

**Syriac Universal Alliance
2010 Iraq Report:**

**Recommendations for the Protection of the
Indigenous Aramean Christians of Iraq**



SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE

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www.sua-ngo.org

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Executive Summary

The Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA), a Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, defends and promotes the global interests of the Aramean Christian (Syriac) people, including the Chaldeans, Syriacs (Orthodox and Catholics) and Nestorians (followers of the Church of the East who sometimes are known as ‘Assyrians’) of Iraq (referred to herein as “**Aramean Christians**” or “**Arameans**”).

The SUA has prepared this Report on Iraq, entitled “Syriac Universal Alliance 2010 Iraq Report: Recommendations for the Protection and Preservation of Indigenous Christians” (“Report”).

This Report contains ten (10) Questions and ten (10) Recommendations (split into short, medium and long term solutions) by the SUA concerning the present and future conditions of the Aramean Christian people in Iraq.

1. The Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA)

The Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA) was established in 1983 and is a global umbrella organization representing the various Aramean (Syriac) national federations in the continents of Europe, America, Australia and the Middle East. SUA is the widely acknowledged voice of the Aramean people whose interests and needs it aims to serve, defend and promote.

Since 1999, the SUA is the only Aramaic-speaking Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. The SUA is a socio-political and cultural organization that works independently, transparently and on a democratic basis. Among others, the SUA seeks close cooperation with national governments, the (agencies of the) United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe.

The SUA is dedicated to answer the call to protect and secure the rights, liberty and equality of the Aramean people, safeguard and promote the cultural heritage of its ancestors, ensuring justice, and uniting its people as a self-determined and internationally recognized Aramean nation.

One of the key projects produced by the SUA is *The Hidden Pearl: The Syrian Orthodox Church and Its Aramaic Heritage* (Rome, 2001). This multimedia project consists of three illustrated books with three accompanying DVD's. It summarizes and portrays a living heritage of 3,000 years.

Another significant project by the SUA in cooperation with its Federations is *Suryoyo Sat* (www.suryoyosat.com). In 2006, this satellite channel was established for the Aramean people. With a great variety of (live) programs in Aramaic, Suryoyo Sat reaches more than 80 countries.

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Co-Signatories to the present report include (with support from Arameans (Syriacs) in India, Latin America, Middle Eastern communities and organisations in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Israel):

Syriac Federation of Sweden
Aramean (Syriac) Federation of Germany
Aramean (Syriac) Federation of Holland
Aramean (Syriac) Federation of Switzerland
Aramean Federation of Belgium
Syriac Association of Vienna, Austria
Aramaic Association of America (New Jersey & California)
Aramean Association of the United Kingdom
Syriac Association of Australia

2. Who are the Aramean (Syriac) People?

Scholars note that 'Aramean/Aramaic' is the original self-designation of the Arameans and the equivalent of the Greek name 'Syrian/Syriac' which they adopted since the early fifth century AD. In order to avoid the oft-recurring confusion with the largely Muslim Arab citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic (i.e. Syria), the preferred self-appellation of this Semitic people in Western languages is the recently introduced and artificial term 'Syriacs' or their old autonym 'Arameans'.

The early Arameans were pastoralists who were an inherent and integral part of the Near East in 1550-1200 BC. In pre-Christian times, notably between 1150-700 BC, they played a crucial role in the socio-political arena of the ancient world. As native inhabitants of Upper Mesopotamia (covering modern south-east Turkey, north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq), they were ubiquitous in this area as well as in Lebanon and South Mesopotamia (corresponding to present-day South Iraq).

Their Aramaic mother tongue enjoyed the status of international language of the Near East between ca. 700 BC and ca. 700 AD. Aramaic also features in the Old and New Testaments, was the mother tongue of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and left indelible traces in the Jewish and Muslim literatures (including the Mishnah, the Talmud and the Qur'an).

Aramaic has for the most part been the main carrier of the identity of the Arameans, who were one of the first nations to adopt the Gospel in the early centuries of the Christian era. Besides the Syriac (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) communities, the Chaldeans, Nestorians (since 1976 officially called 'Assyrians'), Maronites and Melkites are also heirs of the ancient Aramaic heritage. For many centuries, their monasteries and churches functioned as intellectual centers and schools. Experts recognize the importance of the Aramean people and Aramaic language. For instance:

- A) The Aramean ancestry of the Jewish people is widely recognized, for example by Prof. Healey, who rightly observed that "the Israelites were part of the same movement of population as the Arameans and were conscious of a close relationship with that population group... The biblical writers are so strong on the point...that it must have some basis in fact."¹
- B) "The Greeks and Romans knew the Near East mainly through the Arameans, for it was they who united and canalized the sources of its culture, bringing together Babylonian, Persian and Hebrew elements and transmitting them to Christianity, and with Christianity to the West. From the West, at a later date, the Arameans were to bring to the East Greek culture, especially philosophy, which became known to the Arabs through the medium of Aramaic."²
- C) Without Aramaic, "the expansion of Christianity in the Orient would have been unthinkable." Among other essential things, this is "the historical debt which the world owes the Arameans."³
- D) In a voluminous book about the Arameans, another expert stressed: "We see the Arameans as a nation that represents one of our cultural ancestors, as one of the points of departure for us in the West ... [because] western civilization originated in the Middle East."⁴
- E) Unlike Arabic and Hebrew, "Aramaic is the only Semitic language spoken today whose history can be traced back, as a living language, to about 1000 B.C."⁵

3. The Aramean Christians (Syriacs) of Iraq

The present-day Aramean Christians have an ancient history in Iraq and are indigenous to the country. The country of Iraq has an area of 435,052 km² and a population of approximately 30 million people distributed across 18 governorates, three of which constitute the Kurdistan region.

Aramaic inscriptions and external evidence, such as Assyrian sources, testify to the omnipresence of Semitic Aramean tribes in northern and southern Iraq since the early first millennium BC. The Arameans and their Aramaic language have formed an essential part of this land for 3,000 years. Just like Aramaic Christianity, whose 2,000 year old history is at the verge of extinction today.

The following facts, highlighted by the then Dean of Aramaic (Syriac) Studies at Oxford University, Dr Sebastian Brock, have shaped the premise of the present Report, which argues for the safeguarding of Iraq's indigenous Aramaic cultural heritage and people within the country's mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, languages and religions:

1. Aramaic "is the oldest living language of Iraq";
2. Aramaic Christianity "reached Iraq probably as early as the first century AD, and throughout their history in that country Christians have always constituted an integral part of the wider society of the time";
3. "for nearly two millennia Christianity has had a continuous presence in Iraq; furthermore, Christians have always been a religious minority, and never in a position of political power."

Historically, the Aramean Christians of Iraq, according to the same scholar, "have always been a significant presence in professional fields such as medicine, science, engineering, and education, [and] have played a vital enabling role, facilitating important developments that might not, or indeed sometimes could not, otherwise have developed without their presence and participation. What is important to emphasize in conclusion is that the cultural well-being of Iraq...depends on the ability of society at any given time to make the most of its different constituent cultural elements, allowing them to interact freely and so mutually benefit from each other. A society that fails in this respect condemns itself to a condition of cultural and spiritual impoverishment."⁶

The vast majority of the Christians in Iraq, who include about 15,000 to 20,000 *Armenians*, have an Aramean background and are Aramaic-speaking. For a number of Aramean families, however, Arabic has effectively taken the place of their Aramaic language in their daily lives.

In terms of population of the local church communities, the Chaldeans number the highest, then the Syriac Orthodox and Catholics, followed by those of the Church of the East, with its two branches, the old and new (Assyrian Church of the East, since 1976) ones. Hence they have occasionally been referred to in this order as "Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people."

While the international community has focused purely on the "sectarian" nature of the violence because of religious standing of the victims, it is also the case that the victims are part of the Aramean ethnic group. One could therefore argue that this crime against the Aramean people is also a form of ethnic cleansing, since the Arameans are a distinct people. The international community must also examine its responsibilities in accordance with the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

Regarding the identity of the two largest Christian communities, one should take cognizance of the historically justified convictions of their highest religious authorities which are shared by the SUA.

