



## Where is the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa) heading to? Hanna Hajjar

**To Zowaa's Leadership,** Shlama Umtanaya / Shlomo Umthonoyo,

**Disclaimer:** Below I will use the terms Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac the way most people perceive and understand them, in other words "as religious terms". This has nothing to do with the way I understand those names, however I believe that in order to realize a problem and solve it, one needs to look in the roots and causes, and tackle the issue from the perspective of the way other people think, not the way he thinks.

**Background:** The Chaldean community has been under attack from some radical Assyrian groups since the Census-2000 issue surfaced couple of years ago. Let's stop for a moment and ask ourselves what were the reasons for that? If you ask a radical Assyrian, he will answer you: The Census was a plot by the Baath to split and destroy the Assyrian nation.

**My question to those radical Assyrians is:** Since that issue surfaced, what have you done to rectify and solve this issue, and bring communities together, other than attacking and expanding the drift and split? Attacks by radical Assyrians were carried on different public forums, while this should have been solved between the two communities in private dialogue by reasoning and negotiations, and not by mud slinging. Later they sued the Census Bureau to drop the Chaldean name based on the fact that it is a religious name, and ironically they lost their case because it was proved in court that Assyrian is used as a religious name too (as in: The Assyrian Church). Radical Assyrians also claimed that ancient Assyrians were an empire; the Chaldeans proved that they were an empire too. In other words every claim brought in, was challenged with a counter claim proved the opposite. The mistake of the Assyrian radicals was that they escalated the issue and raised the stakes; they didn't realize that the other side might do the same. It was like a couple of guys playing poker, one is bluffing and raising the stakes with an empty hand, and the other has a street flush and meets that challenge and raises the stakes even further. Eventually the court dismissed that lawsuit.

Now, I neither belong to the Assyrian church nor to the Chaldean Church, (I belong to the Syriac Church), so my views are not biased or pro one side over the other, in fact I identify myself as an "Assyrian" yet I find myself understanding the issue from a Chaldean perspective. From my interaction with the Chaldean community I came up with my own conclusions, and this is a summary of my thoughts, which I believe is an objective view on the current situation:

The main reason why the Chaldeans pushed for adding the Chaldean name in the census listing was that they felt that they were not represented adequately and proportionally in what is being claimed as Assyrian nation's representation. In other words they felt that the Assyrian side was getting a free ride using the Chaldeans!

**Here is why:** The Assyrians side claims that they are 4,000,000 and that their people consist of the followers of the Assyrian Church, Chaldean Church, and Syriacs Church. To this date there is no accurate statistics, (some give a lower figure, and some a higher one). With respect to the Iraqi population the total number of our Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac people is important, but with respect to our communities (internally within ourselves) the ratio of the composition of that total number is the issue and not the total number itself. In other words, out of the total; almost half are members of the Chaldean Church, and the other half is split between the Assyrian Church and the Syriacs Church. That means; one quarter of the nation is trying to run the other three quarters, without letting them participate in the decision- making or representation, or negotiation.

Let us be clear on one issue; If some group is to claim that they represents Chaldeans and Syriacs, doesn't logic tell us that Syriacs and Chaldeans should be members and represented in that group? Let's forget about Chaldeans and Syriacs for a moment, and let's ask this question: Can an Assyrian organization claim that they represent the Chinese people when they have not a single Chinese in their organization? If you ask this question to an idiot his answer would be: Sure, Assyrians are 100 billion, after all the Assyrian missionaries went all the way to China, so all Chinese are ethnically Assyrians! On the other hand if you ask a rational Assyrian the same question, his answer would be: No they can't! This leads to the following theory: if you have no Chinese in your organization, then you can't claim that you represent the Chinese people, and with the same token, if you have no Chaldeans and Syriacs in your organization, then you can't claim that you represent them either!

In most of the Assyrians organizations we do not see any Chaldean and Syriac representation. And considering that the Chaldeans are the majority, it is unfair that a minority religious group to handle the destiny of the majority. The Chaldean vs. Assyrian issue has turned into a situation similar to the Shiite vs. Sunni issue in Iraq. Currently the Sunni minority in Iraq represent all Arabs, while the Shiites who are the majority are under-represented, this is the exact same reason why the Shiites want more representation and recognition in post Saddam Iraq, even though the ruling government in Iraq is dominated by Arabs, but to the Shiite those Arabs do not represent them because they are Sunni Arabs! And to the Chaldeans those Assyrian organizations do not represent them because they are all members of the Assyrian Church and not the Chaldean Church.

