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PROTECTION OF MINORITIES IN IRAQ.

I. PETITIONS, DATED AUGUST 16TH AND 30TH AND SEPTEMBER 12TH, 1933,
FROM THE MAR SHIMUN, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE ASSYRIANS
CONCERNING THE SITUATION OF THE ASSYRIAN MINORITY IN IRAQ*Note by the Secretary-General :*

At the request of the representatives of Mexico, the Irish Free State and Norway, the question forming the subject of these petitions has been included in the agenda of the Council on the basis of two previous petitions from the same petitioner (see document C.504.1933.I).

The Secretary-General has now the honour to circulate, for the examination of the Council, three new petitions, with annexes, from the Mar Shimun, dated, respectively : Baghdad, August 16th, and Nicosia (Cyprus), August 30th and September 12th, 1933.

Any observations the Iraqi Government may wish to present thereon will be communicated to the Council as soon as they reach the Secretariat.

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I. Report of August 4th, 1933.

As from Patriarchate, Mosul,
c/o Y.M.C.A., Baghdad,
August 16th, 1933.

*To the Secretary-General,
League of Nations,
Geneva.*

I humbly beg leave to send you a copy of my report, with copies attached of the official documents, and translations of various speeches, and a copy of a report made by an eyewitness of many years' experience of this country and its people. I have made my report in this way not to express bitter feelings, but that the League and the world may make unbiased judgments.

Since writing this report so much has, and is taking place, such as massacre of the women, children and old men which were left in the villages, the robbing and burning of the latter, as revenge taken by the police and Arab army, and certain Kurdish and Arab tribes, because of their defeat and failure to subdue the spirit of the Assyrians who resisted the Government's policy, first by leaving the country to prepare for the exit of all, according to the alternative policy which the Government officials told them (see report of meeting held in Mosul July 14th, 1933).¹

The Government received this decision from the leaders and a copy was sent to me (copy attached to my report).

The circumstances of my forced detention in Baghdad made it difficult to tell the outside world, but I have been able to send out letters and cablegrams through various friends as in this case, with the hope that they reach their destination. So far I have received no acknowledgments.

I beg your help in that an International Commission will be sent out to investigate both sides of this question at the earliest possible moment.

I fully realise that this communication is not coming to you through the proper channels as laid down in the League's regulations, but under the circumstances I have no other alternative.

(Signed) Eshai SHIMUN,
By the Grace of God, Catholicos
Patriarch of the Assyrians.

¹ According to the annexes to the report, this meeting took place on July 10th, 1933.— *Note by the Secretary-General.*

THE PRESENT ASSYRIAN SITUATION, AUGUST 4TH, 1933.
THE OFFICIAL REPORT BY MAR SHIMUN, PATRIARCH OF THE ASSYRIANS.

INTRODUCTION.

It is not an easy matter for me as Patriarch of the Assyrian Church to make a report under the present circumstances.

I am held in Baghdad under Government detention, my residence watched day and night by plain-clothes police and my mail censored and confiscated.

The reason given through the *Iraq Times* and local Press by the Government, is that I have refused to give the guarantees required by the Government.

Attached is the translation copy of the guarantees which I refused to sign, and a copy of my reasons. I must say that a very brave effort was made by Sir Kinahan Cornwallis and Major Edmunds, the British Advisers to the Minister of Interior, to produce a document which both the Minister on behalf of the Government, and I on behalf of my people, could agree to sign. This was helped by the Acting British Ambassador, Mr. Ogilvie Forbes, the British Air Vice-Marshal Burnett, and his intelligence officers.

These efforts beginning on May 21st and continuing to June 25th (much of which is in writing) ended in the Arab Government threatening to resign and my being detained as a prisoner in Baghdad. My reply to the Minister detaining me in Baghdad, copies of which were sent to the various legations in the city, is also attached to this report.

Mr. Ogilvie Forbes, the British diplomat who was sympathetic to me, informed me that I was to be detained in Baghdad and again a few days later told me that His Majesty, King Faisal, had cabled to the Prime Minister from England to release me from detention. No word of such was sent to me by the Government in any shape or form, in fact neither the Arab nor the British officials have had any communication with me since June 25th. Since then I have been separated from my people and home in Mosul, and have been obliged to maintain a double establishment at my own expense.

Before giving my conclusions on the cause of the present situation it is necessary to report at least some of the Assyrian side of the question. I therefore wish to make a summary of such under four periods :

1. From June 1932 the time when it was broadcasted that the mandatory Power in Iraq would cease, till the time when I was delegated by my people to proceed to Geneva to plead their cause before the League of Nations.
2. From the time of proceeding to Geneva, to my return to Mosul on January 11th, 1933.
3. From January 16th to my coming to Baghdad on May 26th.
4. From May 26th to June 25th when I received my detention order in Baghdad (1933).

FIRST PERIOD.

In June 1932 on the eve of the termination of the British mandate in Iraq, the Assyrians, still refugees, after a long and bitter experience of broken promises, from the time they gave and lost practically their all for the Allied cause, until the hour of writing, decided to make a determined effort to get their question settled before Iraq entered the League of Nations.

Those Assyrians who were enlisted under contract with the British Government in the levies, gave the authorities a month's notice to terminate their contracts, stating very definitely their reasons. Those scattered in the various Kurdish districts asked their leaders to make a final petition which was submitted to the League of Nations via the mandatory Power. Sir Francis Humphrys, the then British High Commissioner, in his anxiety to prevent the levies resignation taking effect, requested my help.

Having been dangerously ill, I was ignorant of the levies action until this time. The many definite and helpful promises made by Sir Francis in his letters through me (see copies attached) satisfied the Assyrians that we could expect much, and so trusting his word, the levies withdrew their notice, and continued to carry out their duties ; and my people in the villages to wait patiently for the fulfilment of his promises.

I was asked by my people and encouraged by Sir Francis to go to Geneva to represent the cause of my people, the necessary expenses being subscribed by the refugees.

Before concluding this period, I want it to be known that the levies action on the one hand, and my going to Geneva on the other, was considered to be the unforgivable crime of the so-called " Patriarchal Temporal Power " and was the reason for the beginning of the Iraqi Government's present policy — viz., breaking the power of the people's chosen leaders, and attempting to scatter the people: a very definite breach of the fundamental law.

SECOND PERIOD.

At Geneva, the question of the Assyrians was sidetracked until after the entry of Iraq into the League of Nations although the Permanent Mandates Commission did examine the Assyrian Petition on November 14th, 1932, and endorsed its Rapporteur's conclusions,¹ with unbiased judgment, it became no longer legal as the mandate no longer existed. The essential point to which it drew the Council's attention was the Assyrians need to be settled in a "homogeneous group". The Rapporteur further stated:

"They (the Assyrians) are encamped there in conditions which in most cases are precarious and miserable. They are refugees. We find an expression of insecurity inspired in the Assyrians, not only by climate . . . but especially by the scattering of this community among populations of other races . . . The root cause of the state of unrest revealed by the petition resides in the fact that it has not been possible to collect the Assyrians of Iraq into a 'homogeneous group'. It has not been proved to the satisfaction of impartial observers that lands combining the requisite conditions for settlement of the Assyrians in a *homogeneous group* do not exist in Iraq."

Sir Henry Dobbs in his "Statement of Proposals" for the settlement of the Assyrian people in Iraq copy to Lady Surma dated May 1924 states:

"His Excellency the High Commissioner has ascertained that there are more than sufficient deserted lands, the property of the Iraqi Government to the north of Dohuk in Amadia and the northern hills upon which the latter class of persons could be permanently settled."

In the appendix to the Iraqi Prime Minister's letter dated August 2nd, 1932, which was presented to the League of Nations, the following facts appear: In the Mosul Liwa Settlement Scheme 1927 the Council of Ministers had made provision to settle in various places of the Mosul Liwa, various tribes of the Assyrians, numbering altogether 7,500 people, but those actually settled there now are only 686 families. As pointed out in my notes on this report, which I presented to the Council of the League on November 3rd, 1932, there is still room for another 4,500 persons in this district of Mosul, if the report of the Iraqi Government on past settlement for 1927 is correct. But the administrative inspector who undertook settlement in 1930 said "there was no suitable area in the Mosul Liwa where Ashutis (= Lower Tiari) could be settled together".

