

Assyrians and the Iraqi National Elections of December 15, 2005

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Introduction

People sometimes ask me, why bother wasting so much time on writing articles when people do not even care? First, I tell them, the time I put into these articles is an investment and never a wasted time. Second, our people do care; but they show it when they see something that they could relate to, believe in, or issues that touches them profoundly. This is why I spend two days sometimes in writing some of those articles because I know that people do read them, they do care about what is happening to our people, and in some instances learn a thing or two. Some might not agree with what I present in my articles, and that is Okay.

Today, I wanted to come to you and talk about one of the most important things that is facing our people at this stage of our modern history and that is the elections in Iraq. On December 15, 2005, Iraqi voters will elect a new Iraqi Parliament. There are 307 political entities and 19 coalitions registered to contest for the 275 seats in the future parliament (Council of Representatives). This will be the third time this year that Iraqis will have gone to the polls. On January 30, 2005, Iraqis elected a Transitional National Assembly (transitional parliament). One of the responsibilities for that parliament was to write a draft constitution of Iraq. Iraqis approved the resulting document in a referendum held on October 15, despite the clear objection of Sunni Arabs and many Assyrians because of certain articles that were unfair to our people. This new elected parliament will run the Iraqi affairs for the next 4 years, while the January 30 parliament was temporary. Therefore, the importance of these elections goes beyond saying.

Slates with Our People in them

Here are the slates (lists) that have our people as part of them:

A) Slate 740 – al-Rafidayn

The list includes almost 80 candidates from the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), ChaldoAssyrian Syriac National Council, various civic societies, and independents. The list is headed by Mr. Younam Kanna and included many notables such as Louis Qlemis, Sarmad Ishaq BiDawid, Dr. Ricardos Yousif, Prof. Hanaa' Emmanuel al-Qas, and attorney Majdi Nabil Khadurri.

The 740 slate will compete throughout the 18 Iraqi provinces:

1. In Nineveh, led by former Minister of Migration and Displacement Pascale Eshao Warda, and including Behnam 'Aboosh Abd al-Masih, Duraid Hikmat Tobiya, and Sliwo Masious Sliwo.
2. In Arbil, led by present Minister of Science and Technology Basima Yousif Potrus, and including Nadir Moshe Murad.
3. In Kirkuk, led by former Deputy Governor Sargon Lazar, and including Lu'ai Mikha Elias, Mrs. Dolphin Aprim Gorial, and attorney Ashur Yalda Benyamin.
4. In Dohuk, led by Nisan Mirza, the head of the Assyrian Cultural Center, and including Riyadh Girgis Baddi, and Mrs. Fadiya Karim.
5. In Basra, led by George Ishaq, Chief Editor of Bahra.
6. In al-Anbar, led by Mrs. Janet Rasho.

B) Slate 752 – al-Nahrain Watani

Includes these groups and individuals:

1. Bet Nahrain National Union (led by Gewargis Khoshaba Michael).
2. Chaldean National Congress (led by Fo'ad Rahim Bodagh).
3. Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) (led by Nimrod Baito Youkhana).
4. Suryan Independent Gathering Movement (led by Yashoo'a Majid Hadaya).
5. Chaldean Democratic Forum (led by Sa'eed Shamaya).

6. Hikmat Hakim, as Independent.

Certain of the above people were previously members of the Iraqi Communist Party. Of course, Communism rejects exclusive ethnic nationalism. I am puzzled here. How could people who believed in Communism switch from denying ethnic nationalism to cherishing it over night and defending Chaldean nationalism, for example? Many of these groups did not exist before the fall of Saddam in 2003.

C) Slate 800 – the General Assyrian Congress of Eshaya Eshoo.

Eshaya Eshoo of course was a member of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA). He later split and formed the AUA-Political Arm and this group basically dissolved with time. He represents himself and few members of his tribe and relatives. One of the supporters of this group is Sargon Dadesho and AssyriaSat. Eshaya's accomplishments include being owner of the Social Club in Chicago, a place where Assyrians can meet at nights and play cards among other things. The list includes these as its candidates:

1. In Baghdad -- Wilson Gabriel, Liza Nisan, Bahram Zaya
2. In Kirkuk -- Bassam Matti, Benyamin Nisan, Alice Nisan
3. In Mosul -- Edwar Hanna, Najib Hanna, Basima Zarko
4. In Dohuk -- Hani Endrawis, Habib Sa'eed.

