

Free Occupied Assyria
By Fred Aprim
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... And the Iraqi elections concluded.

I want to say to all those who voted for our own slates, God bless you; I stand and bow my head in admiration. You are a true patriot. Thank you for caring about your people and their future and thank you for voting. To those who were capable of voting and did not, I say: You betray mother Assyria. I often ask myself how would these callous people answer to God and to the souls of one million martyred Assyrians murdered since World War I when they meet them in the other world.

In one of her beautiful poems, Mother Teresa asked us to forgive others, to be kind, good, honest and frank despite how others treat us because in the final analysis, she writes, it is between every single one of us and God and that it is never between "us" and "them." Indeed, this is not about this writer and certain people who many believe that they continue to cause damage to the Assyrian national cause. This writer is just curious, how do such people face God every new day? Do they really think that they are doing their people good when they support division, waste much needed votes during elections, ally themselves with the enemy, or follow in the footsteps of self-destructing or self-glorifying losers?

The Figures Speak Loud, Again

Our people as a whole lost in this election. They scattered their votes between the two main slates of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) and the ChaldoAssyrian Syriac National Council represented under slate # 740, and slate # 752 of a coalition of newly established and non-experienced Chaldean groups, a Syriac group, and the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP). As if this was not enough, many ChaldoAssyrian Suryani seem to have voted for two non-Christian slates: the first is slate # 731 of the secular Iraqi Ayad Allawi and the second is the Kurdish slate # 730. This they did whether willingly in relation to slate 731 or due to pressure, harassment, or bribe in relation to slate 730. Our people seem to have voted for Allawi in large numbers because it is in their best interest to increase awareness for a more secular Iraq. Of course, Allawi stands on a secular platform where he supports all ethnic groups regardless to their religious affiliation.

Having stated that, the voting results still confirmed, and beyond any doubts, which native Syriac-speaking political organization the majority of our people do support. In the January 30, 2005 Iraqi national elections, our people made it clear that they supported the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM). Our people returned again to support the ADM in the December 15, 2005 elections despite the vicious and dirty campaign by the few, led by AssyriaSat and the APP. People often write and ask me to ignore those supporting these separatist groups. I simply cannot; they are our brothers and sisters and we just cannot ignore them. I know that they are misguided and deceived by empty slogans and false claims of the very few. I am just puzzled and I wonder, why cannot we simply use reason, logic, fairness, and commonsense in judging others. President Theodore Roosevelt stated: "It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming ..."

What troubles me is that we could not reach out to these few as we failed to make them see the truth. We failed in this endeavor. I want to ask these brothers and sisters: Is one judged by his/her words, shiny slogans, and claims or by his/her deeds? Why is it so hard to distinguish between that who is on solid grounds and that who is building castles in the sky? Yes, we must dream but dreams alone do not achieve things.

An Aware Nation is a Prosperous Nation

As I stated earlier in Zinda magazine, Assyrians, also known as ChaldoAssyrians, Chaldeans, Suryanis, must mature politically and stop wasting their time on trivial issues and they must stop wasting their votes during elections. Patriotism is not about stubbornness, ill heartedness, self-glorifying, personal attacks, or hatred. Patriotism is about focusing on one thing and that is the well-being and prosperity of the people. Patriotism is not about individuals; it is about the cause of the people.

We have witnessed in two elections and under very harsh criticism and personal attacks that the majority of the Assyrians (also known in Iraq as ChaldoAssyrian Syriacs) still support the ADM. Why are we wasting our votes on other groups when we know that they cannot win? Isn't that self-destructive? What are we trying to prove? I just want to ask, is wasting our vote a patriotic act? I am not against pluralism and multi party system; however, our people cannot afford wasting valuable votes one election after another. When Assyria is on the world map, then let every single thought be represented by its own group and contend with others within that political entity of Assyria. Until then, our people must mobilize their efforts and energies behind the most popular, capable, experienced, and most supported group, which is the ADM. We must give the ADM a real chance in times of freedom; give it the time to prove itself without all these continuous digressions by church and non-significant wannabe politicians. The Assyrian Church of the East should have lived up to its responsibilities and not had its synod and its destructive decisions made one month before the elections. The bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church should have stayed away from political matters. Smaller groups must come to grip with the reality of their real size and be reasonable.

