



Country of Focus: **Iraq**

Summary of Resolution

H.Res. 143 calls on the U.S. House of Representatives to recognize the Semele Massacre of 1933. The Semele Massacre was a genocidal act committed by the armed forces of the Iraqi state systematically targeting the indigenous Assyrian population in northern Iraq in August 1933. The term is not only used to describe the massacre in Simele, but the wider genocidal campaign that took place across more than 100 Assyrian villages in Duhok and Nineveh that led to the death of as many as 6,000 Assyrians.

Background

The Assyrians continued their pursuit of statehood despite the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1932, petitioning the League of Nations for autonomy, protection, and a guarantee of freedom to emigrate out of Iraq in the event of massacres against them. Public animosity towards the Assyrians was widespread, as Iraqi nationalist propaganda campaigns had portrayed them as violent rebels. Assyrians feared potential backlash for their perceived ties to the British.

The expected violence against the Assyrians began in early August 1933. Iraqi troops, joined by marauding Kurdish and Arab tribesmen, organized a massacre of thousands of Assyrian civilians in northern Iraq and looted their villages. Iraq's violent campaign against its indigenous community lasted until August 16, 1933, but violent raids on Assyrians persisted through the end of the month. Assyrians were largely confined to their homes in fear of further attacks. As many as 6,000 Assyrian men, women, and children were slaughtered, while tens of thousands more were forcibly displaced. Thousands of women were sexually assaulted, many of them kidnapped, never to be heard from again.

Type of Legislation: Simple Resolution

Simple resolutions are legislative measures introduced in either the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives. Simple resolutions are not presented to the President, and do not have the force of law. These types of resolution are used to function as statements of intent for one chamber of Congress. Simple resolutions can also set the stage for a bill—a law that is sent to the President for assent—if the legislators sponsoring the legislation can demonstrate broad support in Congress for the policy intentions in the resolution.

Strengths of H.Res. 143

- H.Res. 143 recognizes the atrocities committed by the Iraqi State against the native Assyrian population in August 1933. If passed, it will be the first piece of U.S. legislation that formally recognizes the Semele Massacre.
- Recognition of the Semele Massacre is critical for future justice processes. Recognition goes beyond symbolism, as it restores a sense of dignity for the victims, affirms the moral necessity of remembrance, and counters efforts to reshape history. More importantly, recognition is a prerequisite for justice and reparations. H.Res. 143 also acknowledges the indigeneity of the Assyrians of Iraq.
- The denial of historical injustices threaten the democratization of the Iraqi state and prolong strained relations between different ethnic and religious groups. Recognition acknowledges the gravity of the offenses perpetrated against these communities and initiates the healing process. The passage of H.Res. 143 will help promote Iraq's transition into a pluralist and tolerant society.

Recommendations

- H.Res. 143 should explicitly acknowledge and pay tribute to the members of the Assyrian-American community who are themselves survivors of the Semele Massacre or their direct descendants.
- The exact number of casualties of the Semele Massacre is unknown; however, some scholars estimate that the total number of Assyrians killed was as high as 6,000. H.Res. 143 currently lists the number of those killed at 3,000. The language should be amended to allow for the possibility that the total number of casualties may have been higher.
- H.Res. 143 should acknowledge that Raphael Lemkin, the scholar who coined the term 'genocide', was directly influenced by the Semele Massacre.
- H.Res. 143 should acknowledge the participation of Kurdish and Arab irregulars in the massacre to help advance discussions about the historical tensions and contemporary challenges in order to promote a culture of tolerance and accountability.

Conclusion

The Assyrian Policy Institute **supports** H.Res. 143 and commends Rep. Debbie Lesko's unprecedented leadership on this issue. This important legislation is a critical step in promoting awareness and accountability for the Semele Massacre of 1933.

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