

The Future of the Nineveh Plain: A Proposal from Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian Political Parties

Further to the unified work paper signed by the Chaldean/Syriac political parties on March 6-7, 2017, we stress the following:

For thousands of years, the Nineveh Plain has been known as the home for the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people and Yazidis. As a result of conflicts and wars throughout history, the area has also become home for Shabaks, Kaka'i, Turkmen and Armenians. Consequently, the area has been one of several nationalities, characterized by peaceful coexistence.

Since ISIS attacked the Nineveh Plain on August 8, 2014, the political and military structure of the area has been in shatters. There is today no clear power structure in the area, but rather a military division that divides the area into one southern and one northern part.

The problems, however, started with the establishment of the state of Iraq in 1921. Due to a lack of good governance by the Ninewah Governorate and its headquarters in Mosul, public administration as well as security did not work properly.

As the area was considered disputed between Baghdad and Erbil, neither the Iraqi Army nor Peshmerga contributed to the defense of the Nineveh Plain upon the ISIS offensive.

If there is to be any real hope for the rebuilding of the Nineveh Plain and the return of its people, it is imperative to unite the Nineveh Plain and to empower its governance as well as security. The best way to achieve this is a Governorate ultimately leading to an autonomous region. We refuse a Berlin wall on the Nineveh Plain.

Nineveh Plain Governorate

We demand the creation of a governorate for our Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people along with the other ethnic and religious indigenous components of the area on an administrative and geographic basis according to the 1957 general census, provided that the governorate has the right to develop into a region in accordance with article 119 of the Iraqi Constitution.

It is important to understand the current state of affairs on the Nineveh Plain. There is today a complete lack of any medium or long term guarantees for the security and protection of the area. As all other actors have failed the people of the Nineveh Plain, there is a great need for political empowerment of this very people.

For political empowerment to happen, there needs to be a reasonable degree of self-administration and self-defense. This includes equality as citizens Iraq for the population and legislative, executive and judicial power, compatible with the constitution of Iraq, for the population in areas concerning ethnical identity, freedom of worship and property rights. It also provides the people of the area to manage its daily affairs and to defend itself. Furthermore, it enables the people of the Nineveh Plain to administratively unify with people of its nationalities in other parts of Iraq, including the KRG. This is especially relevant for Chaldeans/Syriacs/Assyrians, who were torn apart during the last century.

Constitutional basis for a Governorate

The Nineveh Plain Governorate is the combined unified area of the districts of Baghdede (Hamdaniya), Tel Kaif and a part of Shekhan/Al-Shikan, including sub-districts and villages.

The Nineveh Plain Governorate will be under governance of its own population, based upon the pre-2003 demography, and will see no presence of political militias of other Kurdish, Shi'a or Sunni political factions. Nor shall these factions usher political control in Nineveh Plain. This consensus can be confirmed by the interim Nineveh Council (described below), Baghdad and Erbil.

Resolution no. (16) issued by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in its meeting numbered (3) dated on January 21, 2014 passed a preliminary approval (approval in principle) of the establishment and creation of the Nineveh Plain governorate (Governorate).

We call for the implementation of resolution no. (16) through article 116, providing the basis for the federal system of Iraq and 122 of the Iraqi constitution, "Governorates that are not incorporated in a region". This means that a Nineveh Plain Governorate (governorate) would be "granted broad administrative and financial authorities to enable them to manage their affairs in accordance with the principle of decentralized administration" (art 122:2). It also states that the "Governorate Council shall not be subject to the control or supervision of any ministry or any institution not linked to a ministry."

In concrete terms, the responsibilities of the Governorate should include all issues concerning Nineveh Plain that can be dealt with at the level of Nineveh Plain Governorate, which should at least include the following:

1. Education that shall be shaped in such way that it takes into account the religious and linguistic uniqueness of the Nineveh Plain, securing that these characteristics of the population will be reflected on all levels of education present in Nineveh Plain. Furthermore, educational institutions should be free to have a special relation with similar educational and academic institutions outside the Nineveh Plain.

2. Health care

3. Regular governmental services such as the maintenance of sewerages, electricity, water supply, rubbish collection etc.
4. The Nineveh Plain will have the liberty to create its own water and electricity supply if it wishes to do so.
5. Police (not to be confused with self-defense forces)
6. Legislative rights in matters covered by civil status law. At least one court at the same judicial level that is normally present at governorate level in Iraq. Shari'a courts shall not be present at Nineveh Plain given that the vast majority of the population is non-Muslim.
7. The citizens of the Nineveh Plain will be exempt from the clauses in article 26 of the new ID law which refer to the religion of the ID card or passport holder. This in light of the non-Muslim majority of the Nineveh Plain. It should therefore be considered that a local NP government would have delegated authority to issue passports on behalf of its central government.
8. Self-defense (see below for further specification)
9. Supervision of rebuilding, including funding
10. Supervision of, within the framework of the constitution of Iraq, the resolution of all issues related to illegitimate or illegal demographic change, that have taken place during the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and even increased since its fall in 2003.

