

**SAFETY OF THE LIFE OF NUN VERDE GÖKMEN IN THE VILLAGE ZAZ (İZBIRAK) – MİDYAT,
TUR ABDIN - AND THE GENERAL SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE ASSYRIAN VILLAGES IN THE
REGION**

REPORT

***“HERE, THE STONES NEED TO TALK.
BECAUSE PEOPLE DON'T EXIST ANYMORE”***

**HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION ISTANBUL BRANCH
COMMITTEE AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION**

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1. REPORT SUMMARY

After hearing the situation of Nun Verde Gökmen living alone in the Mor Dimet Church in the Village of Zaz (*Izbırak* as the changed Turkish name) in Tur Abdin (Midyat region), the Istanbul Branch of Human Rights Association, Committee Against Racism and Discrimination, visited the Nun several times and had telephone conversations and correspondence with Isa Acan, chairman of the Zaz Village Association in Hamburg, starting in July 2017. During their visit to the village of Zaz, July 2-7 2017, the Committee visited nine Assyrian¹ villages in the region and met the villagers, pastors and local authorities at the same time, as will be detailed below. In addition to the Nun, the village headman (*muhtar*) Feyzullah Aslan and the Senior Commander of Hah's (*Anıtlı*) Gendarme Station, Sergeant Major Kadir Altıntaş, were also interviewed on September 3-4, 2018.

1.1 Results of the correspondence and interviews:

- ✓ Nun Verde Gökmen, who lives in the 1500-year-old Mor Dimet Church, has been harassed and threatened for many years. Various methods are being tried to terrify her: Unidentified people come to the church door with vehicles and wait for long hours, sometimes shouting 'Allahu-Akbar' while punching the door, sometimes insulting the Nun directly, and on other times, threatening to kill her in case she doesn't leave the church and the village. All of the complaints the Nun has made to the respective authorities were inconclusive due to the lack of evidence, as no one is willing to testify to these incidents.
- ✓ As a result of raids and harassment by village guards (*korucu*) and their relatives during the 1990s, the Assyrian inhabitants of Zaz were forced to leave their village; people from neighboring Heştrek (*Ortaca*) village settled in the abandoned homes while attempts were made to seize immovable assets like fields, vineyards, oak trees of the Assyrians. Cultivated fields of the Assyrians are seized or un-cultivated fields are utilized without permission while even the crops are confiscated. Assyrians coming from abroad are prevented from hiring workers from the neighboring villages to plough their fields and collect their crops. This is made by threatening the neighboring villagers who might be interested in doing these jobs. This is directly related to what has been done to Nun Verde Gökmen. The Nun's departure from the church will make it easier for them to achieve their goals, to seize the entire village.
- ✓ This issue of rights violations in Dayro da Slibo (*Çatalçam*), Derkube (*Karagöl*), Hah (*Anıtlı*), Der-Hadad (Mor Aho Monastery), Bsorino (*Haberli*), Sare (*Sarıköy*) and Kafro (*Elbeğendi*) in Tur Abdin is almost identical in all of the villages which were visited alongside Zaz: As it will be detailed in the relevant section of the report, there have been and are experienced cases of occupation on immovable property such as houses, fields, land, pastures, vineyards and gardens. It is observed that the officials who came for the land registry and cadastral inspection were sometimes threatened by armed tribal members, sometimes "persuaded", and that the cadastral transactions were concluded in favor of the occupiers. The lawsuits were delayed because either the officers who are working on the modernization of the land registry records, or the experts appointed by the court for cadastral observation were threatened or bribed. Fields and land were passed over to the invaders. Assyrians, who migrated to various European countries after the evacuation of their villages by the state and [village] guards during 1990s then with the call of the authorities, returned in the early 2000s benefitting from the "Return to the Village Law" (*Köye Dönüş Yasası*) were not particularly welcomed by the Muslim population, especially by the Kurdish tribes in power, and were threatened and harassed. This hostility continues in the region.

1 Known as *Süryani* in Turkish

- ✓ The churches, monasteries and their ruins in the region that are historically and culturally invaluable are constantly exposed to the destruction of treasure hunters while Assyrian cultural heritage is being destroyed. One of the reasons for the efforts to cast out Nun Verde Gökmen is the desire to dig and dig in the church comfortably for a "treasure", which is believed to be buried in the corridors of Mor Dimet Church.
- ✓ As a result of our last visit and subsequent telephone conversations with the Nun, we learned that some Assyrians from Zaz wanted to remove the Nun from the church and the village, although we were convinced that they were few in number and had no power to do so. From our research and interviews so far, we reached the conclusion that these people have taken such an initiative under the influence of those who targeted the Nun in the village of Ortaca, especially Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan and his surroundings. This conviction is strengthened when we consider the 2009-dated letter mentioned in Section 3.2 below, in which some Assyrians from Zaz [apparently] asked the Nun to leave the village.

1.2 Our Assessment:

As stated under "Evaluation and Conclusion" in section 7 of our report, the Nun is surrounded by a hostile network, left alone and trapped. At the source of this is the fact of the Assyrian Genocide in 1915 (also known as *Sayfo*), where Assyrians have been separated from their homeland, and that those who tried to claim their history and ancestral lands were subjected to various violations of rights, including threats, harassment and intimidation. As detailed in the concluding section of our report, state authorities must take all necessary measures in order the Nun can live without fear in her place.

Again, and as detailed in the evaluation and conclusion section, effective measures should be taken by law enforcement officers to stop land, field, pasture, and oak barren seizures, also against harassment, threats, intimidation, terrorization and similar violations against Assyrian villages of the Tur Abdin region; local supervisors and chief property administrators should take a clear and decisive stand on the side of the victims. The cases that are dragging should be dealt with immediately.

2. RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST NUN VERDE GÖKMEN

2.1 General information about the situation of the Sister

Harassment against the Church, the Nun, and the then-alive Abuna (Monk) Yakup was reported about already in 2013 on the internet media, such as <http://suryaniler.com> and on websites related to freedom of belief. (Annex 1 - Copy of the 24 October 2013 news article published on the Freedom of Belief Website, Annex 2 - 27 October 2013 Haber Türk newspaper's headline "15 People Standing at the Door of the Church").

The Nun reported that she has been threatened with death and insulted by Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan and his brother Nuri Aslan in recent years. When she filed a complaint in the police station of Anıtlı, the public prosecutor's office called him to testify.

In addition, the Nun applied to Midyat's Gendarmerie Station with a petition; the station recorded the interview in a document titled "Certificate of Interview with Persons Applying with a Petition for Safety of Life". The document signed by the interviewer J. Asb. Çvş. Abdullah Cücük and Verde Gökmen is in Annex 3.

The police station also recorded the testimonies of Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan and his brother whom the Nun accused; both denied the allegations. The testimony of Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan, dated from 5.1.2016, and signed by the Experts Sergeants Güven Çakır and Ömer Çatalbaş is given in Annex 4.

However, the prosecutor's office concluded in its decision Nr. 2017/475 that "the suspect's allegations could not be verified, the statements are superficial and do not extend beyond random

conversations, hence no sufficient evidence could be obtained to begin a legal investigation on behalf of the public, and therefore, due to lack of evidence” no prosecution on behalf of the public against the suspects will take place. The decision of the prosecutor's office is contained in Annex 5.

In a letter sent from Midyat’s Gendarmerie Command to Midyat's District Governor Office, dated January 6, 2017, the Gendarmerie Command requested for a one-month protection by precautionary measure for the Nun according to the law "Protection on Call", and provided the Nun with such a protection. (Annex 6 - Letter of the Gendarmerie Command).

However, in our meeting with the Nun, she stated that she could not reach the authorities at the Gendarmerie station by phone and that adequate protection was not provided.

The 'Protection on Call' measure demonstrates the credibility of the Nun’s complaint.

The continued harassment of the Nun by unidentified people causes her to live in great fears alone in the Church, believing that her life is not safe.

It is scary in itself that a woman lives alone in the Church of Mor Dimet on the hill, at the end of a deserted, small-passenger village road, 20 km from the nearest town of Midyat.

Preventing a 63-year-old woman living in the conditions of being harassed by punching the door, swinging threats, and guarding at night by unidentified vehicles, is the responsibility of the State of the Republic of Turkey, of which she is a citizen.

