

PROTECTION OF MINORITIES IN IRAQ:  
SITUATION OF THE ASSYRIAN MINORITY.

LETTER, DATED OCTOBER 14TH, 1933, FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT  
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Geneva, October 14th, 1933.

I have the honour to invite a reference to League document C.535.1933.I (Annex 1478b), containing certain petitions submitted by the Mar Shimun to the League of Nations regarding the situation of the Assyrian minority in Iraq.

It does not fall to the United Kingdom delegation to comment in detail on these petitions. At the same time, they contain certain misstatements which closely concern Sir Francis Humphrys, now His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador at Baghdad, and which are of such a nature that it is impossible to pass them over in silence.

In the first place, on page 4 of the document<sup>2</sup> the Mar Shimun implies that Sir Francis Humphrys made, but did not fulfil, "many definite and helpful promises" in connection with the Assyrian petition of June 17th, 1932, which was considered by the Council last year. It is only necessary, however, to peruse the letters from Sir Francis Humphrys which the Mar Shimun has attached to his petition of August 16th last to see that, while Sir Francis Humphrys indicated those demands in the petition of June 17th, 1932, which he himself considered to be reasonable subjects for consideration, he repeatedly made it clear that it was not within his power to accept them, since the decision regarding them rested, in the first place, with the Iraqi Government and with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and, ultimately, with the League of Nations, whose attitude it was impossible for him to foretell.

More serious, perhaps, in view of its immediate bearing on the events now under consideration by the Council, is the erroneous account of a conversation at Geneva between Sir Francis Humphrys and the Mar Shimun on the eve of Iraq's admission to membership in the League, which appears on page 27 of the League document under reference.<sup>3</sup> The Mar Shimun alleges that Sir Francis Humphrys then admitted that, in 1931, arrangements were well in train to massacre the Assyrians and that he had taken prompt action to stop such a massacre.

What actually occurred at the interview was that the Mar Shimun complained to Sir Francis Humphrys that the Assyrians lived in constant fear of massacre. Sir Francis Humphrys explained

<sup>1</sup> See Annex 1478c.

<sup>2</sup> See page 1787.

to him that, in his opinion, there was no danger of any harm coming to them provided that they behaved as loyal citizens in the Iraqi State. At no point in the conversation did Sir Francis Humphrys say that he had taken any action to stop a massacre in 1931 or at any other time. On the contrary, he said that he regarded the rumours of a massacre in 1931 as entirely without foundation. The Mar Shimun then said that he referred to economic rather than to physical massacre, and instanced the probable loss of employment in the levies and in the railway and oil companies, and his fear of a general denial to the Assyrians of their rights. Sir Francis Humphrys pointed out that, although the existing numbers of Assyrians employed in the levies would have to be reduced, the Air Officer Commanding had agreed to enlist a considerable number of Assyrians in the new Air Defence Force which was to replace the levies. As regards employment elsewhere, Sir Francis Humphrys said he would always do his best to ensure that they were given equal rights and equal opportunities with other Iraqis, but that he could not hold out any hope of exclusive privileges.

I shall be grateful if you will communicate this letter to the Members of the Council of the League for their information.

(Signed) John SIMON.

ANNEX 1479.

C.544.1933.VI.

IRAQ: SETTLEMENT OF THE ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT AS A RESULT OF THE COUNCIL'S  
RESOLUTION OF DECEMBER 15TH, 1932.<sup>1</sup>

LETTER, DATED SEPTEMBER 20TH, 1933, FROM THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT  
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Baghdad, September 20th, 1933.

In my letter No. 4244 of May 14th, 1933,<sup>2</sup> I had the honour to record, for the information of the Council, the preliminary steps taken by the Iraqi Government to implement the declaration made by its representative at the sixty-ninth session of the Council, pending arrival of the expert who was to assist in settling landless Assyrians.