Thus from all this it will be realised that a "homogeneous group" was the finding of the Permanent Mandates recommendation after fully examining the Assyrian petition. The committee who were authorised by the Council to produce a solution to the problem, seems to have overlooked this in the resolution which it presented and which was passed by the Council on December 11th, 1932,² especially in the declaration by the Iraqi representatives which I quoted:

"Notes with satisfaction the declaration by the representative of Iraq of the intention of the Iraqi Government to select from outside Iraq, a foreign expert to assist them for a limited period in settlement of all landless inhabitants of Iraq, including Assyrians; and in the carrying-out of their scheme for the settlement of the Assyrians of Iraq under suitable conditions and so far as may be possible, in *homogeneous units*, it being understood that the existing rights of the present population shall not be prejudiced."

I appeal to those who see the difference between the words of the Mandates Commission's endorsement, and that produced by this resolution—viz., "homogeneous group" and "homogeneous units". That alteration of group into units was just sufficient to destroy the whole spirit of the League's intention, for it enables the Arab Government to scatter the people into units, instead of settling a group. Thus I returned to my people from the League of Nations (who had in the past assigned our old homes to Turkey, in the settlement of the Iraq and Turkish boundary dispute) empty handed, still refugees and at the mercy of an Arab Government.

I had to inform the League that the third (Assyrian) petition (which Iraq's representative referred to) in which certain Assyrians professed their satisfaction with their present status under the Iraqi Government that the signatures were partly forged, and partly obtained under improper pressure exerted by Government officials, and that I was prepared to substantiate these statements. To-day I discover that 65 per cent are forged and the rest signatures of men who have no following. The fact is, that the Iraqi

¹ See Annex 1418 to the Minutes of the Sixty-ninth Session of the Council (*Official Journal*, December 1932, pages 2290-2296).— *Note by the Secretary-General*.

² See Minutes of the Council meeting held on December 15th (not 11th), 1932 (*Official Journal*, December 1932, pages 2285-2290).— *Note by the Secretary-General*.

Government is unable to carry out its policy towards the Assyrians and the present situation is evidence of this. Before leaving Geneva I, as the representative head of the Assyrians, submitted a protest to the Permanent Mandates Commission in writing, and asked them to reconsider their decision otherwise disaster was bound to occur to my unfortunate people (see my petition of December 16th, 1932). Just before my departure from Geneva I received a letter from the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri Pasha, informing me that I should not return direct to my home in Mosul, but via Baghdad to see the Acting Prime Minister. I took this invitation at its face value. On the frontier of Iraq I was treated with the utmost vigilance by the authorities, and made to sign a statement that on arrival in Baghdad I would report to the police. I have since realised that this was an expression of the Government's disapproval of my going to the League of Nations. However, whilst in Baghdad I had an audience with His Majesty King Faisal, who as always, graciously expressed his goodwill towards my people and myself, as did the Acting Prime Minister.

As was customary in the past, on my return to Mosul, I called together the Assyrian leaders to report to them all that had taken place at Geneva. For this, I was informed by the Government's representative in Mosul that I had no power to do so without his sanction. The meeting was finally permitted and took place on January 16th, 1933. I explained to the chiefs the decision of the League, asking them to remain loyal to the Iraqi Government and to wait and see what the settlement would be.

THIRD PERIOD.

The following period was a real foretaste of the type of rule we had expected, and I was surprised to find that it had already begun during my absence in Geneva. Those of us conversant with "the minorities guarantees" not only wonder why they were so easily broken, but why the Arab Government appointed over the people as leaders, certain Assyrians as their representatives who were paid to carry out a policy of sowing dissension among the people, and a settlement scheme which was bound to fail: it was in the spirit of units or a scattering, and a settlement covering only a very small proportion of the refugees. The people's real leaders were not only ignored, but were ordered to give guarantee that they would not interfere, failing which they were to be imprisoned. No business could be done with the Government's settlement or otherwise, except through those paid Assyrians appointed by Government to force on the people its will.

