

The Tragic Situation of the Assyrians of Barwari Bala

Translated from Arabic in essence by Fred Aprim.

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Barwari Bala is an Assyrian region situated on the Iraqi-Turkish borders. It includes many villages with its center at Kani Maseh (The original Assyrian name is 'Ayna d' Nooneh). This region has been the center for many armed conflicts between Iraq, Turkey, Iraqi Kurds, and Turkish Kurds. It was for this reason that many of its Assyrian population were forced to abandon their villages. During the past Ba'ath regime, fights between the Iraqi government and Kurdish irregular armed forces turned these Assyrian villages and their churches into rubble.

After the 1991 uprising and the establishment of the No-Fly-Zone in north of Iraq, many families began to return to their villages while taking advantage of the assistance of certain international aid groups. However, during this period, many Kurds have taken advantage of the situation and have left their own villages and settled in these Assyrian villages. One example of this is the presence of more than 15 Kurdish families in Kani Maseh since 1993 despite the repeated Assyrian complaints to the local authorities that these families are illegally occupying Assyrian lands. In fact, the Kurdish authorities did not stop there, they have tried repeatedly to build residential compounds inside the village. The Assyrians of Kani Maseh protested and refused to allow such illegal construction on Assyrian lands. The local municipal office found other ways to infiltrate the village. The local authorities of the municipal office built 15 homes under the pretext that these homes were for local municipal office employees. However, after the completion of construction, the homes were distributed to common Kurds who have nothing to do with the municipal office of the village.

In recent years, the meticulously planned oppressive policies of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Mas'ood Barazani against the Assyrians of Kani Maseh have intensified. Persecuting Assyrians who are not members of the KDP, especially those who are members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), is one of such policies. These Assyrians are under direct threat from the local Kurdish authorities. One of the dirtiest games that the KDP plays is economical. The KDP control the employment department assigned to fill governmental positions in the region. Since people are in dire need for employment, especially as the economy in the region has improved in recent years, the KDP authorities pressure the Assyrians to enroll in the KDP in return for a job. Assyrians have experienced harsh times and Assyrian men must find employment to support their families. The KDP realizes this fact and takes advantage of the situation.

Additionally, the KDP refuses to grant the ADM permission to open an office in Kani Maseh despite the fact that an Assyrian landlord in Kani Maseh has donated the required lot for the building to the ADM. Furthermore, the KDP has threatened that same Assyrian landlord, confiscated a piece of his land adjacent to the lot donated to the ADM, and built its KDP office on that land without the willful permission of the owner. Today, the KDP is adding another story on top of what they built already in order to expand the office and increase the Kurdish presence in Kani Maseh.

We ask:

1. Where are the rights of the Assyrians who make a majority in these regions?
2. For how long would the KDP continue its chauvinistic policies of Kurdification of Assyrian lands and its policies of ethnic cleansing?
3. Is there really equality between Kurds and Assyrians in north of Iraq?