

Iraq Must Recognize Assyrians as its Indigenous People

Fred Aprim

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Assyrians are the descendants of the ancient Assyrians.¹ They are historically, culturally, and spiritually tied to northern Mesopotamia, a region that is located from north Baghdad to south of Lake Van, as well as from Persian borders in the east to the Euphrates in the west. However, today, and after centuries of persecution, numerous massacres and genocide they now concentrate in northern Iraq. According to Kelly, while the Assyrians are not legally recognized, many scholars and more importantly the Assyrian community, acknowledge Assyrians as one of the indigenous populations of Iraq.² Many studies, research papers and books about the topic have been published.^{3 4 5 6} These scholarly studies provide ample evidence that the Assyrians survived the fall of the empire.

The Indigenous Assyrians

The late US Senator John Nimrod asked, “how do we know that the Assyrians, who are also known as Chaldeans and Syriac, are the indigenous people of Iraq?” He answers by stating: “One only has to take a shovel and dig it into the ground and the only history found will be that of the Assyrians.”⁷

So what do we mean by indigenous people? The modern understanding of the term indigenous is based on specific aspects, including the followings:

- Self- identification as indigenous peoples at the individual and community level,
- Historical continuity with pre-settler societies,
- Strong link to territories and natural resources,
- Distinct social, economic or political systems,
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs,
- Form non-dominant groups of society, and
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.⁸

1 a. Assyrian Continuity Documentation. Compiled by Mark Gewargis

<https://www.atour.com/history/continuity/20210129a.html>

b. Parpola, Simo. Assyrians after Assyria. The Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1999. <https://www.atour.com/education/20000703a.html>

c. Frye, Richard N. Assyria and Syria: Synonyms. Journal of Near Eastern Studies. The University of Chicago Press. Vol. 51, No. 4 (Oct., 1992). pp. 281-285. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/545826>

d. Warda, William M. Assyrians Beyond the Fall of Nineveh: A 2,624 Years Journey. USA. 2013.

e. Aprim, Frederick. Assyrians: The Continuous Saga. Xlibris, 2004.

2 Katelyn Kelly, Indigenous Persistence despite Government and Religious Persecution. History Corps. The University of Iowa Libraries. Accessed May 21, 2022.

<https://historycorps.lib.uiowa.edu/exhibits/show/indigenousstruggles1900/assyrians?fbclid=IwAR0QlaDiTQ0PhKCxNBBZhBZZdTrSNCjNM-DolC0sYwnQmXluA6l7NJFx42M>

3 <https://www.atour.com/education/20000703a.html>

4 <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/373570?journalCode=jnes>

5 <https://www.xlibris.com/en/bookstore/bookdetails/572239-assyrians-the-continuous-saga>

6 <https://www.atour.com/history/continuity/20210129a.html>

7 Nimrod, John, Assyrians the Indigenous People of Iraq. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Fourth Session, New York, 16-27 May 2005, Date: May 18. Accessed May 19, 2022.

<https://unpo.org/article/2560>

8 https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf

Assyrians meet all the above factors.

The Assyrian community needs to highlight and communicate their unique culture, rooted history, and to stress rights to their historic and ancestral lands on a global level. The doors were opened to effectively do so after the 2007 United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) provides a platform for indigenous perspectives to be heard worldwide. Assyrians attended all UNPFII sessions from 2012 through 2019⁹ represented by delegations from the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS); they met with representatives of other indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, as well as representatives of some participating countries.

The AAS representatives clarified who Assyrians are; neither Arabs nor Kurds, but rather the indigenous people of Iraq. They explained that it was vital for Assyrians to be recognized by both the governments in Baghdad and Arbil and to be allowed to govern themselves as the first step to preserve their culture and history.^{10 11 12}

Assyrians Settled in Mesopotamia since the Dawn of Time

When it comes to documentation, we read from cuneiform texts that after 2750 BC the Akkadian dynasty came into power in northern Babylonia. Sargon, or Sharrum-kin (meaning “just king”), emerged and the power of the Dynasty of Akkad flourished. Sargon expanded his power in northern Mesopotamia, the area later known as Assyria.¹³ From these Akkadians sprung the Assyrians (and Babylonians).