2.2 July 7-12, 2017: Our Observations and Notes from Our Visit

Our Commission members Meral Deli and Ayşe Günaysu's first stops during their visit to Tur Abdin between July 7 and 12, 2017 was the village of Zaz. The Mor Dimet Church was the only church surviving from seven churches prior to Sayfo of 1915. Nun Verde Gökmen lives there. It was reported that three Muslim Kurdish families lived in the village in houses abandoned by Assyrians; though the village appeared abandoned during the visit.

Born in Hah and later immigrated to Sweden with her family, the Nun returned from Sweden in the early 2000s and came to Zaz with Abuna (Monk) Yakup of Zaz. The Monk and the Nun cleaned the church, which the Assyrians restored in the late 1990s, but after leaving their villages, the villagers of Ortaca used it without permission, damaging the tombs of the Saints. It is said that Abuna Yakup was a very knowledgeable person. He died in 2014 and is buried in the wall of the church in a sitting position according to the Syriac Church tradition.

Some of the harassments and threats, subject of our report, against the Nun are issued by unidentified persons; some of them are not from Zaz but are from neighboring villages. A former village guard who was made mukhtar to Zaz by an illegal assignment was Feyzullah Aslan, whose weapon was taken back after being involved in a judicial incident. Members of the Aslan family living in Ortaca played a leading role in attacks, insults and threats against the Assyrians of Zaz.

In order to convey the experiences of Nun Verde Gökmen in the closest way to reality we shortened her narrative by cutting it a little. The Nun spoke Kurdish while a parallel translation was made into Turkish.

2.3 Nun Verde Gökmen’s Narrative:

There's no life left. From now on, my job will be to take note of [car] plates.

A car came in again last week. It was July 1st. A white Doblo. There were two people. They knocked on the door. "Unbeliever, why don't you open the door?" I didn't open it. The people who came looked for the mukhtar and said, "this woman doesn't open the door." They asked the mukhtar for my phone number. Fifteen minutes later, the mukhtar arrived too. He called out to me, I didn't answer. The people who came asked, "is she young or old?" The mukhtar

said, "Never mind, she is a trouble." They said, "you're a mukhtar, you can expel her right away." They were about 50-55 years old.

The Assyrians who are with us say that some of the harassers are treasure hunters, some of them are "allies" of the mukhtar, and in recent years, since the raise of ISIS, Islamic groups also came, threatening the Nun by saying "we'll cut your head."

The Nun continues:

I'm not from here, I'm a peasant of Hah. My mother's name is Nebite. My father is Isa. My father died in 1981. They removed us out of the village and released us into the world. With five brothers and my mother we then emigrated to Sweden. I didn't like life in Europe. I said, I will return to my land again. I stayed in Sweden for five years. I've decided to come back and become a Nun. I've dedicated my life to churches. I came back in 2001. I came back here with Yakup, the monk of Zaz.

When we arrived, they were using the surroundings of the olive and fig trees as toilets (talking about the neighboring villagers from Ortaca who settled in their homes after the Assyrians left the village). Sewage water was pouring into the Saints' graves. They poured toilet water into the chapel. The retreat room was full of wastewater. From the day we arrived, the swearing, the insult, never stopped.

Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan has been a village head here for many years. The mukhtar and his brother attacked Abuna Yakup four times. To beat him, the mukhtar's uncle Cazım Aslan cut the monk's path near the church. This happened three years ago. The monk was sick. He was coming from the hospital. The mukhtar's uncle grabbed the priest's chest and said, "I'm going to drag you to the floor." They beat him, with a rod and fists. Isa [Isa Acan] was with us. I immediately called the Hah (Anıtlı) police station. I said to the police station, "they're attacking Isa and me." The station chief called the mukhtar. We don't know what the result was.

For the first time in 17 years, the two previous commanders were very good. Other than those, no police station commander was interested. Those interested are not serving here anymore.

The threats increased after the monk passed away. A week after his death, six or seven people came to the door, throw stones and used strong language. "Gavur's [Infidel's] son, get out of here," and they swore at me. I phoned the commander, he could hear them on phone and asked me, "are these insults being done to you?" The same commander calls the Altiyol (Sardef) police station, informing that "the [village] guards of your village are insulting the Nun." These are the guards from Derik. The Altiyol commander calls the mukhtar, asking, "why are you insulting the Nun?" The mukhtar answers, "the Nun is lying."

A month before the monk died, on an evening at 10:30 p.m., a pickup, a Doblo car and a taxi parked at the church's door. The monk couldn't get up. He was ill. I was watching from the garden. They split into two groups, while one group walked from the right side of the church, the other group took the left. Those who went to the left became afraid of the dog and couldn't move forward. The people who came spoke Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic. A few of the people who saw me upstairs called out, "gavur [infidel], son of gavur, why are you still staying here?" I said, "this is our land, our church." I picked up a stone and throw it, hitting the black cab. The late monk went out, so they left. Those who came were the son of the mukhtar, the son of the mayor of Dargeçit, and the son of a notable Ismail Kasap from Dargeçit.

Immediately, I phoned Isa, who was in Midyat, and said, "get on the road now, and get the license plates of the cars that leave from here." Isa immediately took the license plate of the three vehicles returning from the village road and reported them to Hah's police station. The station didn't take the issue seriously. This incident was reported in European newspapers and the Turkish press. [2014] After being reported in the press, the authorities and gendarmerie from the police station came, jokingly asking, "did this happen two days ago?" I said, "good

morning, what two days? It happened exactly ten days ago." They're going to say to their superiors, "we were on the spot immediately." I said to the commander, "how many times have I given you plate numbers, you've done nothing. The gendarme next to him looked at his phone and said, "it's true."

After the last New Year's Eve, some big boys came in a Doblo car shouting "Allahu-Akbar." They had black glasses. "Open the door," they said. They knocked on the door, I looked out from the garden and said, "brother, what are you doing here?" "Gavur [infidel], son of a gavur, get out of here," they replied. I said, "my brother, I am a Nun, I am in my own church." They reply: "Lousy, son of a lousy, shut up!" With a hand sign they indicate to cut off my head. "Even if you cut my head off, I won't leave, I said; I called the police station the next morning. "Why didn't you call during the incident?" they asked. "If you would departed at that time, it would have been dangerous for you, I would be gone, the church would go," I answered. Twenty days later, the police station called me and said, "you have made a complaint, you have to go to the prosecutor's office tomorrow to testify."

I went alone to Midyat's prosecutor office to testify. I spoke with the help of a sworn translator. The prosecutor was a woman. She said, "I see, they scared you so much." "Do you know the one who threatened you?" she asked. I said, "there has been so many comings and goings, I can't give you a description," I said and talked about the incident. The female prosecutor said that "certainly these insults cannot be made to Assyrians, especially to a Nun." Then she asked, "how did you spend the days after the incident, aren't you scared?" "Wouldn't you be afraid on your own? I cried from 8 o'clock in the evening until 8 o'clock in the morning," I replied. In the following, the female prosecutor referred me to a male prosecutor. I explained to him, that "I don't have any safety." They said, "We need protection and camera." Both prosecutors said so.

The mukhtar, who organizes all of this, constantly calls. One evening he called 18 times. As I knew his number, I didn't answer. Then he called from a different number. I took the call, he said "Selamünaleyküm". As I asked, "are you the Mukhtar?", he hung up. That happened half an hour later. I gave the second number to the prosecutor. They searched, the line was closed. The prosecutor said, "we will call them all and warn them, we will not let anyone pass along the village road, no one will bother you." I said, "You say so, but when I go, they will come again in the evening." Thereupon the prosecutor gave me a new, a different number of the gendarmerie. "I called you many times, it didn't work," I commented.

The men shot my two dogs with a gun. I went to the police station "What kind of a gun?" they asked. "How should I know?" I replied. The mukhtar came too. "Who did it?" he asked, and I said, "you did it." The police station said, "collect the empty cartridge cases and come." "Is this my job?" I answered and reported this to the prosecutor and said, that "I'm complaining from here till Ankara."

When I returned from the prosecutor's office, Hüseyin, the brother of the [village] guard who died in the bombing, who has always helped me, came with a person from Hah to visit. The mukhtar came too and wandered around for a while and pulled his car somewhere.

