

European Union & United Nations activities initiated with the cooperation of Human Rights Without Frontiers, The Assyrian Academic Society, members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (from our homeland) and the Assyrian Democratic Movement UK Branch (thanks to the financial support of our community in England).

Parliamentary questions

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1029/04

by Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(24 March 2004)

Subject: Ethnic discrimination in funding and administration of reconstruction in Iraq

In the past decade, the Chaldo-Assyrian community in Northern Iraq did not benefit from the UNDP activities under the oil-for-food programme (UN Resolution 986), which was administered through the local government. In 2001, funds were refused specifically in the case of Chakalla in the Dohuk governorate. For that reason, there has been a limited reconstruction of Chaldo-Assyrian villages in Northern Iraq, and the funding has had to be supplied from donations collected by the Chaldo-Assyrian diaspora in Europe, Australia and the US.

The diaspora has had to provide funding for school construction and maintenance as well as for curriculum development to preserve the Aramaic (Syriac) language. Without help for education in areas with concentrations of Chaldo-Assyrians, we may well witness the extinction of this ancient language.

In the same manner, the diaspora has had to supply funds for women's organisations, childcare facilities, and computer training in Northern Iraq.

Diaspora help is limited. Thus it is essential for international funds to be allocated equitably to this oldest of indigenous ethnic groups in Iraq.

The European Union is indirectly involved through the United Nations and directly through its own efforts in the general reconstruction of Iraq. Currently the EC Paper on Medium-Term Strategy on Iraq is being prepared.

1. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the funding and administration of projects in the future avoid ethnic and religious discrimination?
2. Can the Commission take measures to scrutinise funding allocation in Iraq, and guarantee that out of the generally allocated funds, an equitable amount reaches all ethnic communities, and that in the North there is no compensation for past discrimination?
3. Can the Commission take measures to have Chaldo-Assyrian personnel

included on the local fund-administration staff throughout the parts of Iraq where Chaldo-Assyrians reside, in order to prevent future discrimination in the distribution of aid?

Distribution of European aid to Iraq

MEP Jan Maat's question to the European Commission

The fall of Saddam's regime and the construction of a democratic Iraq seemed to offer new opportunities for the fate of Iraqi Christians, particularly the Assyrians. Unfortunately, international aid seldom reaches them and there are still problems about the restitution of property and particularly of church buildings. The European Commission has recently decided that 160 million EUR can be devoted to the reconstruction of Iraq. Christian Democrat MEP Albert Jan Maat has asked the European Commission questions about the distribution of these funds.

Those who watch television can see that freedom of expression too often goes hand in hand with violence. In the current unstable situation, the fate of the Iraqi Christians after the fall of Saddam Hussein is again uncertain. For the nth time, history threatens to repeat itself. Most of the Iraqi Christians are Assyrians. About one million of them live in Iraq. It was different in the past. As early as in the first century AD, the Assyrians converted on a mass scale to Christianity. Until 1400, the majority was Christian in the current region of which Iraq is also a part. Afterwards, Islam progressively became the dominant religion. The oppression tremendously increased around 1900. Between 1914 and 1919, half a million Assyrian Christians were assassinated by Turks and Kurds. For this reason, they massively took sides with the Allies during WW1. After 1918, the Allies promised the Assyrians a state of their own. This promise was however broken. After the British left Iraq, tens of thousands of Assyrian Christians were assassinated by the Iraqi army.

When, after the Gulf War, North Iraq became an autonomous region with a Kurdish majority, better times seemed to break. The Assyrians were officially recognized as a minority. However, discrimination was now the issue. It was also obvious that international help sent to this region hardly reached the Christian minority.

The fall of Saddam's regime and the construction of a democratic Iraq seemed to offer new opportunities. Unfortunately, the practice is different. Albert Jan Maat: "From talks that I had with representatives of the Assyrian community in the US and in Iraq, it seemed that the danger has not disappeared. International aid is mainly distributed through regional, and therefore Muslim, leaders and seldom or never reaches the Assyrians. There are also ongoing problems about the restitution of property and, for example, of church buildings. Now that the European Union has decided to grant aid for an amount of 160 million EUR to the Iraqi people, there are new opportunities to do justice to the Christian minority. In this regard, on behalf of the European Christian Democrats I have contacted the European Commission and asked them with insistence to supervise the distribution of help.

Maat sees a second danger. In the first draft of the new constitution for Iraq, the Assyrians are not named as minority. A good reason for taking up the issue with US senator McCain as well in Europe as in the US. Its importance goes well beyond Iraq. Assyrian minorities also live in neighboring countries (Iran, Turkey, Syria, Central Asia). A recognition in Iraq can improve their situation there too. Otherwise, the

exodus will go on. Nowadays, three times more Assyrian Christians already live outside Iraq than in Iraq itself. Europe and the US would better keep a more vigilant eye on Assyrian Christians. More supervision over the distribution of aid and a targeted contribution to the constitutional discussions in Iraq can bring some improvement. For the European Union as a guardian of democracy and human rights, this is a unique opportunity to replace the divisions over the Iraqi policy by supporting Iraqi Christians.

Question posed by AJ Maat to the European Commission

The Commission has decided that 160 million EUR can be devoted to the reconstruction of Iraq. What guarantees can the Commission give that religious minorities can benefit from these funds on the basis of proportionality?

Is the Commission aware that Assyrian Christians are systematically excluded from the distribution of aid by local leaders?

Translation Dutch-English by *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.*



08.04.04

**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLE ADDRESSES COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Representatives of Three United Nations Mechanisms on Human
Rights of Indigenous People Also Deliver Statements**

NADJA MILANOVA, of International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, said indigenous peoples could be defined as conquered descendants of earlier inhabitants of a region who lived mainly in conformity with traditional social, economic and cultural customs that were sharply distinct from those of dominant groups. The attention of the Commission should be drawn to the ChaldoAssyrian community of Iraq in this context. The rights of the small ethnic and religious communities of Iraq had received very little attention, and today were being set aside in the effort to create major ethnic power enclaves. The Commission should request the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of indigenous peoples and the Working Group on indigenous populations to monitor and report on developments in Iraq, and expand the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iraq to address issues stemming from the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq.