



Assyrian American National Federation

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Dear Congressman Dold,

My name is William Youmaran and I am the President of the Assyrian American National Federation, which was established in 1933 as a result of the Simele Massacre of thousands of Assyrians in Iraq. The AANF is comprised of affiliates spread across the United States of America, east to west coast and north to south. Our origination as a nationwide organization is grounded in the reality of Christian Assyrians being targeted for genocidal violence. I am writing you directly regarding the request that we support H. Con. Res. 75 as initiated by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, and his colleagues in the U.S. Congress.

Please know that the AANF deeply appreciates any and all efforts to raise awareness of our plight. Your efforts specifically are commendable. However, the crisis of Christian Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) is a complicated matter and the AANF's feedback on the resolution should be taken as a reflection of the complexity of this crisis but also our intense desire to work with you directly to find meaningful, substantive and efficacious means of preserving our people and other vulnerable minorities in our ancestral land.

Before discussing the details of the Federation's concerns, I would like to say that the focus on genocide recognition, the role of the Da'esh (ISIS) and its sources of support, as well as the discussion of our suffering is all fully endorsed. What the Assyrian American National Federation urges is the illumination of a second dimension that is either completely missing or misconstrued by H. Con. Res. 75.

What follows are specific amendments that should be made to the resolution:

Section 5(b) requires elaboration, to specify the measures to prevent further war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Simply, these measures include providing aid and relief *directly* to the vulnerable minorities through *legitimate and independent local partners* without using governmental intermediaries. This will help eliminate a pattern of disempowerment used by governing authorities by reinforcing Assyrian dependency and vulnerability in order to facilitate the persecution of Assyrians and Yezidis, and achieve political gains at the expense of their suffering. Measures to help meaningfully must also explicitly state the need to directly support independent and legitimate local forces drawn from the Assyrians, Yezidis and other persecuted minorities.

Section 6 is unacceptable on several grounds. First, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is praised for sheltering and protecting those IDPs arriving in the KRI. Such praise, I assure you, falls on deaf ears for those inhabitants of the Nineveh Plain who were systematically, programmatically disarmed by the KRI's Peshmerga exactly 10 days before the ISIS assault on the Nineveh Plain and then who witnessed the Peshmerga's instantaneous retreat from the Nineveh Plain as ISIS



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advanced. Contrary to the depiction of the KRI as a source of protection, empirical evidence from the Nineveh Plain in August of 2014 strongly suggests Peshmerga facilitation of the cleansing of the region's indigenous, Christian Assyrian inhabitants. Second, the statement 'until they can safely return to their homes in Iraq' suggests that those IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are somehow not in Iraq. They are in Iraq as the KRI is part of Iraq. Moreover, some inhabitants of the Nineveh Plain, such as the Shabak, fled to southern Iraq, and so Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon should be commended. The third concern flows from the two preceding issues, which is that the entire Resolution as framed appears to exploit the Christian Assyrian crisis as a means to promote 'Kurdistan' and to place the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on the level of nation states. This is a grave concern for us because it is in the pursuit of this policy that Kurdistan nationalists of the Kurdistan Regional Government have marginalized, victimized and all but destroyed our independent, legitimate and venerable political, security and humanitarian organizations. Your resolution should acknowledge this reality as a means of identifying truly efficacious solutions.

Constant reference to Kurds as sharing in the suffering and victimhood of our people ignores two stark realities: i) hundreds of ethnic Kurds are members of ISIS, a fact that is widely reported in mainstream Kurdish news/media and attested to by numerous reports of KRG arrests; ii) What distinguishes the targeting of Assyrians, Yezidis, Shabaks and other 'vulnerable' minorities from that of Kurds and Arabs (who are also victims of ISIS violence) is that the former are at risk of complete annihilation from their ancestral land whereas, thankfully, there is no conversation today about the imminent risk of a Middle East without Kurds or Arabs residing there.

The resolution makes repeated reference to other ethnic groups, namely Turkmen, Kaka'e and Kurds but our people are limited only to a sectarian designation, as Christian. Indeed, we are Christian and have been so since the time of the Apostles but we have no less than four millennia of history before Christ. When ISIS was destroying the ancient archeological heritage sites in the Nineveh Plain and Mosul (where the ancient capitol Nineveh exists), they were not destroying Christian heritage sites, but ancient Assyrian architecture, sculpture, texts, and related contributions to human civilization. Media reports did not say ancient Christian archeological sites were being destroyed, but accurately identified these as 'Assyrian', which is also an integral element of our identity and is how we identify ourselves as a people. We hope the resolution can acknowledge this reality.

To our understanding, there are no Assyrian representatives in Washington DC working with the broad mandate and support of the community. Consequently, we hope and trust you will find it in all our interests to deal with one another directly. The AANF remains a capable and willing partner of yours in pursuit of meaningful, substantive and efficacious means of preserving our people and other vulnerable minorities in our ancestral land. It is likely that some of those you are hearing from do not share this objective, and hence proposals derived from their inputs fall short of what is necessary.



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Sincerely

William Youmaran
President, Assyrian American National Federation