The next day the Mukhtar finds Hüseyin in Midyat and asks him, "what business do you have in Zaz?" "I'm helping, I'm bringing food to the Nun," says Hüseyin. The mukhtar insults Hüseyin and threatens him, saying, "you will not be going to take her [food] again". Hüseyin informed me that he was threatened. I told him, "you're close to the police station, go complain." But Hussein was scared, did not go, did not complain. I called the police station. "Without testimony, we cannot take action if the person himself does not file a complaint," they said.

An incident occurred on March 24, 2017: Around 3 pm I was sitting in front of the stove. The mukhtar was waiting outside the door. The police station called and said that the mukhtar called and told them, "let the Nun know that I am in front of the church". Then the commander came. The mukhtar was at the door. The commander had two officers with him. "Do your job,

register, record, do what you need to do," the commander told the officers. I said that, "the Mukhtar is bothering me." "We know," said the commander. "Then, why don't you do something?". The Mukhtar was listening and replied, "Get out of this village, this is our village, you occupied it." He said this in front of the commander. "I have only one cow, what other do I have?" I said. "Take your cow and go away. I'm not going to let your cow go out again, I'm going to write a report about you, I'll complain to the court and give it to the authorities," he said. "Do all the evil you can do. The village is ours, you are Muslim, we are Assyrians and Christians," I replied. "Go wake up the Monk!" he said. "The Monk is in the grave," I said. As we spoke in Kurdish, the commander intervened: "Stop, stop, speak Turkish!" Meanwhile, the Mukhtar raised his hand to hit me. I told the commander, "He tells me to fuck off." "This isn't a Nun, if you want we can go to the Bishop and ask," the Mukhtar said. "Let's go," I said. There was no comment from the commander. I started to cry, I said, "he's threatening me." The commander kept quiet; "I'll call you when I go to Midyat," he said, but he didn't. I called him the next morning twice, it was busy. I told this to Isa. He called the district governor, never got an answer. The former district governor Oğuzhan Bingöl used to always answer his call, he took care of everyone, he was fine. That governor is gone.

2.4 Our testimony:

During the conversation with the Nun, that is, on the afternoon of July 7, 2017, Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan came to the church in a way that was aimless, unrelated to the duty of the village headman, and punched the door, insisting that the door be opened. Our friends, commission members, became witness how the Nun got trembled with fear and some kind of horror; they tried to calm him down, left the church and met with him, introducing themselves to the Mukhtar. Our friends said that the Mukhtar seemed so clearly intoxicated, that he was angry about the Nun, saying, "why doesn't she open the door, I'll see her, she won't open the door for me, tell her to open the door." He didn't listen to arguments that "a woman who lives alone is afraid," and continued his reaction without listening to the explanations and not telling them why he came and what he wanted to discuss. While all of this was happening, the Nun blushed of excitement, fear and anxiety, and our friends were afraid of rising tensions; they saw her hands shaking. Indeed, after the Mukhtar left, the Nun said, "I can't talk anymore today, I can't go on, that's all." Our friends left in the dark with the uneasiness of leaving the Nun alone in this deserted place, in the church.

Following our July 2017 Tur Abdin visit, our commission member Ayşe Günaysu shared our observations with the public in an article titled: "Alone in the Church," published in Agos newspaper of August 18, 2017. See <http://www.agos.com.tr/en/yazi/19199/kilisede-tek-basina>

Following the publication of the article, we learned that three officials from the regional Directorate of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, one of whom being a woman, visited the Nun, asked about her needs, and offered help anytime.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES FROM OUR VISIT TO TUR ABDIN ON SEPTEMBER 3-4, 2018

Receiving the news in August 2018 that the harassment and threats against the Nun Verde Gökmen were continuing, the co-chairman of the Human Rights Association and member of our Committee Eren Eskin, along with Ayşe Günaysu visited the Nun in Zaz, met with the village Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan in the center of Midyat, and the commander Police Station in the Anıtlı, Senior Staff Sergeant Kadir Altintaş, and interviewed them on September 3-4. Our interview notes are below.

3.1 Report of Nun Verde Gökmen

On July 15th, they arrived in two taxis [sedan-type vehicles]. 9 to 10 people. They looked tall, were bearded and had baggy trousers. (Watching and listening from above). They went to the dog's side, and said, "her dog was killed, she bought a new dog?"

They knocked on the door. I was watching quietly. They said aloud, "Armenians live here." "We will do exactly what we did to the Armenians before," they added. Then they left. Evenings hours 7:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. It was dark.

Three days later, on Sunday, 7 to 8 people arrived in a transport-type black car. Time approximately 20:00 to 20:30. They spoke to someone on the phone. "Tell her to open the door, or you come here," they told the person on the phone. At one point, when the word "mukhtar" was mentioned, I realized that the person they were talking to was the Mukhtar [Feyzullah Aslan]. "We need to make this village worse than it used to be." Then they left towards Dargeçit.

On August 25th, it was around 3:30 pm, I opened the door of the church, saw a taxi [sedan type vehicle] with a person inside, the car was close to the door. I was so scared that they'd kidnap me, so I went inside. When I looked again, I saw that the car was still there and its door was open. A man was sitting inside. Then he went out to open the trunk. He opened the trunk, turned around, walked to the side of the church, then came and stood before me, holding a phone in his hand; he stood there for a while holding the screen towards the church [like taking videos or photographs]. A little later a black car arrived, it was full. As they arrived, the other man left. After they left, the son of Şemsettin [Şemsettin Akyüz] came; [Serdar or Sedat Akyüz] looked for the dogs. "Maybe she is with the cow," they said. The man next to Şemsettin's son realized that I was watching them from above, "Is she that?" he asked. "Are you asking about me?" I replied. "Are you the owner of the dogs?" he said. "Yes," I said. I was scared.

At night, between 20:45 to 21:00 o'clock 3-4 people came with their beers. Electricity was cut. They hit the door four or five times. "There is no one here, but we were told that she was here," they spoke among themselves. They stopped in front of the church for about 15 - 20 minutes. Then they left. The dogs were barking. One wanted to throw stones at the dog, the other blocked it, saying "it is an animal, it is a sin, don't do it."

Around 10:00 pm that same night, a gray windowless van [panelvan type] arrived. There were five or six people in the car. The driver and the person next to him got out of the car. The dogs began to attack even though they were tied up. I picked up a rock to throw [to the windshield of the car]. "There's no sound coming from inside, the dogs are annoying," they said. They stayed for 15 or 20 minutes and left.

Yesterday [September 2nd] around noon, Assyrians, together with Paulus arrived. We had tea in the garden. They took a photo. A car arrived at about 1:30 p.m. When a sound was heard from below [from the front of the church], one [of the Assyrians] went down and opened the door, and closed it immediately. Then he went again and opened the door. The car was parking there. Paulus saw them. They had beer bottles in their hands, and guns in their waistbands. Paulus hesitated, "hope it is a good sign, why are you here?". "We'll sit in the garden, have some fun," they said. "What garden, there is not even water here; there are beautiful gardens in Anıtlı, you can go there," Paulus told them. "We will go there anyway." They asked Paulus: "Are you staying here?" "No," he says, "we'll go." I'm silently warning him not to say "we" [so they wouldn't know she is alone].

Our Assyrian friend, who translated the Kurdish narrative into Turkish told us that, some kind of a new campaign against the Nun was started, that she made wine in the church and that she let men into the church. He added that Assyrians were among those who made these rumors.

Among the events described above by the Nun are situations that do not directly cause threats or harassment; however, in a village, where there are no Christians left, where a Nun lives alone in the church, aimless and unreasonable visits always cause suspicion and fear especially considering the Nun's previous experience.

3.2 Interview with the Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan

On the same day Eren Keskin and Ayşe Günaysu called and made an appointment with the Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan, who was described as “the main culprit for the grievances that the village has suffered” by Isa Acan, the chairman of the Zaz Village Association in Hamburg. Isa Acan fought personally for years against problems such as land extortion, harassment, threats, and bullying in Zaz. The meeting took place at Artuk Bey Café, a local products market and café owned or operated by the son of Feyzullah Aslan. When we went there we found out that the partner of the business is Robert Tokgöz, an Assyrian, residing in the center of Midyat.