2. I have now to inform you, with great regret, that, owing to the refusal of the Mar Shimun to acquiesce in the Council's decision of December 15th, 1932, his organisation of a mass emigration to Syria of even settled Assyrians, and the subsequent armed attack made by a large force of his followers on the Government troops, no further progress has been made. The circumstances are fully set forth in the accompanying Blue Book published by the Government.<sup>3</sup>

3. In view of the manifest unwillingness, for political reasons, of a large number of the Assyrian immigrants, even those happily established on the land since twelve years, to settle down peaceably in Iraq, and in view of the recent bloodshed that has exacerbated intertribal animosities, my Government is forced to the conclusion that the whole Assyrian question will now require consideration *de novo*.

A further communication on this subject will be addressed to you in due course.

(Signed) NOURY Said,

Minister for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Journal*, December 1932, page 1985.

<sup>2</sup> See *Official Journal*, June 1933 (Part I), page 737.

<sup>3</sup> This publication is retained in the archives of the Secretariat.

## ANNEX 1479 a.

C.577.1933.VI.

## IRAQ: SETTLEMENT OF THE ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ.

REPORT BY MAJOR THOMSON, THE EXPERT APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL RESOLUTION OF DECEMBER 15TH, 1932.<sup>1</sup>

I. LETTER FROM THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE KINGDOM OF IRAQ TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Geneva, October 9th, 1933.

With reference to my letter No. 8765 of September 20th, 1933,<sup>2</sup> I have the honour to transmit herewith, for the information of the Council, copy of a short report by Major Thomson, the expert engaged by the Iraqi Government to assist it in the task of Assyrian settlement, in accordance with the Council's decision of December 15th, 1932.

(Signed) NOURY Said,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs.

II. LETTER AND REPORT FROM MAJOR THOMSON, EXPERT FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF THE ASSYRIANS IN IRAQ, TO THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT.

Mosul, September 28th, 1933.

In accordance with your instructions, I beg to submit a brief report on my investigations on the subject of Assyrian settlement in Iraq.

I would emphasise that, in the time given to me to write this report, it is quite impossible to deal as fully and adequately with the question as I should like.

I understand that this report is to be submitted to the League of Nations, and I must therefore request that, in submitting this report, the League of Nations be informed of your request to me for a brief report and also of the very limited time which has been given me in which to prepare my report.

(Signed) D. B. THOMSON (Major),  
Adviser on Assyrian Settlement.

*Note of Preliminary Investigations for Assyrian Settlement in Iraq.*

This report is a general, up-to-date survey of the Assyrian settlement problem and also a collection of data, statistics, etc., made during the two months of actual investigation of this question.

The exodus of Assyrians into Syria and the consequent conditions of internal unrest rendered any further consideration of the problem impossible for the time being.

On my arrival in Iraq on May 31st, 1933, I made it my first duty to study the history of the Assyrians both prior to and since their entry into Iraq up to the present.

This was done both from official records and relevant literature and by personal interviews with leading members of the Assyrian community.

On June 4th I met the Mar Shimun in Baghdad and had with him a conversation of more than two hours' duration.

I found him suspicious of my appointment and the scope of my terms of reference, and critical in a vague and indefinite way of what he believed to be the Government settlement policy.

At first he declined to make any counter-proposals or even to assist me by introductions to the Assyrian leaders with whom he consulted.

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Journal*, December 1932, page 1985.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex 1470.

I urged the necessity of the latter point, but he remained adamant, and I can only assume that, for some obscure reason, he did not wish me to see these people other than in his presence.

As regards the Government settlement policy, he undertook to let me have in writing a full statement of his views on the subject, and this he confirmed later by letter. I much regret that his promise has never materialised.

It should be noted that, some days prior to my arrival, the question of "temporal and spiritual power" of the Mar Shimun had been raised by the Iraqi Government.

From the general tone of the conversation, and the veiled allusions to the subject made by the Mar Shimun, I could only feel that the personal factor loomed large in his argument and the future of the Assyrian people was a secondary matter.

I tried to impress on him that his first duty as Patriarch was to subordinate his personal ambitions and that he should work for the welfare and future of his people. I explained that my appointment was by virtue of a promise made by the Iraqi Government to the League of Nations to appoint an Adviser on the question of the settlement of Assyrians in Iraq, and that he could rest assured that I would see that right was done by them to the best of my ability. On the other hand, non-co-operation by him with me could only reflect unfavourably both on him personally and on his people, as by such action he would be denying the responsibilities which were his by virtue of his position amongst the Assyrian people.