A Nineveh Plain Region

Article 119 of the Iraqi constitution states the following,

“One or more governorates shall have the right to organize into a region based on a request to be voted on in a referendum submitted in one of the following two methods:

First: A request by one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region.

Second: A request by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region.”

This provides a legal path for a Nineveh Plain governorate to become a region, should its population wish so.

A Nineveh Plain region would have “the right to exercise executive, legislative, and judicial powers in accordance with this Constitution, except for those authorities stipulated in the exclusive authorities of the federal government.” (art. 121:1). It would also be responsible for “the establishment and organization

of the internal security forces for the region such as police, security forces, and guards of the region” (art. 121:5).

We note that the Constitution of the Kurdistan Region, which by definition is part of the Iraqi federal system, “guarantees national, cultural and administration autonomy to the... Chaldeans/Assyrians/Syriacs “ (art. 35). We urge the Government of Iraq to work in this spirit.

After the continuous persecution of our people, culminating in the genocide perpetrated by ISIS, we emphasize the legitimacy of our demands for the Nineveh Plain to ultimately become an autonomous region within the Republic of Iraq.

Interim Nineveh Plain Council

To prepare for the rebuilding phase, the representatives of the local councils, political parties and NGO’s will elect an interim Nineveh Plain Council (reflecting ethnic diversity) that will:

- Coordinate rebuilding efforts and resumption of basic services
- Prepare the establishment of a unified governance for the Nineveh Plain
- Establish police protection
- Support the unification of the self-defense in cooperation with national and international forces.

Security

In the short term, the international community needs to push for police and military units belonging to the same people as the inhabitants of the village or town in which it serves. A military coordination committee among our present militias should be formed under the supervision of the international coalition forces, the Central Government and the KRG to maintain security on the Nineveh Plain, pending the formation of a unified Nineveh Plain Defense Force.

It is necessary to create one single self-defense force for Nineveh Plain consisting of the peoples of Nineveh Plain in cooperation with the international coalition that is already present in Iraq. All defense forces that were created between 2004-17 should be integrated into a central Nineveh Plain Command within the structures of the Iraqi federal forces and local police. A central Nineveh Plain Command will lead the Nineveh Plain Defense Forces. Initially this Command will consist of the following:

1. A representation of all existing militias set up by the CSA people, Yazidis, Shabaks and Kaka’i between August 2014 and May 2017. The militias will at the same time agree that they will dissolve and unify under the Nineveh Plain Command that will be professionalized.
2. Representatives of Iraqi Security Forces and international forces (interim).

3. The commanding officer shall be a military person of high rank from the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people.

The international coalition will directly supply and train the Nineveh Plain Defense Forces in close coordination with the ISF. We suggest that one or more countries of the International Coalition maintain a long-term relation with the Nineveh Plain Command to support confidence and professionalization.

The road towards a Governorate

The U.S. and the EU need to give clear political support to the principles of and self-defense of Nineveh Plain and express their support in political and practical terms for the interim Nineveh Plain Council and the Nineveh Plain Defense Force as described above.

They should engage in a negotiation with the Iraqi central government and the KRG in order to achieve recognition of the interim Nineveh Plain Council and the interim Nineveh Plain Command and an agreement to have a referendum (all as described above).

Reconstruction

The required amount of funds should be allocated for the reconstruction of destroyed properties in the Nineveh Plain. We call for the UN, the EU and the U.S. to arrange an international donor conference for the reconstruction Northern Iraq.

Preferably, UN, EU and US aid will be coordinated with the proposed interim Council of the Nineveh Plain. Aid to the Central Government and to the KRG should be conditional and based upon the treatment of minorities, as this will have a very strong positive impact on the potential for rehabilitation of areas formerly occupied by ISIS/Da'esh.

The Iraqi Government has to undertake its constitutional obligations and to speed up the reconstruction and rehabilitation of our towns in terms of the infrastructures and the destroyed houses in Nineveh Plain and to ensure the safe return of the residents and compensate them fair compensation in order to start a new dignified life protected by the Iraqi state . And to implement that through reliable and accredited groups which have the experience and efficiency in administering such affairs. As well as adopt the invitation and hosting for an international conference involving all reputable countries in order to secure the necessary financial support of the above.

Reconciliation

Justice is a precondition for reconciliation, and every perpetrator of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide against Iraqi citizens must be prosecuted. The UN should work together with the government of Iraq and the KRG to gather

evidence, and the EU and the US need to facilitate the construction of an ad-hoc tribunal for the crimes of ISIS/Da'esh.

(Document to be signed and presented by the political parties of the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people of Iraq in Brussel on June 28-30)

Finally, we invite every true friend of our people to endorse the Brussels Position Paper.

Beth Nahrain Democratic Party

Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union

Chaldean Democracy Forum

Chaldean National Congress

Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council

Chaldo Ashor

Syriac Assembly Movement