When we told Mukhtar Feyzullah Aslan the reason for the interview, he said that he had no hostility towards the Nun, on the contrary, that he was trying to help her. On the other hand, he was reproducing the sexist mentality of the male society, targeting the Nun's gender identity, he conveyed the ugly rumors about the Nun's past, as if they were true. According to him, all of the Nun's claims, harassment, threats, mysterious vehicles that came and parked at the church gate were lies. The Nun was lying altogether, for him.

He pulled a letter from the file he brought with him, and asked if we knew about it. It was the first time we'd seen that letter. It was written on the official letterhead of the Zaz Village Association in Hamburg, dated 2009, and addressed to Nun Verde Gökmen, stating, that she was excommunicated by the church, illegally residing in the church, and that because of her the village was also excluded; therefore, she was requested to leave the church and the village immediately. According to the letter, this decision was taken by the board of directors of the association; the letter was signed by the members of the board of directors. In addition, the names of the village's clergy and civilians were listed under the text.

Later, two of the Assyrian opinion leaders of the region, that we met in Midyat, and who were in favor of the Nun, stated that this letter was "forged", that it was denied by the same signatories; they forwarded us a copy of a document on this topic which was written and signed in 2018.

Isa Acan, whom we spoke to by phone on our return to Istanbul, said that the letter which requested to expel the Nun from the village did not reflect the truth, and that he would meet with the signatories personally. He later reported that the people he could reach said they had not signed such a letter. Though, he was not able to reach some of the signatories.

The copies of both writings are in Annex 7 and 8.

It is a widespread belief among the Muslim Kurdish community and some Assyrians that the Nun has been "excommunicated" by the church. However, a cleric we met in Diyarbakir explained that excommunication cannot be issued unilaterally, without defense and presentation to a spiritual council. Other sources have also stated that the information of excommunication is not true, but it is true that local Assyrian institutions keep the Nun at a distance.

When we interviewed Feyzullah Aslan in the Artuk Bey Café, he indicated that some of the young people who worked there were Assyrian, pointing to a trouble-free, brotherly live together; he called one of the young people and asked him, "tell me, are you having a problem?" The boy said, "No, we don't have." Feyzullah Aslan then mentioned the shop's partner, the young Assyrian Robert Tokgöz, and introduced him to us.

Robert Tokgöz confirmed Feyzullah Aslan, in line with their business relationship. “That woman,” he said, referring to the Nun, wasn't actually a Nun. He said that “he used” to visit the Nun, but he was no longer interested, because the Nun always wanted “something.” When we asked him what she wanted, he said, "tea, coffee, sugar." Asking whether she wanted other things except for personal consumption, e.g., large amounts of cheese, food or other things, "No, no," he replied.

We left after informing the Mukhtar, that as her lawyer, Eren Keskin will take legal action based on the Nun's complaints, and that we will talk to the command headquarters, while knocking on any door needed.

3.3 Meeting with Anitli's Police Station Commander

On the same day, Eren Keskin and Ayse Günaysu went to the recently built fortified police station in the village of Anitli (Hah), called "Kalekol" in the region, and met with Commander Senior Sergeant Kadir Altıntaş.

Eren Keskin, as the Nun's advocate, said that we would like to inform the police station about the fact that she is and will be following on her complaints.

The commander said that he knew the Nun very well, that he was aware of her complaints, he has her file, he definitely visited her, and that the Nun was happy to see him. Unlike the Mukhtar and others, he did not claim that her complaints were ungrounded. He said that she was a woman who was "alone, in a difficult situation, unjustly treated, in need of help," so that she could sometimes experience extreme fears and that this should be understood.

He was told, that in order to protect the Nun, the establishment of a camera system to monitor the four sides of the church would allow to legally verify the Nun's complaints. The commander added that he would also ask the company which will install the police station's camera system to install the church's camera system too. He promised this. This statement was not fulfilled at the time this report was written, that is to say, one year later.

The commander also gave Eren Keskin the new phone number he had changed and told him that if the Nun has a complaint, she could call him; he would be there "within 3 minutes."

However, from our visit in 2017 and our last visit, we knew that the same commander, despite he was asked for help and received complaints, did nothing to prevent threats and harassment or to provide protection to the Nun.

We also learned from Nun that the commander recently told her, "don't call me, call the head of the village guards, if needed." The Nun said that the aforementioned guard is one of the sources of her problems.

3.4 The conclusion we derived from our visit

We left Midyat, further consolidated in our opinion that the Nun lacked the safety of her life and the right to live in safety without fear. Our impression and observation solidified, that her most basic needs are met with difficulty in the church as she is left alone. For example, the Nun has difficulty in water supply. Since there is no water in the village, the municipality must provide water at regular intervals. However, since the tanker does not come very often, the Nun has been repeatedly staying dehydrated for long periods of time. Since the church is a place of worship, this obligation of the public becomes even more important.

4. UNLAWFUL SEIZURE OF PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE VILLAGE OF ZAZ, VIOLATION OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

4.1 The village of Zaz during Sayfo

- In 1915, prior to Sayfo, which means "sword" in Assyrian, Zaz was a completely Assyrian village. Midyat and its vicinity, i.e. the Tur Abdin region, many villages had completely Assyrian population, many others had mixed Assyrian-Muslim Kurdish population. 200 Assyrian families were living in the village. The Assyrian population was around 2000.
- When the genocide started against the Christian peoples of Asia Minor and Northern Mesopotamia in 1915, what happened to all the Assyrian villages of Tur Abdin occurred also

in Zaz. Zaz too was besieged by the Muslim Kurdish tribes from the vicinity. The people took refuge in the Mor Dimet Church, where Nun Verde Gökmen lives today, and took shelter in two mansions in the village, then surrounded by high walls, but did not survive the massacre.²

- The majority of the Zaz's inhabitants were slaughtered, but the remaining few Assyrian groups were rescued by a unit arriving here under the command of an Ottoman officer. But this [surviving] group was split in two parts, first smaller group was taken to Dargeçit (Kerboran), the other to Midyat.
- The purpose of their transfer to here was to collect and bury the slaughtered Assyrian corpses in the streets, which were piled up in front of some houses, the leftovers from cats and dogs, degraded, wormed, emitting unbearable scents to the environment. Because it was believed that Muslim who touched a Christian's corpse would become "filthy." Christians had to collect and bury the Christians' corpses. In the words of an Assyrian, "killing a Christian was not a sin, but it was a sin when his blood smeared on hands, feet, and on the body of the killer." Many of the Zaz's Assyrians who survived the massacre started to vomit, some fainted. But the captain forced them to carry out their orders, saying he had saved their lives on this condition.³ The desperate Assyrians collected and buried the corpses. But those who were taken to do it were either killed after they were done, or they died in hunger and thirst.

4.2 Today's Assyrians of Zaz are descendants of Sayfo survivors

- There were no Assyrians left in the village after Sayfo. A small number of surviving Assyrians took refuge in the neighboring village of Gülveren (Bahvar) in exchange for slavery, shepherding, laboring, and weaving for Muslim Kurds. People from neighboring villages took young boys and girls from the Assyrians who had taken refuge in the church which they could use for their work, "as if they were picking animals from the market."
- A handful of surviving Assyrians from Zaz returned to their villages around 1920. Today's Zaz people are the children of the returnees. There is only one exception, and that is an Assyrian whose entire family was killed in Ortaca (Heştrek) and his wife was forcibly taken away, reluctant to go to that village again.⁴

4.3 Zaz in the 1990s

- The second disaster that happened to Zaz after Sayfo began in 1992. In the conflict environment of the period, in the days when the village guards exercised their infinite powers with great pleasure. The long-established Christian hostility led to the intensification of the pressure of the village guards on the Assyrians. As mentioned frequently in our interviews, the concept that "infidel's [gavur's] property, life, honor is permissible", was widespread.

² David Gaunt, *Katliamlar, Direniş, Koruyucular*, Belge Yayınları, 2007, s. 374

³ ibid. Also see Kemal Yalçın, *Süryaniler ve Seyfo*, Book 1, p. 361-384 for the massacre of Zaz during the time of Sayfo. For the details of the survivors made to collect and bury the destroyed bodies of the Assyrians in Kerboran (Dargeçit) see p. 380.

⁴ From our e-mails with İsa Acan on 27 May 2019.