- A) Patriarch Emmanuel Delly III of the Chaldean Church of Babylon (Interview to Ankawa in October, 2008) commented: “I would like to state that we, the Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriacs are one people that is known as the Aramean people.”
- B) Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch stated in his *The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch At A Glance* (1983), p. 12: “The Syriac language is the Aramaic language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. He who has made a distinction between them has erred.”

Statistics on Christian numbers are very difficult to obtain. As a result of the UN Security Council, which called on the Iraqi government to undertake research into the Christians in Iraq, the government passed a census law in 2008 which allows a nationwide census to be conducted in the future. Regarding the current status of Iraqi Christians, the US Department of State Report entitled “*International Religious Freedom Report 2010*” (17 November 2010), confirms that:

- a) “Approximately 3 percent of the population is composed of Christians, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Baha’is, Shabaks, Kaka’is (sometimes referred to as Ahl-e Haqq), and a very small number of Jews.”
- b) “Reported estimates from leaders of the Christian population in 2003 ranged from 800,000 to 1.4 million. Current population estimates by Christian leaders range from 400,000 to 600,000.”
- c) “Christian leaders estimated that as much as 50 percent of the country’s Christian population lives in Baghdad, and 30 to 40 percent lives in the north, with the largest Christian communities located in and around Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk.”

According to information provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), while the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq at the end of 2009 remained high (2,764,111 individuals), the overall total number of IDPs decreased for 2009.

In 2009, approximately 205,000 individuals returned to their places of origin consisting of 167,740 IDPs and 37,090 refugees mainly from Syria, Jordan and Iran. This number is comparable to that of 2008 (221,000 individuals) where 90% of IDPs returned to Baghdad and Diyala. It is unclear how many Aramean Christian refugees and IDPs from Iraq exist in the world today. However, according to the World Refugee Survey 2008 by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, at the year’s end, Syria hosted some 1.3 million Iraqi refugees, of whom about 20 percent were Christian. The US State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report 2008 states that 16 percent of registered Iraqi refugees in Jordan were Christians.

IDPs in Iraq	Numbers
pre-2003	1,021,962
2003-2005	190,146
post-February 2006	1,552,003

Politically speaking, Iraqi law provides for eight seats out of 325 in Parliament to be permanently dedicated to Iraqi minorities. Of the eight seats, five are allocated to Christians with one each in the governorates of Baghdad, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Dohuk and Erbil. The remaining three seats are allocated one each to members of the Shabak minority in Ninewa, the Sabian Mandaeans in Baghdad and the Yezidi in Ninewa. In late November 2010, the SUA understands that the Iraq Prime Minister Maliki has discussed increasing the number of Christian Ministerial posts although the detail around this remains limited.

In an effort to achieve more parity in representation, the SUA further understands that on 29 November 2010, the Iraqi Parliament also decided to create a new police force to protect the Christian areas, especially in the Nineveh area. Although lacking in any real detail and certainly subject to some skepticism, all of the force would be Christian Iraqi's and answer to the Iraqi Interior Ministry.



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4. The Danger for Aramean Christians in Iraq

Arameans and their Aramaic language are in serious danger of extinction today. Their future survival in Iraq is contingent on immediate international action to combat the danger the Aramean Christians face in the country. Iraq has gone through three major wars since the 1980's where violence in society has become a part of everyday life. This has added to the chaotic behaviour we see today across the country.

There is no question that the systemic chaos which is rampant in parts of Iraq has added fuel to the fire across the country. The lack of real government in Iraq has also led to a direct lack of leadership and strength of direction for society. Yet, the Aramean Christian community is one which has been disproportionately affected by the violence. A peaceful community which does not involve itself in any form of aggression has been the victim of bloodshed, mass emigration, discrimination, ethnic cleansing, kidnapping, rape, torture and hostility for too long.

Although violence against the Aramean Christians has been primarily prevalent since the 2003 US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom, there is no question that an escalation in such violence has been witnessed recently. The bloody massacre in Baghdad on 31 October 2010 was the most disturbing of recent attacks. A vicious strike on the Syriac Catholic cathedral where 44 Christian worshippers, two priests and seven security forces personnel died and almost 100 injured, after it was seized by Islamic militants and then stormed by Iraqi troops. Subsequent days saw another 13 bombs and 2 mortar attacks specifically targeting Christian homes in Iraq.

In fact, victims have confirmed that in many instances the Islamic terrorists came to the homes of the Baghdad Church victims and hunted them. Despite the public condemnation from the Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, who stated that "the equality of Christians and other Iraqis is a sacred duty," the violence has continued unabated and has even, with great concern, intensified. To date, it is unclear how many Aramean Christians have been killed since the 2003 Gulf war in Iraq.

The month of November 2010 has seen a substantial increase in sectarian violence with Aramean Christian Iraqis being specifically targeted. There seems to be no end to the violence and if past experience is any evidence, the Christmas period will no doubt see an even greater increase in violence against the Aramean Christians.

The "Islamic State of Iraq" ("ISI"), the local branch of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network, has recently stated that "All Christian centers, organizations and institutions, leaders and followers, are legitimate targets for the *mujahedeen* [holy warriors] wherever they can reach them." It is unfortunate that the voice of a number of eminent Muslim leaders have not been heard to condemn and combat such heinous statements and equally denounce the spate of Christian attacks.

The abuse of the Christian population is not limited to extremist Islamic forces. In fact, there is evidence that the discrimination, attacks, kidnapping, intimidation, forced conversions and day to day harassment is part of everyday life in Iraq, including in the Kurdish zone which is under the rule of Kurdish President Massoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).

In recent weeks, many governments, organisations and government leaders have condemned the violence against Christians in Iraq, as follows:

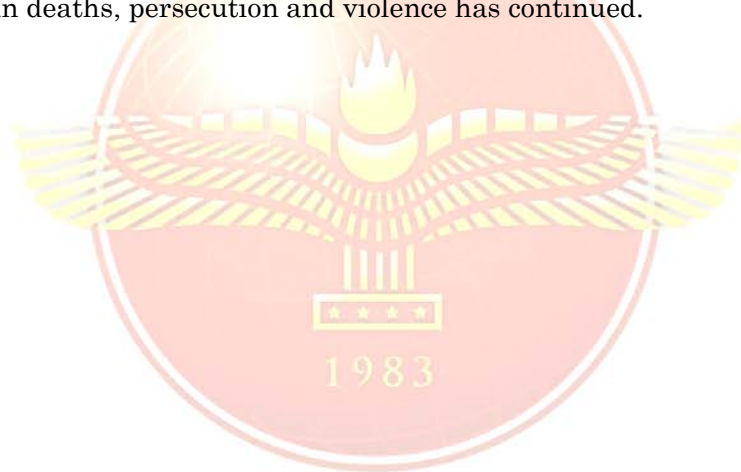
- A) The UN Security Council condemned "all incitement to and acts of violence, particularly those motivated by religious hatred" and urged nations to cooperate to "bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice."

