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SYRIAC UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE

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PRESS RELEASE: SYRIAC MONASTERY LOSES FORESTRY CASE

Midyat, Turkey, Wednesday 24 June, 2009

Midyat, Turkey – In an astonishing verdict, the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA), a recognized NGO at the United Nations that represents the Aramean (Syriac) people worldwide, reports that the court trial held today on Wednesday, June 24 2009, in Midyat, Turkey, has resulted in a lose of the “Forestry Case” by the Saint (*Mor*) Gabriel Monastery. However, in another puzzling decision, the Court also ruled today in favour of the Monastery on the “Treasury” Case.

The Midyat Court decided as follows:

- The Monastery has lost its appeal against the earlier decision of the Forestry Department which claimed ownership over some 34 Hectares of Land from the Monastery (“Forestry Case”). The Court decided that the Forestry Department, on behalf of the Turkish State Government, owns the land and now has complete discretion over what it will do with the land;
- The case involving the Head of the Religious Foundation of the Monastery, Mr Kuryakos Ergün, as a defendant, for the “intentional violation of the Forestry law”, has been postponed to 30 September, 2009; and
- The Turkish State Treasury Department has lost its case against the Monastery claiming the 12 Parcels of land inside and outside the wall of the Monastery, amounting to some 24 Hectares of Land.

In the Forestry Case, the Judge proclaimed that the State considers the land as a “forest” and therefore by definition it has become “Forestry” land owned by the State. The result of the case has deeply troubled the Monastery, with Kuryakos Ergün stating: “These are scary times. We are not sure what to do now. The State Government can now break down our protective wall and give a substantial amount of our land to third parties to cultivate it. Who knows what is next for us. All I know is that we now live with fear and an insecure future.”

Daniel Gabriel, SUA’s Human Rights and NGO Director, expands on this: “While we are pleased that we won the Treasury case, we are equally concerned by how we lost the Forestry Case. The court ruling shows us how the Turkish Government continues to mistreat its minority groups. I understand that we will appeal this decision to the Court of Appeal in Ankara. This is just a first step. Recent European Court of Human Rights decisions have shown us that the EU will not tolerate such discriminatory decisions by the Turkish State. On several occasions, the European Union, which Turkey seeks to join, has called on the Government to return seized properties to minorities and expand their religious and cultural freedoms. This is no different.”

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Johny Messo, President of the SUA, expressed his concerns stating: "With the loss of this case, we question the sincerity of the Turkish State when it claims it intends to secure the future of the indigenous Aramean people in their traditional homeland. We surely cannot and will not accept this remarkable verdict. By all peaceful means, we will intensify the pressure on Ankara, where the final decisions are taken. I call upon all politicians and media, and in particular the Turkish people, to stand united behind the Mor Gabriel Monastery and act accordingly to uphold justice."

The SUA again requests all media, human rights organizations and politicians to increase their public outcry over the injustice which is faced by the Aramean (Syriac) people. The victory of the Boundary and Treasury Cases, proves that international pressure can affect other cases.

The SUA will continue to keep you updated in relation to all events related to these trials. If you require any further information, please contact Mr Daniel Gabriel (SUA's Director of Human Rights and NGO) on +44 7795 602 078 or on daniel.gabriel@sua-ngo.org. For more information, especially on historical matters, you can also contact Mr Johny Messo (SUA's President) on +31 611 539 771 or on johny.messo@sua-ngo.org.