- On February 18, 1992, the village was raided at night by [village] guards and their relatives. By putting a gun to Mukhtar Gevriye Akyol's head at least 20 million Lira ransom money of that time was taken from the villagers. The soldiers that were passing by arrested the driver carrying the robbers at the time of the robbery, and based on his confession, others were also arrested; but no information was given to the villagers of Zaz about any legal action taken against them.
- In April 1993, the [village] guards told the Assyrians of Zaz that they would be killed if they do not leave the village. Several families immediately left the village and settled in Midyat. They hoped that after a while the situation would improve, but it didn't; they couldn't even take care of their crops. The powerful family of the neighboring village of Ortaca (Heştrek) planted the fields of the Assyrians. When the summer came, the families in Midyat went out to take their own grapes, figs, melons and similar products, but were expelled. An Assyrian woman who is still alive today tells, that the headman of the guards said, "if you come again, I will crush you on the Midyat-Dargeçit road, take out your intestines, and measure the Midyat-Zaz road with them."
- Assyrian families were constantly harassed by frequent raids on the village by guards, robbing money, belongings and property in the houses, and sometimes detaining and oppressing the villagers for allegedly giving bread to "terrorists". An Assyrian who reported the raid, fled and hid in the neighboring village; he was found there and beaten to death with gunstock. In our interview, this person's son said that, as a result of the begging of neighboring villagers to the guards, his father "narrowly escaped death." and "did not forget those sufferings until he breathed his last breath in Germany". He adds, that the authority in the hands of the village guards is stronger and more valid than the authority of a prosecutor, making it an unlimited authority.⁵
- Under these conditions, in 1993, the Assyrians of Zaz left their village and immigrated to various European countries, particularly to Sweden and Germany.

4.1 Isa Acan's endless struggle for rights

4.1.1 Who is İsa Acan?

- İsa Acan is the grandson of one of the few Assyrians who survived the Sayfo in 1915.
- The [Turkish] author Kemal Yalçın, for his book "Assyrians and Seyfo" interviewed Melke Gabriel from the village Hapisnas in Tur Abdin. According to the oral narrative, in August of 1915, at the beginning of Ramadan, as in all parts of Tur Abdin, the village of Zaz was also besieged by neighboring Kurdish tribes for the purpose of massacre and looting. As described above, Assyrians took shelter in the two large mansions and the church in the village; 365 or 366 of them came out of their hiding place, believing in the oath given on the Holy Koran. They were taken between Zaz and Ortaca village to a place called Perbume, where they were handed over to groups of perpetrators waiting for them, and were killed there.
- As described above, when the Ottoman Captain came to the village with his unit and removed the Assyrians who had taken refuge in the church by providing their safety, as İsa Acan puts it: "They selected the young people they need in their villages, among them young girls and women, as they were picking up animals from the market." Among the people taken by the neighboring villagers were İsa Acan's grandfather and siblings, who were children at that time. The children were taken home by a family of Gülveren's peasants and served as shepherds of the family for years. His grandfather's parents watched in tears how their children were being taken away, unable to do anything. They would never see each other again. They were among those who were taken to Midyat to collect and bury the

5 From our e-mails with İsa Acan on 09 May 2019.

decomposed Assyrian bodies in the summer heat. Never again they would hear from them again.⁶

- Isa Acan was born in Zaz in 1955, attended primary school in the village and continued his education at the Mor Gabriel Monastery. In the following, he first went to Istanbul and then to England in 1975, and in 1976 he moved to Australia. After serving [his military service] in Amasya in 1988, he returned to Hamburg, Germany at the end of 1999. Here he founded the "Mesopotamian Cultural Center" and collected thousands of books, magazines, articles, tapes and videos from all cultures and languages of Mesopotamia in order to create a library. The bibliography, which "will be the first in the world", is still under way regarding these cultures, whose heirs are the Assyrians.
- In 2004, he was one of the founders of Zaz Village Association. Since 2005, he has been fighting against the seizure of the Assyrian properties in the village. In this process, he was subjected to threats and physical attacks, which were confirmed by the judiciary. His lawyer in Midyat, has been fighting against the seizure of goods, property and products by forcing legal means in recent years.

4.1.2 Rights violations since 1993 and Isa Acan's appeals for each

- Although there was four Kurdish families in the village, in 1994, Feyzullah Aslan, a villager from Ortaca, as stated earlier in our report, was made village headman by "appointment" and not by election. Against the will of Zaz's people he makes decisions concerning property. His brother, Mehmet Nuri Aslan, represents Zaz in the Agricultural Chamber; however, he has no cultivated land in Zaz.
- As Assyrians of Zaz live abroad, they regularly come to Midyat in the summer months since 2006 in order to sow their land, to plow and collect crops. However, Muslim Kurds from neighboring villages occupied the houses of Assyrians who had to flee the village of Zaz. Kurdish families not from Zaz live in four houses. Assyrians therefore cannot stay in their own homes and have to stay in Midyat district paying rent. Annex 8 - a, b and c are petitions dated 10.10.2010, 5.10.2011, 28.06.2013 and filed by Isa Acan to the Governor's Office and Governorship on this issue.
- The villagers of neighboring Nurlu, Ortaca, Çatalan and Gülveren, careless of the owner of the lands, plowed some of the Assyrian fields, and released their animals on their vineyards and fields that destroyed some of the products. Annex 9 contains a petition filed by Isa Acan to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission for the Investigation of Human Rights, dated 11.11.2017, providing a summary of all rights violations.
- The people whose names are mentioned in various petitions and applications, collect the products, sumacs, almonds, peanuts, grapes of the Assyrians of Zaz and seize the income of these products. İsa Acan prepared long lists of the owners of the products, the location and parcel numbers of the lands, the names and surnames of the unauthorized collectors of the products and submitted them to the entitled authorities. The file titled Product Extortion Notice sent to the Consulate General of Hamburg, dated from 14.10.2016, and the petition written to Midyat's District Governorate are included in Annex 10. These people deliberately cut and destroy oak trees in the forest and registered land of Zaz. See. Annex 9.
- During the land registry cadastre operations carried out in 2005, the land borders were drawn in the middle of some of the Assyrian fields which were left within the borders of neighboring villages were confiscated. See Annex 9.

⁶

From our e-mails with İsa Acan on 27 May 2019.

- Assyrians of Zaz were repeatedly threatened, insulted and physically attacked by people from the village of Ortaca. Abuna Monk Yakup, who was living in the Church of Mor Dimet at that time and while bedridden, he was assaulted by these people, subjected to insults, threats and sycophantic profanities. Isa Acan was attacked in the same way.
- Although Zaz was forcibly evacuated, it was not considered one of the “evacuated villages” [formally]. Thus, the law no. 5233 regulating “damages resulting from terrorism” was not applied and the damages were not compensated for. Although an application was filed to the Consulate General of Hamburg on the Consulate’s recommendation to benefit from the law, the application was not forwarded to the relevant authorities and no response was obtained. (Annex 11- Isa Acan's application regarding petitions sent to the Governorate of Mardin to which he has not received a reply.)

5. VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS IN ASSYRIAN VILLAGES VISITED IN TUR ABDIN

"HERE, THE STONES NEED TO TALK. BECAUSE PEOPLE DON'T EXIST ANYMORE."

5.1 The situation across the villages

The story of rights violations in Dayro da Slibo (Çatalçam), Derkube (Karagöl), Haḥ (Anıtlı), Der-Ḥadad (Mor Aho Monastery), Bsorino (Haberli), Sare (Sarıköy) and Kafro (Elbeğendi), which were visited alongside Zaz in Tur Abdin, is almost identical in all of the villages: As it will be explained in detail in the relevant section of the report, there have been and still are experienced occupation on immovable properties such as houses, fields, lands, pastures, vineyards and gardens. It is observed that the officials who came for the land registry and cadastral inspection were sometimes threatened by armed tribal members, sometimes "persuaded", and that the cadastral transactions were concluded in favor of the occupiers. The lawsuits were delayed because either the officers who are working on the modernization of the land registry records, or the experts appointed by the court for cadastral observation were threatened or bribed. Assyrians, who migrated to various European countries after the evacuation of their villages by the state and [village] guards during 1990s then with the call of the authorities, returned in the early 2000s benefitting from the “Return to the Village Law” (Köye Dönüş Yasası) were not particularly welcomed by the Muslim population, especially by the Kurdish tribes in power; and threats, harassment, and animosity continues.