For nearly seven months this state of affairs has been going on, and my people through their leaders sought my advice. I protested where possible, and asked the people to again wait patiently for the coming of the new Foreign Settlement Expert, as per the Iraqi Government's promise to the League of Nations. In the meantime pressure was being brought to bear on the people and their leaders to profess that they were happily settled and force was being exhibited to make them sign documents accordingly. In fact we now realise that the great idea was to stage a sham settlement scheme to influence the Foreign Settlement Expert to carry on with the Government's settlement policy, which had already failed. When I asked the officials to substantiate their accusations blaming me for the failure, they failed to do so: but adopted the same methods with me as with the people's leaders, and tried in every possible way to destroy the Patriarchal influence over the people, giving out the old falsehood that I was fighting for my own family and its position (see the conversation recorded by Sir K. Cornwallis's note attached, in which I refused to be treated apart from the people's settlement).

FOURTH PERIOD.

On May 22nd I was called to the Mutassarif's office in Mosul and told by him that the Minister of the Interior wished me to go to Baghdad to discuss the Assyrian Settlement with him and the Foreign Expert, Major Thomson. Because of the Baghdad heat and my health, I asked that I would not be detained more than four days. On reaching Baghdad I informed the Minister of the Interior of my arrival, and was kept six days waiting before an interview with him. In the meantime, the Foreign Expert had arrived in Mosul at the time I was called to Baghdad. Now I realise, I was brought to Baghdad on false pretences. I therefore sent a special letter to His Majesty King Faisal (see attached copy) but received no reply as His Majesty left for Europe next day. During my interview with the Minister, Assyrian settlement and the Foreign Expert were not mentioned in the conversation that took place. I was informed of the unfavourable attitude of the Iraqi Government towards me, and that I should receive a letter accordingly in which I should be asked to sign guarantees (see copies of the Minister's letter and my answer). To this day no definite accusation of any wrong I have done has ever been told to me. The only possible thing the Government can say against me is that I refused to be a party to the present policy which had incensed the people before I got back from Geneva. It was officially stated in the Press that Major

Thomson was in Iraq "purely in an advisory capacity and he will have no executive powers". My one meeting with Major Thomson only confirmed the Government's attitude towards the Assyrian settlement scheme. I did my utmost to change this policy. Advisers did their best, but as will be seen from copies of the official documents, nothing happened except my continued detention in Baghdad.

The threat of the Government to resign brought things to a standstill, as far as I was concerned, and no official, Arab or British, has been to see me or transacted business with me since. The exception being that I took a copy of my protest against detention to the British Ambassador, as I did to the other diplomatic representatives.

CONCLUSION.

From this time on the Government officials in Mosul did their utmost to force the Assyrians to submit to their policy which ignored the sacred minorities guarantees given to the League of Nations. On the other hand, the idea that we were refugees, wanting to be subjects and not serfs, did not occur to them. They forgot that we were tribal people and had traditional customs going back for at least 1,900 years. They demanded guarantees from us before they satisfied us that we would be settled (in a homogeneous group?), where we could live and not starve. We had already had experience of land settlement which had been altered three times. We had no guarantees from the Arab Government of land settlement except broken ones; in fact we had no chance to accept or reject settlement, but were imprisoned if we refused to give guarantees accepting their policy.

By the attached reports it will be seen what has been happening. The Arab Press has published articles full of hatred towards the Assyrians and myself. The reports of speeches made in the Parliament are most bloodthirsty and inflammatory. The Army Commander in Mosul threatened to exterminate the Patriarchal House and the Assyrians in that city, and made the Arabs very hostile towards the Assyrians there. The police arrested my private chaplain and some other Assyrians. Why? It eventually transpired that one of his officers living in the same block of houses as myself, was very annoyed by the mysterious throwing of stones into his courtyard on several nights. His Moslem servant was giving the customary warning of an immoral woman in the house. Even the *Iraq Times* published the Government reports which were full of untruths, ridiculous fabrications and contradictions. I attach the speeches of the Mosul officials which were given at the meetings on July 10th and 11th. Can anyone wonder why the Assyrians chose to leave Iraq, when they were told to go if they were not satisfied? My people were led to believe that their final settlement would be at least in homogeneous groups or units and that their lost lands and homes would be replaced in Iraq, and they would be enabled to settle down again in peace after nearly twenty years of refugee life. This was not to be:

1. They had either to accept the Government policy of being as now scattered as serfs to Kurdish Aghas as their landlords, and with a Government tax to pay as well in most cases, or if they settle on Government land, it would be liable to be taken away any time, at the whim of some local official, as past experience has shown. The British officials left in the country having no executive power, are even an incentive to the local officials doing whatever they like, and being ignorant of the law of the land and also the fundamental law. Politics being their only qualification for office.

