

Assembly Joint Resolution

No. 31

Introduced by Assembly Members Aghazarian and Steinberg
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Cogdill and Matthews)
(Coauthors: Senators Denham and Poochigian)

April 23, 2003

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

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 31, as introduced, 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.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, Assyrians are a Semitic people indigenous to
2 Mesopotamia and are a people distinct from Arabs and Jews; and
3 WHEREAS, By 2500 B.C., three Assyrian cities were well
4 established and thriving metropoli, including Nineveh, where
5 eminent British archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan in 1932 dug up
6 a pottery sequence showing it to be inhabited by 5000 B.C., Arbel,
7 the oldest extant city, and Ashur; and
8 WHEREAS, This period around 5000 to 2500 B.C. saw the
9 development of the fundamentals of civilization, including animal
10 domestication, agriculture, pottery, controllable fire in kilns, and

1 smelting. The Assyrian city of Arbel was one of the very earliest
2 permanent agricultural settlements; and

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

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

13 WHEREAS, The years 745 to 727 B.C. marked the beginning
14 of the greatest expansion of the Assyrian empire with
15 Tiglath-Pileser III. Through a series of able kings, Sargon II,
16 Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbnaipal, Assyria would
17 extend its rule over a vast area, from Egypt up to Cyprus to the
18 west, through Anatolia, to the Caspian region in the east; and

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

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



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

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

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

22 WHEREAS, In spite of the struggle for survival, the Assyrian
23 Levies have performed heroic acts fighting on the Asian,
24 European, and African fronts from after World War I until 1955,
25 including a victory over the pro-German rebel forces backed by the
26 Iraqi government that prevented the oil fields from falling into the
27 hands of Nazi Germany in the early stages of World War II, thereby
28 guaranteeing the continuous oil supply for the Allies in the Middle
29 East; and

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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