Considering that monasteries and churches constitute the cultural heritage of Assyrians, the most typical illegal methods applied are making construction on church land, enclosing and claiming the lands. The aim of these methods is to gradually spread in the area and to melt and destroy Assyrian lands.

One example of this is a constructing a building on the Mor Aho Monastery grounds near Midyat. Mor Aho is a site assigned for protection in public interest (*SİT alanı*) and is now in ruins. Inside the monastery grounds, in the vacant land, where there was no settlement, a strange building, supposedly a house was built, and surrounded by walls to include even the monastery. The monastery, a historical structure thousands of years old from the pre-Christian pagan era, is trapped within the walls of the house. The Monuments Council was approached, because this was built inside the protected area without permission. The Monuments Council replied that the municipality should do the demolition as the construction started when the application was made. However, arguing that the location falls within the borders of Midyat municipality, Mardin’s large-metropolitan municipality referred the case to Midyat; the latter informed that Mardin's large-metropolitan should take care of the issue and thus, for years, this building and the walls with wires attached, have not been demolished.

The rights violations in the villages we interviewed during our visit are briefly listed below.

5.3 DERKUBE (KARAGÖL)

Narratives:

In 1995, the village was burned and evacuated for security reasons. "We've been accused of aiding the terrorist organization. People from neighboring villages (Zahuran region) were reporting to the authorities that we were harboring the terrorist organization. They were accusing us with the things they did. They said, 'we will expel you from here, we will turn your church into a mosque'."

The aim was to evacuate the village and seize the land, cut down the trees in the forests of the village. When we evacuated the village, the first thing they did was to cut the forest. They cut the forest and sold it.

During the "return" era in 2002, the armed men of the tribe came and threatened the Assyrians.

During the cadastral operations in 2006, the armed men of the neighboring Kurdish tribe came when the cadastre officers arrived for the inspection claiming that they are also making measurements. They threatened the officers and us by pointing their guns. Two tribes, one from the HDP, the other being [village] guards, reached agreement with the officer during the cadastral operations resulting in the fact that the land of the village, fields with deeds, vineyards, and gardens to become common. They shared all the land except the new houses, old houses of the village, and the church.

More than 250 acres of Assyrians land have been seized. There are 54 cases filed by Assyrians, more than half of which have been ruled in favor of Assyrians. The rest is pending. And more than 10 locations have not been explored yet, but will be done.

Groups come to the village from time to time, threaten and harass. The police station is being reported, but the police station is not interested.

One of the tribes that seized the land is from the HDP. In 2013, three commissions were established by HDP members at various times, unable to solve the problems, or were somehow neutralized.

Vecdi Erbay's article entitled 'Thief Partners of Derkube', published in the Newspaper Duvar on August 24, 2018, describes this process.(See: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/hayat/2018/08/24/derkubenin-hirsiz-ortaklari/>)

Following this article, inspection was made. Judges were appointed by the court to do the investigation, and experts were appointed. During the whole process, Assyrians, who sued, were verbally attacked and sometimes threats were made to the plaintiffs in front of the judge. During a discovery, an attempted physical attack on an Assyrian was made in front of the [village] guards tasked with providing security.

Assyrian families determined to defend their rights on their land became the targets of a heavy antagonizing campaign, accused of being "obstinate" and challenging the region's powerful tribe. The more they resist, the more anger they face.

The claiming tribes took advantage of their economic and social power to sometimes intimidate and make threats to the safety of parents and children of Assyrians, who they regarded suitable to succeed with and drive them to a point to give up; in doing so, they managed to get some on their side. In this way, the Assyrians who changed their ranks were able to damage the position of the Assyrian side during the trial processes, rendering them powerless in the face of the law, resulting in further audacity of the tribe.

In fact, this summarizes the ongoing pressures in the entire Tur Abdin region.

5.4 DAYRO DA ŞLİBO (ÇATALÇAM)

Reports:

The tribe of the neighboring village seized the fields of the Assyrians. Cadastral study began in 2009. The officers who were appointed by the court to do the inspection escaped under pressure from the armed occupiers. Lawsuits have been filed. In some cases, location inspection was initiated in 2015. The cases ended in the interest of the Assyrians; however, as the occupation attempts continue, crops cannot be cultivated in these lands and yields obtained from the field for the last 20 years. Three Assyrian families live in the village.

Thirty years ago, there were 25 or 30 families. They were forced to migrate. Pressure from neighboring villages and tribes continues from time to time. Through threats and insults they want us to evacuate the village.

Because of the recent events, villagers who have been abroad can't even come to visit since last year.

Under pressure from Assyrians in Sweden we received support from AKP leaders.

Statements made during inspections: Assyrians: "This land is ours." Muslims say, "don't say so." "It's all God's. Don't claim God's places for yourself."

An Assyrian lady is telling me. She has a 15- to 16- year-old daughter and a son. When they were in primary school, "only two of them were Assyrians in the class. The children have rebelled, we don't want these two Christians in our class. The teacher silenced them all." "I won't hear it again. No Christians, no Muslims, everyone is one, equal here," she cites him. He silenced them. However, children's attitude is a direct reflection of the attitude towards Assyrians in the region.

5.5 BSORİNO (HABERLİ)

Only Assyrians live [here]. One of the most important churches in this village is Mor Dodo. It was a place of asylum and resistance during Seyfo.

Mukhtar Shamun Güzel explains:

We're 30 families. The village was founded before Christ. Some of the buildings are ruins others are standing. They adopted Christianity in the 3rd century.

Sariköy (Sare) was established during the time of Prophet Ibrahim; these are fields over there, and the village is over there. Not very impacted during Sayfo, but many people were killed afterwards, during the post-1915 Republic period, including those massacres in the 1930s. They even shot the workers in the field. The killers were from the surrounding Kurdish villages. Shoot him and take his property. Our guys were solid-sturdy. They stayed here. Between 1919 and 1926 Muslims still lived in this village. They returned in the time of Mustafa Kemal. In 1910, books were taken from the libraries here. Making peace - is verbal. Resisted during Sayfo, but then they were blindsided, deceived, and killed.

In fact, our people were killed after Sayfo. People were killed for very simple reasons. The man is [village] guard and is shooting a citizen with a weapon provided by the state. Hanna Dolabani, the Metropolit of Mardin, has written a book and talks about this.

We lived in Sariköy (Sare) 10 years ago. In 1994, the [village] guards settled there. When the owners returned in 2004, the State requested them to leave. They did beat and intimidate our children. Sariköy was evacuated, now the original owners settled.

There are 2-3 families living in Sariköy, while those in Europe did not leave the village empty.

They wanted to come again, the guards wanted to establish a police station here; we complained to the State, no permission was given.

They even want to take ownership of our forest. They have their own forest, they don't cut it down, they want to cut down the forest of Assyrians. We say if you're poor, we can help you, you don't need to steal. At the end, they go, and cut down the Assyrian's forest.

There is a doctor at the Idil hospital, he said: "They are letting us live." How are you? The better it can be, the better we are. They let us live.

In 2006, the cadastre inspection came; there are seven villages around, with all of them we live in hostility. They seized our fields, our land, our forest; in order not to begin a fight, we accepted. There is nothing we can do. As the saying goes; the lesser of two evils.

Priest Saliba reports:

I'm from here, born here. But 20 years ago, at age 20, I went to Switzerland. I came back in 2004; the years 1982-83-84. Teaching Syriac was very difficult, we learned Syriac secretly, it was a very difficult time. Then I emigrated. I got citizenship there. They stripped me of my citizenship in Turkey. Around 2010, I applied again for the Turkish citizenship. I waited a year or two. They said you'd go to the army. We waited a while. I received a letter saying your citizenship was granted. I applied for military service. In 2004 I served for a month [exempted] military service, came to the village, dug the foundation of my house.

The reason I wanted to become a Turkish citizen was the return I had in mind. I brought my family. I decided to live here. My children were born there. Then I built a nice house so they wouldn't say I forced them to come; when they were at home, they felt they were in Switzerland.

Bringing the children was so hard for me; I took them out of school. My elder boy quit school, conditions were difficult. My other two sons, and my daughter studied in the village of Karalar, until secondary school. My daughter visited a classroom for a year. But then my son and my daughter went back to Switzerland.

