



TREE OF LIFE

Assyrian Aid Society of America

May 2021

30 Years Serving Assyrians Around the World



REBUILDING ASSYRIA, ONE HOME AT A TIME

CHAQALA FINDS NEW LIFE, NEW HOPE

Funding for Phase One of the Assyrian Aid Society of America's ambitious Chaqala village rebuilding project has been completed, with final construction and family move-ins now imminent.

The Assyrian Cultural Foundation in Chicago kicked off the project with a \$50,000 donation last fall, followed by individual contributions totalling \$150,000 by the end of the year.

Located on the Khabour River in the agriculturally rich region of Barwari Bala, Chaqala has long been abandoned. Today AASA is working to enable the return of its inhabitants, stop illegal land grabs, and empower the Assyrian population to reap economic benefits

from their land.

The Chaqala village inhabitants were originally from the Arush region in Hakkari, present-day Turkey, resettling to the village in 1922. These Assyrian families were farmers who cultivated wheat, barley, rice and various fruits.

As a result of Kurdish uprisings, in 1961, the Assyrians in Chaqala deserted their village. Thirty years later, they attempted to return to their homes after the establishment of the protected no-

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STREET LIGHTING BRINGS SAFETY TO RURAL VILLAGES

At the request of villagers complaining of unsafe streets and walking paths after sundown, the Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq took up the task of installing public street lights in areas where local government have failed to do so.

Among the communities in the Barwar District benefitting from the project or in the process of applying for help are Derishke, Beshmeyaye, Ainnony, Dooreh, Mayeh, Mosaka, Eyat, Tashish, and Koregavana, Baz, Chaqala, Jalek, Markajya, Hayes, Jedede, Beqolke, Perozawa, Bagerat, and Kani Balave.

The ongoing street lighting project has been funded by AASA, AAS-Australia, and the Iraqi Christian Relief Council.

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AASA MARKS 30 YEARS OF SERVING NEEDY ASSYRIANS

It's 2021 and your Assyrian Aid Society of America is about to celebrate a big anniversary!

Thirty years ago, in November 1991, AASA was founded in San Francisco as a California nonprofit corporation. Its mission was to fund refugee relief and rebuilding projects in north Iraq in the aftermath of the First Gulf War.

Thirty years and millions of generously donated dollars later, AASA is still going strong. And the mission grows.

The continuing pandemic is still cramping our style but soon we expect to be announcing our plans so that we can all get together once again and celebrate.



AASA Board of Directors, March 1999

NARSAI'S TASTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN LOOKING AT POSSIBLE FALL DATE IN 2021

One year ago *Narsai's Taste of the Mediterranean 2020* was held in San Francisco on Saturday, March 9, just one week before that city became the first in the U.S. to declare a lockdown due to COVID-19.

Eight days later the event and the tens of thousands of dollars it raised couldn't have happened.

The scheduled Saturday, May 8 date for *Narsai's Taste of the Mediterranean 2021* has, alas, been cancelled due to the ongoing pandemic.

It is hoped, however, that, with accelerating vaccinations, a new 2021 date can be set for November or December. Stay tuned for more information!

The annual *Narsai's Taste of the Mediterranean* fundraising dinners began in November 2002 and have raised nearly \$2 million for AASA humanitarian projects.

THE TREE OF LIFE

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Assyrian Aid Society of America

30 Years Serving Assyrians Around The World

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From the President's Desk

AASA TEAM STANDS AND DELIVERS IN 2021

Dr. Antoine Varani

You asked and AASA delivered!!!

It is with joy and pride that we are once again able to bring to you the Tree of Life publication. This is our way to show you that we are listening. You wanted more ways of us conveying our project successes, so we worked on recruiting volunteers to run and expand our social media and website. This is in addition to our weekly show on ANBsat. You can now see all the ongoing and completed projects via these different platforms.

Despite all the challenges that we faced last year, Assyrians did what they do best: we pulled together and made 2020 one of the most successful years in fundraising and humanitarian work. We not only continued to fund our schools, but, with the help of our supporters and other organizations, we were able to

provide Covid care packages, village street lighting, repairing of homes damaged by Turkish bombings, new computers and printers to our students, mobile medical clinics, and building homes in the village of Lower Chaqala, which will



be completed very soon. We also helped our Assyrian sisters and brothers in Armenia and Lebanon.

This year is a monumental year for Assyrian Aid Society.

It's our 30th anniversary. I can proudly say that this organization, with its many selfless volunteers and supporters, has been able to provide critical assistance needed for our people in the Middle East. From the Gulf War, ISIS, the COVID pandemic, to so many challenges that the public rarely hears about, AASA has been the backbone of humanitarian effort for three decades.

