

PRESS RELEASE FROM JUBILEE CAMPAIGN

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PARLIAMENTARY MEETING CALLS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE REGION FOR IRAQI CHRISTIANS

At a meeting chaired by Stephen Pound MP in the House of Commons on October 21st, the UK branch of Iraq's leading Christian political party, the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Christian human rights organisation, Jubilee Campaign, called for an Administrative Region for the ChaldoAssyrian Christians of Iraq, which they can administer for themselves. Article 53 (D) of Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law guarantees the ChaldoAssyrians the right to administer their own region. It states, "This law shall guarantee the administrative, cultural and political rights of the Turcomans, ChaldoAssyrians, and all other citizens."

Stephen Pound MP and other speakers at the meeting, jointly organised by the Assyrian Democratic Movement (UK branch) and Jubilee Campaign, stressed that the British Government should support the creation of an Administrative Region in the ChaldoAssyrian heartland in the Nineveh Plains. The escalating attacks perpetrated against the ChaldoAssyrians by extremist and fanatical Islamic groups warrants the creation of such a region. The meeting also called on the British Government to strongly support the return of ChaldoAssyrian villages in the provinces of Nineveh and Dohuk, which the ChaldoAssyrian's Arab and Kurdish neighbours have encroached on. ChaldoAssyrians, who feel threatened, especially in Mosul and parts of Baghdad, could then move to the regions of Nineveh and Dohuk, rather than flee their ancestral homeland in Iraq.

Christians have been subjected to escalating violence in Iraq, including a series of bombs exploded at five churches across Baghdad early on Saturday 16th October. There were no casualties in that incident. Islamic extremists conducted lethal terrorist bombings on Sunday August 1st against 5 churches in Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul, which killed 12 people and injured many more. On July 4th, two ChaldoAssyrian children were killed in Baghdad at their home by Islamic terrorists. Raneed Raad, 16, and her six-year-old brother, Raphid, were shot dead. Since April 2003, the assassinations of at least 88 Christians have been recorded by ChaldoAssyrian organisations in Iraq. The most recent victim was a little girl who was brutally murdered by Islamic extremists. In the wake of the August church bombings and other anti-Christian violence, tens of thousands of ChaldoAssyrians have fled, further decimating Iraq's Christian presence.

The headquarters of the Assyrian Democratic Movement in Baghdad came under mortar attack in the early hours of Sunday morning, August 8th 2004. The Assyrian Democratic Movement is the leading political party representing the ChaldoAssyrian Christians of Iraq. One of this party's founders and its current Secretary General, Yonadam Kanna, was the only Christian member of Iraq's former Governing Council and is now one of four ChaldoAssyrian Christians serving in the Iraqi National Assembly. Over 95 percent of Iraq's Christians are ChaldoAssyrian and they are the indigenous people of Iraq, descended from the ancient Assyrians of Biblical times. Their language is Aramaic-based and similar to the Aramaic which Jesus spoke.

The meeting's speakers were Stephen Pound MP, John Michael, an Assyrian who is British representative of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, Professor Eden Naby, an Assyrian and specialist on the Middle East, Shamiran Mako, from the Council for Assyrian Research and Development and Human Rights Without Frontiers, and Wilfred Wong, Parliamentary Officer for Jubilee Campaign.

John Michael says, "If the International Community, specifically the governments of the U.S.A and U.K, want peace, stability and democracy to prevail in Iraq, thus spreading throughout the Middle East, then the security and continued presence of the ChaldoAssyrians in their ancestral homeland must be guaranteed. Therefore, it is imperative that the British government supports the ChaldoAssyrians in every respect, including the creation of an administrative region for the indigenous ChaldoAssyrian people, as granted under article 53(D) of the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law."

All the speakers supported the meeting's call on the British government to urgently encourage and support the creation of an administrative region for Iraq's ChaldoAssyrians; financially support the reconstruction of ChaldoAssyrian villages and infrastructure; provide across the board political support to the ChaldoAssyrians; assist ChaldoAssyrians in their struggle to reclaim their towns and villages; financially support the return and resettlement of ChaldoAssyrian refugees and to facilitate the ability of those forced to flee Iraq by the Hussein regime, or exiled in recent months, to register to vote if eligible.

In his presentation to the meeting, Wilfred Wong stated, "There is no danger of the Kurdish or Arab community disappearing from Iraq but there is a real risk that one day soon the ChaldoAssyrian community may largely vanish from that country. Not only are the ChaldoAssyrians facing the usual risks of violence which all average Iraqis have to currently put up with in their daily lives, they are also having to deal with the additional violence of being targeted by Islamic fundamentalists simply because they are Christians and intimidation from their Kurdish neighbours because they want to grab ChaldoAssyrian land for themselves. The British government must support the forces of moderation in Iraq, which include the Christian community. Moderate Muslims would be much better able to oppose the Islamicisation of Iraq if they had the support of a strong Christian community and the British government should do all it can to empower Iraq's Christians."

Stephen Pound MP says, "This meeting is only the start of a process to bring the world's attention to the terrible suffering of the Christian communities in Iraq. By meeting today we not only raised the issue in the British Parliament but also sent a strong signal of support and solidarity to this persecuted minority. No one in Parliament can now say they are unaware of the sufferings of this beleaguered community. I'm very grateful to the UK branch of the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Jubilee Campaign for organising this meeting."

Jubilee Campaign is an interdenominational Christian human rights organisation which has worked with over 150 British parliamentarians on human rights issues worldwide.