- b) British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said several council members worried that the attacks could drive from Iraq the religious minorities with “a long history and tradition in the region ... one of the bedrocks of long-term stability in the Middle East.”
- c) French Ambassador Gerard Araud said the “horrendous attack” against Iraqi Christians was “an attack against the diversity of Iraqi society, which means Iraqi democracy.”
- d) Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, stated: “we believe that attention should be focused on healing the wounded Christians and to provide humanitarian aid and not to encourage them to leave Iraq for European countries because that is not in their interest nor in the interest of Iraq, and we do not want to displace a dear part of the Iraqi population, especially since the Christians are the indigenous people of Iraq, who lived in Iraq since the advent of Christianity, played a role in civilization and culture of Iraq.”
- e) After the Baghdad Church attack, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki issued a statement condemning the violence: “Those with deviant thoughts from al Qaeda and their allies belonging to the followers of the ousted regime targeted our Christian brothers in a terrorist crime that aims at undermining security and stability, inciting strife and chaos and sending Iraqis away from their home.”
- f) His Holiness Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, stated “we reaffirm our rejection and condemnation of all acts of criminal terrorism that aims bloodshed and expulsion of Christians from our beloved Orient, especially from Iraq. And we reject any opinion or instigation that encourage the members of the Holy Church to emigrate from Iraq to any other state. We are partners in building civilizations of the Orient since ancient times and we will continue there, not allowing anyone to take this sacred right away from us.”
- g) His Eminence the Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk in Iraq stated: “He who is not a Muslim in Iraq is a second-class citizen. Often it is necessary to convert or emigrate, otherwise one risks being killed.”
- h) Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles remarked “We are stunned by the barbarity of this onslaught. We share the grief of the survivors, the families of victims, and our many friends in Christian communities worldwide...but we are also outraged by the indifference of the international community. The only thing more outrageous than the systematic slaughter of families gathered in their place of worship is the overwhelming silence at this heinous act.”
- i) The US Government has long recognised the danger which has beset Christians in Iraq by stating the following, although recent statements from both President Obama and Secretary of State, Ms Hilary Clinton, seem to be absent:⁷
- i) House Resolution 944 calls on the Secretary of State to present to Congress a “comprehensive strategy to encourage the protection of the rights of members of vulnerable religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq”. It appears that this report is still not complete.
 - ii) On 26 September 2008, the then Senator Barack Obama wrote to Secretary Rice: “What specific steps has the State Department taken to urge the Iraqi government to provide protection to Iraq’s Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities?”

Has the Iraqi government been responsive to requests for such protection? What is the U.S government's assessment of the Iraqi government's efforts to protect religious minority communities?"

iii) The US Department of State Report recently stated "violence conducted by terrorists, extremists, and criminal gangs restricted the free exercise of religion and posed a significant threat to the country's vulnerable religious minorities throughout the reporting period. Radical Islamic elements from outside the government exerted tremendous pressure on individuals and groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islamic precepts. Sectarian violence, including attacks on religious leaders and religious places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely."

As one can see from the above statements, there is a worldwide consensus growing that the **Aramean Christian community is in danger and needs assistance as a matter of urgent priority.** While the above statements were largely made following the October 31, 2010, the statements still hold true as Christian deaths, persecution and violence has continued.



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5. The Most Critical Issues Facing Aramean Christians

5.1 Need for Peacekeepers in Iraq

General: With all the abuses of religious freedom becoming rampant throughout Iraq, both in Iraq proper and in the Kurdish region, it is clear to the SUA that the Iraqi Police, Iraqi State, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and US Forces are unable or unwilling to protect the Aramean Christian people of Iraq. Surprisingly, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)⁸ plays a very minor role in the protection and safety of Iraq's Aramean population. While UNAMI has a very specific mandate from the United Nations, many Aramean Iraqis increasingly ask whether its unsuccessful mission is a function of apathy, lack of jurisdiction, discrimination, inability to perform or corruption within the Iraqi protective forces.

Although there have been recent reports that the Iraq Parliament called for an Iraqi Christian police force to be formed to police the Christian neighbourhoods, the timing, intent and reality of such a proposition is questioned. Nevertheless, the SUA fully supports such a proposal and believes that a process and plan be put in place to implement the strategy. The SUA also recognises that the Iraqi Christian Police force is a long term visionary plan. If we move too quickly on this then it can simply help to inflame the situation even more. It is a process of long term education, training, financial support, military aid and social change. The question is also whether the Christian community trusts the Iraqi police to solve their issues. Unfortunately, to date, with deaths, persecution, theft and violence against the Christians becoming a more systemic part of society, the need for international assistance is necessary today. Therefore, the SUA requests that world community still focus on a short term solution of a Peacekeeping force.

Typically, United Nations Peacekeeping Forces are employed in order to maintain or re-establish peace in an area of armed conflict. As we know, Peacekeepers are deployed to war-torn regions where no one party or state is willing or able to go and prevent conflict from returning or escalating. With the Security Council's recent condemnation of the increase in violence against the Iraqi Christian community, in early November 2010, Peacekeeping missions allow the Security Council to participate in the creation of conditions for peace.

There is a distinction between two kinds of peacekeeping operations, being, unarmed observer groups and lightly armed military forces. The latter Peacekeepers are only permitted to employ their weapons for self-defence. They are evenly divided between observer groups and military forces. The observer groups are concerned with gathering information for the UN about actual conditions prevailing in an area, for example, as to whether both parties adhere to an armistice agreement. The military forces are entrusted with more extended tasks, such as keeping the parties to a conflict apart and maintaining order in a specified area.

The European Union (EU) only provides troops under specific UN allowances and clear UN mandates, such as the European Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR). These types of forces, however, are only a temporary measure, with annual reviews of the necessity for troop presence. On 18 November 2010, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of Operation Althea and NATO HQ Sarajevo for a further 12 months. This example shows that the same can be done with UNAMI if the political will and commitment of the international community are there (see below).

What Role Can the Peacekeepers Play? UN Peacekeeping has been increasingly applied to intra-State conflicts and civil wars. Although the military remains the backbone of most peacekeeping operations, the many faces of Peacekeeping forces include the following, and the SUA requests that any Peacekeeping force in Iraq, without limitation, undertake the following activities:

- a) function as an impartial third party in the protection against attacks on defenceless ethno-religious minorities;
- b) have both a civil as well as an armed protective function;
- c) have a special focus on vulnerable ethno-religious minorities;
- d) support the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees;
- e) supply the need for impartial police officers and legal experts and strengthen the rule of law;
- f) provide impartial electoral observers and advisers;
- g) provide human rights monitors and assistance;
- h) provide specialists in civil affairs, governance and power-sharing arrangements;
- i) act in the role of humanitarian workers (not only funding);
- j) ensure the trials in Iraq are fair and unbiased;
- k) help to rid the Iraqi Police Forces of all militia groups and corruption;
- l) act as administrators and economists; and
- m) provide experts in communications and public information.

Next Steps: Peacekeepers are normally deployed as a consequence of a Security Council decision. The SUA strongly supports the need for Peacekeeping troops being sent to Iraq or having UNAMI expand its mission, under a very specific mandate as listed above. The SUA recommends that the UN Security Council members be rallied to support either:

- a) the creation of a new Peacekeeping force to be deployed into Christian dominated areas; or
- b) an expansion of the mandate currently possessed by UNAMI to an armed protection function, to complete the current mandate it possesses and to extend its current mission beyond 1 July 2011 (including the aforementioned activities).

In regards to the latter, the SUA asks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Iraq (SRSG), Mr. Ad Melkert, to push for an extension of the UNAMI term and to seek a greater mandate in the country, as described above. The preference for the SUA is that UNAMI extend its mission in Iraq and expand its mandate to include the above matters relevant to Christian protection.

The SUA reiterates that it is not the job of Peacekeepers to create a permanent solution. The goal is to stabilize a situation so as to give the politicians and diplomats the opportunity to establish permanent peace with the Aramean Christian community.

For the sake of clarity, the SUA is not calling for a “military zone” or what some commentators have suggested is a “free zone” or “green zone” with military blockades, heavily fortified areas or crossings. There is no need for such formality or exclusion of Iraqi communities from public life. The SUA’s strong preference is that UNAMI expand its mission, as described above, to specifically take care of Aramean Christians and to have a significant presence in Christian dominated areas, thereby offering security and real safety to Iraq’s native Aramean people and culture.

Relatively new to the UN’s peace department are the Peace-building and Peacemaking factions. These have been developed to work in co-ordination with peacekeeping operations. While Peacekeepers create a stable environment, the peace-builders and peacemakers focus on longer-term, diplomatic aspects, helping to create the conditions for sustainable peace.

5.2 Should Aramean Christians Leave Iraq?

While the SUA completely understands any persons' request to leave Iraq, this should never be a forced situation and we implore Western countries, which have the best intentions in mind, not to demand that Christians leave their homeland.

It is clear to the SUA that the Aramean people, by and large, wishes to remain in Iraq. They wish to stay in their indigenous homelands. They wish to reap the benefits of a new democratic society. They wish to remain with their families, churches, jobs, friends, social gatherings, schools and familiar neighbourhoods. No person wishes to leave their homes behind and sell their properties to opportunists who have offered either inflated amounts to purchase lands, as we have seen in the Kurdish regions, or in other Christian areas where Arameans feel forced to either escape from their properties or sell their lands for a small fraction of their market value.