D) Slate 620 – Mithal al-Aloosi List for Iraqi Nation

It includes the following groups: The Iraqi Federalist Gathering and The Iraqi National Party

While I respect Mithal al-Aloosi as an individual for his liberal views for Iraq as expressed on many media outlets, the fact remains that he will succeed to win a position for his slate in parliament from the many of the good and moderate Iraqi voters. Yes, his views are healthy but Assyrians with their small numbers compared to the rest of the Arab and Kurdish Iraqis cannot afford to cast their vote to his group. Mr. al-Aloosi will guarantee a position in parliament from the moderate Arab votes. We must vote for slates devoted for and by our own people first since the Arab Shi'aa will support Shi'aa slate, the Arab Sunni will support Sunni slate, the Kurds will support Kurdish slate, and the Turkoman will support Turkoman slate. After Mr. al-Aloosi wins his seats, he and the Assyrians could cooperate in parliament.

Two Assyrians are running in this slate:

1. Dr. Shimon Khamo. Dr. Khamo was earlier member of the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP). He then formed his own group after his problems and the lawsuit by the BNDP of Dadesho. He joined other groups and became the Vice President for External Affairs with the Hizb al-Ahrar wa al-Ta'akhi al-'Araqi (Iraqi Liberals and Fraternity Party). However, Dr. Khamo and ten others in the party had their disagreements with the president of the party, Mr. Hussein al-Mosawi, and the 11 members resigned on October 28, 2005. After deliberations with Mr. Mithal al-Aloosi, the 11 individuals joined al-Aloosi and his list # 620.
2. Jacklin Zomaya (ran on the Kurdistan slate last elections).

E) Slate 798 – Jabhat al-Khalas al-Watani (National Salvation Front).

It includes the Democratic Reconstruction and Justice Party and the Nasiri Forefront Socialist Party. The latter is a Pan-Arabist movement.

I understand that there is a member of the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party in this list. The name of that individual is unconfirmed. However, AssyrianSat did ask the viewers to vote for 800 or 798.

F) Slate 730 – Kurdistan slate.

The only person that counts on our people and who is part of this slate is Abd al-Ahad Afram Sawa. Abd al-Ahad is a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and has been for years. He has commitment to the KDP and continues to work for Kurdish goals in parliament. He secured his seat in the present parliament, which will dissolve after the new elections by running on the Kurdish slate last elections.

G) Slate 667 – al-Jabha al-Iraqiya li al-Hiwar al-Watani (Iraqi Front for National Dialogue). This slate is joined by the Iraqi Christian Democratic Party of Minas al-Yousifi. Minas, who lived in Sweden, stated in an interview on al-Jazeera Arabic International Satellite TV station on July 1, 2003 that there was no difference between Christians and Moslem, or between Kurds, Chaldeans or Assyrians, etc. He rejected the leadership of the ADM in Iraq and claims that he is an umbrella for all Christians of Iraq. Some claim that he had allegiances to the Iraqi Communist Party and more recently to the Kurds and Barazani.

Why Should We Vote?

After the conclusion of World War I in 1918, the surrender and defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and the decision of the partition of that empire, the Assyrians (AssyroChaldeans or ChaldoAssyrians) and their case was on the agenda of the League of Nations in 1919. The Treaty of Sevres of 1920 instituted specifically the Assyrians (under the AssyroChaldeans title) and their rights in the post World War I political Middle East scene. Of course, in 1920 in Sevres, the defeated Ottoman Sultan was doing the negotiations with the victorious Allies. Sadly, the treaty was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which was negotiated by Kamal Attaturk's powerful new government in Ankara who refused to comply with the Treaty of Sevres signed by the weak then Sultan in Istanbul.

