

No-Fly Zone over Northeast Syria

2019-01-03

We appeal to world leaders and to Christians throughout the world to support us, the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians living in Syria's North East region, as indigenous people of the Middle East. We urgently need protection from Turkey's threats to invade and "cleanse" our territory from Christianity, religious freedom, and democracy. US President Donald Trump's sudden decision to withdraw US troops, leaves us powerless and open to be destroyed by either Turkey or other regimes scrambling to see our demise in the vacuum this will create.

Turkey is threatening us daily in the local media to invade, and kill us. They are calling us "infidels." When Turkey was allowed to enter Afrin by the West, Turkey committed war crimes and ethnic cleansing against the religious minorities. All the Christians had to flee the area as Turkey's jihadi troops conducted door to door searches to hunt the Christians down, to kill them and destroyed all of Afrin's churches. They had to flee with nothing, and take refuge in the area that Turkey is now threatening to invade; north and east Syria. When President Trump gave Turkey's Recep Erdogan the permission to replace the US forces this means Turkey will crush the multi-religious democracy that is happening in north and east Syria. It alone is an island of religious freedom, decentralized and representative government, and is the only hope for our long term survival as Middle Eastern Christians.

As Christians, we know what it means to live under the Ottoman Empire's Caliphate. We carry a collective memory of the Ottoman's "special treatment" of Christians: demeaning laws as second class citizens, extortion taxes for being Christian (jizya), oppression, persecution, ethnic cleansing and genocide. We do not want to live again as second-class citizens under Turkish rule should Turkey occupy our land in Syria. The memory of the genocide of 1915 still lives vividly in our daily lives. It was our great grandparents that fled Turkey due to the 1915 genocide to Syria's North East region. We, the descendents of the survivors are at risk of reliving a genocide of the proportions our ancestors told us about, and by the same oppressor: Turkey.

From the beginning of the civil war in Syria until now, we Christians have worked actively as a bridge between the communities in north and east Syria working for pluralism and democratic values in the alliances we have promoted, both politically and to defend all people of north and east Syria. We Christians have played a significant role in local government and have freedoms that we haven't experienced for centuries in Syria: like the right to use our native language, Aramaic, the language of Jesus. We took a leading role in creating the Syrian Democratic Forces. Our people have fought and died side by side with our allies: Kurds, Arabs, and the US-led Global Coalition in the war against the Islamic State (I.S). We had hoped we, who have given everything for the same freedoms of the west would be supported to secure our democratic institutions in post-war negotiations.

An abrupt American withdrawal would mean chaos and war throughout the region. We need time to develop alternative and lasting security arrangements that keep north and east Syria free to follow a model of democracy and freedom for all.

Without protection, Christians will be the first target of Turkey's jihadist groups—just as we were in Afrin. We hope you can join us in our appeal to the International Coalition not to leave us unprotected and without guarantees. Without your support we fear that when Turkey invades we will see the end of Christianity in north and east Syria.

It is urgent to establish, as soon as possible, a no-fly zone for North East Syria to protect us against Turkey. Turkish air power overwhelmed the defenders of Afrin and even our brave Syriac Defence Forces forces cannot defend against this powerful NATO army. It is urgent to stop the invasion and occupation of Syria. This would give us back hope and trust in our Christian sisters and brothers in the US and other Western countries. It is time to stand together for our Christian values. Together, we need to defend and preserve Christianity so it is not wiped out from the Middle East.

