

## **Rima TÛZÛN**

We are running out of time. Distinguished Members of the European Parliament, honourable Chair, dear guests, on behalf of the European Syriac Union, I would like to thank the EPP for this invitation, for the possibility to make a short speech.

First of all, I would like to introduce us very shortly: Syriac people: who are we? Syriacs are known as the Christians from Iraq, from Turkey, from Iran, from Syria. We are only known as the Christians from the Middle East but we are the people who first recognised Christianity, and we are the people who spread Christianity to the world. We are the people speaking the language of Jesus Christ, Aramaic.

Before Jesus Christ, our people were known as the Assyrian, the Chaldean, the Aramaic, the Babylonian people. This is very short and is meant to give you an idea of who we are speaking about.

I would like to speak about Christianity in the Middle East, not only about the threat we are facing today from ISIS, but really to make the connection between the threat of ISIS, which we are facing now in the Middle East, and the threat it represents for Europe and the whole world.

When our people recognised Christianity, they recognised it under every form of oppression. They have been killed, but again they were able to spread Christianity in the world. The more Christianity was spread in the Middle East, the more it was spread worldwide and brought solutions, but the weaker Christianity became in the Middle East, the more the numbers of Christians declined worldwide, and conflicts have not been solved.

Fanatic Islamist groups saw this. As Islam was able to weaken Christianity in the Middle East, Christianity worldwide, especially in Europe, weakened too. So, if Christianity is now under threat in Europe, look at the Middle East. Christianity is struggling to survive there.

For 1,500 years, because of their Christianity my people lived under oppression in the Middle East. We faced much genocide: 1843, Hakkari Iraq; 1915, Turkey. This genocide is known as the genocide against the Armenian people, but it was not only against the Armenian people, also against the Syriac people: 500,000 people were killed and my grandmother was a witness of this genocide. 1933: Simele, Iraq, only one year after the Iraq government was established. In 2003 again, in the name of a democratic transition, the change in regime from Saddam to a democratic system, as mentioned today, the number of Christians has decreased from 1.5 - 2 million Christians in 2003 by more than one million.

Now, in 2011: Syria; 2014: again Iraq. Nevertheless we kept our faith and nobody can take this away from us, so we are still resisting there as Christians. Our children have been abducted, our monasteries and churches changed to mosques or looted. Since the Mosul incidents, the whole world knows about the so-called Jizya and the other fatwas like 'convert or die'.

...For my people, they are suffering for thousands of years, Jizya in the Middle East, because they are Christians.

There was a Christian today who asked: “Who is guilty? What is the role of the West?” Let me say one thing. Since the economic interests increased in the Middle East, the values of humanity, solidarity, love and peace, are almost lost. Petrol became more valuable than the people.

The Christians in the Middle East have been set aside. For us, as representatives of our people in Europe, it is incredibly difficult to speak from the perspective of Christians in the Middle East, but let me share with you three quotes from people who are now living in Iraq. They are in their indigenous homeland, but they are refugees in their own land. One man said: “How many times have we fled? How many times?” A young woman carrying a baby in her arms: “We talk now, you asked us to talk, so what? You come and record us. We have become a joke in the face of everyone, we, the Christians. No one is finding a solution for us. We have been here for months, and there is still no solution. What have we done wrong?” Another one: “We want to return to our houses but without international protection, it is impossible.”

The fanatic Islamic ideology understands very well that if they manage to eradicate Christianity at the root, they can affect Christianity worldwide. This is why we hear about Pakistan and Nigeria. Since there is the risk that Christianity may be eradicated from the Middle East, we can anticipate what will become of Christianity in other parts of the world.

The goal is not only to oppress my people. My people took their Christianity from the soul of Jesus Christ. To succeed, Christianity has to be eradicated from its roots in Iraq. Let me just say one thing. It is not only a threat from ISIS. This is a policy. In the ‘80s, there was a meeting in Lahore (Pakistan), where the Islamic States gathered and took the decision to eradicate Christianity from the Middle East before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This decision was made in Lahore. Incidentally, Turkey was chairing this meeting.

As you see, the economy of the Middle East becomes very strong, and this strength brings about a bigger threat to the Christians worldwide. If Christianity is wiped out, what will happen to the Jews? Will they be the next? Europe will also be affected, because Christianity seriously decreased here. If those radical groups realise that nobody cares about Christians in the Middle East, they will understand that they will have a free hand wherever they want.