During the preparations to end the British mandate on Iraq in 1932 and the admittance of Iraq into the League of Nations, the Assyrian question was again addressed by the League. Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun tried hard to convince the League to bring the Assyrian claims to a mutual satisfaction of all parties involved. The League commission recommended specifically that the Assyrians must be settled homogenously in northern Iraq, i.e., some sort of an enclave and administrative area for the Assyrians; however, the British had other plans for Iraq. Since then, the Assyrian issue has been put of the shelves until the fall of Saddam's regime. Today, the Assyrian case and their rights for an administrative region similar to the Kurds is open again and is being discussed by the powerful nations. Many of us might not be aware of such thing. Many of our real leaders in Iraq might not be talking about it publicly because the time is not right to do so. However, the Assyrian case is alive. We must keep it that way. How, one might ask? I say through voting.

We must vote. This is the only way that we could tell the world that we exist. We cannot afford letting the world assume that we are only 50,000 around the world since that is the total number of votes our people cast in the January 2005 elections. We cannot demand greater things with a population of 50,000. We must show the world our true numbers and the only way we can do that at this time and with the lack of reliable census in Iraq is by voting.

If we do not vote, we do not exist politically. It is that simple.

Whom for Should I Cast my Vote?

That is a good question. To me, there is nothing simpler than this to answer. All that a person needs to do is to be objective and truthful with him/herself. Lets look at the slates above and the names of the candidates and ask ourselves after considering all that is around us, the complexity of the situation, and our real abilities: who, besides talking, has been there for our people in Iraq in the last 25 years? Who, besides talking, has accomplished anything for our people in Iraq in the last 25 years? Who was the first to put in motion the unity process, emphasized on its importance, and organized a conference in October 22-24, 2003 to bring our people together? Today, everybody wants to use that same concept of unity and that the Syriac-speaking Christians are ONE people as a powerful tool in their election campaign. The ADM envisioned the urgency of unity and sought it genuinely because it realized that we could not prosper in future Iraq if Chaldeans, Nestorians, and Jacobites did not come together again and forgot their sectarian divisions. Most importantly, whom do our people in Iraq really support, which was reflected in the past elections? The answer is clear, the ADM.

The Credentials of the ADM

The ADM has been struggling for Assyrians on the ground in Iraq since 1979. The ADM was part of the Iraqi opposition groups meetings in Beirut, London, New York, etc. Most importantly, and under the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, President Bush and the United States government recognized the ADM as a legitimate and democratic opposition group through Presidential Determination No. 2003-05. Why didn't President Bush recognize BNDP or APP for example? Because the Americans know very well who is behind the real Assyrian force in Iraq. The ADM participated in the 15-Member Iraqi Governing Council, in the first Iraqi transitional government of Ayad 'Alawi, and later in the transitional elected government of Ibrahim al-Ja'afari. More recently, the Arab League and its Secretary General Mr. 'Amro Mousa invited many Iraqi delegates, representing notables, parties, movements, and organizations to attend the Iraqi Dialogue Conference in Cairo and the ADM was there as it received a direct invitation.

You see the world is making it clear who has the experience, legitimacy, and is in the leadership position to lead the Assyrians in this critical transitional period.

Why is the ADM on a Separate Slate of 740?

Efforts were made to have all of our people in one slate; however many reasons prevented such efforts to materialize. Certain Christian personalities tried to link that proposed united slate to Christianity and to our church leaders. That was a dangerous path for the Assyrians to follow. In addition, there were disagreements on the principles by which this proposed cooperation was to be achieved, how they perceived our history, and the path this new united slate was to take in the future Iraq. Furthermore, certain of our people from abroad demanded high position in the proposed united slate even when they have no support in Iraq. As far as not being part of any Arab or Kurdish slate then the ADM made it clear that its slate takes pride in representing the Assyrian Chaldean Suryani people as a distinctive ethnic group and part of the Iraqi mosaic and not just as a Christian group. This stand has gained the ADM the admiration of many Iraqi secular and liberal groups.

Why Vote for the ADM and Slate 740?