I regret that our meeting was very definitely unproductive of any form of working agreement.

The whole issue then became further embarrassed by the definite refusal of the Mar Shimun to agree with the Government on the question of the extent of his powers and duties as Patriarch of the Assyrian Church.

The inability of the Mar Shimun to agree to the Government formula, and his consequent retention in Baghdad, caused the atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion and non-co-operation towards land settlement which already existed to become markedly accentuated, and this it has unfortunately been found impossible to dispel.

Failing the co-operation of the Mar Shimun, I decided that my only course was to get into immediate touch with the Assyrians as a whole, to interview all their leaders, visit the Assyrian villages, and enquire into their conditions and obtain their views on settlement in Iraq; also to have meetings with the mukhtars and chief men of those villages which I was unable to visit personally.

On questioning the Assyrian villagers as regards their settlement, the chief answer, with few exceptions, was the same: "We are refugees, and, unless we are told by the Mar Shimun to settle, we remain refugees". This attitude, undoubtedly fostered by the Mar Shimun's orders, was bound to lead to an impasse.

Further discussion with these people emphasised the opinion I had already formed—namely, that the Mar Shimun and/or his representatives had not fully and clearly explained to the Assyrians generally his failure to win the agreement of the League of Nations to the claims he had submitted.

Consequently, it was felt that only by freely and clearly explaining the true facts to the Assyrian leaders could they be made to understand the real position of affairs. With this end in view, it was decided to have a meeting in the Mutasarrif's office, Mosul, on July 10th, 1933, of all the Assyrian tribal maliks, raises and notables. At this meeting the final decision of the League of Nations made on December 15th, 1932, was read and explained in its relation to the requests contained in the Mar Shimun's petition of September 1932, and the policy of the Government regarding citizenship, land tenure, suggested area for settlement, etc., was also explained.

On the following day, a further meeting was held to reply to questions arising out of the statements of the previous day.

When the meeting finally concluded, it was felt that it had done much towards generally clearing the atmosphere of doubt and misunderstanding and created an opening for constructive settlement work.

The impression was formed during this meeting that the maliks of the chief Assyrian tribes who had asked the Mar Shimun to plead their case at Geneva believed that the Mar Shimun, as their representative, still felt it his duty to continue to support their requests. It was suggested that, if they could meet the Mar Shimun and further discuss the question with him, he and they could modify their views so as to be more in conformity with the general Government policy. It was believed that they then realised that acceptance of this policy was the only feasible course in the circumstances.

It was therefore suggested to certain Assyrian leaders—the Metropolitan Mar Yusif, Malik Andrios of Jilu, Yaqo Ismail of Upper Tiari, who is the son of Malik Ismail, who was sick in hospital in Baghdad, and Lucco Shlimon of Tkhuma—that they should go to Baghdad and consult with the Mar Shimun.

After several private meetings, the Metropolitan was finally unable to accept the suggestion, but the other three agreed, and definitely stated at a final interview on July 13th that they would leave for Baghdad at once. They certainly left Mosul, not southwards to Baghdad as was intended, but northwards to the Assyrian villages of Dohuk Qadha, with what consequences is now only too well known.

*Land Tenure.*

Land tenure may be roughly of two kinds: (1) Government-owned land; (2) privately owned land.

In the case of Government-owned land, tenants who have cultivated satisfactorily and paid their taxes regularly after ten years' tenancy acquire the right to a freehold in their land. This freehold can only be legally given by a Land Commission, of which there are at present several working in various parts of Iraq.

In the case of privately owned land, any freehold right in the land cultivated can only be obtained by the tenant by purchase.

The latter method of acquirement of land has been successfully carried out by the Armenian colony at Havraiz, aided by loans from the Armenian Benevolent Society in Paris.