Without Christianity, there will be no peace of religions anymore. As long as Christianity exists in the Middle East, we will strike a balance. Let me give you one example. I am working with a women’s organisation in Syria. They are Christians. The Arab women came and said to us: “Please, do whatever you can but don’t leave. We want the Christian women to stay here in Syria with us. If you leave, what will happen to us, Arab women? We will be thrown back to the Stone Age. We will live like decades ago. We need you here in order for us not to lose our rights”.

The threat of ISIS, we all know, is that they want to expand to Jordan, to the Palestinian territories and to Lebanon; and referring to ISIS, all those who are not living according to IS Sharia are considered as kafir, unbelievers. ISIS wants to root out from the Middle East every other religion, such as Christianity and Judaism from the roots.

Europe experienced Hitler. Europe knows the extent and danger of fascism. IS represents a risk similar to fascism as perpetrated by Hitler. ISIS accepts no existence of others, only

themselves. In the mentality of ISIS, those who are not living according to Sharia law, and as mentioned here, also other Sunni or Shiite groups who are not living 100 percent by the Sharia law, can only be their slaves. The ISIS is a serious threat to humanity.

ISIS is using the same methods as we know from the Ottoman Empire. The Balkans know that very well. The Ottoman Empire took Christian children, raised them and made them into soldiers and sent them to kill their own people. This is what happened now to the Yazidi children. Thousands of Yazidi children are now with ISIS, and they are being trained to become soldiers in order to kill their own people.

We, as Syriac Christians from the Middle East, lost everything: our lands, houses, churches, monasteries, mothers, sisters, fathers and children.

My name is Tüzümeer, but I am not a Tüzün. In 1932 Turkey forced our families to take Turkish surnames. This has nothing to do with my family, with my background, with my people, with my history. Nothing! But this is how it happened.

What we want to say is: we want to prevent what happened to us, to our people, and what we fear is that the mentality of the Middle East will take over Europe too.

What we have to do – and this is a task for all of us – is to preserve the place of origin of Christianity. This will guarantee that we can preserve Christianity everywhere.

For our people, and let me honest, this is really our last cry. We have been crying out for years, for thousand years, but it is our last cry: now, we need support, politically and economically. Please, Europe, don't be afraid of helping us!

I have been working for 2 years on humanitarian aid projects. I have attended many workshops. I was very sad when I came back. Because of the problem from Turkey and Kurds in [Al-Hassa] we were not really able to get humanitarian aid to [Al Hassa] to Syria. We have to help the people there now to stay, not to leave, not to flee. But it was very difficult. For other groups it is different. I don't want to accuse anybody here, but Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor<sup>1</sup> receive millions of aid, but we Christians, we only watched and we were unable to do anything.

Please, Europe, don't be afraid of helping us directly!

I heard this a lot when I went to meetings. "Yes; we are Christians in the Western world; we cannot directly help your Christians. It will be seen as why?" But the Sunnis get help from Sunnis, the Shiites from Iran, they get support from Hezbollah, and Kurds are supporting the Kurds. Why are you not supporting us? We need your support!

Let me end with this. After this crisis, after all these incidents, we tried to reach out to the European Parliament, and I am very happy to say that at one of the first meetings we had a roundtable organised by the Chair of the EPP, Mr Manfred Weber. He invited us and other MEPs and they were listening to us. At that time, we were together with the Yezidis, in an alliance, because we now have a solution. We have a political roadmap. We have a plan how to overcome all this.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalresearch.ca/u-s-humanitarian-aid-is-being-channeled-to-the-islamic-state-isil/5409334>

At that time, the Turkmens were not on board, but at last we have been able to also have the Turkmens. We have an alliance of 3 peoples, the Syriac people, the Yezidi and the Turkmens, and together we have a common declaration, and we now are urging Europe to support us.

The idea of the EU, of reconciliation and peace, is what made us work together, as Christians, with the Turkmens and the Yezidis, because we want to move on a path of negotiation with those who really did not help us or with whom we had real difficulties, such as the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government.

Together now we are working towards self-governance without isolation for our people. These are also the values that make the EU different. The EU should never give up on this and remain a beacon of civilisation in a violent world.

We need the whole Christian community to support us on this road ahead. We need your support for our common declaration and political roadmap, which we made together with the Yezidis and Turkmens of Iraq.

We are lost without your political support to this process that is based on European values.

It is time now to really support the Christians in the Middle East.

Again, I would like to thank Mr Weber for the roundtable, which was so encouraging for us, and with today's event, I see a clear signal that the EPP wants to work on our situation, and therefore really thank you very much.