

The Message of the 6758 Akitu Parade in Nohadra (Dohuk)

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I waited anxiously to watch the Iraqi *al-Iraqiya* Satellite TV station after learning that it was going to broadcast live segments from the Assyrian New Year (Akitu) festival from Nohadra (Dohuk) on the morning of April 1, 2008 (Baghdad Time). Then when the coverage began, I was all ears and eyes; I did not want to miss one clip or one word. Later that day, I began to look at pictures from the parade/festival that became available on various Assyrian Internet media outlets.

I went out for a drive that night and all I could see flashing on both sides of the highway were images and faces of the 60,000 heroes who turned out to celebrate this national day of Kha b' Nisan 6758. The faces of babies or toddlers that were in their strollers and those of young boys and girls, middle aged, and mostly of those beloved elderly men and women are wedged in my mind for eternity.

I pondered and asked myself: what do the pictures of the Nohadra (Dohuk) Assyrian New Year 6758 parade that was organized by the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) tell us? The pictures assert the absolute fact, which is that our people in Iraq love the land of Assyria (modern Iraq) and that many have decided to stay on the land of the forefathers despite all the hardship and life threats. The Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans, Jacobites, Suryanis, Nestorians and ChaldoAssyrians) delivered the message that they are the original people of Iraq, they are alive, and that they are not going anywhere. They demanded recognition and the right to live free and dignified on their historic lands and the lands of their ancestors. Sixty thousand heroes said no to fear, no to division, and no to submissiveness. The pictures tell us undoubtedly that the majority of the Syriac-speaking Christians of Iraq supported the ADM; they have supported the ADM in 1992 northern Iraq Kurdish regional elections (won 4 out of 5 seats in the regional parliament), they supported the ADM in the two Iraqi national elections of 2005 (won 85% of our people's vote) as they continue to support the ADM today.

On the other hand, Sargis Aghajan, Minister of Finance in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and his Ankawa so-called council (motwa) tried hard to stop and/or undermine this parade. Aghajan gave his orders to his Ishtar TV not to broadcast the event. This presumed Assyrian Satellite TV station (and California based AssyriaSat satellite TV station as well) did not broadcast one moment from this Assyrian national festival. Amazingly, there are still some people out there who doubt that Ishtar TV is a Kurdish propaganda machine. The Ankawa council, which is SELECTED by Aghajan and approved by the Barazani regime, realized that they were going to subject themselves to great embarrassment if they ran their own parade. They have been working hard to set up their own parade, but realized that they did not have the bodies necessary to exhibit a decent march despite the millions of dollars they have been spending to buy people's support. Therefore, on March 27, 2008, the Ankawa council issued a statement in which it announced that the council leadership had decided to cancel their parade because of the murder of martyr Bishop Polous Faraj Rahho. Nice try! I am absolutely sure that if Bishop Rahho was alive, then He would never have approved that a parade that calls for unity, peace, love and progress of people be cancelled, regardless of circumstance. I think that the spirit of martyred Bishop Rahho is joyful today seeing the faces of the 60,000 heroes out there participating in a parade for freedom, peace, love, unity and liberty.

Additionally, reports from northern Iraq indicate that Aghajan and/or his advisors sent their operatives to many Assyrian towns and villages, knocking on doors and telling people that if they participated in the parade that was organized by the ADM, they would lose their share of the KRG monthly ration. Furthermore, clergymen from several churches that are present in the Kurdish region and that are influenced by the Kurdish authorities, ordered their parishioners not to participate in the parade. Well, more people turned out in this year's Akitu parade than that of last year or even those of the years before. More recent reports on the Internet indicate that Aghajan's council suspended the membership of certain Assyrians that went against the directions of Aghajan and his council and participated in the parade, thus lost the only source of income that they had to support their families.

We must understand that the ADM is a grass root movement, which gets its strength from the people. History teaches us that movements that have the people behind them never die and are destined to go forward. True movements will face setbacks due to hurdles, which are mostly planted by the enemy and that is expected. So for those Internet chitchat losers who have lately been gossiping that the ADM was finished as a political organization, I say: Open your eyes and ears, then watch and listen to the message of the 60,000 heroes.

On April 2, 2008, Ashur TV showed clips from the 6758 Nohadra parade/festival and conducted a couple of phone interviews. One such interview was live from Iraq with Raabi Ishmael Nanno, a previous member of the ADM Central Committee. Raabi Nanno spoke eloquently about the activities of the ADM. He stated that the ADM pockets were not filled with enough money to buy people's support. He stated that the ADM, as the ELECTED representative of the ChaldoAssyrians, gives the people a true independent voice in Iraq. He added that there were actual orders by some "kurdistani" Assyrians given to people not to attend the parade. He emphasized that the impressive turnout was despite the lack of funds needed to hire more buses to bring more people from far away places. Scores of Assyrian families had planned to participate in the parade, but could not afford the travel expenses. Raabi Nanno also stated that the members of the ADM were not working to secure a ministerial position or be in parliament, as few claim. He explained that when the ADM first joined the Kurdish regional parliament to represent the Assyrian voice, they were heavily criticized by some for supposedly selling out. Yet, today, those same critics are more "kurdistanis" than Kurds themselves.

Let me say that the Nohadra parade was a message to the world that the Assyrian people are alive, that they will not accept submissiveness, that they will continue to fight for their rightful and legal national rights, and that they will stay in Iraq, their ancestral home. The message was clear in that our people in Iraq want unity and peace and that they are against the division caused by the churches and by few wannabe nationalists and their paper-like organizations. The Nohadra parade was a message to all the weak at heart Assyrians and all those who are working for the enemy that the ADM is and will be the only representative for the Assyrians in Iraq since the 2005 Iraqi national elections instituted that. The parade was a slap in the face of KRG ministers Sargis Aghajan, Nimrod Baito, Romeo Hakkari, and George Mansour and few others; it was a message to them that they could enjoy their personal prosperity and positions, but they have nothing to do with the Assyrian people. The parade was a message to the Kurdish leadership and Barazani as well. The message was that the millions of dollars the Barazani regime was spending to undermine the true Assyrian leadership and Assyrian institutions would not work. It would be a better policy by Barazani to deal fairly and justly with the real and legal representatives of the Assyrian people. Barazani must understand that selecting and then presenting few Assyrian puppets as Assyrian representatives does not serve the Assyrian-Kurdish relations best. The earlier Barazani understands and then accepts this fact, the better it is for both peoples future in Iraq.

In conclusion, I would like to say may God bless our people in Iraq; they have proven time and again that they will not fall in the trap of Barazani's regime and his KDP, Aghajan, Ankawa's SELECTED council, AssyriaSat contemptible slogans, Ishtar TV Kurdish propaganda or in the trap of few other groups or individuals here and there. The message from the parade was thunderous and transparent and I invite every genuine Assyrian soul to take a moment, be truthful to himself/herself and listen to it, because in it is the Assyrian salvation.