At its most basic level, all that the Arameans request is security, peace and freedom to live their daily lives and not be forced to leave their homelands. The SUA supports the Aramean Christians in their quest for freedom and in their attempts to remain in safe and peaceful conditions in Iraq.

The SUA notes that the Christian churches are equally dismayed by the lack of protection afforded the Christian population. What the Church says publicly is very different to what it says privately. In our discussions with Church leaders, in and outside of Iraq, there is a clear fear of what the future may bring for the Christian community. They are afraid of what they can say in public, they are scared to walk outside, they are fearful of wearing their religious clothing and symbols. Church leaders and parishioners even fear attending mass and doing day to day routine activities.

Having stressed the above, and with a complete understanding of the current fear which pervades the community, the SUA defends the position taken by such religious leaders like His Holiness the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, stating that "we reject any opinion or instigation that encourage the members of the Holy Church to emigrate from Iraq to any other state."

Although the SUA has taken this stance, we also concede that there are times where Arameans may be so fearful for their lives that they may wish to leave Iraq. This is understandable and the SUA does not wish to partake in a debate which forces individuals to remain in Iraq. In such a situation, it may be best for Iraqi refugees to *temporarily* leave Iraq, but return safely when the political and social culture has realigned to a more positive state. This is a challenging situation for all involved and yet the SUA remains optimistic that our Aramean Christian community in Iraq can build a positive future, provided they are truly supported to remain in Iraq with security, peace and demonstrative, objective and achievable safety measures put in place.

5.3 Rights of Refugees

There is no question that we have a real refugee crisis in Iraq. More than half of the Christian population has already left Iraq and others have escaped to countries such as Jordan and Syria even though these countries are not being equipped to take care of the refugees. Syria alone may be hosting more than a million refugees from Iraq. As of 2007, only 1 percent of the total Iraqi displaced population was estimated to be in the industrialized world.

According to UNHCR figures, approximately 2 million Iraqis are now outside the country with another 2.2 million internally displaced. Amnesty International goes further, stating that "Iraq remains one of the most dangerous places in the world. Its refugee crisis is worsening. According to the...UNHCR, since the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, an estimated 4.7 million have been displaced both within and outside Iraq and for many the situation is desperate."

There has been a great amount written on the refugee crisis in Iraq and yet there is a real lack of international assistance dealing with this issue. While UNHCR assists in the trenches of daily Iraqi life, many international governments deny that any substantive problems exist in Iraq. However, recent massacres and the public statements from Islamic extremist groups has led to many Western governments reformulating their positions. While the Swedish government, for example, recently attempted to deport rejected asylum-seekers back to Iraq, other governments have been openly debating opening its borders to Iraqi Christians on a temporary and permanent basis.

Again, while the SUA does not wish the Aramean community to leave Iraq, we believe strongly that they should be given the freedom to leave Iraq if they so choose. At the same time, external governments should not encourage Aramean Christians to leave Iraq. The attention of external governments should rather be directed at eradicating the sectarian violence and moving towards real security and peace in Iraq.

The SUA calls on the international community to take the Iraq refugee problem seriously and to act immediately to ensure that the problem does not become worse. The UNHCR has often reported on the issues the IDPs and other refugees face. The SUA asks for the state of refugees and IDPs to be addressed and not just given lip service by the global community.

Given that the winter season is approaching, the SUA believes that the support for the Aramean people is more crucial than ever. In late November 2010, following discussions with many in Iraq, the SUA understands that the number of IDPs is growing. For example, just recently, another 450 families fled from Baghdad and Mosul to Northern Iraq. As usual with such IDPs, these families require **urgent assistance**. Again we see IDPs struggling with fear, bad weather conditions, a lack of shelter, clothing, jobs and financial support, The SUA calls on the Iraqi government to assist such IDPs who have fled their homes because of sectarian violence.

Such is the complexity of this issue that many IDPs or refugees who try to return back to their original homes, arrive finding nothing is left or it is being occupied by others. Therefore, the SUA calls on assistance for returning individuals as well. It is also the case that under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, many Kurds faced persecution including in the 1988 Halabja gas killings. The response from the British government and other nations, for example, was to give large numbers of Kurds asylum. The international community must look at the current killings of Christians and recognise that the current situation requires a more urgent response. People are scared to live their lives, to walk on the streets, to go to work or the grocery store. The SUA has direct reports from Arameans in Iraq, which state that the Iraqi Christians are threatened daily with death threats, demands to convert from Christianity, abusive graffiti, phone calls, notes thrown on their doorsteps. This must all stop.

With Aramean Christian refugees primarily finding homes and camps in countries like Syria, Turkey and Jordan, the SUA asks those governments to continue to protect and promote the interests of those individuals and families who feel they cannot return today or in the near future. It is also critical that IDPs escaping to the Kurdish region be supported financially with at least \$1000 per month in social security payments. The rhetoric coming from Mr Barzani and the KDP about supporting the Christian community is insufficient. Similar statements of protection and support from Prime Minister Maliki and some Iraq Parliament members must be backed up with real action. The SUA has been informed that many IDPs struggle to find work in the Kurdish region, have little support and have to deal with the much more expensive area in the north. Therefore, the SUA asks for the following:

- a) A complete analysis of the number of Aramean IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees in and outside Iraq since 2003. This work should be conducted by UNHCR in conjunction with the Iraqi government;

- b) All Arameans should be encouraged to remain in Iraq and not leave the country, unless absolutely necessary in accordance with international law protection rights of refugees;
- c) If any Arameans become IDPs, the SUA encourages the Iraqi and Kurdish governments to assist them in every humanely way possible, including the provision of financial, housing and employment based support. While UNHCR is assisting IDPs today, there is no question that more must be done to assist those IDPs immediately. The Iraqi government must provide additional funding to ensure that IDPs are successfully supported and also assisted to move back to their original homes with safety and security;
- d) If any Arameans become asylum seekers or refugees, the SUA strongly recommends that international governments assist them in achieving a successful **temporary relocation** to their new countries. Such countries in the West must take a truly humanitarian position which is based on objective and demonstrable criteria. Such criteria must take into consideration the desperation and fear which exists within the Aramean Iraqi community. Just as the United Nations Security Council condemned the recent violence against the Christian Iraqi people, the international world must stand united and agree that **any Aramean asylum seeker be given temporary refugee status if absolutely necessary**. The SUA asks progressive Western and local governments to take these *temporary* refugees as required, based on their Christian Aramean status.

5.4 What Does Autonomy and Self-Determination mean for Aramean (Syriac) Christians in Iraq?

Under Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, there is reference to the concept of administrative and political rights of various nationalities, such as “*Turkomen, Chaldeans and Assyrians*”. There is also a reference to “other constituents” which would include Syriacs and other ethno-religious groups.¹⁰

Although a few interest groups refer to this Article as a justification for “autonomy”, the SUA views this with some caution. The Article speaks of “*administrative and political rights*” and therefore, the discussion should focus on these terms and none other. The SUA believes that the local public discourse should be shaped primarily by the guidance given in the Iraqi Constitution. Further, the SUA asks that external groups not try to detrimentally influence local area needs.

In the first instance, it is important to look at terminology. The term “**autonomy**” means a region similar to that of Kurdistan which is one of the only areas to have obtained international recognition as a sovereign quasi-independent state. Individuals or groups using this term request “autonomy” in the sense of a distinct geographic area. It is clear, however, that this is not contemplated by the Iraq government or its people.

Alternatively, the debate has focused on the concept of “administrative area or territory” or “administrative or territorial division” (referred to herein as “**administrative area**”). This is an interesting discourse because the definition is subject to much interpretation. These terms can mean anything from political, economic, civil, military or social independence on many different subject matters. At all times, the sovereignty of the Iraqi Country becomes paramount and it can be equated somewhat with a Federal system with State based powers. Many groups have pushed this angle because it is mentioned specifically in the Iraqi Constitution, but it seems many of them have misunderstood the intention of the term used.

