

SPEECH BY THE SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE
ON EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MINORITIES

Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues
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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentleman, my name is Daniel Gabriel, Human Rights and UN NGO Director of the Syriac Universal Alliance.

Shlomo 'alaykhu! Greetings to you, as we say in our Aramaic-Mother tongue!

I can see that there is great support for the Recommendations made by Madam Gay McDougall. Madam Chair, Ms. Lee, and Madam McDougall, thank you so much for giving neglected people a voice in this important forum.

Madam Chair, I represent the genuine indigenous people of Mesopotamia and Lebanon - we are from the Aramean (otherwise known as Syriac) people. We are a Christian minority group in the Middle East. Not only are we the Indigenous People of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, we are also a Minority Group.

Now I could go on about how persecuted our people are and give you a 3,000-year history of Syriac Aramean people. I could talk about the Syriac Aramean people's decimation in Iraq. I could even mention the well-documented persecutions against our people by the Kurds.

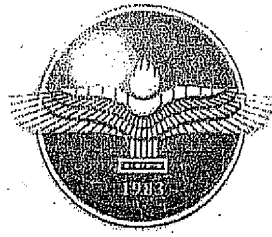
I could go on about the obliteration of Syriac Aramean people in Turkey. The lack of political participation, the lack of recognition as an Indigenous People or National Minority, the lack of protection of our endangered language and people. I could talk about how the Syriac Aramean people have had no choice but to escape from their homelands to countries like Holland, Sweden, Germany, North America and Australia. - and continue to escape. That is why we are a true diaspora people today. But for all this, we refer you to this summary document which you can attain at the table in the back.

Let me instead focus on the Recommendations written by Madam Gay McDougall. We agree wholeheartedly with the Recommendations but from our experience we offer five comments on:

1. Recognition. Political Participation as a Minority implies that the respective community is actually recognised as a Minority. In Turkey, for example, the Syriac Aramean people are not even regarded as a Minority under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the Turkish State demands that we become completely "Turkified".
3. Informing Governments about the Importance and Benefits of this Recognition. Madam Chair, we ask the Forum to not only promote education of Minorities around the world; but to educate governments as well about why it is important and beneficial to them to recognise Minorities and support them in the first place. Neglect of Uprooted minorities: Madam Chair, what about national minorities who have been systematically uprooted from their ancient homeland who live in a worldwide diaspora today? Does your Article 31 about international support to and sufficient resources for minorities also apply to a diaspora people like ours? And what about effective political participation from the diaspora?
4. State-sponsored Media. Madam Chair, what about state-controlled and state-sponsored media? How can we balance the way national owned media present a distorted view about or even utterly silence the voice of marginalized minorities? In regard to your articles 38-40, will the UN sponsor minorities when they have the intention to initiate and maintain their own media channels?

5. Follow up. God forbid, but if the Recommendations will not be accepted, is there a Plan B? If so, can you tell us more about it? Madam Chair, let's also consider what happens if a country does not recognise Minority Rights.

Madam Chair, thank you on behalf of the Syriac Universal Alliance.



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