Tenure of privately owned land by lease or agreement is the accepted procedure. Assyrians, who in past years settled in villages, took out leases for three years. These leases generally fell in many years ago, and the agreements have never been renewed; consequently, the tenant holds his land on a doubtful yearly tenancy.

The reason of this non-renewal of leases was the hope, ever present in the hearts of the greater numbers of Assyrians, that the day of their general exodus was at hand.

I have even met cases of villages in which, owing to some groundless rumour of an imminent move, the villagers as a whole have sown no winter crops, believing that they would have left the country before the next harvest.

*Density of Population.*

The density of population in Mosul and Arbil liwas varies from eight to sixty-four persons per square kilometre, though more generally from eight to thirty-two persons per square kilometre in the country areas. In the towns, the density is 256 persons per square kilometre. This represents a fairly dense population, especially when it is remembered that the lands in question are largely mountainous and therefore unsuitable for cultivation.

*Conditions.*

The villages and their lands occupied by Assyrians come under two heads:

- (1) Those on Government land;
- (2) Those on land owned by private persons.

In the first case, the inhabitants are entirely Assyrian. In the second case, there may be also inhabitants who are either Kurds, Yezidis or Arabs.

There are 116 villages occupied in whole or in part by Assyrians, and, of these, thirty-eight villages are on Government land and seventy-eight on land owned by private landlords.

On investigation of local land conditions, I was faced by the definite fact that there was little or no land certainly belonging to Government which would fulfil the requirements demanded by the Assyrians—namely, mountainous country with fertile valleys and running water.

Again, it was impossible to settle these people in homogeneous groups of villages and at the same time conform with the decision of the League—namely, "that the existing rights of the present population shall not be prejudiced".

Any movement of local inhabitants, even by the purchase by Government of lands from private owners, is bound to have most undesirable repercussions, and can only accentuate the enmity that exists between the Kurd and the Assyrian.

I visited various areas, both Government-owned and privately owned, which it appeared might be suitable for settlement.

1. *Deshlazi Area.* — This area was already under consideration by Government, one of the proposals to make it suitable for settlement being the building of an irrigation canal of considerable length and the construction of which entailed many engineering difficulties.

The Government had already approved a sum of 13,000 Iraqi dinars to cover the cost of this irrigation scheme, and a detailed survey was being made when I visited the area.

I confess the proposition did not appeal to me, nor did it to those Assyrians whom it was proposed to settle there.

2. *Champashai Area.* — This land is privately owned, but the owner is prepared to sell. There is land available for 200 families, in addition to 120 families, mainly Arabs, already settled there. The ground is exceedingly fertile and could produce excellent winter crops, and, being on the banks of the Tigris, could be easily irrigated by means of an ordinary...

3. *Qaz Fakhra*. — Government riverain land on the Tigris eight miles north of Mosul. This is excellent and valuable land, and easily worked by local irrigation methods. It would hold forty families.

4. *Khargooz*. — Government riverain land on the Tigris two miles north of Mosul. This is excellent and valuable land and easily worked by local irrigation methods. It would hold thirty families.

5. *Aqra Cadha*. — This area lies south and north-west of Aqra town, and is rolling, down-like land which would yield excellent winter crops and fine grazing for sheep and cattle. Water can be obtained from wells at from two to four metres depth.

6. *Villages capable of Development*. — Appendices C and D show lists of villages in various qadhas which are capable of development either by increasing the number of villagers or by re-occupation.

From these appendices it will be seen that a considerable area of land is available for occupation, though in some cases development of a sufficient water supply would be necessary.

#### Education.

The following are the education facilities available for Assyrian children:

##### *Mosul Liwa:*

Number of Assyrian primary schools under Government supervision (One at Sumail, one at Kani Masi, one at Jerahiya.) . . . . .	3
Number of Assyrian students attending the above schools . . . . .	341
Number of Assyrian students in Government schools . . . . .	194
Number of schools run by Mr. Panfil, of the American Mission. . . . .	27
Number of Assyrian students attending Mr. Panfil's schools. . . . .	1,068

##### *Arbil Liwa:*

Number of Assyrian students attending Government schools . . . . .	27
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##### *Sulaimaniya Liwa:*

Number of Assyrian students attending Government schools . . . . .	14
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It will be noted that a comparatively small number of children attend Government schools, where they get instructions in Arabic but not in Syriac.

