FACT SHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN ASSYRIAN VILLAGES IN NORTHERN IRAQ

THE ASSYRIAN FEDERATION OF SWEDEN

APRIL 2013
The Duhok governorate constitutes the northernmost part of Iraq. It is divided into four main municipalities: Dohuk, Amedi, Semel and Zakho. The city of Duhok is the capital of the province. The Duhok province has an area of circa 6000 square kilometers.

All the Assyrian villages mentioned in this fact sheet are located within the Dohuk governorate with the majority of them being in the municipality of Amedi.

The majority of the population is of Kurdish ethnicity with the second largest ethnicity being Assyrian.
Demographic Change Under the Veil of Development

The governorate of Dohuk approved in 2006 a “Master Development Plan” created by the German company Voessing. The plan has yet to be made public in its entirety. According to official statements made by representatives of the governing council the plan includes substantial development. New schools, roads, hospitals and other infrastructure projects are all part of the plan, which has not been implemented yet.

The Assyrian population in the governorate have recently realized that major parts of the development plan will affect their villages and lands. In some instances the plan entails serious encroachments in areas mostly inhabited by Assyrians and where Assyrians are the major land owners.

As more details about the development plan have become known to the public it has become obvious to the Assyrian population in the province that the predominantly Kurdish authority is implementing such plans to change the demographics of the region. The Assyrians are deeply concerned that the authorities are seeking to reduce their presence and landownership in the province by, among other things, planning to build a highway right through several Assyrian villages and small towns. The development of this highway will have devastating consequences for the Assyrians living in the area as they would become forced to sell their property.

Other highly alarming signs include plans to increase and make permanent an illegal settlement of Kurds from the time of the Saddam regime in the village of Kore Gavana. Furthermore, Kurdish contractors are planning to build several residential towers in Assyrian villages. These and other construction plans indicate that the authorities are actively trying to create a dominant Kurdish settlement in the remaining villages and areas where the Assyrians make up the majority in terms of inhabitants or land ownership.

In conclusion, the risks coupled with this “Master Development Plan” are major demographic changes which favor the major ethnic group, i.e. the Kurdish population. This in turn makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the Assyrian population to survive on their ancestral lands and keep their ownership of it. At the time of this writing several Assyrian villages affected have already filed official complaints with the local authorities in objection to the plans.

The Assyrian Federation of Sweden has in this fact sheet compiled fundamental information to shed light on this issue and form opinion against parts of the development plan that pose a major threat to the Assyrian minority’s presence in Northern Iraq.

The information in this fact sheet has been gathered via telephone conversations and emails from representatives of Assyrian political parties and persons from the concerned villages in northern Iraq. Live interviews took place in Northern Iraq with concerned individuals during the first week of April, 2013.

The Assyrian Federation of Sweden
Demographic Change under the Disguise of Modernization of the Countryside

It has recently come to our attention that the Regional government has entered into an agreement with a German company by the name of “Voessing” to redesign the city of Dohuk and the surrounding towns and valleys in the province of Dohuk for touristic purposes; specifically, the areas that will be included in this plan are our historical lands where many of our towns and villages lie along the sides of the road between Dohuk and Amadiya. This road passes through the villages of Babelu (Bab Eilu) and Kori Gavana and Bakierat in addition to the villages whose populations were forcibly removed after the Simel massacres of 1933, such as the villages of kaflasan, loumana, boubawa, tazikee as well as the villages of Sacreen, Bardarawa, Dohukey, Beth Anasah, Hsmaziki, Bardaresh, Sarsank, Einashke, Blijan, Biebad, Bimadah, Mircetk and Deraluk and dozens of other villages located on the same road and in other valleys where the same program will be implemented as well, sooner or later.

It is only normal for those that are in power to be responsible for the development of the region with the goal to improve the lives of the citizens by creating opportunities for employment, providing social welfare within the framework of the principles of humanitarian values that were adopted in the new Iraqi constitution. The urbanization of the countryside and the re-design and development of urban and rural areas is an important step especially when it comes to making use of natural resources to achieve prosperity for mankind and his overall well-being. This however, should be conditional to other aspects, in the forefront of which is the preservation of the “identity” of the land and the distinctive culture of the region, in addition to achieving justice and fairness in the use of resources and not, as is the current reality on the ground such as in Ankawa, Shaqlawa, Harir or Diana in Erbil province. Most evident is the situation in Ankawa; which has lost more than 98% of its territory in the past few years by granting permission to unknown investors who are not residents of the area to build high-rises. Most recently, four towers were built which will certainly have a “demographic impact” in favor of the prevailing ethnic majority of the region, hence changing forever the ethnic identity of the land and culture of the city.

Back to the design project in the province, the municipal offices in the area had declared their intention to confiscate the land by initially prohibiting the current owners to act freely with their properties. This announcement was made under the pretext of vital planning in the area of Sapna which includes the villages of Sarsank - Eineshke- Aradin - Hamziki - Beth Anatha - Blijan – Baibad, as well as Derre Koomaneh and Mirectek.

It is also worth mentioning here that the local authorities had approved earlier the construction of a housing complex known as GIA which resulted in the confiscation of thousands upon thousands of Dunams (each Iraqi Dunam is equal to 2500 square meters) of agricultural lands in the area known as Rofee that belonged to the people of Sarsank, hence granting the residents of the housing complex the usage of what was left of the villagers’ land and the
foothills which were considered to be natural pastures of the village. Few months ago, the people of Kori Gavana woke up to find their land had been included in this new design and that the distinct identity of the village had been demographically changed, as a matter of fact, this unique identity has been completely erased. The housing complex built by Saddam’s regime still exists and continues to grow and expand which is in direct conflict with the resolutions the regional parliament had adopted to remedy the damaging effects of the former regime’s policies and at odds with the language of article 58 of the Iraqi Transitional Law and interim constitution which later became known as article 140 in the permanent constitution of the country. Isn’t this considered to be applying a double standard by the regional authorities, or is it because they think they can easily trample on our nation’s rights and properties under the veil of public interest?

In conclusion, we want to inform our people that the municipal authorities had published on January 7th their intentions to sequester our territories. You have the right to object to this decision by March 7th. Note the publication of this information came in an unknown local newspaper which 99.9 percent of people do not read. It was done in this manner so our people would not know about this law and would not be able to object to it within the specified time frame.

We urgently call upon our people to act quickly and register their objections so the whole project would be reconsidered and eventually reject all that harms public interest and benefits only few and leads to the elimination of what is left of the distinct identity and culture of the area. We are hopeful the concerned authorities will respond positively to our legitimate demands and will return what was ransacked during the rule of the past dictatorship and the years after that. We also ask the same authorities to extend the time allotted for registering objections for another three months to give all those affected by these measure ample time to fully review the intricacies of the project and act accordingly.

A scan of the note about the infrastructure plans in the Kurdish paper.
Contact the Assyrian Federation of Sweden for further information.

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