The Assyrian civilization existed over at least five millennia ago in Assyria. According to Saggs, Assur (Ashur) was the first capital of Assyria. The name Assur comes from a temple name that was dedicated to the goddess Ishtar, attested from soon after 2800 BC. Religion occupied a major place in the social and economic structure of the lives of the Assyrians. Saggs explained that the religious power and civil functions have always been interlocked.¹⁴ And according to Bottero, Assyria was established in northern Mesopotamia from the middle of the second millennium. She states, “[ancient Mesopotamia] was an original civilization, rich and complex, that survived for three millennia through innumerable vicissitudes, across generations of people, of whom I personally know a few thousand...”¹⁵

Also excavations in Kala-tepe, near Kara-Eyuk, a mound lying eighteen (18) kilometers north-east of Caesarea in Cappadocia in modern Turkey (still in northern Mesopotamia), shows some tablets written in Semitic containing theophorous names, compounds of Ashur, Itti-Ashur, Taba-Ashur, Ashur-Malik, Ashur-muttabil. That in this region northwest of Assyria there were Votaries of Assur in the twenty-fourth century before the Christian era.¹⁶

9 COVID caused the cancellation of meetings in 2020 and 2021.

10 <https://www.atour.com/government/un/20130612a.html>

11 <http://assyrianaidiraq.org/news/810>

12 <https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/post/assyrian-aid-society-president-testifies-at-un-session-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>

13 Saggs, H.W.F. *Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria*. B. T. Batsford Ltd. London. 1965. p. 30

14 Saggs, H.W.F. *The Might That Was Assyria*. Sidgwick & Jackson, London. 1984. p. 21

15 Bottero, Jean, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*. Translated by Zainab Bahrani & Marc Van De Mieroop. The University of Chicago Press. 1995. p. 21

16 Delaporte, L. *Mesopotamia: The Babylonian and Assyrian Civilization*. Translated by V. Gordon Childe, New York, Barnes and Noble, Inc. p. 240

Historical evidence is plentiful to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the Assyrians (Suraye) are the descendants of the ancient Assyrians concentrated in what is today northern Iraq. The Assyrians (Suraye) lived in the modern region of Iraq before Arabs, Turkomans and more recently Kurds arrived to the region and before Islam swept the Middle East. In the Chronicle of 640 or the Chronicle of Toma, we read, "In Mesopotamia, many of the Assyrians that were within the Persian Empire were sold by the Tayaye (Arabs)".¹⁷ Here the Christian Assyrians are shown to be living in northern Iraq and a good reference to the Assyrians presence in the early Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia.

The Language Continuity

The Assyrians spoke the Assyrian Akkadian language. However, the cuneiform script was not convenient for running a vast empire. Communication between Nineveh, the capital, and the vassal regions were difficult as the Cuneiform was a complex script that few were capable to understand. Thus, in around 750 BC, the Assyrians and the other people within the empire began officially to use the Aramaic alphabet because it was easier to learn and be communicated between the various people under the empire. It is not strange then that the Assyrian language and Aramaic script became the lingua franca of the vast empire. After the fall of the Assyrian Empire, the Medes, Romans, Greeks and Parthians controlled northern Mesopotamia, but the Assyrian language and the Aramaic alphabet remained in use specially by the Assyrians. Scholars have shown that the Akkadian language survived until the 3rd Century of the Christian era. M. J. Geller states, "I have argued elsewhere that Akkadian was likely to have survived throughout the Parthian period, at least until the mid-third Century A.D."¹⁸

Even 2,600 years after the fall of Assyria, linguists have shown that many words being used today were, in fact, in use in ancient Assyria. These linguists have argued that the Assyrian language (known widely by the Assyrians as Sureth), is a mix between the Assyrian Akkadian and Aramaic. Furthermore, the Aramaic script continues to be used by the Assyrians.

Religion Continuity: The Assyrians have been Christians for the last 2000 years.

The Assyrian people converted to Christianity during the time of the Apostles and remained Christians ever since. The Christological controversies that followed the Council of Ephesus (431) and the Council of Chalcedon (451) isolated the Assyrians as denominational units and communities. As the Church established further structure and hierarchy, the Churches of the Assyrians kept the various Assyrian communities together under the leadership of their respected patriarchs. The Assyrian denominational terms Nestorian and Jacobite were born. Later, in 1681 in Diyar Bekir (Turkey) and in 1830 in northern Iraq (Alqosh) the conversion of Assyrians to Catholicism isolated Assyrians as the term Chaldean was given to these converts. However, and according to Nisan, these communities created strong ties between themselves. He states, "... in the far north of Iraq bordering Turkey, The patriarchal ideal was the social norm in the family unit. Further north in the Hakkari Mountains, tribal formations remained the grid of the communal life. These units did not prevent joint action and the cultivation of national unity ..."¹⁹

17 Toma was a Syriac Othodox priest, a native of Mardin. The Chronicle is preserved at the British Library under reference number ADD.MS.14,643.

