

**Next Steps: The post genocide recognition steps involve both immigration and repatriation efforts.**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Members and Guests,

My name is Johnny Oram, Executive Director of the Chaldean Assyrian Business Alliance of Detroit, Michigan. We are a group that is aimed at promoting professional and social causes important to our communities worldwide, especially at a critical time where the existence of our people in our Mother Land of Iraq is being threatened.

Before I go into recommendations for this Committee, I'd like to talk briefly about our people's presence in these United States. We Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs are the descendants of the original peoples of Abraham. We are defined by our language, Aramaic, which is the language in which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke. We are also defined by your Faith, as we are an Eastern Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. A good number of Assyrians are from the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Syriac Church, as well as Presbyterian, etc. My people immigrated to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to come to the greatest country in history, a land where they can seek opportunity and be free to profess their faith. Oftentimes the Assyrians and Chaldeans are categorized as Arabs, however, we are not Arabs but rather we live in predominantly Arab countries, though many live in Iran and Turkey which are not Arab countries. We are the indigenous peoples to that land, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria after all. We have close to 150,000 Chaldeans/Assyrians in the Metro Detroit region alone and additional 200,000 throughout the United States, in Chicago, Phoenix, San Diego, San Jose, Modesto, Turlock as well as in the large Syriac communities in New York and Connecticut. My people here in the United States have a deep connection and relationship to our persecuted refugees and we have welcomed thousands of those who have come to the United States with open arms. We feel for them!

**People who want to leave:** Seeing as Christians and other minorities are particularly targeted by ISIS it is imperative that they be given special consideration in their search for asylum. This is amplified by the fact that they even face persecution in asylum shelters in Europe by radicals. Nuri Kino, a world renowned investigative journalist and founder of the grassroots human rights group A Demand For Action has been instrumental in uncovering this in Sweden and elsewhere. The opening of new processing centers in Erbil and Beirut, where the majority of Christians flee from Iraq and Syria, were a positive step but the number of people processed must be increased to deal with the overwhelming. As far as assimilating into the US, I think this is a perfect time to talk about schools like KEYS Grace Academy and how they help kids adjust and integrate into American culture while maintaining their heritage in a meaningful way. The public education system is woefully unprepared to deal with these kids, many of whom have severe trauma, but schools like KEYS which are run by our own people who understand what they've been through are critical. Furthermore, groups like the Chaldean Community Foundation in Sterling Heights, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, have been instrumental in helping Assyrian and Chaldean refugees to assimilate into American society. The Foundation sees over 20,000 visitors annually as they help our new arrivals to learn English, find work, seek health care, and employment. Our community in Metro Detroit is 150,000 strong and growing.

As you are all aware, my Congressman from Michigan's 11<sup>th</sup> District, Dave Trott offered an amendment to the NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) that passed the House on May 17<sup>th</sup>, which is aimed at protecting Christians and other religious minorities throughout the Middle East from the IS led genocide by establishing a UN Refugee Processing Center in Erbil. This requires the United Nations to step up and do its share to protecting our vulnerable communities in Iraq. I also urge the United States Congress to reform the Refugee Act of 1980 by establishing more P2/P3 visas for our refugees and bypassing the UN mandated refugee allotments / quotas. Moreover, this is also going to be important for the refugees in that they can apply directly for admission to the United States rather than be sent off to other lands such as various destinations in Europe and elsewhere.

**People who want to stay:** The reality is the vast majority of people will not be able or desire to leave, so the particularly important measures will those that deal with the situation in Iraq and Syria. In the short term, emergency aid going directly to the organizations on the ground is critical. Aid organizations like Help Iraq, ACERO, Syriac Patriarchate, etc have a proven ability to actually get aid to our people. The fact that our people are still being targeted in UNHCR camps (by locals, not UNHCR itself) they almost exclusively stopped going to UN runs camps and therefore critical aid doesn't reach them through the traditional channels. Our aid orgs fill the void as much as possible but resources are always in dire straits. We've seen some legislative support in SFOPS appropriations, but unfortunately the legislative support has not translated into enough material support on the ground. We MUST directly support our indigenous aid organizations on the ground. For example, our own USAID sends funds to the United Nations with the intent of distributing these funds to our communities in Iraq / Syria. The Iraqi and Syrian Christians are not receiving these very funds. All this money goes to the UNHCR camps, a place that is unsafe for Christians and Yezidis. Where is the security apparatus to protect our people in these camps, especially when they are trying to receive critical aid for their survival?

Supporting local security forces in Iraq and Syria is the best way to ensure a stable environment where people are able to return. After ISIS invaded, both the Peshmerga and Iraqi army abandoned the Christian and Yazidi areas of the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar, leaving the inhabitants defenseless and deeply distrustful of the institutional security apparatus. Support authorized through the NDAA for Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac Christians and other minorities in Iraq and Syria is crucial to standing up these forces. You worked with A Demand For Action on these efforts, and there has been some support realized for Syriac/Assyrian forces in Syria, but the forces in Iraq are going to need considerable support, but it is support they deserve and are entitled to and is the only way to gain the confidence of the people who have inhabited that land since time immemorial.

Finally, the creation of a Safe Haven with international protection, which ultimately would be transitioned to a province in the Nineveh Plains with some semblance of self governance and self security is the only way to regain the trust of the minorities who feel they were betrayed by the Iraqi government and the KRG.

These issues affecting our communities in Iraq and Syria are specifically addressed in H.Res.440, a resolution introduced by Congressman Trott of Michigan and Congressman Sherman of California which calls for precise actions that can positively affect the situation on

the ground. Marking up that resolution is critical, as it would additionally serve as a moral boon to our beleaguered people as it is the first resolution in Congressional history to recognize the Simele Massacre of 1933.

### IDP's in Turkey

67 year ago here right here in Washington, D.C, all the signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) agreed to the following: "The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security." Being a member of NATO requires respecting of peoples of all faiths. Many of our Churches in Turkey are being confiscated. My Bishop, Francis Kallabat and other Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac clergy oftentimes have to travel to Turkey to administer to our faithful there because Turkey has seized many Churches and deemed them as state property. These include Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches that date close to 2000 years. Mr. Chairman, I would sincerely request that you and your colleagues to move forward in existing efforts in this Congress to urge the Turkish government led by President Erdogan and his Council of Ministers to immediately return these Churches to their rightful owners. This right here is an example of the continued persecution and displacement of Christians in the region. Isn't Turkey supposed to be our ally? These actions clearly undermine the very agreement that the Turkish government signed to become of a member of our NATO alliance in 1952.

We have a moral obligation here to step up as the leader of the Free World and help the thousands of Christians and other religious minorities escape displacement and death, give them hope when they have lost it, and to reassure them that they have a place that they can come to if they so choose, where they can be a part of our nation and contribute to American society. As I had mentioned earlier, we have the resources to absorb them. This is the right thing to do.

I thank you very much. God Bless you all and May God Bless America.