Situation Worsens in Iraq but Assyrians Unite on Aketo

Joint fact-finding mission returns from northern Iraq after landmark decision of Assyrian political parties to unite. Now attentions focus on finding common solutions to insecurity, emigration, unemployment that are discriminating Iraq’s historic Christian community and reducing the country’s capacity to rebuild.

Erbil, 3 April 2011 – Aketo, the Assyrian New Year was celebrated in Dohuk on 1 April 2011 amid a new sense of political unity. 30,000 Assyrians joined to welcome Year 6761 in the largest celebration seen to date. This follows a year that saw fifty-three lives lost in the bombing of Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad, attacks on Assyrians throughout Iraq, and a dramatic increase in emigration from the Nineveh Plain to neighbouring countries. Leaders from all Assyrian political parties walked side-by-side in the Aketo parade as part of the new Assembly of Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Political Organizations, established in December 2010 at the World Congress of the Assyrian Universal Alliance in Erbil, northern Iraq.

Amid these developments, a joint ACE-UNPO fact-finding mission travelled to northern Iraq from 27 March-3 April to gauge support for the new Assembly and its call for a Nineveh governorate for all ethnic and religious communities as the Iraqi constitution permits. The mission also investigated the current state of security, economic development, and emigration that has fuelled these calls. The establishment of Assyrian security guards have improved community security but beyond town districts in Nineveh Province insecurity has increased. Discrimination in employment is leaving Assyrian graduates unemployed and their skills unutilized while instability drives experienced workers from jobs.

After meetings with civic, church and security leaders the fact-finding mission concludes that Iraqi decision-makers and the international community have one generation in which to safeguard the future of Assyrians in Iraq. Failure will lead to an exodus that will set-back efforts to rebuild Iraq, erode cultural diversity, and remove from the Middle East one of its oldest indigenous peoples.

Details of the fact-finding mission are available from www.unpo.org and www.assyriacouncil.eu with the report on the situation in Northern Iraq expected for public release on 11 April 2011.

Note to Editors:
The ACE-UNPO collaborated in 2009 to monitor the Provincial Elections in Nineveh Province with UNPO subsequently observing the Kurdistan Presidential and Parliamentary elections in the predominantly Assyrian districts of the region. The European Parliament’s Delegation for Relations with Iraq heard testimony from UNPO & ACE on the situation facing Assyrians in a hearing convened on 29 November 2010.

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