

# State spares 1 million lira budget for Mor Gabriel Monastery

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The Syriac Monastery of Mor Gabriel in Mardin's Midyat district is seen in this file photo. Hürriyet photo

Midyat Governor's Office has allocated a budget of 1 million Turkish Liras for the restoration of the road leading to the Syriacs' Mor Gabriel Monastery, a move viewed by the Syriac community as contradictory as the monastery was previously labeled an "occupier" and its lands were transferred to the Treasury.

The road works will be rolled out on the initiative of Midyat Governor Oğuzhan Bingöl, and supported by Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek and Interior Minister Muammer Güler.

David Vergili, a spokesman for the Brussels-based European Syriac Union (ESU), one of the most influential Syriac organizations in the diaspora, said the state tried to slide over the crucial problems by keeping people busy with formalist and cosmetic activities.

"The demand for the return of the all the lands of Mor Gabriel is stated in both the EU's annual report and the U.S. International Religious Freedom Report," Vergili said.

"The progress of the law cases and the state's attitude is evident. Both the state and the parties of that subject agreed on the fact that the lands belong to the monastery. But they are making things difficult by making various proposals, such as renting the lands. This is against morality and human rights," he said.

Mor Gabriel Foundation Head Kuryakos Ergün argues that the road construction works and the case should be considered individually. Ergün said thousands of people paid visit to the monastery.

"The road is in a very poor condition. The Midyat Governor works so hard for the construction of the road since he came to office. It can be regarded as a positive first step, but we would be gladder if our cases result in our favor," Ergün said.

Chair of the Midyat-based Syriac Associations Federation Evgin Türker also regarded the decision as a positive step, adding that they had made some contacts with Ankara on that matter and the governor Bingöl's efforts yielded some results. "But still there is a contradiction here. Even though the governor has a good will and is sensitive to our problems, he is still a part of the bureaucracy. Our procedures are ongoing and we are regarded as occupants in our own lands," Türker said.

Mor Gabriel is a 1,700-year-old historic monastery located in the southeastern province of Mardin's Midyat district. In 2008, the Forestry Ministry, the Land Registry Cadastre Office and the villages of Yayvantepe, Çandarlı and Eğlence sued the monastery for allegedly occupying their fields. The lawsuit was finalized last year, recognizing the monastery as an “occupier.” The case was then brought to the European Court of Human Rights. The future of the monastery currently hinges on the ECHR's decision.

Source: Hurriyet Daily News

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