

THE NINEVEH PROJECT

WHAT IS THE NINEVEH PROJECT?

The Nineveh Project is an international, non-profit economic development fund for the purpose of providing security and sustainable investment in the Nineveh Plain of northern Iraq for the survival of the indigenous people of Iraq known as Assyrians as well as Chaldeans and Syrians.

The goal of the Nineveh Project will be to create an economic development fund, not solve the name issue that has divided our people for generations. Solving the name issue will take generations, and yet we have maybe a decade to survive in Iraq. So, for the sake of our existence, we need to put the name issue aside and agree to work together now to assure our survival. Thus, membership in the Nineveh Project will allow people to self-identify in a manner that they feel comfortable. Members can identify as being of Assyrian descent or as an adherent to any of the following churches: the Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Maronite Syriac Church, or any other established Christian church that is not Armenian, but has historic roots to the aforementioned churches. For the purposes of the Nineveh Project, we will consider all these identities to be the same people. Moreover, a key principle of the Nineveh Project will be that all investments must inure equitably to the benefit of Assyrians as well as Chaldeans and Syrians living in or willing to relocate to the Nineveh Plain.

WHO IS BEHIND THE NINEVEH PROJECT?

The ideas and the motivation to make The Nineveh Project directly evolved from the Black Marches that took place throughout the world after the attack on Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq, on October 31, 2010. A group in Detroit organized a conference in January, 2011, with representatives from Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. After witnessing the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that were made possible through the power of the internet, this core group in Detroit, namely Ranna Abro, André Anton, Wisam Naoum, and André Halabu, working with Elmer Abbo in Chicago, decided that the idea of organizing the Diaspora through the internet was possible and they moved forward with making the Nineveh Project a reality.

WHY AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR THE NINEVEH PLAIN?

An economic development fund has the best chance right now of organizing the Diaspora around a mission to save our people in Iraq. As we all know, our existence as a unique culture is under threat as our people flee persecution from our homeland. However, the survival of our culture depends on us surviving in our homeland. The Nineveh Plain is the heart of our homeland and our survival there still remains our best chance to hold on to a meaningful presence in the Middle East. If we believe in our future, we have to believe in the Nineveh Plain. We have maybe a decade, perhaps less, to stop this flight and stabilize our population in Iraq. We must act now, but we must do things differently than we have in the past because what we have been doing has not been working. It is time we stop begging the politicians who ignore us and start looking to ourselves, reach into our own pockets, realize we do have some extra cash we can live without, and put it together with others in a manner we can trust. It is time we in the Diaspora just start helping ourselves because we can. We do not need anyone else's permission. If others do not want to help us, that is fine because we can help ourselves. We can help our own people and build up our own land in the Nineveh Plain, but we need to start doing this now because it will be too late to help if we wait any longer.

IS THE IDEA OF AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND REALLY POSSIBLE?

Absolutely! If we had an economic development of \$10 million per year to invest in the Nineveh Plain for our people, we could make a real impact. That investment would likely improve our political prospects as well. How can we generate \$10 million per year? Well, what is a reasonable amount of money we could ask people to give to this fund? How about \$250? It is a meaningful amount, but quite manageable. So at \$250 per person, we would need 40,000 people to get \$10 million. Well, that seems like a lot, but it is completely within reach. We have one million people or more in Diaspora, so we do not need everyone. We do not need half. We do not need a quarter. We do not even need a tenth. We just need 2.5% of the entire Diaspora. 2.5% is 40,000 people. We can do that. With the internet we have today, we can find the 2.5% of people who are believers. If the Tunisians and Egyptians created a revolution overnight because they sent messages to their friends on Facebook, then we can build an international network on the internet in the Diaspora to save our people.

