



# Petition for Mor Gabriel Monastery

From 28.10 – 31.10.2011 a delegation of the German Christian Party CDU visited the Syriacs in Sweden to speak about their signature campaign for the monastery Mor Gabriel in Turkey.

The delegation was supervised by our European Syriac Union ESU, which organized meetings with the archbishop of the Syriac-orthodox church Mor Abdullah Gallo Shabo, the churches of Mor Juhanun in Märsta and Mor Jakob in Södertälje, member of the Swedish parliaments Yilmaz Kerimo and member of the commune in Södertälje Metin Rhawi.

The delegation of CDU visited furthermore the Syriac TV Channel Suroyo TV and was able to speak on a live programme about the signature campaign.

The goal of the signature campaign is stated as followed: On January 26th 2011 the highest court in Ankara ruled that large parts of the possession of the Mor Gabriel monastery will be taken away from it. The 1600 years-old monastery has owned the land for centuries but has been unable to register it so far because of bureaucratic stonewalling. However it is undeniable that the monastery shall be recognized as the owner of the land. It is a matter of fact that the monastery since 1937 regularly pays property fees.

The many ongoing lawsuits against the monastery strongly suggest that the monastery is no longer wanted to exist. Moreover members of the Syriac-orthodox community living near the monastery have recently suffered under serious attacks in which also their houses have been set on fire.

Despite some attempts of the Turkish Government to improve the situations of Syriac-orthodox living in Turkey they continuously suffer under ongoing attacks and threats against themselves and their properties. The Government in these cases does not provide the expected protection.

Member of the European Parliament Elmar Brok MdEP has already expressed this very unsatisfactory situation in a letter to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dated February 7th 2011. The subscribers listed below share the given criticism and declare solidarity with the Syriac-orthodox community in Turkey, Germany and across Europe. Elmar Brok MdEP has taken patronage on this initiative.

When we speak about the lawsuit cases of the monastery Mor Gabriel we do not only speak about one or two, but also about five. Here a short overview:

1. In 2008, two villages bordering on the monastery filed

suit claiming that the land-registry office gave lands away to the monastery when the boundaries were established. The court in Midyat dismissed this suit.

2. In accordance with the decision mentioned in this context, the neighbouring villages have expanded onto the monastery lands. The monastery itself is part of the village of Kafarbe, which maintains close contacts with the monastery. The village of Kafarbe filed a lawsuit against the two neighbouring villages in order to have the land boundaries clarified. The court in Midyat decided in favour of the village of Kafarbe. However, the two neighbouring villages appealed. The higher court repealed the first decision and declared that this matter had to be handled by the administrative court in Mardin.

3. 27.6 hectares of land are located within the monastery walls, and 6 hectares outside of the monastery. These lands have belonged to the monastery for centuries. During the land register work, these are entered under the name of the treasury. The reason given is that these are forest areas. But the monastery seeded trees here itself. Therefore the Mor Gabriel foundation filed a lawsuit against the Midyat forestry office. This suit was dismissed with the reasoning that these lands looked green on aerial photographs taken in 1950. The foundation hasn't withdrawn the lawsuit at this point, but it is still with the courts.

4. Lawsuit by 3 mayors entered with the crown prosecutor in Midyat. The crown prosecutor is charging the chairman of the Mor Gabriel foundation, Kuryakus Ergün, with "occupying forestry lands". Grounds: The monastery lands include 27.6 hectares of lands which belong to the forest. This case will be heard on January 11, 2012 in Midyat.

5. On 29/01/2009, the treasury filed suit against the Mor Gabriel foundation. It claimed 24.4 hectares of lands which are registered in the name of the monastery. The court dismissed this lawsuit. But the treasury appealed to the higher court and the first decision was repealed, so that now the claim is to have these lands transferred to the treasury.

At last the lawsuit case of the forest will be delivered to the International Court of Strassbourg. Of course for us Syriacs it is very important to get international support such as the support of the German Christian Party CDU. Therefore we thank them and wish them success with the signature campaign.

According to latest news Mor Gabriel prepares to bring the lawsuit to the European Court of Human Rights. Today, most of the Syriac people don't trust the decision that will be occurred by the Turkish state's courts.

## ESU Press Release for Zakho attacks

The attacks against Christians and other minorities now started in the Northern part of Iraq. The first attack took place on December 2nd. Islamic Kurds in Zakho following the Friday Prayer and with the instructions of the Imam attacked and destroyed all Christian owned businesses from liquor stores to beauty salons plus the Chinese owned massage shops. The following days these attacks spread to other cities of Northern Iraq.

Since a heavy security presence in the Nineveh Plain, the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian (CSA) people are concerned, because this can be a laying of groundwork for eventual annexation by the Kurdistan region. Kurds came into villages where exclusively Christians live.