2. They must fight for their rights, or,

3. Leave the country.

The first meant starvation and persecution. The second spelt disaster. The third was the only possible alternative to those Assyrians unable to agree to the Government's policy.

Attached is a letter which those who crossed the frontier into Syria sent to the Minister of the Interior of Iraq.

No British official now left to deal with the Assyrian case, has any real first-hand knowledge of my people, or what they have suffered during the past nineteen years.

The League of Nations betrayed us

(1) By giving our old lands and homes to Turkey;

(2) By handing us over to an Arab Government.

At the moment of closing this report I have knowledge of the burning of an Assyrian village, the local papers are full of news of fighting between Assyrians and Arabs on the

frontier, the deporting of some of my relations and Assyrian notables from Mosul, and carrying away of cattle and other properties from the villagers.

(Signed) Eshai SHIMUN,
By the Grace of God, Catholicos
Patriarch of the East.

Appendices.

COPY AND TRANSLATION RECEIVED ON JUNE 1ST, 1933.

No. U. 1104 Baghdad,
28/5/1933.

Honourable Mar Shimun,

During my last visit to Mosul, I informed you of the Government's attitude with regard to your personal position.

I wish now to confirm in writing what you heard from me verbally. The Government desires to recognise your Spiritual See (leadership) over the Assyrian people, and is promising that you will maintain the honour due to your above-mentioned position for always, and as previously the Mutassarif of Mosul has already informed you that the Government desires to obtain your assistance in establishing a Community Law, on the same basis of the rules at present in force with regard to other peoples.

In order that you may maintain your spiritual leadership, in a fitting manner, the Government is at present discussing the means of finding a permanent income towards your support, and it is not the intention of the Government to decrease the monthly allowance which at present is paid to you, until such time when the Government is satisfied that you are in receipt of sufficient income from other sources.

I must however inform you that the Government cannot agree to transfer to you the temporal power and your position will be the same as that of other spiritual heads of other people in Iraq, and that all the Assyrians should conform to all the administration rules and regulations which are enforced on all other Iraqis.

It is needless to assure you of the Government's sincere desire to fulfil whatever is possible to see the Assyrian people satisfied and happy, and that your people may become one of the most faithful subject peoples to His Majesty the Great King; the Government by its declaration before the League of Nations has fully declared itself to this effect, and this policy has been accepted and approved. I am to state that the Government, according to the agreement of last autumn, has been making efforts to secure the services of a foreign expert, to advise in the important question of settlement, and this foreign expert who is Major Thomson will very likely arrive at Mosul at the end of this month, the most important and greatest part of his work will be for the Assyrian peoples. I very strongly hope that he will get full assistance from all those who wish good of this people.

I very much regret to say that according to certain reports which have reached us, your honourableness have up to the present adopted a non-assisting and obstructive attitude towards this important question. I therefore deem it very essential to ask you to give a written guarantee that you will never take an action, which may be an obstacle to the work of Major Thomson, and cause difficulty to the Government.

If there are any points which are not mentioned in this letter, I shall be glad if you draw my attention to them. The Government's official recognition of your above-mentioned position is subject to your desire to accept it, and your giving a definite promise that you will always and in every way be as one of the most faithful subjects of His Majesty the Great King. I shall be very glad to receive your written reply to this letter as per attached text.

(Signed) Hikmat SLIMAN,
Minister of Interior.

The text referred to is as follows :

"I Mar Shimun have studied the letter from Your Excellency No.U.1104 dated May 28th, 1933, and have accepted all it contains.

"I do hereby promise that I will never do anything which may be an obstacle to the duties of Major Thomson and the Government of Iraq, namely in whatever it concerns the settlement scheme: that I will always and in every way remain as one of the most faithful subjects of His Majesty the Great King."

