



ASSYRIA COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
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Press Release

## New Human Rights Policy Report promises more Protection for Minorities – European Commission must put its Commitments into Practice

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The European Parliament adopted a [report on human rights in the world](#), paying close attention to EU action for the human rights of minorities. The report also comments on a range of new measures, including the creation of an EU Special Representative on Human Rights and calls for a consistent implementation of the European human rights policy. According to the report, which was drawn up by MEP Richard Howitt, traditional national minority communities “have specific needs, which are different from other minority groups, and (that) there is a need to safeguard equal treatment of these minorities with regard to education, healthcare, social services and other public services.” The EU must “promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority”. The report further believes that funding lines for support to civil society and human rights defenders, particularly from indigenous communities, should have their budget increased.

In a speech to the European Parliament EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton highlighted the commitment to encounter “discrimination against people of faith”, mentioning Christians in particular. Baroness Ashton stressed that “the EU needs to strengthen its policy on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, which is so fundamental to a free society.

### **EU must deliver on its commitments by addressing human rights violations against Iraqi minorities**

The Assyria Council of Europe (ACE) welcomes the European Parliament’s step towards a better protection of minorities. However, the European Union must go beyond rhetoric and deliver on its commitments. The European Commission, in particular the European External Action Service, must ensure to use its diplomatic, trade and development powers to support the rights of indigenous and minority people.

Iraqi minorities, like Assyrians (also known as Syriacs and Chaldeans), Sabeen-Mandaeans and Yezidi are being persecuted and systematically driven out of their ancestral country. They are subjected to a pattern of official discrimination, marginalisation and neglect. They neither receive sufficient protection by the Iraqi and Kurdish government nor do they enjoy fundamental rights that guarantee their existence in Iraq. The riots in Zakho that spread across North Iraq late 2011 and the way Kurdish authorities were dealing with the conflict are just one example of unequal treatment of ethnic and non-Islamic minorities within the KRG region. At least 20 businesses in Zakho and a dozen of other

properties and businesses in other places across North Iraq owned by Assyrian Christians were burnt, and more than 30 people were injured. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has not made efforts since to investigate and punish the perpetrators, or compensate the victims of the attacks. At the same time EU representatives are welcoming Kurdish politicians without addressing the human rights situation of minorities in the KRG region. ACE's latest [human rights report](#) demonstrates that a huge exodus has taken place since 2003 which marks the biggest threat to the survival of minorities in Iraq. More than half of the Assyrian community has left Iraq since 2003.

Assyria Council of Europe calls upon the European Commission to pay more attention to vulnerable groups in Iraq in its external policy actions in Iraq, and to take definitive actions to guarantee the rights of Iraqi minorities.