This year an assembly of political parties and organisations delivered an official request concerning a province project in the Nineveh Plain for Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians. With this province a solution for the situation of Christians and other minorities would be finding. Although the official request has been sent to representatives of the Iraqi government, it has not been responded until today.

Referred to latest statements of Kurdish leaders, Christians would be better off joining the Kurdistan region, because of more protection and free practicing of their religion.

But latest developments show us, that even in the "secure North Iraq" Christians are not in security. Latest attacks against Christians determined a big lack of confidence and security. Especially the latest decision of Masoud Barzani concerning the contingent of minorities in the Kurdish parliament is a cause of concern on the rights of minorities. Five Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian and one Armenian member of the Kurdish parliament and the assembly of political parties and organisations showed a reaction on the decision of the Kurdish parliament. Also they wrote a letter to Barzani to not undersign this decision. Unfortunately last days Barzani signed this letter, so that now this contingent has been reversed.

The situation of Christians in the Middle East is very

alarming. The Northern part of Iraq was seen as a secure place for Christians and other minorities. But latest outcomes show that even there a future for Christians is not guaranteed.

During last decade, we have been observed the escalation of violence against Christians in the Middle East countries. The annihilation policies are conducted to eradicate the Christian presence from the concerned countries. The ongoing policies of Western countries remain weak and passive to protect autochthon Christians minorities of Middle East and preserving their existence in the region. European Syriac Union (ESU) is highly concerned about the future of Christians in the Middle East and asking to the Western powers, where can Christians continue to their existence and which measures have to be taken in order to secure Christians in the region.

At the current process the developments of Iraq and Syria are related to each other. The potential of our people could emerge on surface within this context. Especially Syria has very great importance for us. In order to avoid the wave of migration also in Syria from now on, the conditions should be prepared for our people.

The presence of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East is crucial and vital for the establishment of democratic, humanism and open society. Therefore, our call is clear; Christians of Middle East have to be protected and new policy toward them has to be realized.

European Syriac Union demands that regional and federal governments have the obligation to bring the responsible of these barbarous in front of the justice, compensating all damages caused during the attacks.

ESU condemns firmly the latest attacks against Christians at the Northern Iraq and demands to the regional and federal governments to take necessary measures to prevent similar attacks and create the atmosphere of security. Finally, on the basis of the Federal Constitution, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people have to acquire the right of the autonomy as soon as possible in order to continue to flourish their existence and culture as autochthon people of the region.



## The Voice of the Syriacs

### IMPRINT

Information bulletin about the social position of the Syriacs in and outside the Middle East.

It appears periodically, published by the European Syriac Union (ESU) in Brussels-Belgium.

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## "MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR"

The nativity of Jesus Christ had been the essence of life and gave the hope to the nations, people and communities. Until today, the world celebrates this day with the same meaning and aspirations.

As European Syriac Union (ESU) and Syriac people, we continue to celebrate this great day as the day of pardon, unity and salvation among nations and different cultures around the world and in

our region, Middle East. During the history, Syriac people gave many sacrifices and it is well-known it has been described as the "people of sacrifices". Syriac people played important role at the history to cherish the Christianity and during the first centuries had very crucial role with the spread of Christianity.

During the centuries we observed the decrease of Christian population at the region of Middle East because of the massacres, killings and wrong policies.

Even then, Syriac people around the history tries to keep alive this great culture in the homeland and today in diaspora.

From the establishment of ESU until today, we try and work to maintain adequate conditions to our people to celebrate it's religious, cultural and social feasts and holidays with freedom in the homeland and trying to preserve it's identity in European countries.

Today we are witnessing great political, cultural and social changes in our region, Middle East. Syriac people have to prepare itself politically to these changes if they desire to continue to celebrate such feasts with freedom and democracy.

On behalf of European Syriac Union, with great pleasure we wish you the best and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year of 2012. With the hope of year 2012 be the year of success and the good things for you and for your families.

## Syriac Young killed in Syria

The Arab awakening that change the atmosphere in Middle East countries continue to make the agenda in the international community. The manifestations, uprising and insecurity reign in Syria, country tourmoiled by the demands of the end of Bashar Al-Assad regime.

Meanwhile, Syriac people and other vulnerable communities are suffering from this situation.

Syriac young engineer Samir Cassaf from the city of Sadad (60 km from Homs) had been killed during clash and manifestations. Samir Cassaf had been attacked by unknown persons and killed on the place.

The city of Sadad, with ancient Syriac heritage, has been particularly dangerous at these last periods and Samir Cassaf was not the first victim. During the uprisings 6 young Syriacs lost their life's.

With the presence of several religious leaders and people the funeral ceremony took place at the church of Saint Jerjes.

Syriac people are now at the difficult period especially in Syria with the fears to live the same perilous tragedy of their brothers in Iraq which

were massacred, attacked, killed and forced to immigrate because of their ethno-religious identity.

