

Current situation - October 2020

2020-10-20

In these difficult times of pandemic, preventive measures, and partial lockdowns we ask for strength, health, and patience to all. We as European Syriac Union co-chairs had hoped that the world would come to reflection, understanding, and cooperation in fighting this virus. Unfortunately, we see hostilities and wars continuing. Enmity endures and we see authoritarian regimes trying to benefit from the situation. This is inexcusable.

In the Middle East, we see that the U.S.-led International Coalition against ISIS has brought back hope for indigenous components like Syriacs and Yazidis who suffered genocide by terrorist ISIS. Slow reconstruction work and insufficient peacebuilding efforts in the ISIS aftermath, however, are threatening the existence in Iraq of these indigenous components. Syriacs and Yazidis are still forced to flee their Mesopotamian homelands.

Shiite Shabaks and their Iranian-backed PMU-militias aim to bring about a demographic change in Iraq's Nineveh Plain. This keeps Chaldeans-Syriacs-Assyrians from returning to the Nineveh Plain where only an estimated 35%-40% of the pre-ISIS 125 thousand Chaldeans-Syriacs-Assyrians have returned to. The situation in Shingal (Sinjar), where Yazidis have their population centers, is even more dire and reconstruction almost absent. Tens of thousands of Iraqi Yazidis and Syriacs still remain internally displaced. Syriac and Yazidi political organizations have repeated therefore their calls for more self-representation and self-protection.

In North and East Syria, we see that the Democratic Autonomous Administration is a model of how peoples and cultures can cooperate and co-exist. It has given hope for a future united democratic Syria and constitutional and political rights for Syriacs, Yazidis, Kurds, and others. The Democratic Autonomous Administration is an eyesore for Turkey. It feels threatened by this democratic peoples' model and hence Turkey and its militant factions, some espousing Islamist ideologies, have invaded North and East Syria in front of the world's eyes. Turkey with its dream of re-establishing Ottoman glory, again threatens co-existence of indigenous components and puts them into jeopardy.

Critical voices of Turkey's domestic crackdown on political opponents and restricting freedom of expression are systematically put in jail. Today, Turkey is one of the biggest jailers of journalist. Political opponents are threatened, slandered, removed from democratically elected positions, and stripped from diplomatic immunity. Changing churches into mosques for internal propaganda and populism creates animosity between the countries' civilians and puts the future of Syriacs, Armenians, and Rum-Greeks in Turkey at risk. This is all aggravated by Turkey's recent hostility against Greece and it openly inciting hostility in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Artsakh.

ESU calls on the world public opinion and international powers to come to the help of the indigenous components. They have suffered more than enough genocides, persecutions, and emigration. Only full recognition of their rights can guarantee a future in their middle eastern countries of residence. The

disappearance of Syriacs from the Middle East is a risk for the whole world. Diversity, pluralism, and continuation of Christianity in the Middle East are necessities for the Middle East to develop to full democracy and respect for human rights. It is imperative for the UN, EU, U.S., and Russia to take away this clear and present risk.