

The land grabbing on the Assyrian lands in Iraq

Report to the Universal Periodic Review of the State of Iraq

Date: March 28th 2019

Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq

A charitable, humanitarian, non-profit organization with financial and administrative independence, non-governmental and not linked to a political party, with a public interest and working in accordance with the principle of voluntary collective action, to achieve humanitarian goals through development programs, capacity building, relief, education and culture.

The Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq was established in 1991 in northern Iraq to serve all the people of Mesopotamia.

To contact us: www.assyrianaidiraq.org - ashur@assyrianaidiraq.org

The purpose of the report is to document and propose solutions to illegal land grabbing in the indigenous villages and towns of the Assyrian Christians in Iraq.

The research included the various Assyrian areas and villages located in northern Iraq, which are currently under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, especially the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Nineveh as well, where there are various cases of land grabbing, of which, some began since 1933 as a result of the massacres, killings and genocide suffered by the Assyrians in August 1933 during the kingdom era, and through the events of the Kurdish revolution in the sixties, seventies which followed with a systematic displacements carried out by the Baath regime in the seventies and eighties with the aim of Arabization of these areas.

The land grabbing continued after that and until now there are dozens of unsolved cases of land grabbed.

Research Methodology

The Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq conducted investigations and documented the land grabbing that took place according to the different regions and different time periods of which took into consideration the availability of documents and proofs for each case of land grab with their causes and date of occurrence, where there are cases of land grabbing in this report include Assyrian areas and villages in Dohuk governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and include the villages whose residents filed complaints about them and some were directed to the courts and others that have been approached to the competent government agencies concerned to address them and issue the necessary instructions regarding them.

The following is a presentation of the **Main Findings** of our research and documentation process.

First:

There are more than 70 Assyrian villages and towns that have been either completely or partially land grabbed, or confiscating of some lands of the Assyrian villages after the genocide of the Assyrian Christians in 1933 known as the Semele Massacre by the Iraqi government during the kingdom era, Neither the Iraqi government nor the Kurdistan Regional Government has addressed this important issue, and most of Assyrian lands and rights are still being expropriated against their will.

Second:

There are cases of land grabbing for the entire villages and prevent their owners from returning to them for many years dating back to the sixties of the last century or the seventies, mostly of these cases were done by the neighboring Kurdish tribes.

Third:

Cases of land grab on some lands in the villages; many residents of the towns or the owners of villages and Assyrian territories in the areas of the Kurdistan Regional Administration of Iraq requests to address these cases, but unfortunately the vast majority has not been solved to the moment, including cases in villages of Nahla, Barwari Bala, Amadiyah, Zakho and others regions. Some of these cases, the landowners had recourse to the court seeking for justice, but court orders were not decided in their favor or were decided in their favor but not implemented.

Fourth:

Several cases of the Assyrian Christian villages and towns were documented that have been exploited illegally by PKK militants for several years, which is preventing the Assyrian Christian landowners and others from returning to their areas of origin, this is occurring in areas related to districts of Amadiyah, Aqra and Zakho, and there are fears among the Assyrians of making a demographic change in these land grabbed towns or villages.

Fifth:

Continuing of land grabbing cases after the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government after 1991, which included the housing of many Kurdish families in the areas and territories of the Assyrians, which undermined the confidence of the people in the administration and its promises to address cases of land grab in the areas under its control significantly including land grab by acquisition of the Assyrian lands to construct of buildings and government departments.

Sixth:

There are cases of completely or partially land grabbed of the villages and towns of the Assyrians that are not reported by the owners either because of the loss of hope of resolving or migration and lack of knowledge or no interest in the subject, or as a result of fear of its repercussions and their reflection on their situation in the region. In addition to many cases that their owners are have lack of support to pay attorneys' fees.

Seventh:

Since the seventies of the last century, especially in the period of the takeover of the Baath Party to authority, it practiced the policy of Arabization and demographic change against Iraqis, including the Assyrians, where it destroyed and displaced dozens of Christian Assyrian villages and towns, it also carried out programmed demographic changes, especially in the Nineveh Plain, and included extensive housing for non-Assyrians in the Assyrian areas, including the Talkeif district and the Bartilla subdistrict, also other many villages, including Bandwaya and Badriya near Alqush, as well as the confiscation and destruction of fields belonging to the Assyrians.

Recommendations to the Iraqi government

Given the importance of the resolving of land grab in the Assyrian towns and villages in Iraq as indigenous people to the country, and in order to return them to their lands and historical areas that they inhabited for thousands of years, we propose the following procedures:

First:

We recommend the Iraqi government to work with the Kurdistan Regional Government to establish a government body linked to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq and be specialized in documenting and monitoring all cases of land grab occurring in areas under the administration of the KRG and to be allocated a budget of its own from the Government within the annual allocations and to adopt a specific program for this purpose.

Second:

To urge the Iraqi government to work with the Kurdistan Regional Government to document and monitor cases of land grabbing and to address them through the appropriate legal and constitutional methods.

Third:

The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government have the responsibility to deal with the impact and consequences of the Semele massacre in 1933 and to restore the rights of the Assyrian people or compensate them as a result of the seizure of their land in case of settlements between the two parties.

Fourth:

For the villages and areas under the control of foreign militants as PKK militants, the Iraqi government and the KRG must take the necessary measures to address these land grab, which result in heavy losses to the Assyrians as a result of their loss for their properties and the opportunity to exploit them for the past years and compensate them for the reparation to return them to their areas

Fifth:

To urge the government and parliament of the Kurdistan region to issue instructions and laws that put an end to the ongoing land grab on the Assyrian regions and territories immediately, and seek to address the issues that can be dealt with in coordination with the relevant departments of the courts, local administration departments, agriculture, municipalities, planning and other official departments concerned, with the need to involve representatives of the Assyrians in dealing with these issues and to ensure justice to return the land to the owners.

Sixth:

To carry out the monitoring and documentation of the rest of the Assyrian lands and villages that are not documented in the annex and to provide the necessary resources for this by the KRG.

Seventh:

To stop and address the cases of land grab and demographic change in the Nineveh province, especially in the areas of the Nineveh Plain, including Telkief, Bartilla, Badriya and others, which occurred during the previous regime during the seventies of the last century and the subsequent, in coordination between the Iraqi government and with representatives of Christian Assyrians.

Annex: Table for 94 cases showing the land grab of the Assyrian villages.