18 Geller, M. J. Paper titled "The Survival of Babylonian Wissenschaft in Later Tradition." In the Heirs of Assyria. The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Sanna Aro and R. M. Whitting, ed. Helsinki, 2000, p.3.

19 Nisan, Mordechai. Minorities in The Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publisher, London. 1991. p.157

The birth of Islam was a double-edged sword for the Assyrian Christians and the region's history. Before Islam, Mesopotamia belonged in part to the Byzantine and Sassanian empires, each people keeping in its possessions a body of troops and administrators. Ras al-'Ayn (Rish 'ayno) and the territory beyond it as far as the Euphrates belonged to the Romans; Nisibis (Nisibin) and the territory beyond it as far as the Tigris belonged to the Persians.²⁰ Islam reunited Mesopotamia. On the other side, many peoples (including Assyrians) converted to Islam to escape death or avoid taxes. With time they were Arabized because of the influence of the Koran and the Arabic language. But many remained faithful to their religion and continued to live close to their ancestors historic capitals: Ashur, Kalah (Nimrud), Dur-Sharukin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh (Nebi Yunis) or close to their churches and the diocese of Mosul, Arbil, and Kirkuk in modern Iraq, Qudchanis (modern Turkey) or Antioch and Tur 'Abdin (modern Turkey).

According to Murre-Van Den Berg "The Church of the East, as present in the region of Urmia, Mosul and the Hakkari mountains at the beginning of the nineteenth century, has its origin in the Christian communities that developed in the first centuries AD in the Parthian and Sassanian (from 224) empire."²¹

The church of the Assyrian people was not spread in northern Mesopotamia alone. History tells us that prior to Emperor Zeno's closing of the Edessa "Nestorian" work in 488, a very significant event in the history of the Church of the East took place in Beth Lapat, near the ancient Ur. Zeno has addressed his famous instrument of union to the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch; all three had adopted his formulation of the heretical monophysite christology. In 484 the Church of the East called a synod in Beth Lapat where they did not oppose the Chalcedonian formula of 451, but resented that Council's confirmation of the repudiation of Nestorius. The path of the Church of the East was now different from the Church of Rome.²² This led soon to the separation of the Church in the Persian Empire from the rest of the Christendom – the Church of the East became an independent church.^{23 24} The Church of the East mission evolved into a marvelous church that was born in Edessa (Urhai), then in Adiabene (Arbil) and soon with its headquarters at Ctesiphon-Seleucia (al-Mada'in, near Baghdad).²⁵ That church is still standing today as the Assyrian Church of the East. It remains an eastern church native to modern Iraq.

One of the most celebrated days in the liturgical calendar year of the Church of the East is the Rogation of the Ninevites. This is a three day fast observed by the churches that follow East and West Syriac (Assyrian) liturgical traditions. This fast is based on the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament where God sends Jonah (c. 786-746 BC) to Nineveh to warn its inhabitants of destruction unless they repent for their sins. The Assyrian King repented and covered himself with sackcloth, sat in ashes and called upon all the people to fast.²⁶ The Assyrians have observed and celebrated this tradition for centuries.

20 Palmer, Andrew. *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur 'Abdin*. Cambridge. 1990. p. 7

21 Murre-Van Den Berg, H. L. *From A Spoken to a Written Language*. Leiden. 1999. p. 31

22 Young, John M. L. *By Foot to China*. Radiopress, Tokyo. 1984. p. 7

23 Vine, Aubrey R. *The Nestorian Churches: A Concise History of Nestorian Christianity in Asia From the Persian Schism to the Modern Assyrians*. Independent Press, Ltd. London. 1937. p. 22

24 Holm, Frits. *My Nestorian Adventure in China*. Gorgias Press. 2001.

25 Stewart, John Rev. *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: The Story of a Church on Fire*. Trichur, India. 1961. p. xxxi