Our livelihood is viticulture and livestock. We've almost no fields, we've got land which was seized. It was taken forcefully in the process of the cadastral measurements. The usurpers file a lawsuit. One ends, one starts, they change names, sue under someone else's name. This a land that is cultivated and harvested; these are officially our lands our forests, the fields, and the pasture, all are situated legally on our administrative borders.

They're doing this, so we're tired of it, and we go away.

I went to the judge and prosecutor, talked to them; the court decides in our favor, but for the same land they file a lawsuit again. They file with different names. When the case is lost, they sue again so forest can be transferred to the Treasury; once in hand of the State, they get it back from the government.

The chairmen of AKP and HDP (AKP Mayor, HDP town chairman) unite and open these cases.

We win the case. One judge was fine, the second judge who came did not let the witness to talk.

The field is being turned into a forest. "Don't be offended, don't be angry," says the judge. "I've been here for a thousand years, my father and grandfather were here, how can I not be offended, how can I not be angry?"

Now the trials are over. Ten years after the cadastral inspections and decisions they cannot file a lawsuit themselves, but they are suing in order to transfer forest to the

Treasury. They write a petition, file a request, saying, "I couldn't eat it, they shouldn't eat it either."

The cadastral survey will begin, they say, come and declare your administrative borders. But the administrative borders are already on the record. Apparently, we needed to draw a "workspace borders." "Everybody should draw their own borders." He is not even ashamed of the God, draws his borders as he wants and claims that is his land.

I also argued with the officers. "We are officers, technicians, it is not in our hands". The cadastre officer, the director, says, "give money, will correct it". When challenged, he makes a false statement, saying, "they will kill me."

Most of it comes from the village of Karalar. We didn't want to become enemies. The AKP mayor and the headman of the village are the problem. They said, "Fuck you, when you go we'll keep these places."

Harassments and threats happened lately as well. Three years ago, they brought in a special engineer to our fields, they were doing measurement. It was my grandfather's land, and my parents said, "go see what's going on." The mayor was there. We asked, "what's going on?" They called Karalar and 15 people came, beat us until we didn't have any unbeaten spot. We couldn't get a report from the hospital. Prior to our arrival to the hospital, they arranged it with the hospital. We couldn't get a report. They said that we attacked them. From the other side, even those who were not involved in the fight, went, and got reports. We realized that we're going to jail, so we did refrain from filing a lawsuit.

What ISIS is doing now is not one-tenth of what is being done to us. [After Sayfo, during the Republican era] 19 out of 20 people were killed in this land. The Assyrian nation did not exist in the Ottoman Empire. There was Armenian nation, Greek nation, Jewish nation, but no Assyrian nation.

Mukhtar: "The stones need to talk, to explain all of these, because there are no people; the people have been killed".

An Assyrian teenager:

Let me tell you a story: a peasant with blue eyes, "your eyes are blue, you're infidel", they beat him until they're sick of beating, and ask, "are there any other infidels besides you?" An Assyrian from another village hides his identity, resists before being beaten, does not betray the other Assyrian, but in the end, he gives up and says, "oh, he's Assyrian too," pointing to the one hiding. They beat him too, both pull aside, they moan and try to heal their wounds. The one beaten last, "why did you betray me?" The other replies, "you've been slapped twice for our Christ, is it too much to take for him?"

Cases of Assyrians filed to reclaim their confiscated land and pastures continue.

There was a health center in the village: a health worker was appointed. Then the health center was shut down, and the one in charge was transferred to the Idil state hospital. (he is from Diyarbakir). But he continues to stay in the village, as he continues to settle, he takes animals and occupies registered land of Assyrians which doesn't belong to him and claims it. A meeting with the governor, and the head of the provincial district is arranged.

One from Bsorino:

Ahmet Türk was reported about this. "It is just one man; what do you want"? he said. He's from the AKP. An application was submitted to the authorities and no results were obtained. Typical methods of settlement and expansion.

5.6 İŞTAR, SARE – (SARIKÖY)

Former mukhtar Fikri Turan reports. The grandson of Shamun Hanne Haydo (Assyrian folk hero).

In 1994, the state evacuated the village from the Assyrians. In 1995, the [village] guards were settled. Then I came back in 2004. The governor of Şırnak took the guards out, they did not want to leave. Osman Güneş, the governor of Şırnak, forced them out. There's a lot of work to do, both from the outside and here. 184 petitions were filed, all the way to the Ministry of Interior. We tried so hard. It took a few years. I went to Germany, Holland. We came back the law of return to the village.

They did not touch the church, but they destroyed the village, built a guarding tower on top of the church. They built 6 to 7 towers.

5-6 families stay through the winter.

In 1994 there were 33 households. Each house had a herd of at least 150-200 sheep and goats. There were cattle too. We lost them all.

The villages with police stations were not evacuated. There was a police station in the village of Bsorino (Haberli); in total there are 7- 8 such villages.

We were told, you're either going to become a guard or you have to go.

The land registry came. Those from the county of Karalar took most [of the land]. It wasn't like that before, it was a village, it became a county, and they wanted to all the land.

After the cadastral inspectors arrived in 2006, the guards raided every day. The police did not go against them of course.

What happened in Bsorino also happened here. They beat the kids two or three times.

In the past, the village of Karalar was good, then the population increased, and they started to say, "it is ours." They used to be minority, now they're majority. Our population increased, now we have more rights, they say. When they get the chance, they become despotic.

The mayor is from the AKP and the county head is from the HDP. They don't say anything to each other. It's not ideological, it's about interest. There used to be seven churches in the village of Karalar, now there are none. The Assyrian name is Crowën-Rovin.

Forests burned. The armed conflicts were the reason.

5.7 TUR İZLO KÖYLERİ

The historical name of the region is Tur-İzala. This name is even mentioned in the Torah.

The villages of the region are: Kafro-Elbeğendi, Arkâh-Üçköy, Arbo-Taşköy, Uhwo- Güzelsu, Badebbe-Dibek, Saydari-Üçyol and Harbtho D'meşko-Dağıcı.

When we, Ayşe Günaysu and Meral Çıldır, as committee members arrived in the region on November 11, 2017 to go to the villages of Tur İzlo, we were stopped by the military on the grounds that there were "operations". With permission, we could only go to Kafro which is one of the Tur İzlo villages.

Reports from Kafro village

During the Sayfo period, the Assyrians of this region took refuge in the Mor Malke Monastery (in the village of Arkah). In the village of Harbtho D'meşko a cemetery for the PKK martyrs was built. Since in 1997 a PKK militant was killed and buried there, funerals thereafter were brought from other places and buried here; it became a place of "martyrdom". Neighbor to Harbtho D'Meşko is the Muslim village Maare. The cemetery

was built on the territory of the Assyrian village. This is a protected area. A cemetery shouldn't be built [there].

We applied to the Assyrian mayor of Mardin and said, "if the cemetery grows, a mosque might be built here." "Leave the area alone. This is Tur İzlo, historically a very important region for Assyrians. If the Assyrian culture will flourish again, it will be here. There were returns to the villages, houses started to be built, such developments and land occupations will prevent this." But we didn't get any results.

The Muslim Maare villagers, the neighboring village of Harbtho D'mashko, are emboldened with growing martyrdom; they produce false deeds and enter the borders of Harbtho D'mashko, based on false deeds.

A Land Registry Officer in Nusaybin is assisting [them]. When we went to the village of Maare, they came armed, this land registrar told the Assyrians, "go, so nothing happens to you, we will come and will determine your borders the way you want". He comes, he does what they want.

When the return [to the villages] law came into effect, we started building houses in 2003. The village of Barmunus (Pelitli) is a neighboring village. There were two of us here, they attacked here, they tried to shoot someone, but this person defended himself with a gun; he was arrested. There was a trial, he was released. They saw that these people were determined, and then there was no harassment or rape. They say, "We need a property without headache."

The village was evacuated in 1994. My father and two brothers were here. The state said, "we can no longer protect you, go to Enhel or other villages." We said, no, if we leave here, we'll go to Europe. We went to Europe in 1994.

A bomb exploded here, an Assyrian boy lost his foot.