Let's take the current situation in Northern Iraq for example, with all due respect to Zowaa (the Assyrian Democratic Movement), they claim to represent all Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs, yet their leadership is controlled and dominated by members of the Assyrian Church (and in some cases to a certain tribe of that community). Just look around you and you will see that, it doesn't need a rocket scientist to realize that, and I have been hearing that from many people, it is very obvious, and people can see and talk, however this talking is not done in the face of those leaders, it is done behind their backs, and in this article I would like them to take notice of that because that can have drastic effects on our nation when a segment of our society feels un-represented. Please, note that this is not an attack on Zowaa in any way, Zowaa had done great things to our people, however there are few points that need to be fixed, and it is important that they get an honest feedback from an ASSYRIAN, rather than be complemented by their hard-line supporters who would not point out their mistakes, because in that case it would be like Saddams entourage, they all complement him and no one dares to open his mouth to criticize his mistakes, and this is what actually lead Iraq to this bad situation. I hope that the Zowaa leadership and their hard-line supporters take this as a positive criticism coming from an Assyrian brother to another Assyrian brother, and correct those issues before it is too late.

The attitude of Zowaa towards the Chaldeans has to be clarified, so here is my questions to the Zowaa leadership:

1. To this date we haven't seen Zowaa sending a member of the Chaldean Church as their representative at the negotiation table to sit, talk and negotiate with the other Iraqi Opposition groups, even though that in Northern Iraq the Chaldeans are the majority, and there are many educated and qualified people among them. I am not saying to send Tariq Aziz who claims that he is an Arab, but isn't there among Zowaa any Chaldean who shares the same thoughts and ideologies as them? And if there is none, then how can they claim that they represent the Chaldeans?

2. Does Zowaa believe that it is the custodian of a minor (who is in this case the Chaldeans), and that they have to talk on behalf of that minor because that minor is not qualified?

3. Does Zowaa preaches something and practices something else?

4. Zowaa claims that there is no difference between Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs, they are all one Assyrian people known in different names. If that is what they believe in, let them put that to practice, and show us that they truly believe in what they preach! Let us see Zowaa sending a delegation that has Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs, similar to the makeup of the Assyro-Chaldean delegation that attended the League of Nations conferences in 1920.

5. The negotiations with the other Iraqi Opposition Groups, will affect the future of our people regardless of their names, and it is the right of every group to have a say in that, where they input their needs and expectations. If Zowaa does not include Chaldeans and Syriacs on their negotiating team that will open the door for some Chaldeans and Syriacs to get in as a separate delegation and join the Iraqi Opposition under their own name, just like what happened during the Census-2000, and this is what is surfacing now. Is that what Zowaa wants?

6. If Zowaa goes on with this policy of monopoly of power (i.e. not sharing it with Chaldeans and Syriacs), you will eventually see a separate Chaldean and a Syriac delegations, then the Assyrian side could not claim the 4,000,000 population, (but rather few hundred thousands only) and that would weaken Zowaa's position dramatically. Is that what Zowaa wants?

**Conclusion:** It is in the best interest of Zowaa to have a variety of people from different communities in their leadership and in their negotiating team. Otherwise, the Chaldeans and Syriacs will drift away, and the Arabs and Kurds will jump at this golden opportunity when they see our people are divided, and give them all (Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs) the short end of the stick. I sincerely hope that Zowaa leadership looks into the mirror and reevaluate and modify their positions, ideology and policies, it is their choice. The ball is in the court of Zowaa now, if they take positive steps, then they would be able to get the backing of all Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs, and if they don't, they will end up as a narrow tribal group representing a certain religious denomination.

If I am wrong in my above evaluation please correct me! However how come is it that I am hearing this from outside sources, and they are not? Are those people afraid to tell that to Zowaa face to face? Is Zowaa falling into the same mistake as being blinded with power as Saddam? Is Zowaa getting false feedback from its hard-line supporters who are becoming like Saddam's entourage telling their leaders: "Yes Sir", "Excellent Job Sir", and covering up their mistakes? Could this be the cause of the recent split in Zowaa that we heard off?

In this article, I raised several questions, and I hope that those questions will reach Zowaa's leaders, and they become kind enough to offer our people an explanation. The truth might hurt, but nevertheless it is the truth, and past mistakes can be fixed, and we can move on as a united people. However covering-up is wrong, because that leads to distrust among brothers, and eventually the collapse of unity, and the goals that they are trying to achieve, no matter how noble those goals are.