How does one prove himself? Cheating the Assyrian people through empty talk will not work. When a group wants to prove itself and its legitimacy, it must persistently prove it through its deeds over the years. For example, if Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) and Sargon Dadesho do not approve of the ADM, its policies, and its activities, then Dadesho must show what he and his group have achieved in the past and what is their national agenda. More importantly, he must show what steps he and his group have taken to achieve whatever it is that they are set to accomplish. However, what we have seen, and for two long years, are continuous attacks, smearing campaign, swearing, and bad mouthing of the ADM and its leadership through AssyriaSat, the mouthpiece of Mr. Dadesho. Is this how one proves that he is working for the Assyrian people? I say, show us what have you done. Prove that your achievements, if any, are better than those of the ADM. We must not just attack while doing nothing because we cannot win the support of the people that way. Putting others down and belittling them does not mean that one is better.

One cannot deceive the Assyrian people any more, not in this day of the Internet. This is not Biblical times. Genesis 27 describes how the near death and blind Isaac asked in privacy his first born son Esho for savory meat, which he loved, and promised him his blessings and how Esho went out to hunt for venison. It described as well how Rebekah overheard that talk and told her favorite son Jacob to bring back two good kids of the goats meat, then made Jacob feel like a hairy person like his brother Esho, took goodly raiment of Esho and put them on Jacob, and then sent him off to meet his father pretending to be Esho. Isaac was deceived and he gave his best blessings to Jacob. The Assyrian people will not be deceived because they are not blind and they can see who is accomplishing what, who is really on the ground and giving one martyr after another for the Assyrian cause.

AssyriaSat and Sargon Dadesho on Tuesday, November 29, 2005 questioned that the two Assyrian members of the ADM who were pasting election campaign posters on a wall in Mosul were murdered. Dadesho stated that the photo showing the attacked white car the Assyrians were using was fake. Do we not fear God any more? Have we lost all decency and honor?

What is wrong with the Assyrian groups? Why are they so against the ADM? Why don't they just do their thing and prove themselves to the people?

Before I proceed, allow me to use the Bible again. Genesis 37 explains that Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age and that he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Then Joseph told his brothers how he saw in his dream that he would reign over them and they hated him more. Finally, when Joseph was in the field with his brothers, they stripped him of his beautiful coat and later sold him to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver who took Joseph to Egypt. We then read how Joseph became powerful in Egypt and how his brothers did indeed bow for him later in Egypt.

In Dora, Baghdad, and according to a report posted on www.ankawa.com a supporter of slate 800 hired three Arabs and paid them 15,000 Dinars each to paste the posters of slate 800 over the posters of slate 740, when there was enough space on the same wall to have the posters pasted somewhere else.

Why are the Assyrian political groups putting the ADM down and conspiring against it? Is it because the ADM is the only group that is truly accomplishing something and whom the Assyrian people in Iraq support more than the rest of them combined and more?

My fellow Assyrians,

The people are very much aware of who is really struggling on the ground in Iraq. They have spoken in the previous elections when the slate of the ADM won far more votes from all other Christian groups combined. The people will bless those who are doing the real work and they will translate that blessing through their vote for the slate that represents true unity in its ranks and file and to the slate that truly struggled for our progress and better future. While many other candidates joined non-Assyrian slates to guarantee a free ride to parliament through the large Arab or Kurdish voters, slate 740 is depending on the vote of our own people. This is where the ADM gets its strength. Those on the non-Assyrian slates have obligations to the programs of their corresponding slates. This is logical. Meanwhile, slate 800 whose supporters won some 7,000 seats in the last elections are destined to repeat that result according to all analysts. Even if they gained 10,000 votes, it will not be enough to secure a seat in parliament. My question to those truly patriotic Assyrians who are supporting slate 800, why waste your vote if you know that you cannot win? Why not empower the slate that proved to be a winner in the previous elections? Would you just waste your vote rather than giving it to another Assyrian winner? What kind of an Assyrian patriot are you?

Vote on December 15, 2005

Vote for the sake of the blood that our martyrs gave to our cause

Be patriotic and vote for our united nation

Vote for 740 because it is the right thing to do and because we should not waste our votes on losing slates.