Based on the above, the SUA believes that an administrative area(s) should be considered by the Iraqi government. However, the SUA believes that significant time must be spent to have a robust discussion and debate with all the key players on what this concept actually means for the

Arameans and the country of Iraq. Having said that, the SUA reiterates its position that recognises the sovereign power of Iraq and therefore does not call for an autonomous region at this time. From all the discussions held with Arameans in Iraq, it is clear that they wish to be part of a Federal Iraq. Among their leading representatives, there is no call for political independence among the Aramean people.

It is clear that the absolute priority of the Aramean people is to have security and peace within the country. To that end, the Arameans can only be expected to remain in the country and stay a part of the Federal system, if they continue to be protected. Various suggestions have been made on what options should be pursued for the Arameans. Such options have been narrowed down to the following four (4) as follows:

1. A completely independent zone, which is autonomous such as the Kurdish region;
2. An administrative area, with limited autonomous rights in certain defined, populated and protected areas specifically for the Aramean Christians;
3. The Arameans becoming part of a larger Kurdistan regional area and government; and
4. The Arameans remaining a part of Federal Iraq system without aspiring independence.

The SUA currently recommends pursuing Option 2 above for the Aramean people in Iraq. However, such support is qualified. While the SUA is supportive of certain administrative independent rights being obtained by the Aramean Christians, it is recommended that it only takes place after a long term process of collaboration, consultation and democratic discourse taking place with all relevant parties involved.

Therefore, the SUA calls for Option 2 in the future. All too often foreign powers and organisations have made decisions for Iraqis instead of the Iraqi people making decisions for themselves. Based on the above, the SUA makes the following points:

- a) As of today, a completely independent zone for the Arameans is not what the Iraqi citizens want and it is not what the Aramean people strive for either. The Arameans want inclusion into Iraqi society, not exclusion and they do not want an enclave scenario where they potentially become easier targets for Islamic extremists;
- b) The Federal system of government is the best possible solution for Iraqi society at large;
- c) A united Iraq will help with the cohesion and unity of the country;
- d) In this very fragile Iraqi society, the SUA is somewhat sceptical of absolute autonomy but suggests that the situation be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis;
- e) Article 125 is unclear in its scope or application. It is the understanding of the SUA that enabling legislation has not been drafted as of yet. The SUA strongly encourages a long term public enquiry into its applicability into wider society for the benefit of all relevant and appropriate groups. Such enquiry must include all representatives from the Aramean people to openly discuss the options available to them;
- f) There are many Arameans who believe a specific autonomous zone would be detrimental given that they may have to relocate to another area. Therefore, any discussion of an administrative area should consider all places where the Aramean Christian community

are located rather than just focus on a specific whole geographic space, such as the so called “Nineveh Plains” which has at times been proposed by certain lobby groups; and

- g) The Kurdistan option is not feasible. The Kurdish area has not been very receptive to the Aramean Christian community. The SUA notes that: (1) certificates and diplomas obtained by IDPs are not accepted in the Kurdish Autonomous Region; (2) many Christians are encouraged to leave the Region to Kurdish migrants purchasing their properties; (3) there appears to be an ulterior motive for the call to include the Aramean Christians in a larger Kurdistan region, which includes greater political power and representation in the Iraqi government and also access to precious resources in Aramean areas, such as oil reserves, including in Kirkuk; and (4) Aramean Christians often struggle with providing adequate language schooling for their children in Arabic, Iraq’s official language until June 2004 (let alone in Aramaic, a recognized regional language according to the current Constitution).

With respect to our third concern, Iraqi Kurds continue to argue that Article 140 must be implemented without delay. This Article refers, for example, to “a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories,” which are not (yet) under the control of the Iraqi Kurds. It appears to the SUA that the outcome of such a referendum will not appropriately reflect the will of the Aramean Christians in the Nineveh area. Although Iraqi Kurds publicly deny such otherwise well-founded suspicions, it is clear that Article 140 puts them in an excellent position to incorporate, in the future, Kirkuk and other oil-rich areas and enables them to define and finalise a larger Kurdistan region. Related to this irredentist idea of a Greater Kurdistan is the notion of an autonomous area popularized as the “Nineveh plain” in the recent years and which allegedly is destined for the “Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people”. It is noteworthy that this latter idea has been actively supported by a handful of nationalist organizations that promote the name ‘Assyrians’ and/or can be linked to Kurdish organizations one way or another as well as by politicians who have been or still are members in the Kurdistan Parliament.

The SUA encourages the Iraqi government to review and analyse the application of Article 125 into Iraqi society. A long term vision must be implemented by the Iraqi government which ensures that the indigenous Aramean people are protected in the country. The SUA supports the option which most achieves this end. At present, the most feasible and viable option appears not to be an autonomous region for the Aramean people.

In the meantime, the SUA asks that the Iraqi people open the debate and begin to truly involve relevant and appropriate groups in the decision making process to determine the future of the Arameans. Real administrative rights for Arameans is possible and plausible, but only after a long term plan to implement it. There are different civil, social, economic rights that an Aramean area could be responsible for in a Federal system. There is no question that administrative zones will provide the Arameans with a sense of freedom, independence, unity, preservation and strength. The degree to which this takes place needs to be assessed by all relevant parties.

The SUA also asks that the international community to beware of certain groups which announce publicly to represent all groups in Iraqi society, while excluding some of the largest Aramean Christian people from the public discourse. This goes back to the need to step back from the issues and have a long term vision to giving the people on the ground what they really want and need, while keeping “administrative rights” as the northern star end target.

6. Ten Critical Questions for Iraq and International Community

One of the SUA's goals is to seek justice, security and a bright future for Arameans in Iraq. There are many barriers which impede achieving this. Thus, the SUA has focused on 10 primary critical and unanswered questions to Iraq which will guide Iraq and the international community to achieving this goal of justice and security in Iraq. This is not an exhaustive list of concerns, but rather those issues which have the highest priority today. The Questions to Iraq's government and the international community are as follows:

A. Security and Peace in Iraq

1. With respect to general security issues, the SUA asks:

- a) What are the Iraqi Government, Police Forces, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the US Forces doing to find a short and long term solution to protect Aramean Christians in their populated areas and ensure that all Arameans live with peace and security in their Iraqi homeland?
- b) When will the Iraqi government hold an official Commission based on public inquiry into the critical issues that surround the Aramean Christian people in Iraq, including the violence, IDPs and refugee status, discrimination and intimidation that they continue to face?
- c) What is the US Government doing to play a more critical role in the protection of Christians in Iraq and has it conducted an audit on funds provided to third party groups on how money is spent to reinforce security of the Aramean people?¹² Will the US Government continue to financially support the Aramean people in Iraq? If yes, how? If no, why?
- d) Has the Iraqi government considered and will it implement a funding program for the Iraqi Aramean Christian people to support the most negatively impacted community in Iraqi society? To this end, will the international community support this plea for special assistance?

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2. With respect to the United Nations and the EU, the SUA asks:

- a) Why hasn't UNAMI expanded its mission in Iraq to true peacekeeping activity to assist the Aramean Christian community?
- b) Will the Security Council of the United Nations revise its current stance on the need for Peacekeepers in Iraq with the primary focus being to keep the peace and security of Iraqi Christians, particularly during the upcoming Christian holidays and celebrations when new large-scale attacks are expected?
- c) What has the European Union done in relation to the Iraqi Christian crisis which exists today and what level and type of support will it provide to protect the Christian population in Iraq (including refugees and IDPs)? For example, will the EU consider a moratorium on deportation of Iraqi Christians until the current humanitarian and ethnic cleansing activity is resolved?

B. Fact / Statistics Gathering

3. The government passed a law in 2008 allowing it to conduct a census in the future.¹³ Why has the Iraqi Government continuously delayed gathering data on the number of Aramean Christians with respect to the following:

- a) Number of Arameans in Iraq in pre-2003 and today;
- b) Where are the Aramean Christians currently located and where did they live previously – again pre-2003 and today (this will show the levels of internal and external migration); and
- c) Number of Arameans killed and/or injured in Iraq since 2003 Gulf War (including all civilians and clergy).