26 Holy Bible: From the Ancient Eastern Text. George M. Lamsa Translation. 1984. Book of Jonah 3:6-7.

Genetic Studies

There have been genetic studies about the Assyrians. One of such studies was conducted under the leadership of Professor L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza who is one of the most preeminent human population geneticists in the world. He, along with Professors Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza spent eight years collecting data for their study on the genetics of almost two thousand different populations and gathered some eighty-six thousand entries. Their analysis shows that the Assyrians, as a population, represent a unique genetic profile that is distinguished from other peoples. They write: “*The Assyrians are a fairly homogeneous group of people, believed to originate from the land of old Assyria in northern Iraq*” (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1996, 243)²⁷. The authors additionally write that the Assyrians spoke a Semitic language and they used the cuneiform that were replaced later by the Aramaic, which used the Phoenician alphabet. The Assyrians to this very day, the authors write, speak this language. They add that the Assyrians living between Mosul and Arbil “*are Christians and are possibly bona fide descendants of their namesakes*” (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1996, 218)²⁸

Historically, the Assyrian people rarely intermarried with surrounding populations. This fact was supported by the 2000 and 2008 genetic studies that proved Assyrians as genetically distinct from other groups in the Middle East.²⁹

Broken Promises

The Iraqi people were looking forward to freedom and peace within a secular and democratic Iraq as President George W. Bush promised to end the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein and secure freedom for all Iraqi people regardless of their ethnicity or religious belief. Speaking from Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, President Bush carefully distinguished between the various people of Iraq when he declared, “the oppression of Kurds, Assyrians, Turkomans, Shi’a, Sunnis, and others will be lifted. The long captivity of Iraq will end, and an era of new hope will begin.”³⁰ However, the new Iraqi Constitution, ratified in 2005, continues to define Assyrians as an ethno-religious minority. Article 125 guarantees fundamental rights to “various nationalities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents”.³¹ The Iraqi Constitution came short from recognizing Assyrians as the indigenous people of Iraq and it divided the Assyrian people into Assyrians and Chaldeans.

Proposed Regions Under The Iraq Protected Indigenous Status

The Indigenous status must be applied on the Assyrians in Iraq: the Iraqi and Kurdish regional constitutions must assert to it and a protected region administered by the Assyrians within historic Assyria must be secured in order to allow the Assyrians to live and thrive in peace in accordance to the 1994 United Nations General Assembly resolutions A/RES/48/163. These steps are achievable, considering that the Iraqi Council of Ministers has approved the creation of the Assyrian Christian Administrative Area. That came first in 2014 a short time before ISIS invaded Mosul and the Nineveh Plain. The approval was reiterated again on June 2, 2019 after the defeat of ISIS.

27 Elias, Joel J. “The Genetics of Modern Assyrians and Their Relationship to Other People of the Middle East.” Article in Nineveh Magazine, no. 1 & 2. Berkeley, 2000.

28 Ibid

29 Assyrian Continuity. Accessed 8/3/2022.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_continuity#CITEREFTravis2010

30 Aprim Frederick, The Betrayal of the Powerless: Assyrians After the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq. Xlibris. 2021

31 “Iraqi Constitution,” Iraqi Nationality, accessed May 22, 2022.

http://www.iraqinationality.com/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf

We suggest the following regions to be categorized as protected federal regions for the Assyrians:

A) Sapna region:

Sapna is a large valley in northern Iraq, contained by two small mountain ranges to the north. The valley is watered by the Upper Zab River, which flows along the eastern portion of the valley, and features hilly terrain in the central portion of it around Amadiya District.

The villages are:

Bibedeh, Komaneh, Deiri, Bilejan, Hamziyya, Inishkeh, Araden, Dawodiya, Dehe, Sersank, Badarish.

B) The Barwari Bala Region:

This is the Assyrian region along the Turkish Iraqi borders that has been forcefully occupied by the Kurds.

The villages are: Aina d' Nuneh (Kani Masse), Maya, Derishke, Bi-Qolke, Doureh, Aqri, Helwa, Bet Shmiyaye, Hayyat, Hayyis, Malakhta, Jdide, Musakan, Dargeli, Tuta Shamaya, Tarshish, Be-Baloka, Maghribiya, Chim Dostina, Saradashti, Bet Tanoreh, Biqoole, Mani Nsara, Beshmayaye, Dereshkeh, Khwara, BuTarra, Merka Chiya, Hesseh, Kani Blafeh, Moska, Baz, Chaqla, Chalek Nsara, Ayit Horkeh, Dar Keleh, Chameekah, Torwanish, Bazeveh, BiKozinkeh.

