

Statement by the Assyrian Confederation of Europe, July 6 2017

Confiscation of Assyrian church properties is not in the Interest of Turkey

The Assyrian Confederation of Europe condemns the recent confiscation of approximately 50 Assyrian church properties by Turkish authorities, namely the state treasury and the Religious Affairs Directorate, the Diyanet.

Invaluable and historic churches, monasteries and cemeteries — many of which are over a thousand years old, and which constitute some of the most profoundly rooted and culturally significant material pillars of the Assyrian identity itself — are now in jeopardy.

This act of confiscation is a grave violation of the human and cultural rights of one of Turkey's most exposed and vulnerable indigenous nations, serving as a stark contrast to the image Turkey has projected in recent years as a Muslim country tolerant of non-Muslims and minority groups in general. This recent development sends a negative signal to Assyrians in Turkey as well as Assyrians in diaspora who have undertaken (at considerable risk) to not only preserve, but repopulate and rebuild, the ancient Assyrian presence in Turkey.

Turkish authorities must work together with the Assyrian community in Turkey to reverse the confiscation of properties and make sure that measures are taken to guarantee that Assyrian ecclesiastical property is excluded from the municipal reform which has facilitated the confiscations.

Turkey must put in place legal and political measures that protect the rights of minorities and shield them from sweeping reforms and decisions that would threaten their very presence in Turkey. The implementation of protective measures and mechanisms for indigenous groups is an integral practice of every modern and democratic society.

The Assyrian Confederation of Europe intends to follow this issue closely and work to help highlight and resolve the problem. Our hope is for a political solution that would avoid the need to transfer the issue to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Assyrian Confederation of Europe, Brussels, 6 July 2017