C. Political Representation and Participation

4. It appears egregious and blatantly discriminatory that a representative democracy limits the number of Christians to a minute number. The SUA has two questions here:

- (a) What is the Iraqi government willing to do to give Aramean Christians a greater role in political life and civil society, and focus primarily on Aramean affairs (not just at the Federal level, but also at the regional and local levels where most crime and danger exists)?
- (b) How has the Iraqi government encouraged and facilitated the Arameans to participate effectively in civil society, and to further control and direct their own destiny in Iraq?

D. Endangered Aramaic Cultural Heritage

5. There have been approximately 66 churches bombed by Islamic terrorist groups since 2003. With the Arabization and Kurdification policies, in addition to the attacks and emigration of the Aramean people, the future survival of the Aramaic (Syriac) language, as referred to under Article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution,¹⁴ has been jeopardized. This illustrates just part of the immeasurable damage done to the cultural destruction being witnessed in Iraq. Following UNESCO's distinction between tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) cultural heritage, the SUA asks:

Is the Iraqi government willing to take any responsibility in restoring, safeguarding, developing and promoting the endangered native Aramaic cultural heritage in Iraq? If so, when and how?¹⁵

E. The Refugee Question

6. Is Iraq ready to invest structurally in its Aramean dominated region, particularly in improving the security, infrastructure, job employment and facilities for normal life circumstances in all areas of Iraq? If so, when and how?

7. How will the Iraqi government ensure that the Iraq region remains populated by its original Aramean inhabitants for the distant future as expressed under Article 44 of the Constitution (Protecting the right of return and freedom of movement) and that Aramean Christians do not leave Iraq or their historical homes?

8. What is the Iraqi government doing to ensure that all Aramean Christian refugees and IDPs return to their homes in Iraq with safety, peace, security and compensation if appropriate?

F. Muslim Leadership Condemnation of Violence against Christian Populations

9. There are two parts to this question:

- a) What has the Muslim world (including Grand Mufti's, prominent Imam's, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference) done to support the Christians in Iraq and publicly condemn the recent spate of attacks on the Christian communities in Iraq?
- b) Are Muslim leaders (as described above) ready to issue a *Fatwa* to prohibit every Muslim believer who kills or persecutes Christians in the name of Islam, so that they can help to protect the Christian populations? If so, when? If no, why not?

G. Iraqi Constitution and Legal Reform

10. There are two main issues here, although the SUA realizes that the Constitution is a breathing document and much still needs to be done to refine it as well as some of the laws in the country:

- a) With the Iraqi Constitution acting as a living document and amendments to Laws are common practice, the SUA requests greater clarity in relation to Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution. The Article refers to "Local Administrations" and states: "This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents [cf. endnote 10], and this shall be regulated by law." It is our understanding that the enabling legislation for the operation of this Article has not been enacted. The SUA, therefore, asks for a thorough and independent review by the Iraqi government to analyse and discuss the ramifications of this issue upon the Arameans of Iraq.
- b) Why hasn't Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution been implemented for the indigenous Aramean population in Iraq?

7. Recommendations for a Stabilized Iraq

The Syriac Universal Alliance appeals to the Iraqi Government, US Government, European Union, Council of Europe, the United Nations, others in the international community and to the people of Iraq to support the forgotten Aramean people with all the necessary facilities to safeguard, develop and promote the endangered Aramaic civilization. This is especially so because Aramaic culture, heritage, history and current global standing is a vital part of the worldwide heritage and Iraq's rich cultural heritage. From that perspective, the SUA offers the following recommendations to the international community and to Iraq. These are split into Short, Medium and Long term solutions:

A. Short Term Solutions

7.A.1 Provision of Real Security and Peace

- A. Iraqi and US governments, either alone or in cooperation with the UN, EU, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, should immediately act to prevent the tide of emigration from Iraq growing any larger by taking necessary security and safety measures in Aramean Christian populated areas. For example, this may include additional Iraqi Police monitoring and surveillance activities and also increased check points to be placed in large Christian population areas;
- B. Iraqi and US governments, either alone or in cooperation with the UN, EU and Arab league, should immediately aid the refugees outside of Iraq, in both its neighbouring countries and in the West, to return to their ancestral homeland. In this respect, concrete legislation must be drafted and an unambiguous UN Resolution passed to ensure the right of return in order to prevent future problems when non-Arameans occupy their lands and homes, as has happened for example with the Christian Aramean refugees of Southeast Turkey in the recent decades;
- C. US Government should exchange security information with the Iraqi Government and work closer in the provision of data on terrorist activity and the eradication of terrorist cells in Iraq;
- D. Iraqi government to provide additional Iraqi Police to monitor and protect the Christian populations where there is a prominent population of Christian communities and where Churches and Christian places of interest are located;
- E. In the short term, the SUA asks the Iraqi government to implement a policy of true representation of Iraqi Christians in the police force that can police their own local communities under the auspices of the Iraqi Police Force. The SUA notes that this is standard practice in all countries in the world where there are open calls for proportional representation of religious, ethnic or gender groups in the local police forces. The implementation of this plan takes considerable time and this is why the SUA views this as a short term decision but with a long term vision. We appreciate that this has been spoken about lately by certain government officials but the rhetoric must pass and real action must take place immediately;
- F. Iraqi government to become much stricter on terrorist activities in the country in order to fight the systemic violence which is more prevalent in Iraqi society;

- G. In many instances, it is clear that certain police forces have been infiltrated by corrupt individuals or militia groups. As illustrated by the Baghdad Church massacre, the police are also quite unprofessional and may not be trusted in certain circumstances. The Iraqi government and Police Authorities are to provide assurances that only the most elite, trusted, trained and professional forces will protect the Aramean population;
- H. Related to point (G) above, the Iraqi police must regain the confidence of the local Aramean people. There is an air of distrust that exists and this must change. In our conversations with the Aramean community in Iraq, it is clear that everyone from the helpless families and even clergy are distrustful and even fearful of the Iraq police.

7.A.2 Islamic Leaders Condemnation of Attacks

The request should be made of all Muslim Leaders, including Grand Muftis, Imams, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to publicly and strongly condemn violence and human rights abuses which specifically target Christian populations. Such public condemnation should be accompanied with a *Fatwa* on all the prohibition on the killing or persecution of all Christians in the name of Islam. Public Statements and Media discussions should reinforce this condemnation and such a position should be reflected in the schooling of students in Iraq and the Islamic world for that matter.

7.A.3 Self-Defence by Aramean Christians

There must be a right for all Aramean Christians in Iraq to defend themselves, their families, other innocent people and their properties. This should be explored further but to clarify, the SUA does not ask for the civilian Christian population to be professionally armed, in a manner leading to a official militia, vigilante or defence force as this may inflame the violence, but they must have the right to defend themselves in line with international law principles.¹⁶

7.A.4 Reinforce that Aramean Christians Stay in Iraq

The Iraqi government must stress the importance of all Iraqi Aramean Christians to remain in Iraq, their indigenous homeland. No Aramean Christian should be pressured or feel so endangered that they wish to leave their homelands. The Iraqi government must reinforce that all Arameans stay in Iraq with security and peace, and take real and effective steps to support reinforcement. The SUA calls on all Arameans to remain in Iraq and to maintain their strong positions in the social, cultural, religious and political life in Iraq. While we appreciate there may be refugees with legitimate claims to escape the persecution they may experience and endure, we encourage all Iraqi Christians to remain in Iraq to the extent that they can do so.

At the same time, the SUA requests that the global community halt all deportations of Iraqi Christians back to Iraq for the foreseeable future. This must be a short term action to ensure that all Christians returning to Iraq are safe and not returning to an extremely dangerous situation. This comes on the back of the recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights ruling against the forcible return to Baghdad of Iraqi asylum seekers and calling for the activity to be halted immediately, because of an upsurge in sectarian violence and suicide bombings.