C) Nahla Region:

Nahla is a region in the provinces of Nineveh and Dohuk to the north of Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq.

The villages are:

Kashkawa, Belmit, Hezaneh, Merokeh, Khalilaneh, Jouleh, Rabetkeh, Chameh Chaleh, Kasreh.

D) Nineveh Plain Region

The Nineveh Plain is a region in the Nineveh Governorate that comprised of three districts: Telkepe, Hamdaniya, Shekhan.

The towns and villages includes:

District of Telkepe (Telkepe, Batnaya, Tesqopeh, Alqosh)

District of Hamdaniya (Khidir Ilyas, Baghdeda, Ba'sheeqa, Bartella, Karamlesh)

District of Shekhan (Ain Sifni, Ba'thra, Qasrok)

Read also the attached details for the Assyrian villages in northern Iraq.³²

The Issue is Political

Many Assyrians in the national and human rights circles argue, rightfully so, that the recognition of Assyrians as the indigenous people of Iraq lacks neither historical arguments nor evidence. The evidence is there. The Jews and Kurds were assisted to have lands reserved for themselves, so do the Assyrians. Even during his trial, the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein responded to the Kurdish lawyer who claimed that the Christians and Yezidis living in the Kurdish region were Kurds. Saddam said, "as for the Christians, there are Chaldean Christians [Catholic Assyrians] and they are the origin for establishing the Iraq's ancient Assyrian State".³³ The reason that Saddam opted to mention exclusively the Chaldeans is of course because of Tariq Aziz, his most trusted Christian Ba'ath Party friend and comrade, who was a Catholic Assyrian (Chaldean). Saddam mentions that the identity of a group is based on history and belonging. He was trying to say that the [Chaldean and Assyrian] Christians and Kurds Muslims neither share the same history nor belonging, thus the [Chaldean and Assyrian] Christians are not Kurds.

32 <https://www.atour.com/news/assyria/20080813a.html>

33 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdtIAIIVT_c



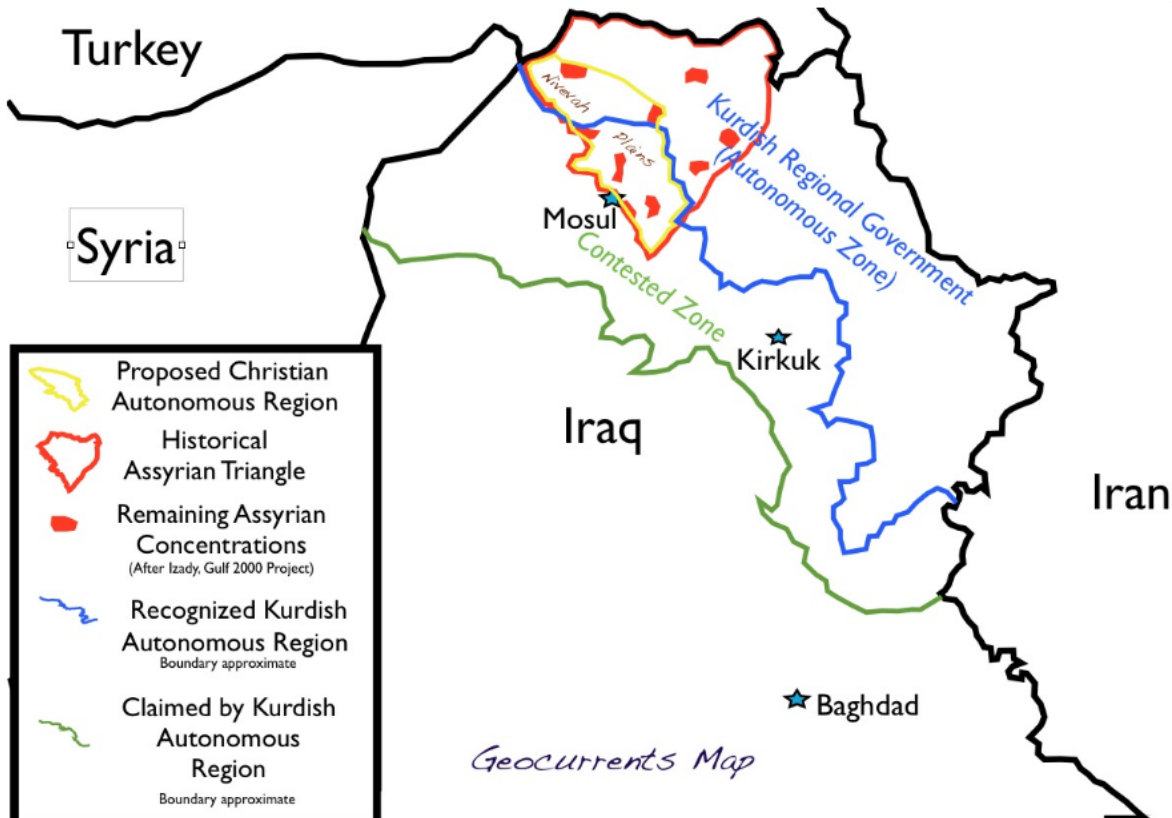
The Above map is from a book titled, “The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East: 1318-1913”. By David Wilmshurt. Published in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 582, Tomus 104. Lovani. In Aedibus Peeters. 2000.