The complaint of Assyrians that they are not given greater opportunities for employment in Government offices is definitely negated by their general ignorance of Arabic written or spoken, and their disinclination to qualify themselves for such posts by availing themselves of the facilities provided by the Government in its schools.

#### Health.

The health of persons, both adults and children, in the villages visited was generally good. Malarial infection is common, and, in villages when the malaria is particularly prevalent, magalospenia is general amongst the children.

The prevalence of malaria is only to be expected, as the Assyrians are ardent rice-growers and cultivate this cereal wherever sufficient water is available. In spite of warnings from the medical authorities, and even of orders by local qaimaqams that rice should not be grown except at a considerable distance from the village, the Assyrians are apparently prepared to suffer the discomforts of chronic malaria and its deleterious effects on their children rather than forgo their rice cultivation.

Quinine is supplied free on demand to mukhtars of villages.

It should be noted that, though the incidence of malaria may be high, it falls on Moslems and Christians alike.

#### Medical Facilities.

*Mosul Liwa*. — One hospital with following sections in Mosul:

- (a) Special room for out-patients;
- (b) Special room for venereal disease;
- (c) Isolation hospital;
- (d) Hospital and pharmacy for the prisoners.

Twenty pharmacies distributed through Mosul Liwa, of which one is the travelling pharmacy.  
List of Medical Staff: 1 civil surgeon; 7 doctors; 4 pharmacists; 19 dressers; 33 nurses.

*Arbil Liwa.* — 1 hospital; 7 pharmacies throughout the liwa.  
List of Medical Staff: 1 civil surgeon; 3 doctors; 4 pharmacists; 3 dressers.

#### *Privileges to Assyrians by the Iraqi Government.*

The following list of privileges extended to the Assyrians by the Iraqi Government may be of interest:

- (a) A remission of sheep tax and land revenue to settlers amounting to a sum of 52,669 rupees;
- (b) A monthly grant to the Mar Shimun of 21  $\frac{1}{3}$  Iraqi dinars;
- (c) A grant of 96,000 rupees for relief of those driven out of Turkey in 1924;
- (d) Remission of rifle tax or reduction of licence fee for private rifles;
- (e) Increased medical facilities;
- (f) Special education grant.

#### *Settlement.*

It must not be assumed that the Assyrian people in Iraq are in fact a homeless and destitute people. They describe themselves as refugees and homeless mainly because they are not living in their old mountain homes across the Turkish border, and from my experience they certainly cannot claim, as a people, to be destitute. Very many Assyrians have occupied their villages, and lived there prosperously and contentedly, for thirteen years. Many more have lived and earned their living in cities and towns of Iraq since the days of the Bakubah refugee camp.

More, again, are normally of a nomadic temperament, and move with their flocks of sheep seasonally through Mosul Liwa.

For settlement purposes I would therefore divide the Assyrians into three groups: (a) townsmen; (b) agriculturists; (c) pastorals.

Prolonged residence in Bakubah and Minian refugee camps has gone far towards the conversion of a proportion of a race of mountaineers to a people preferring the comforts and attractions of a town life, and this is especially evident amongst the younger generations of Assyrians.

When these camps were closed, many of the older people, with some of their families, returned to the land either as agriculturists or pastorals; others remained in Baghdad or moved to their towns in Iraq.

In dealing with the question of the settlement of the Assyrian people, one must consider in the main the agriculturists and the pastorals; townsmen are generally unsuitable for land settlement, and, from my enquiries, I am convinced that few, if any, of these people would be prepared to try the experiment of agriculture or shepherding.

Iraq has been faced with, and dealt with, the Assyrian settlement problem on four previous occasions. In 1921, some 500 families were settled in Dohuk and Aqra Qadhas.

In 1922, the Upper and Lower Tiari, the Tkhuma, Baz and Jilu were repatriated to their pre-war homes, and the problem appeared solved, as, with the return of these refugees to their original homes, sufficient lands were available in Mosul and Arbil Liwas for the remainder.