B. Medium Term Solutions

7.B.1 Investigations into Aramean Christian Persecution

The Iraqi Government must conduct a full police investigation into the Church Massacres of 31 October 2010 and in relation to all Aramean Christian killings in Iraq, especially since the Second Gulf War in Iraq began in 2003. The SUA specifically recommends:

- A. An Independent Commission be formed by the Iraqi Government (must be lead by prominent Christian leaders) in order to conduct a thorough and full investigation into all Aramean killings, discrimination, forced conversions, abuse, land expropriations and other human rights abuses in Iraq;
- B. The Commission to determine if there is any pattern in the killings and ensure perpetrators of the crimes are properly prosecuted (the SUA also requests truth in sentencing processes so that perpetrators of crime are given appropriate sentences and serve their punishment); and
- C. A call on the Iraqi police forces to find strategic, demonstrative and achievable solutions to the crimes against the Christians and provide them with security and peace in Iraq.

7.B.2 Iraqi Government Data Gathering

A complete analysis of the statistics on Aramean Christians in Iraq. Questions must be asked and statistics drawn on the following:

- A. Number of Arameans in Iraq in pre-2003 and today;
- B. Where are the Aramean Christians currently located and where did they previously lived – again pre-2003 and today (this will show the levels of internal and external migration); and
- C. Number of Arameans killed and/or injured in Iraq since the Gulf War began in 2003 (including all civilians and clergy).

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7.B.3 United Nations and EU Peacekeepers

It has become critically clear that the UNAMI (current mandate), US Forces and Iraqi government cannot take care of the dangers alone. They are in need of urgent external assistance. The UN (through the Security Council) must spearhead a movement to place true peacekeepers in Iraq. The aim must be to protect and promote the cause of Aramean Christians in Iraq, as further described herein. This is the critical path for a solution.

Further, the EU agreed to follow up its concerns regarding Christian security with real action. However, this does not appear to have happened to date. The EU should work in close consultation with the Iraqi authorities and other partners, such as the UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The aim would be to further condemn and combat plans by Al-Qaeda to target the Iraqi Christian community and also to provide peacekeepers to support local police in halting the overt attempt to rid Iraq of its ancient Christian population. The EU must leverage its

relationships and place appropriate pressure on those in Iraq to make Iraq a more democratic, safe and peaceful country.

Given that the EU is still working towards finalising the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which began in November 2006, the SUA requests that this PCA include the issue of minority rights, safety and future status of the indigenous Aramean people of Iraq.

For example, the European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2010 on Iraq stated that it “[w]elcomes the statement of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2 November 2010 calling on the specialised authorities and all security forces to stand firm against any attempts to separate Iraqi citizens on a sectarian or racial basis, and to provide protection for Iraqi citizens and safeguard religious practice.” This is acceptable but the SUA asks the EU to also impose real pressure for this to take place and to monitor the situation on a constant basis so that the terror faced by Aramean Christians halts quickly.

7.B.4 Protecting Aramaic Cultural Heritage

In accordance with Article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution, the Iraqi Government should agree to implement a program to actively restore, safeguard, develop and promote the endangered Aramaic cultural heritage in Iraq. This includes the Aramaic (Syriac) language, as referred to under Article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution.

C. Long Term Solutions

7.C.1 The Refugee Question. There are two important points here:

- A. There must be the right of return for all Aramean Christians to their original indigenous lands which have been expropriated from them or left under pressure after the first Gulf War in 1990-1991. Even though this right is stated in Article 44 of the Constitution, the Iraqi government must define the return process, provide just compensation where reasonably appropriate, and ensure that security, peace and infrastructure are all provided upon return to the ancient homeland.
- B. All refugees must be given an adequate level of financial and life-rebuilding support in order for refugees and IDPs to return to their homes and satisfactorily transition back into society. The Iraqi government must show an honest intention to return IDPs and refugees by creating real demonstrable, objective and results based programs. This must include structural investment in its Aramean dominated regions, particularly in improving the security, infrastructure, employment opportunities and facilities for a normal living environment in all areas of Iraq, including in the Kurdish zone of the country.

7.C.2 Autonomy / Self-Determination

The SUA calls on all relevant parties to focus on security and safety of the Aramean people and make this the absolute priority. While some have called for “autonomy now”, the SUA views this as a distraction from the main issue that people care about on the ground. The Iraqi Aramean

Christians are focused on survival, they think about living another day, practicing their Christian beliefs in peace. They are not focused on obtaining their own autonomous region for political and economic reasons.

The next step is to begin a truly public discourse and socialisation process into the concept of administrative rights for the Aramean Christians. The SUA wishes for a more securely protected area(s) for the Aramean Christian community and for true administrative rights to be provided to this community in the future. Those rights are to be publicly discussed, considered and debated by all relevant parties in order for the best result possible to be obtained by the Aramean people. The situation of administrative powers is to be monitored on a continual basis and all relevant views are to be consulted and audited constantly.

It is clear that the Aramean Christians wish to remain in a Federal Iraq system with the current 18 governorates.¹⁷ The SUA recognizes the sovereign power of Iraq and does not call for an autonomous region in Iraq. As of today, one Federal Iraq is clearly the vision of Iraqi Aramean Christians on the ground. The outside world, with their own agendas, should not force their views on those in Iraq, particularly when they have limited, or no, understanding of what is happening on the ground. Therefore, the following is recommended:

- A. No instantaneous self-determinate/independent/autonomous region or zone in Iraq for Aramean Christians;
- B. In accordance with Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, the Iraqi government should consider the long term benefits of the administrative rights of the Arameans in Iraq. The prime factors should be the needs of the Aramean people balanced with the benefits to Iraqi society at large. The focus must always be a peaceful, integrated and stabilised Federal Iraq, rather than external forces imposing their view on the socio-political conditions and future of the Aramean Christians in Iraq; and
- C. The Iraqi government should review and analyse the application of Article 125 into Iraqi society on a continual basis. A long term vision and monitoring exercise should be implemented by the Iraqi government which includes a constant data gathering exercise and an acknowledgment that one of the most important considerations is the protection and safety of the indigenous Aramean Christian population in Iraq.

8. Conclusion

The SUA is concerned about the most serious of grave situations facing the Aramean Christian people in Iraq. We ask the Iraqi people, Iraqi government and world community to take action and assist the Arameans in their desperate time of need. In this SUA Iraq Report 2010, the SUA has attempted to provide readers with an understanding of the primary issues of concern to the Aramean Christian community in Iraq. We ask the questions that need to be addressed urgently and also provided our primary short, medium and long term recommendations to make the shocking situation of today a better one for tomorrow.

In chapter one of this Report, the Syriac Universal Alliance was introduced as the only Aramaic-speaking NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. As stated, the SUA serves, defends and promotes the interests of the Aramean people, worldwide, including those of the Chaldeans, Syriacs (Orthodox and Catholics) and members of both branches of the Church of the East ('Nestorians' and 'Assyrians') of Iraq. To achieve this goal, the SUA closely cooperates with national governments, the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Chapter two showed the ancient presence of the Aramean people in Iraq. Historically, they have contributed much to this country in particular and even to world civilization in general. In a word, the world is much indebted to the Aramean people and their endangered Aramaic mother tongue.

The third chapter argued that the indigenous Aramean people constitute an integral part of Iraqi society for nearly 3,000 years and, as such, must be protected by the Iraqi government. The Aramean Christians have always remained an indispensable part of Iraqi society and without their presence, the country would be culturally and spiritually impoverished. Yet, as also shown, the Aramean Christians substantially dwindled in their ancestral land. They numbered between 800,000 to 1.4 million people in 2003, whereas today estimates differ from 400,000 to 600,000. The biggest Aramean Christian community consists of the Chaldean church, followed by the Syriac and the Church of the East (old and new calendarist) communities, respectively.

Because of the contemporary anarchy and the existing power vacuum in Iraq since 2003, as discussed in chapter four, the Christians have become the direct victims of Islamic terrorists. Hence the Arameans are dominated by insecurity and fear about their lives and future in Iraq.

As dealt with in the fifth chapter, the most critical issues faced by them are the urgent need for peacekeepers coordinated by the international community (UN with the support of the EU), the unconditional fact that the indigenous Arameans have to be supported in their determination to stay in the land of their ancestors, to create ways to allow the Aramean refugees and IDPs to return to their homeland under auspices of the UN, and finally how to regulate the self-administration of the Arameans in Iraq in accordance with Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution and international law.