Religion is an issue since Assyrians are Christians while 98% of Iraq’s population is Muslim. The US applies double standards when dealing with the various oppressed people around the world. The policy depends on the US economic interests. The US helps the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, but does not do the same with the Assyrians. In fact, the US opened all avenues possible to see the Assyrians out. The author’s entire family side that settled in Tell Hafian, Khabor, Syria since 1933 have been resettled in the US, Sweden, Germany and Australia after the attacks of ISIS on the Assyrian Khabor villages. Most of the Khabor Assyrian villages are empty of Assyrians. Who will occupy those villages? The Kurds, of course.

The Return of Assyrians to their Ancestral Lands

The Iraqi government must establish a road map that clearly defines the process for returning Assyrians to their ancestral homeland and the returning all illegally confiscated Assyrian towns and villages, specially in the Kurdish controlled areas to their rightful Assyrian owners. The two governments must secure the necessary funding for the reconstruction of the destroyed villages and worship places during the Kurdish revolt years. The reconstruction of the 14,000 homes and building in the Nineveh Plains must begin as soon as possible. Many misconceptions exist contrary to the realities on the ground about the condition and situation of the Assyrians. As one Assyrian observer explains, “In the decade leading

up to the Islamic State invasion, the Kurdish regional government created the appearance of security in the plains through the harassment of locals and a system of political and financial patronage”.³⁴ The continuous disputes between Arbil and Baghdad and the so-called disputed territories continue to delay any efforts of return.



<https://www.geocurrents.info/geopolitics/the-complex-relations-between-kurds-and-christians-in-northern-iraq>

The long claimed Assyrian triangle autonomous region that was presented to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (League of Nations) that was modified later as shown in the map above could be declared as a protected indigenous region protected by an Assyrian Force that could emerge from the already existing NPU (Nineveh Plain Protection Unit).

Assyrian Towns and Villages Names to be Restored

We are told that the names of places are more than a geographical indicator. Indigenous place names carry knowledge that has been passed from generation to generation - they have connected Indigenous people to their homes. While this Assyrians and their cities, towns, rivers, mountains, etc connection has at times remained strong despite several eras of assimilation; however, it has also disassociated them of that link. Thus, the consequences could be annihilative. This historic people-place link is powerful and it has threatened subsequent nations ruled northern Iraq. Hence, subsequent authorities

³⁴ Zaya, R.S. Iraq's Indigenous Peoples Can't Face Another Conflict. Accessed May 22, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/07/iraq-assyrian-indigenous-peoples-another-conflict-nineveh-plains-iran-backed-militia/>

have replaced the Assyrian town names by Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish names. Consider changing (or Kurdifying the name) Arbil (Arbela) to Hawler, Aina d' Nuneh to Kani Masse, Diyana to Soran, Mar Yaqu to Kasha Fir, Shiyas to Sayjay, Harrania to Rania, Aridu to Rawanduz, Anisu to Qal'aat Diza, Ieri to Sardasht, Arzuhina to Gok Tape, Assur-Iqisha / Bidaro to Zakho, Gannanati to Qasr-e Shirin, Azari to Sulaimaniya, Girmua to Jerwan, Musru to Jabal Maqlub, Milqia to 'Ain Kawa, Amantu to Sultan 'Abdallah, etc.³⁵ It is argued that indigenous people can reclaim the spaces in which their cultures and languages have been subjected to attempted assimilation or outright eradication, but the authorities need to understand and tolerate the indigenous people's dilemma and endangered situation.