In the autumn of 1924, as a result of an affray between Tkhuma tribesmen and the Turkish Wali of Julamerl, who was tax-collecting, Turkish troops were sent to deal with these tribesmen, and forced a complete evacuation by the Assyrians of their homelands. Some 2,290 families returned to Iraq, and the Assyrian settlement problem was in being once more.

These people were then settled temporarily in Dohuk and Shaikhan Qadhas.

In July 1927, a British officer was appointed Settlement Officer. This officer, though possessed of considerable knowledge of the different Assyrian tribes and speaking their language fluently, at once met with obstruction from those whom he tried to settle.

Though faced with enormous difficulties, by the end of 1928 he was able to effect a re-distribution with the object of grouping settlers as far as possible according to tribes. In carrying out this settlement, funds amounting to some £5,500 supplied by the Sir Henry Lunn Fund were distributed to Assyrians to help them in their settlement.

When the Settlement Officer retired at the end of 1928, it was estimated that but a few hundred families required final settlement.

During the following years, ceaseless attempts were made to complete the settlement, and

by the settlers, which necessitated the postponement of each scheme for one reason or another.

In 1932, I believe that no more than 350 to 400 families wishing to settle remained without land, and these were chiefly the pastoral Ashutis of the Lower Tiari.

In 1933, it has fallen to me to complete the settlement. From the beginning I have been faced by a spirit of non-co-operation and suspicion, and the acute nature of the final methods of obstruction are only too well known, and so, for the present, the problem of Assyrian settlement in Iraq at any rate must be left dormant and unsolved.

#### LIST OF APPENDICES.

- A. List showing Number of Assyrian Families settled in Villages.
- B. List showing Number of Assyrian Families by Tribes.
- C. List of Villages which can hold Additional Families.
- D. List of Empty Villages in Mosul Liwa.
- E. List of Assyrians in Government and Other Employ.
- F. Census of Assyrians and their Distribution in Iraq.

#### Appendix A.

##### LIST SHOWING NUMBER OF ASSYRIAN FAMILIES SETTLED IN VILLAGES.

Name of qadha	Number of families in Agha villages	Number of families in Government villages	Total number of families	Number of Agha villages	Number of Government villages	Total number of villages
Amadiyah . . . . .	258	245	503	13	12	25
Agra . . . . .	—	80	80	—	5	5
Arbil . . . . .	19	—	19	1	—	1
Dohuk . . . . .	706	290	996	32	11	45
Rowanduz . . . . .	363	—	363	10	—	10
Shaikhan . . . . .	253	18	271	19	2	21
Zakho . . . . .	—	2	2	—	1	1
Zaibar . . . . .	42	105	147	3	7	10
Total . . . . .	1,641	740	2,381	78	38	118

#### Appendix B.

##### LIST OF NUMBER OF FAMILIES BY TRIBES.

Name of tribe	Number of families in Agha villages	Number of families in Government villages	Total number of families	Number of Agha villages	Number of Government villages	Total number of villages
Tkhuma . . . . .	167	136	303	7	4	11
Upper Tiari . . . . .	96	141	237	7	7	14
Lower Tiari . . . . .	122	304	426	7	15	22
Baz . . . . .	222	10	232	15	1	16
Shemzdinan . . . . .	427	48	475	15	2	17
Ashotis . . . . .	—	6	6	—	2	2
Jilu . . . . .	194	15	209	15	1	16
Tiari . . . . .	15	—	15	2	—	2
Arboshi . . . . .	20	—	20	1	—	1
Talis . . . . .	15	—	15	1	—	1
Kafris . . . . .	45	—	45	2	—	2
Daizis . . . . .	35	—	35	1	1	2
Marbishos . . . . .	—	76	76	—	2	2
Barwari Saiwin . . . . .	84	—	84	3	—	3
Qochanis . . . . .	—	4	4	1	3	4
Different tribes (in Dohuk town) . . . . .	200	—	200	1	—	1
Total . . . . .	1,642	740	2,382	78	38	116