Conference Declaration

Vulnerability and Empowerment of Women and Children in Armed Conflict

International Assyrian Women’s Conference

29 September 2016 | 10:00 to 13:00
European Parliament, Brussels | Room ASP-1E1

Following decades of marginalisation and targeted violence, today the Assyrians - an ethnic and religious minority, whose homeland comprises parts of northern Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran - continue to be subjected to extreme violence at the hands of the various actors of the conflict ravaging Iraq and Syria. This conflict, has had a particular impact on Assyrian women and children, who continue to be displaced, deprived of education, food and shelter, and who suffer from severe psychological trauma as a result of their current situation.

Against this background, we, participants to this International Assyrian Women's Conference, adopt the following declaration:

Whereas the European Parliament has recognised that the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’ is committing genocide against ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East (2016/2529(RSP));

Whereas the ongoing power struggle and armed conflict dominating Syria and Iraq has and continues to displace and kill hundreds of thousands of Assyrians;

Whereas the conflict has also lead to the destruction of Assyrian historical and cultural heritage in the area, crucial to the maintenance of the collective integrity of the Assyrian population;

Whereas Assyrian women no longer wish to be portrayed by the media as irrelevant actors and therefore pushed to the side-lines of these political games, denied their voice and thus the opportunity to stand up for their rights;

Whereas we need to recognise the many Assyrian women in Iraq and Syria, who aside from fighting for their own life are given the huge responsibility of ensuring the well-being of their entire family;
Whereas Assyrian women, be it in Turkey, Syria, Iran or Iraq, are consistently subjugated to physical, psychological and sexual abuse;

Whereas there is an urgent need to tackle the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, including rape, the abducting of women to turn them into sex slaves, and forced marriage;

Whereas the cultural and religious cleansing operations by ‘ISIS/Daesh’ forcing civilians to convert to Islam has had a severe impact on Christian Assyrians making them a particular target of persecution and impossible for them to freely practice their faith;

We appeal to the international community to take all necessary measures to effectively ensure the safety and rights of Assyrians in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, who despite various resolutions continue to be subjected to gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, with discrimination, displacement and arbitrary executions among the main abuses. This could potentially be achieved through projects and schemes to protect and monitor the situation of Assyrian women in war-torn regions.

We also ask for the support of democratic parliaments to pressure relevant United Nations bodies and agencies to take effective measures to ensure that appropriate action is taken on ground;

We call for the international protection of the Assyrian language and cultural heritage in order to not let this brutal conflict wipe out the Assyrians and their rich history;

Finally, we underline that there can be no peace without taking concrete action.