many years back.

What is your retrospective impression to the conference?

We regard the conference as successful, the majority of our parties in Iraq were represented and along with representatives from Kurdistan and Iraq government we feel hopeful to achieve our objectives. We had also representatives from other minorities living in the Nineveh Plain as part of the conference. The outcome was in line with what we trusted it would. The other invited organizations, guests, sponsors, EU and US representatives completed the quota of different involved entities.

We regard that the CSA parties were clear in their stands and we support them in their struggle and demands.

What kind of goals followed up the conference and are they achieved?

The primary goal was to have the CSA parties from Iraq to sign on common declaration.

The second goal was to have EU and US representatives present and that they could hear how the CSA parties think for their and the future of Iraq.

The third goal was to create willingness from different stakeholders to help our people in Iraq.

The fourth goal is to arrange a conference for countries and big organizations to donate money for rebuilding the Nineveh Plain.

In parallel with us, we expect the CSA parties in Iraq to work on the other CSA parties that did not sign to sign as well and that they all together later promote their position toward KRG and Baghdad.

The Christian Syrians, as original inhabitant of Iraq and Syria, are nearly disappear from Iraq, how you can reconstruct and reorganize Nineveh Plain based on the demography of the year 2003?

Of course, this work is not easy but is doable if we all join forces. This requires work from the CSA parties in Iraq and the diaspora.

First of all Baghdad and Erbil must stop our calling the Nineveh Plain (our homeland) "disputed area". Baghdad and Erbil must empower the different minorities and our people to govern themselves according to the constitution of Iraq. Baghdad and Erbil must support our people to defend themselves.

If the autonomy Region of Nineveh are established, to whom it should belong to, Baghdad or Erbil, if we consider that Erbil is going to make a referendum about its independence from Baghdad at 25th of September this year?

Due to the existing constitution, the Nineveh Plain should be part of Iraq as a province with several autonomies according to the agreed and signed position paper.

For us as ESU it is not a matter of belonging to this or that but being a part of federative system. In our opinion it's not up to the diaspora CSA organizations to decide, it has to be what our people in the Nineveh Plain decides, could be a referendum regarding this issue. Of course, this is a matter for the future.

What is the view of Baghdad or Erbil regarding the Idea of an Autonomy Region Nineveh Plain with Syriac participation?

In words, they both agree but we still wait for them to act and fulfil their promises.

What is the relevance of USA and are they committing to its historical responsibility, if we consider no US-invasion no such Syriac tragedy in Iraq?

Of course USA and other countries has legal and moral obligation to all Iraqi people and in particular to

the minorities such as the CSA people. What the coalition did years ago was and is good for Iraq; we should not forget that Saddam was a dictator. In our opinion they didn't have a post Saddam plan to work after, therefore the vacuum after Saddam regime created a lawlessness and Iraq ended up in the "law of the jungle" the strong and powerful dominates the small and powerless.

USA and EU must see to that all people are given the chance to benefit from the democratic values agreed in the UN.

What is the relevance of the EU, in particular of Germany? Germany spend already 1.3 Billion € to the KRG. Does Germany helps the Syriac and have been they at the conference?

Given to the position of Germany in EU and all the money the country has invested in Iraq they should make sure that the money are used as they were intended too. Unfortunately, we can see that many European countries has invested and donated big amounts of money to Iraq and not all of them did the aftermath, the money ended up in the hands of different components such as the Shia and Kurds in particular in some parties' pocket. The money has not benefiting the Christian minorities the CSA people nor the Armenians. The money has stayed in the hands of the already powerful groups and made them stronger in relationships to the already powerless or poor minorities. Everybody knows that money gives political empowerment.

How do you think, how it can be done the reconciliation of the Syriacs and other minorities in Nineveh Plain?

The actual objective is very simple but in practice, it is more difficult, but first of all the CSA people must be empowered with clear demand from USA and EU on the Iraqi government and the KRG.

After that, we must all understand that people will return to their homes if they feel secure, the security must be in the hands of the CSA people and other minorities of course according to the federative constitution of Iraq.

The rebuilding of the Nineveh Plain is a matter of small amount of money in regards of EU or USA budget.

The people of the Nineveh Plain must feel that they have power to control and defend themselves that they are supported by Baghdad and Erbil to govern themselves. They need helpful friends now.

What kind of organizations or countries helps with the reconciliation at the Nineveh plain? We heard that the money do not arrive the Syriacs from local authorities, because of they are Christians.

Today it's mainly different church or human charity organizations that helps but it's not much at all and it should be more coordinated with the people of the Nineveh Plain and of course with the council of the CSA parties. The seven parties are ready to take this responsibility and they signed on the position papers that they are ready to create an interim authority for this subject.

What will be now next?

We are waiting for the recognition of the position papers from Baghdad and KRG and of course, from EU commission since the EU parliament already has accepted a resolution on this issue. USA has also in many way expressed that they are ready to support the Christian of Iraq now we are waiting for their active work and full finless of their promises.

What is the relevance of the Christians Syriacs in Iraq or Syria, are they needed or just a disruptive element in a Muslim majority?

The Christian of the Middle East are in the first hand the CSA people, this people are the original people of the Middle East we are talking about presence since 8-10000 years in this region. We are not someone who moved in recently. It is not about who was here first or came after.

They are some Christian militia. What relevance they have and should they works together?

For the Nineveh Plain to realize and govern as a province with several autonomies it's lethal for the militia to become on force under one command and it must be one political body that gives the command political perspective.

What is the influence of Shiite and Sunni conflict to the Syriac people?

The influence is much bigger then that one can imagine of course the local, regional, national and international strategies are something that affects our parities even though they not always talks openly about it.

In preparation of the Brussels conference, they happened some irritations regarding the participation of some Syriac political leaders from Iraq. What exactly happened and are they solved now or how they can be solved?

In our opinion, the CSA parties along with other organizations are entitle to decide their people's future. All parties where invited but some of them decided in the last minute to not come, we think that this easy to solve if the parties that stayed at home are working for the best of their people should join the majority of the parties. All should be given a second chance to join the common signed position papers.

What is the influence of the Syriac conflict regarding the people's name: Aramean or Assyrian or the generic term Syriac?

The name conflict seams to lose ground, which is good one less thing to fight or disagree about. Unfortunately for quite some time the name-conflict has been very harmful to our people and the unified agenda for the future.

What is the role of the Church in general in this issue?

In the Middle East still the churches had more to say and can influence our people. Sometimes its influences very bad and other times good like when the church leaders talks in terms " we are all one in Christ" this of course can unified us.

If Nineveh Plain is established, what are the three most important steps to do at first?

Political empowerment and self-govern
Common military command, no more political party militias
Rebuilding & Reconciliation

Mr. Rhawi, I would like to thank you for your time.

From Mesut be Malke

Brussel Conference to Nineveh Plain

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