Chapter seven has offered the international community (with the USA, the UN and the EU at the forefront) and the Iraqi Government ten (10) questions that deal with seven (7) key issues for the Arameans. Respectively, they consist of security and peace in Iraq; fact / statistics gathering; political representation and participation; endangered Aramaic cultural heritage; the refugee question; Muslim leadership Condemnation of violence against Christians population; and, finally, the Iraqi constitution and legal reform.

In the final chapter, the SUA offers several recommendations to the Iraqi Government and the international community. These are split into Short, Medium and Long term solutions.

The premise of the present Report is that the Iraqi Aramean Christians wish to continue to live in peaceful and harmonious co-existence with their fellow ethno-religious communities in the country. Urgent and immediate action must therefore be taken by the Iraqi government and the international community which aims to protect them in their homeland and which will effectively prevent further escalation of the ongoing violence in Iraq which continues to spur mass emigration.

Indeed, the SUA claims that the time is now critical for the global community to act. The recent spate of attacks and the current narrative from the Islamic extremist community in Iraq leave no doubt that the time to act is *now*. Many have equated the decimation of the Aramean community with an ethnic cleansing exercise from Islamic extremists. For the Arameans, this narrative is not new. The numbers of Christians in other original homelands of the Middle East have equally dwindled in number through mass emigration, persecution, discrimination, killings, massacres, genocide (in Turkey), rape, forced conversions and intimidations in the preceding decades.

Thus, the SUA implores the world community to act *now* before it will be too late. Numbers of Iraqi Aramean Christians have halved in number already down to approximately 400,000 to 600,000. The historical situation in Iraq's neighbouring nation-states shows that we have to take the worsening precarious situation of the indigenous Christians of Iraq seriously.

We can all stop the ethnic cleansing *now*, if we act as one global voice and assist the Iraqi government today. If not, the situation of the Aramean Christians of Southeast Turkey may serve as a vivid example of how a native people and civilization in less than a few decades of time may be effectively eradicated in their ancient soil and silently replaced by historically foreign entities.¹⁸

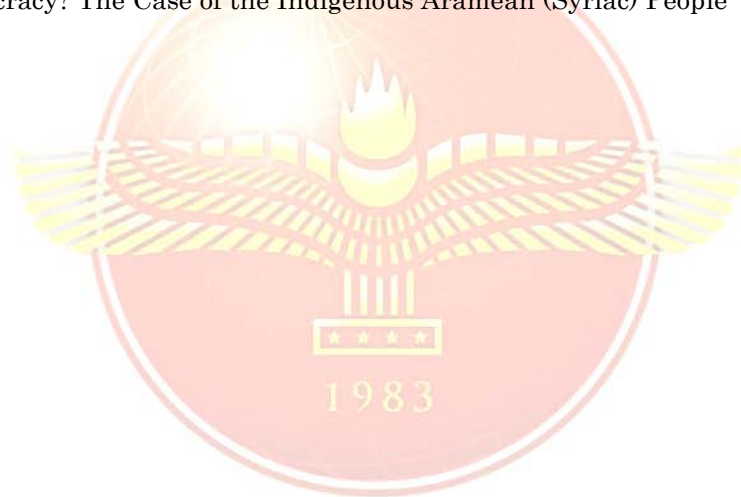


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Endnotes

- 1 J.F. Healey, "Ancient Aramaic Culture and the Bible," in *ARAM* 1:1 (1989), p. 36.
- 2 S. Moscati, *Ancient Semitic Civilizations* (New York, 1957), p. 179.
- 3 E.G.H. Kraeling, *Aram and Israel or The Aramaeans in Syria and Mesopotamia* (New York: Colombia University Press 1918), p. 139.
- 4 E. Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 12f.
- 5 E.Y. Kutscher, *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 90.
- 6 S.P. Brock, "Two millennia of Christianity in Iraq," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21:2 (April, 2010), pp. 175-184; citations from pp. 175 and 182f., respectively.
- 7 Surprisingly the Statement from the US White House was quite generic and did not even mention the religious nature of the massacre or that the victims were in a house of God when attacked: "The United States strongly condemns this senseless act of hostage taking and violence by terrorists linked to al Qaeda in Iraq that occurred Sunday in Baghdad killing so many innocent Iraqis. Our hearts go out to the people of Iraq who have suffered so much from these attacks. We offer sincerest condolences to the families of the victims and to all the people of Iraq who are targeted by these cowardly acts of terrorism. We know the overwhelming majority of Iraqis from all its communities reject violence and we stand with them as we work together to combat terrorism and protect the people of our two nations."
- 8 UNAMI engages in the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law in close collaboration with the Government of Iraq and non-governmental sectors, in accordance with its mandate under UN Security Council resolution 1883 (2009) to "promote the protection of human rights and judicial and legal reform in order to strengthen the rule of law in Iraq." To that end, UNAMI monitors the human rights situation in Iraq and assists, especially through its capacity-building activities, in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of state and civil society institutions. Note that Security Council resolution 1883 was passed on 7 August 2009, deciding that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNAMI "shall continue to pursue their expanded mandate as stipulated in Resolution 1770 (2007) and 1830 (2008)." (Source: UNAMI Human Rights Report 1 July – 31 December 2009.)
- 9 UNHCR for example stated in its Report Freedom in the World 2010 – Iraq, 3 May 2010: "Meanwhile, Shiite party militias were able to infiltrate the Interior Ministry's police and counterinsurgency forces, and extrajudicial detentions and killings by both the militias and militia-dominated police units became common during 2005 and 2006."
- 10 The SUA requests that the term "Syriacs" and/or "Arameans" be added to Iraq's Constitution, just like the term "Syriac" already appears in Article 4 of the Arabic original of the country's Constitution with reference to the Aramaic language.
- 11 See, for example, <http://www.krp.org/eng/issues/article140.aspx> (official website Kurdistan Region Presidency) and <http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/iraq/3339.html>. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution reads: "First: The executive authority shall undertake the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the requirements of all subparagraphs of Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law. Second: The responsibility placed upon the executive branch of the Iraqi Transitional Government stipulated in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law shall extend and continue to the executive authority elected in accordance with this Constitution, provided that it accomplishes completely (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens), by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007."
- 12 The SUA notes that the Iraq Program's Committee on Appropriations, under the "Economic Support Fund" for Iraq, provided \$10,000,000 to assist religious minorities in the Nineveh Plain region of Iraq. Of this budget, \$8,000,000 should be provided for internally-displaced families and \$2,000,000 should be invested in microfinance programs. A further \$10,000,000 has been granted for support of IDPs. The SUA asks how this large sum of money has been used for the benefit and aid of the Aramean people in Iraq and whether an audit has been conducted on the use of such money?
- 13 The last Iraq Census took place in 1987, whereas the most recent Census was to take place on 24 October 2010. However, that has now been delayed to 5 December 2010.

- 14 Note that the true translations of the Iraqi Constitution, from Arabic to English, refer to “Syriac” rather than the oft-cited and inaccurate translation as the “Assyrian” language.
- 15 The SUA understands that the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Education funds Aramaic-language public schools (elementary and high school) where students are taught in Aramaic, Arabic and Kurdish. Yet, this is still insufficient for a language of this local, regional and global significance which is indigenous to the land and its local society.
- 16 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its Preamble: “Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.” Article 2 (Right to life) of the European Convention also states that “Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary: (a) in defence of any person from unlawful violence...”
- 17 The SUA notes that in all countries to which the Arameans have emigrated, they have integrated perfectly well. In their homelands, they have always been upstanding citizens who deliver a great deal to the local society and even economy. The Aramean Christians should continue to be supported in order that they remain in their native countries and, regarding Iraq, continue to be strong and vital members of society.
- 18 For the precarious situation of the Arameans of Turkey, cf. for instance the forthcoming SUA 2010 Turkey Report and <http://www.neurope.eu/images/issues/rf.pdf> (see “The Sincerity of Turkey’s Democracy? The Case of the Indigenous Aramean (Syriac) People” on pp. 17b and 37).



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