In many purely Catholic towns and villages in northern Iraq, our people did not vote for the isolationist policies of newly invented Chaldeanism and slate 752. The claims that 70 to 80% of the Syriac-speaking Christians are Chaldeans and that they will gain 70 to 80% of the votes in places like Nineveh Plains, Detroit, and San Diego proved to be nothing but a mirage. On the other hand, AssyriaSat and other forums have been predicting the rise of the Assyrian Tsunami and thunder represented in slate 800, which proved to be a drizzle in a beautiful autumn day. In California, slate 800 won 240 votes out of 6,788 total voters, meaning 3.5% of the total votes. In Chicago, ADM slate (740) won 4,191 votes whereas slate 800 won only 242 votes. In many towns in Iraq, slate 800 gained no votes at all or perhaps one or two in other cases. AssyriaSat has been poisoning the minds of the viewers in Modesto/Turlock/Ceres/Manteca and the Bay Area for years. It supported and propagated for slate 798 as well; however, it won a meager 17 votes out of the total 1,841 votes in Pleasanton (not even 1% of the total votes) whereas slate 740 (ADM slate) won 812 votes in that station (44% of the total vote).

These figures tell us that those among our people who voted want unity; they stand against isolationists and they believe in the ADM, with the exception of a very insignificant minority. We must mature and stop thinking as small people if we truly want to revive our past glorious history. Another reality that I just hate to admit is that that majority of our people in the Diaspora simply do not give a damn about our people in Iraq. It is only a very small minority that has struggled to help those in Iraq and work hard and sweat to keep the Assyrian cause in Iraq alive. It is heartbreaking.

Great Anxiety

The ChaldoAssyrians are facing great dangers ahead. The Kurds continue to build the Kurdish state infrastructure in northern Iraq while the Americans are still in Iraq. A Kurdish state carved from northern Iraq is only a matter of time, because Kurds simply have the numbers. What will happen to the ChaldoAssyrians? After the partition of Ottoman Empire post World War I in 1921, the Assyrians living within the borders of the empire were divided into four separate national groups: Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian ethnic Assyrians. Are we going to live a *déjà vu*? Are ChaldoAssyrians yet to be divided between two separate Arab and Kurdish states? Could the ChaldoAssyrians ever rebound if they were to be divided yet again to a level of beyond recovery as some predict?

My brothers and sisters please open your eyes widely and look ahead. Save our people and unite.

Assyria is the Answer

Those who lost the elections twice and in a landslide must put their pride aside and think about the future of the people as a whole through the most powerful tool called cooperation and unity. Many Democrat or Republican candidates, for example, run in the U.S. primaries; however, when the competing candidates realize that they are not being supported by the people, they begin to withdraw, concede the defeat, and turn to support the most popular in their party in order to face the rival party. This is the norm in politics; this is how those who really are concerned about their cause act. Activism or patriotism is not about sitting in front of a camera, belittling, smearing, and attacking others day after day and year after year for reason or no reason without providing a strategy and plans for alternatives.

It is time to mature, draw the lines, and reach a mutual consensus for the sake of our children. It is time to analyze the voting results of the two elections that we had in 2005 (January 30 and December 15). Two very obvious facts stand out from the two elections: First, we cannot make it as divided denominations. Second, the ADM should be in the leading position but not seize absolute control. The ADM must reach out to all other groups now that it has proved to be the most popular among our voters and lay out a strategy. We must not allow Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) members like Abd al-Ahad Afram and Fawzi Franso Hariri who won their seats in the new Iraqi parliament by being on the Kurdistan slate from running our affairs. Furthermore, it is conclusive that the people rejected loudly the extremism in both the Chaldean and Nestorian communities even in places that are the strongholds of these two camps.

A very important strategy to bring all the fragmented pieces of the Syriac-speaking Christians of the world together and those in Iraq in particular is to fight for the historical and ancestral homeland of Assyria in Nineveh Plain in northern Iraq. Be an Assyrian, be a Nestorian, be a Chaldean, be a Suryani, be a Jacobite, be a ChaldoAssyrian, be whatever you want to be; however, let's all fight for one historic Assyria. Come and let's support the most popular group; the ADM. Come together with whatever your name is but let's have an agenda to establish Assyria; an Assyria for all and for all names. Let's act as true patriots and leave our differences behind. Let's leave the past behind us and face the challenges of the future together. Let's release today the "Free Occupied Assyria" campaign for the sake of all our children.