Staying Pro-active and Final Thoughts

Assyrian groups have worked very hard to stay pro-active in the global forum of the UN. They participated in discussion on both the indigenous and minority levels. The Fourth Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues convened in Geneva, Switzerland from November 29-30, 2011. The Minority Forum is meant to identify best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) Americas' Global Policy Director Alen Mirza and Assistant Director Jennifer Babaie provided interventions focused on the situation of Iraqi Assyrian women in post-conflict situations. In her statement, Babaie advocated for specialized bilateral and multilateral bodies aimed solely at battling human trafficking among Assyrian women refugees. Mirza recommended the establishment and support of civil society groups for Assyrian women in Iraq as a means of combating economic and political disenfranchisement.

On May 13, 2012, at the Indigenous People's forum in New York, President of AAS in Iraq, the late Ashur Sargon Eskrya, stated, "We call upon you for the inclusion of the Assyrians as one of the indigenous peoples of Iraq and be eligible for support from programs funded by the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples, as well as support from other United Nations organizations in accordance with the UN Declaration on the indigenous peoples and their legitimate rights."³⁶ AAS has called for the support of and empowerment the Assyrian people to rebuild their historical areas, protecting their cultural heritage and language. AAS also called on all indigenous people to cooperate with each other in order to learn and benefit from any successful experiences to ensure the revival and preservation of the languages of the original peoples.³⁷ Also, the AUA Americas has been proudly representing the Assyrian Indigenous plight since gaining Consultative Status with the United Nations in 2013. The AUA focus and mission had been on preserving the Assyrian ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traditions and representing the Assyrians on the UN global forum.

If Iraq does not recognize the Assyrians as its indigenous people, the Assyrians will continue to face genocide and massacres³⁸ and in time will disappear from Iraq, (and Syria and Turkey). This recognition will not add any burden on Iraq since that status will make the Assyrians eligible for support from various programs provided by the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples, as well as support from other United Nations organizations in accordance with the UN Declaration on the indigenous peoples. Recognizing the indigenous status of the Assyrians is very important not only for the Assyrians, but also for Iraq, Syria and Turkey themselves. Iraq, Syria and Turkey have their issues

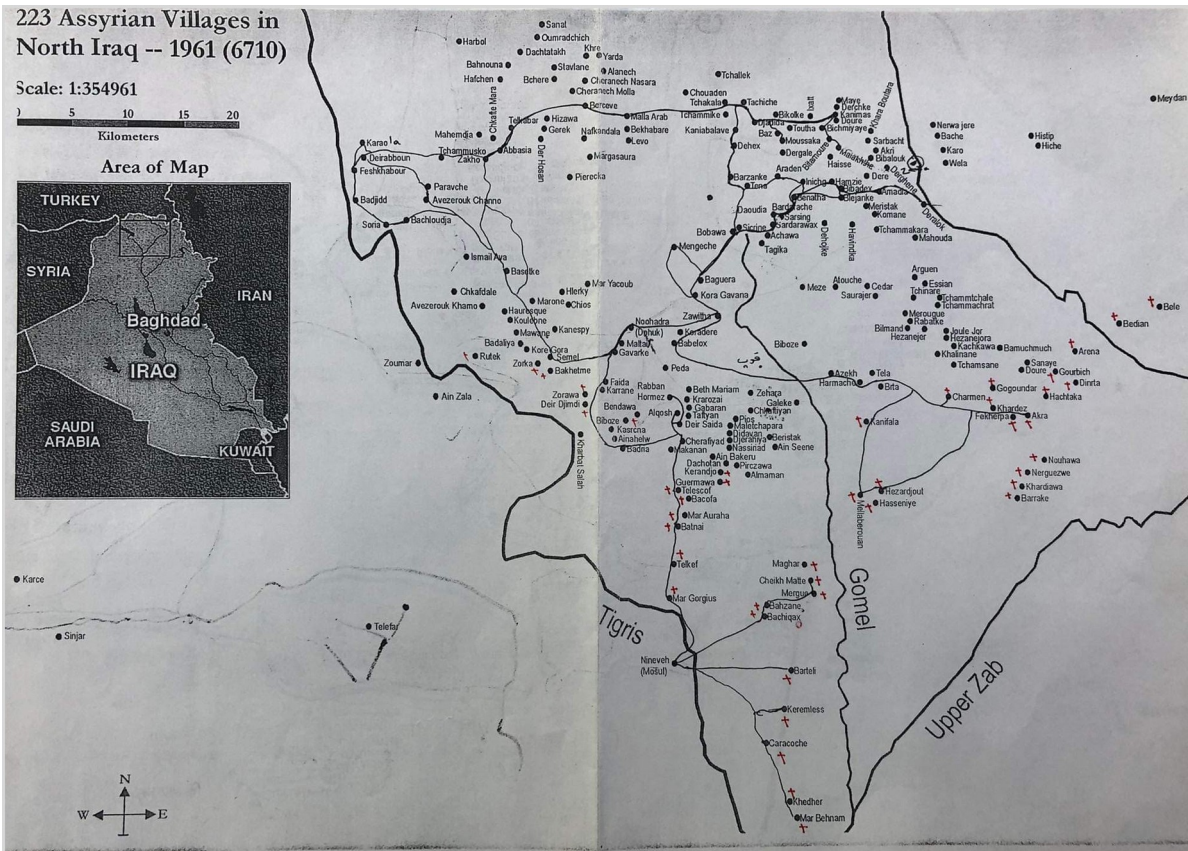
35 Most of these original and modern names are from Simo Parpola & Michael Porter. The Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period. Helsinki, 2001.