We knew when we left, there was movement at that time. It was horrible. The PKK emerged. We said we will work in Europe, go to work, collect some money, and return here again with paid military service. The news came in that it was getting worse. There was a festival in 2002, we met each other, asked, why don't we return? Ecevit made a call to return to the villages. Our return was not spontaneous, or by coincidence, it was official. We met with the [Turkish] consulates, talked, came to Ankara, outlined the project for reconstruction. We met with relevant institutions; this [return] project was officially carried out. The state promised to make this happen. We first came to assess [the situation] in 2000, as it was a region under state of emergency. In 2002, the news came from Ankara saying we could return. The soldiers were in the church; a restricted area. They destroyed houses with cannons so that the PKK would not use them. The village was in ruins. We stayed here. They gave permission, allowed us to start work. The state gave some support but did not contribute fully. We paid 40 percent of the infrastructure [investment].

In the beginning, we were the ones to start in this region. Official transactions such as taxes were issued here. Working with stones is important for Assyrians. "The stone has come back to life." The stonework of the Assyrians was reborn, people began to realize this. In the 1990s, stonework wasn't allowed, it was an "infidel's work."

Only 5 per cent of the promises made to us at the time of the government's "return to the village" initiative have come true. Infrastructure, sewers, electricity, water, sidewalks, we did it all. We said, "we'll provide labor and bring the workers, just give us the material."

They gave us the construction machinery; the drivers' salary, the fuel, the food came from us. 300 - 400 TL per week. We were providing the food of the workers. We paid 40% of the paving stones. The promises were verbal. No written protocol was made.

They said we will sort the problem of road, they started work, but did not continue; [it remained] unfinished. For eleven years the governor is saying, I will come, I will do it; still not done. But in the governor reports, "it's done thanks to me."

Construction began in 2004; the architect was my friend from Germany. Two people were in charge; one was an architect, the other one an assistant. The Pelitians, behind Botaş, were jobless, they were [village] guards. Their animals were here. The architect said, don't harass us, they reply, "we'll come; who are you?" The architect was wounded with an axe. But he went after them with a shotgun, and hit them. He was jailed. This was no "self-defense," because he went after them. He was detained for two months and then released.

6. INSECURE LIFE CONTINUES FOR THE ASSYRIANS

6.1 Fires in Assyrian habitats in July 2019

On July 26, around 3:00 in the morning, a fire broke out in the olive groves belonging to the Deyrulzafaran Monastery. The rapidly spreading fire was extinguished with difficulty. The olive groves were of great importance for the monastery's economy; maintenance and needs of the monastery are met with the income from the olive products.

Just one day later, on July 27, there were successive fires around the Assyrian villages in the Tur Izlo region. As fire from these villages was approaching very close to Kafro, it caused concern. See: <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/22735/suryani-yerlesim-yerlerinde-pespese-yang-days>

Assyrians think the fires were caused by arson. See: <https://bianet.org/bianet/ekoloji/210983-suryani-koylerindeki-yanginlar-sabotaj-olmasa-bile-ihmal-buyuk>

According to the report of the firefighters who intervened in the fire in the olive groves of Deyrulzafaran Monastery on July 26, the fire started in three "different" places, and as recorded, the reason for the fire was "presumably" arson. Report signed by Firefighting Artuklu Group Supervisor A. Halim ÇURĞATAY , in Annex 12.

6.2 Example of life under threat: Attack and assault on Mor Abrohom Monastery's attendant

Mor Abrohom-Mor Hobil, the Assyrian monastery in central Midyat was in ruins, and repair works began in 2001. Local Assyrian youth started to plant trees here. The monastery garden became more and more green, turning into a park with plenty of trees. According to the information given to us, the park is so popular that it becomes a promenade, where few Assyrians and numerous Muslim families come here for picnics. As the park develops and becomes more beautiful, the outdoor photo shoots for weddings began to be done here. This development also leads to an economic activity in the monastery garden. Photographers charge high fees for wedding photography. On the other hand, the park's toilet, toilet care and cleaning are covered by the Monastery. However, the visitors of the park do not pay attention to cleanliness and order, they leave behind trash, pollute the toilets, and pick the flowers. Upon the fact that various groups of artisans make money from the park, the monastery management decided to take a very small entrance fee of 10 - 30 TL from the groups who came for photographing in order to compensate for the caring costs met by the Monastery.

It is reported that meanwhile, and from time to time, groups who came to have fun in the garden of the Monastery, harass and threaten the Assyrian monastic officials with words such as "You, rogue infidel, we will drive you out, and turn this place into a mosque", and even attack them.

Lately, on July 11, 2019, one man from a Muslim family in Midyat, who came here for a wedding photo shoot, refused to pay a fee and severely beat up the monastic official. The other officer who came to his aid was beaten in the same way. The monastic officer receives a report from the hospital, but was prevented to make an official complaint by some people "intervening". In light of the living conditions of the Assyrians in Tur Abdin, as described in this report, it is not difficult to imagine the reasons why these "interveners" discourage the assaulted person from complaining.

"You come to my house, you beat me because of my rightful demand in my house."

ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Related to the Nun:

- The Nun is left alone and unattended in the midst of a hostile world surrounding her. The characteristics of the region, the abandonment of the village, the place of the church on a hill, the nearest district being 20 km away, everything is already scary on its own. In addition, the hostility she is confronted with, the threats she receives, the harassment she has experienced, the various ways of making it clear that she is not wanted there, condemns the Nun to a fearful loneliness in a sense of deprivation of safety.
- In this case, it should be ensured that the authorities, Governorate, District Governorate, relevant ministries, security authorities and other authorities, hand in hand, must ensure the Nun's fearless and safe life in the church, where she has sworn not to leave and has been taken care of for years.
- As after the attacks in Istanbul, police protection was provided in front of the synagogues, protection should be provided to the Mor Dimet Church in the village of Zaz. A camera system must be installed so that the church can be monitored from all over.

7.2 Related to the Assyrian villages of Turabdin

- Assyrian villages of Turabdin-Midyat are under severe threat from historical, religious, sociological and economic perspective. In 2002, the "Return to the Village" law was passed by the Republic of Turkey. Many Assyrians left their job in the European countries, disrupted their orderly life, came to their ancestry land and villages while accepting economical burdens to rebuild their homes; they face constantly loss of land, live under threat, and have been subjected to physical attacks. In view of these, all precautions should be taken to protect them effectively.
- For this purpose, a commission consisting of property supervisors, regional/ provincial/ district directorates of the relevant ministries, Land Registry Cadastre officials, and security officials should be established. This commission should meet with Assyrian villagers and identify the problems. In discussions with the elders of the tribes, who are the perpetrators of the rights violations, it should be decisively stated that the state stands with the victims of the rights violations. In this context, and particularly for Zaz, a strong message should be given by the state to the neighboring village Ortaca as well as to the Aslan family and the Mukhtar Feyzullah's brother, who is causing severe problems to the Assyrians of Zaz, that the state will ask for accountability of all kinds of harassment, insults, threats against the Nun, and that these will not end in impunity.
- The interviews conducted should be put into a report and submitted to the higher authorities.

- The work of the Commission should be open to the review of non-governmental organizations.
- In context of security measures, it should be ensured that the village guards are not involved in any function in the problems caused by the seizure of land between Assyrian peasants and neighboring Muslim Kurdish tribes. The guards have interests in the seizure of assets, property, and land, they are a party, so they should not be given the task of maintaining order in these matters.
- Departments affiliated with the Ministry of Justice should initiate an investigation process for the cases that are in progress, and prevent intervention during inspection procedures.
- **Zaz in particular:**
 - Although Zaz village was forcibly evacuated, it was not counted as one of the villages evacuated under the context of law. Hence the damages were not covered. Damages caused to the village Zaz and Assyrians of Zaz should be compensated, for both, during the evacuation process and due to the ongoing rights violations.
 - The mistakes conveyed to the authorities by Isa Acan concerning land registry and cadastral operations of the village of Zaz should be corrected. To do this, the authorities should contact Isa Acan directly.
 - Following the evacuation of the village in April 1993, the houses where the villagers of Ortaca settled in unlawfully and which are still occupied, must be evacuated.
 - Necessary measures should be taken to preserve the historical and cultural fabric of the village.

Human Rights Association Istanbul Branch

Committee Against Racism and Discrimination

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