

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 31

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 73

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 31—Relative to Assyrians in Iraq.

[Filed with Secretary of State June 24, 2003.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 31, Aghazarian. Assyrians in Iraq.

This measure would declare that it is a matter of urgent and enduring importance that Assyrians be given a seat of recognition at the table during negotiations regarding the postconflict restructuring in Iraq and would memorialize California's Senators and Members of the House of Representatives to take all prudent and necessary steps to ensure that this matter is addressed at the highest levels of the federal government.

WHEREAS, Assyrians are a Semitic people indigenous to Mesopotamia and are a people distinct from Arabs and Jews; and

WHEREAS, By 2500 B.C., three Assyrian cities were well established and thriving metropoli, including Nineveh, where eminent British archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan in 1932 dug up a pottery sequence showing it to be inhabited by 5000 B.C., Arbel, the oldest extant city, and Ashur; and

WHEREAS, This period around 5000 to 2500 B.C. saw the development of the fundamentals of civilization, including animal domestication, agriculture, pottery, controllable fire in kilns, and smelting. The Assyrian city of Arbel was one of the very earliest permanent agricultural settlements; and

WHEREAS, Between 4500 and 2400 B.C., as complex societies began to appear among Sumerians and in other parts of Mesopotamia, including Assyria, in the form of cities, with craft specialization and writing, Assyrian settlements became large and guarded by fortification walls, which implies the risk of attack and the need for defense and warfare; and

WHEREAS, In 1813 B.C., Assyrian political coherence was clearly in existence. King Shamshi-Adad I established the early Assyrian Empire, and laid the foundation of the Middle Assyrian Empire in 1365 B.C.; and

WHEREAS, The years 745 to 727 B.C. marked the beginning of the greatest expansion of the Assyrian empire with Tiglath-Pileser III. Through a series of able kings, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbnaipal, Assyria would extend its rule over a vast area, from Egypt

up to Cyprus to the west, through Anatolia, to the Caspian region in the east; and

WHEREAS, The Assyrian empires, particularly the Neo-Assyrian (912–612 B.C.), had a profound and lasting impact on the Near East. Before Assyrian hegemony would come to an end, the Assyrians would bring the highest civilization then known to the world. From the Caspian region to Cyprus, from Anatolia to Egypt, Assyrian imperial expansion would bring into the Assyrian sphere nomadic and barbaric communities and would bestow the gift of civilization upon them; and

WHEREAS, Today we are far removed from that time, yet some of our most basic and fundamental devices of daily survival, to which we have become so accustomed that we cannot conceive of life without them, are believed by many to have originated in Assyria. One cannot imagine leaving his or her home without locking the door; it is in Assyria where locks and keys were first used. One cannot survive in this world without knowing the time; it is in Assyria that the sexagesimal system of keeping time was developed. One cannot imagine driving without paved roads; it is in Assyria where paved roads were first used. Other developments originating in Assyria include the first postal system, the first use of iron, the first magnifying glasses, the first libraries, the first plumbing and flush, the first electric batteries, the first guitars, the first aqueducts, and the first arch; and

WHEREAS, Not only things originated in Assyria, but also ideas that would shape the world to come, including the idea of imperial administration, of dividing the land into territories administered by local governors who report to the central authority, the King of Assyria. This fundamental model of administration has survived to this day, as can be seen in America's federal-state system; and

WHEREAS, It is in Assyria that civilization itself was developed and handed down to future generations. It is here where the first steps in the cultural unification of the Middle East were taken by bringing under Assyrian rule the diverse groups in the area, from Iran to Egypt, breaking down ethnic and national barriers and preparing the way for the cultural unification that facilitated the subsequent spread of Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and

WHEREAS, In the 20th century, Assyrians have suffered massive genocide, have lost control of their ancestral lands, and are in a struggle for survival. The Assyrian nation today stands at a crossroad. One-third of its population is in a diaspora, while the remaining two-thirds of the population lives perilously in its native lands; and

WHEREAS, In spite of the struggle for survival, the Assyrian Levies have performed heroic acts fighting on the Asian, European, and African fronts from after World War I until 1955, including a victory over the



pro-German rebel forces backed by the Iraqi government that prevented the oil fields from falling into the hands of Nazi Germany in the early stages of World War II, thereby guaranteeing the continuous oil supply for the Allies in the Middle East; and

WHEREAS, In 1955, the Assyrian Levy was dismantled and the force was integrated in the Iraqi Army. The Assyrians withdrew in isolation. With the coming of the Arab national parties to power in Iraq since 1963, the oppression of the Assyrians became visible and obvious; and

WHEREAS, In the late 1970s, the Assyrian private schools were closed, and teaching the Syriac language of the Assyrians was prohibited. In the 1977 and 1987 Iraqi general census, the Assyrians were prohibited from registering as Assyrians and were given the option of registering as Arabs or Kurds only; and

WHEREAS, In 1981, as the Iraq-Iran War commenced, many Assyrian families in Iraq were deported to Iran. These families were forced to leave their homes and properties behind. The Iraqi government deported these families despite the fact that members of these families were born in Iraq; and

WHEREAS, Since 1985, many Assyrian villages and ancient churches and monasteries have been destroyed; and

WHEREAS, After the 1991 Gulf War, the Assyrians in northern Iraq began to face acts of aggression, assassination, and intimidation. Other ethnic groups were encouraged to move and live in purely Assyrian villages in order to change the demographic picture of the purely Assyrian regions. Many acts of assassination against Assyrian priests and political leaders took place, rape cases against Assyrian young women increased, and attacks on Assyrian villages were reported. None of the perpetrators were brought to justice even when the criminals were identified; and

WHEREAS, With continued attempts by the Iraqi opposition to marginalize legitimate Assyrian representation in ongoing deliberations about the future of Iraq, three Members of the United States Congress have sent a terse letter to the United States State Department expressing concern about the undemocratic nature of the Iraqi National Assembly meetings. The bipartisan letter was spearheaded by the Honorable Rod Blagojevich (D-Illinois) and cosigned by the Honorable Anna Eshoo, (D-California), an Assyrian, and the Honorable Frank Wolf (R-Virginia); and

WHEREAS, An estimated 350,000 Assyrians have migrated to the United States, many of them concentrated in the Turlock-Modesto-Ceres areas and in Detroit and Chicago. They brought with them farming and business skills, entrepreneurial ideas, capital, and their religious heritage; now, therefore, be it



Resolved by the Assembly and Senate of the State of California, jointly, That, considering the ancestral history of the Assyrians in Iraq, it is a matter of urgent and enduring importance that Assyrians be given a seat of recognition at the table during negotiations regarding the postconflict restructuring in Iraq; and be it further

Resolved, That California's Senators and Members of the House of Representatives should take all prudent and necessary steps to ensure that this matter is addressed at the highest levels of our federal government; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the United States Secretary of State, and to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States.