But how will we suddenly get 40,000 people to all believe in this idea all at once? The answer is we will not because we do not need to. What we will do is take pledges to believe in this idea; the pledge is \$1 that once you get another 12,000 people to believe in this idea, you commit to paying \$250 for the right to elect the leadership of this development fund. And so, in the end we only need about 1% of the population to believe in this idea to get started. If only 10,000 people come through initially, that is still \$2.5 million; it would be more than any effort has ever had to work with for our people. In this start-up phase, we take the first \$1 million to hire the staff and give flesh to the vision by starting to meet with people in the Nineveh Plain, identify investment opportunities, and travel throughout the Diaspora to explain the work directly to people. After that, thousands more will join. Potentially much more than 2.5% of the population will believe. We can do this. We do not need everyone. We just need 2.5% of the Diaspora, and in so doing with just 2.5% of the Diaspora, we will create the most important social movement in the modern history of our people.

WHAT WILL THIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND REALLY DO?

Imagine an annual fund of \$10 million dollars per year to pour into sustainable economic development in the Nineveh Plain. Imagine investing in businesses in our community. Imagine developing the human capital within our community to enable our people to create and run those businesses. Imagine supporting that economic development through appropriate investments in our community's infrastructure, such as education, housing, health care, and security. And imagine a full-time staff of dedicated youth whose career is to build the Nineveh Plain for our people rather than take just another job in Germany, Canada, or Sweden. With that said, we do not know what the first project will be. Why? Because then this effort would not be a democratic effort led by its actual leadership if we did. We are first putting the pieces in place, then the people who are granted authority to act will do the hard leg work and make reasoned decisions of where to invest. If you do not want to invest until you know what is going to be done, that is fine. Wait and see. But in the end, the vision here is not to ask people to donate to build a school, a water treatment plant, or a factory; what we are really building here is the infrastructure that supports a sustainable fund for investment into the future. That is the project: the economic development fund, not a school or a factory *per se*.

More importantly, we are not trying to replace those who have been doing this important work for decades. We see ourselves as partners with anyone in the Diaspora or the homeland that is already doing this work. What we are doing is filling the structural gap by bringing real resources at a scale that no one else has been able to do to this point because they either have more narrow allegiances, have not been able to engender the trust because they lack sufficient accountability, oversight, and transparency, or have not leveraged the modern power of the internet to bridge the Diaspora in a new way. The Nineveh Project aims to solve this problem, but then partner with those who can get the work done while adding a layer of accountability and transparency that will keep the resources flowing. That is the true vision of the Nineveh Project: to be a sustainable economic development fund over a generation.

WHO WILL LEAD THIS FUND AND HOW CAN WE CREATE A LEADERSHIP SYSTEM WE CAN TRUST?

The Nineveh Project will have a two-tier leadership structure. A qualified but democratically elected Board of Directors from across the Diaspora will oversee a paid, professional Executive Staff. The Executive Staff will do 90% of the work with the supervision of the democratically elected Board of Directors. The Nineveh Project is all about hiring a team of talented people to take the resources of the Diaspora with accountability, transparency, and genuine oversight; and then use these resources to save our people and our culture from extinction by investing concertedly in smart, sustainable development in collaboration with our people on the ground who are desperate for this hope from the Diaspora. We have plenty of young people who are talented and would love to do this work. It is time we in the Diaspora take advantage of our own human capital and put it to work, but this time for us. However, at the same time, it is time we stop relying on volunteers to save our culture. We need to pay people to make saving our people their careers. By taking 10% of the resources, or \$1 million per year, we can finally stop relying on dedicated people to save our culture as a hobby. Yet at the same time, these individuals will be fully accountable to the democratically and internationally elected Board of Directors as well as the membership because the actions of the Nineveh Project will be highly transparent.

HOW DO WE ASSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY?

The Nineveh Project is dedicated to developing a culture of accountability and transparency. From the very beginning, the Nineveh Project will be utterly transparent. Every transaction will be posted on the website. The finances will be there for everyone to see. Thus, the membership can hold both the Board of Directors and the Executive Staff to higher levels of accountability. Furthermore, there will be a diverse international leadership elected from the membership, not a bunch of cronies that know each other, but competent people who are professionals in their own careers. These competent, democratically elected individuals will follow this standard of transparency precisely because the membership will expect and insist on it since this level of transparency is a non-negotiable requirement of the by-laws and is built into the fund's essence.