36 <http://assyrianaidiraq.org/news/580>

37 <http://assyrianaidiraq.org/news/1471>

38 Consider WWI genocide, 1933 Simele massacre, 1969 Soriya massacre and 2014 ISIS genocide and the destruction of Assyrian archaeological sites, villages, churches and monasteries in both Iraq and Syria.

of human rights violations and the treatment of non-Arabs and non-Turks in their respective countries. Many argue that recognizing the Assyrians as the indigenous people of these three host countries and recognizing and improving the treatment of all the other components in those societies will open a new page in the history of the three states. We can envision the relationships between those three countries and the rest of the advanced and civil world. In addition, a new page of peace will spring between the Assyrians and those states. The recognition of the three said countries, Iraq most importantly, is very important, because, as Donabed and Joseph argue, “As long as Middle Eastern states do not recognize Assyrians and other peoples as indigenous, the process cannot commence; first peoples will be unable to negotiate in the political forum as long as their host countries monopolize their rights”.³⁹ And since most Assyrians in Iraq live in northern Iraq’s region under the Kurdish control, then we expect the KRG to do the same and recognize the Assyrians as the indigenous of the region.



The Assyrian people deserve and are entitled to live in peace, security and freedom and their endangered language embraced and protected. Consider that the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages warns that the Assyrian (Syriac/Aramaic) language will disappear within a century. Many linguists argue that a language dies within three or four generations outside its original habitat. Some Assyrian schools have been opened in Iraq and in the KRG region; however, the financial support for these schools is meager and there is no genuine legislation to support the Assyrian language. During the time that you finish reading this article, another language somewhere around the world has died. With every language dying, a culture also dies. Imagine the impact of that on civilization. Most importantly, Iraq voted in favor of the 2007 UNDRIP. Only four countries voted against it and they were Australia,

39 Donabed, Sargon George and Daniel Joseph Tower. Reframing Indigeneity. The Case of Assyrians in Northern Mesopotamia. 2018. Accessed May 25, 2022. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2018/reframing-indigeneity-the-case-of-assyrians-in-northern-mesopotamia?fbclid=IwAR0PVZT5w5Ky3jwBbhhR231mT9PvghAnkL6Bg3EVJIHOrbsfN6z8jVWSpkM>

Canada, New Zealand and the United States.⁴⁰ Lastly, but not least, the Assyrians' population was around 1.5 million before 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Today, observers put their numbers at 250,000 at best. Only the designation of indigenous people of Iraq will save and keep them in this diverse region of the Middle East.

* Fred Aprim is an Assyrian American. He was born in Iraq. His father and younger brother were both imprisoned during the rule of Saddam Hussein. He has published three books:
Assyrians: The Continuous Saga
Assyrians: From Bedr Khan to Saddam Hussein
The Betrayal of the Powerless: Assyrians After the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq.

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40 <https://www.usetinc.org/general/undrip2021/>