



# Assyrian American National Federation

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## **ASSYRIAN AMERICAN NATIONAL FEDERATION STATEMENT ON THE “IRAQI KURDISTAN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM”**

The Assyrian American National Federation, Inc. (“AANF”) strongly condemns the purported “Iraqi Kurdistan Independence Referendum” that took place on September 25, 2017. The Kurdistan Regional Government (“KRG”) of northern Iraq has clearly demonstrated its illegal and unconstitutional ambition to secede from the rest of the country and function as an independent state. The implementation of this referendum will form an autonomous state in illegally occupied territory within the Nineveh Plains and encroach the rights of the local citizens.

Neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria, and the international community, including the United States of America, have expressed a serious concern regarding the referendum. For example, Turkey has already threatened to cut-off a critical oil pipeline into Iraq. Iran similarly banned the transportation of crude oil products by Iranian companies to and from the Kurdish region of Iraq. Additionally, the Iraqi central government has demanded control of the airports in Erbil and Sulaimaniya and threatened to close airspace in the region. This referendum will undoubtedly create further instability in the region and diminish the integrity of the Republic of Iraq as a whole.

The KRG did not obtain approval for the referendum by the Council of Representatives and ratification by the President of the Republic as required by Article 126, Chapter One, Section Six, of the Iraqi Constitution. Therefore, the referendum is clearly unconstitutional and may create an insurgency, unrest, and even civil war. Furthermore, the referendum is not an accurate electoral representation of the population in the region. Many of the local eligible voters that opposed the referendum, including the Assyrians, Turkmen, Shabaks, Sabians, and Yazidis, refused to participate in the referendum due to its unconstitutionality and illegality. Therefore, the final results released by the KRG are a skewed and distorted representation of democracy.

Beginning in 2003, the KRG has systematically encroached on land in the Nineveh Plains historically belonging to the Assyrian and Yazidi people. However, this type of oppressive behavior has significantly increased within the last three years. The territory in which the KRG currently controls is 40% larger than it was in 2014. The KRG has taken over land, homes, and towns belonging to the Assyrians, Yazidis, Arabs, and Turkmen. Kurdish forces have barred tens of thousands of Arabs from returning to their homes even after ISIS retreated from the region.

The KRG has also led campaigns to relocate ethnic Kurds into towns predominantly occupied by Assyrians in an attempt to dilute the indigenous population. Furthermore, the KRG has assigned ethnic Kurds, and non-Kurds loyal to a KRG agenda, to political seats within district and sub-



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district councils of the Nineveh Plains. For example, in July of 2017, the Nineveh Provincial Council, an entity controlled by the KRG and Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), removed the democratically elected Assyrian mayor of Alqosh, Fayez Abed Jawahreh, and replaced him with a KDP member. Again, in August of 2017, Basim Bello, the democratically elected Assyrian mayor of Tel Kepe, was removed in a similar manner.

The indigenous people of the Nineveh Plain have the right to security and self-determination within the federal structure of the Republic of Iraq. On January 21, 2014, Iraq's Council of Ministers agreed to establish a province in the Nineveh Plains. This decision was the first step in granting the Assyrian people a sustainable future in their homeland. The territorial expansion of the KRG, coupled with the recent purported referendum, creates a political disadvantage for the Assyrians and other indigenous groups in the Nineveh Plains. Furthermore, absorbing the diverse communities into a Kurdish state will create serious obstacles for the minorities in the area due to the ethnocentric agenda of the KRG.

The AANF calls upon the Republic of Iraq, the United States of America, and the international community, to take the following action in order to ensure that the indigenous people of the Nineveh Plain have the right to security and self-determination:

1. To immediately withhold any funding and aid to the KRG until it agrees to fully comply with the laws and Constitution of the Republic of Iraq and it agrees to abandon its referendum.
2. To direct monetary support and aid to the Nineveh Plain Protection Unit because it is the only independent Assyrian force that provides protection for the local inhabitants in the Nineveh Plains while complying with the laws and Constitution of the Republic of Iraq.
3. To direct monetary support and aid to the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq and the Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organization. These groups are Assyrian Non-Governmental Organizations (“NGOs”) that have a proven history of providing humanitarian aid for Assyrians in the Middle East.
4. To ensure that the Nineveh Plains remains an undisputed “stand-alone” province as intended by the Republic of Iraq in January of 2014.

We must strive to ensure liberation, freedom, and prosperity for every citizen of the Republic of Iraq. The AANF accordingly condemns this referendum as it will incite further violence and instability in the region.

Martin Youmaran  
President, Assyrian American National Federation