With the help of our team and your support, I look forward to another productive year filled with success. At the same time, I ask that you invite others, especially the younger generation, to get involved in this beautiful organization by contacting our chapters in different cities or our national office. With your support, anything is possible.

God bless you and our Assyrian nation.



Pre-pandemic Akitu celebration in north Iraq

CHAQALA

(continued from Page One)

fly zone in north Iraq. However, non-Assyrians from a neighboring village were encroaching on the Assyrian-owned land and illegally constructing their own homes. Attempts for Assyrian



Atra Project apple trees, 2008

resettlement failed.

In an effort to establish an economic infrastructure based on agriculture, in 2002 AASA funded the Atra Project and, led by Dr. Ashour Moradkhan, seeded over 8,000 apple trees across the Lower Chaqala region. When the neighboring villages did not allow water to flow to the orchards, AASA established a drip irrigation network to water the farms.

In 2016, the region continued to face aggression and the lands were burnt—including over 4,000 apple trees, 1,000 grape vines, 100 almond trees, 100 olive trees, and 100 fig trees. Yet again, AASA brought relief by restoring the drip irrigation network.

The Assyrians of Chaqala currently live and work in Nuhadra (Duhok) and Baghdad. Their desire to live in their ancestral village and reap the economic rewards from their land is an inspiration to Assyrians everywhere.



AAS-IRAQ PRESIDENT APPEARS ON BBC NEWS FOR POPE'S VISIT

As Pope Francis stepped off his plane and arrived in Iraq for his historic pilgrimage to the cradle of Christianity, Assyrian Aid Society-Iraq President Ashur Eskrya was live on BBC World News being interviewed for his comments on what the Pope's visit means for Iraq's indigenous Christians.

President Eskrya, who passed away a month later, explained to the worldwide BBC News audience that his hope is the Pope's visit will 1) encourage the indigenous Christian communities to remain in their ancestral lands and 2) encourage those who recently

fled to neighboring countries to return, rebuild their lives, and rebuild their Assyrian communities.

This can only be realized with the national government's commitment to provide safety and ongoing security for its Christian minority, Mr. Eskrya said.

The Vatican itself had publicly echoed these very same hopes that the landmark Papal visits to Erbil, Mosul, and the Nineveh Plains village of Baghdedeh would rally the country's dwindling Christian communities and encourage them to stay in Iraq.

ASSYRIAN SCHOOLS IN IRAQ RETURNING TO NORMAL AS RESTRICTIONS RECEDE

The teachers and thousands of K - 12 students in our Assyrian schools in north Iraq have been eager to return to their classrooms following months of pandemic lockdown. Government restrictions have begun to be lifted, with twelfth grade students already having returned to their classrooms.

The Assyrian schools are a critical focus of AASA, especially in such trying times as these .

AASA CFO Reports

2020 INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS HOLD STEADY IN FACE OF COVID-19 CHALLENGE

Sargon Shabbas, AASA CFO

FY2020 presented extraordinary and unprecedented challenges for all sectors of the economy, including charities. AASA was no exception. Due to the national shutdown, our local chapters and the Berkeley office were unable to stage the customary fundraising events and activities that fuel the AASA mission and projects in north Iraq.

But even so, thanks to our loyal supporters' continuing donations and our stable operating expenses, AASA was able to meet and exceed most FY2019, pre-pandemic numbers.

FY2021 promises to be equally challenging as COVID-19 continues to depress the economy and impair charitable giving. But our first quarter numbers are encouraging, and our numbers will only get better as more of the population gets vaccinated and the country returns to some form of normalcy. AASA is ready.

AASA 2020 CHRISTMAS APPEAL ENDS YEAR ON A HOPEFUL NOTE

The 2020 Christmas holidays were unlike any other holiday season before it, but AASA supporters came through once again in the annual holiday fundraising drive.

Besting the previous two years, the 2020 Christmas appeal took in over \$15,000 via direct mail, online donations, and independent giving.

AASA FY2020 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

INCOME

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Arizona | \$8,210 |
| Central Valley | \$65,284 |
| Chicago | \$342,483 |
| Washington D.C. | \$23,843 |
| Los Angeles | \$23,495 |
| Michigan | \$5,009 |
| Santa Clara Valley | \$74,779 |

Chapters Subtotal **\$543,103**

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| National Office | \$129,023 |
| Taste of the Mediterranean Event | \$122,260 |
| Bequest | \$230,918 |
| Interest | \$4,949 |

National Office Subtotal **\$487,150**

TOTAL INCOME \$1,030,253

DISBURSEMENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Financial Aid to Homeland (monthly transfers) | \$554,010 |
| Assyrians Armenia | \$2,000 |
| Assyrians Lebanon | \$2,500 |
| Christmas Gifts Iraq Children | \$930 |
| Chapter Expenses | \$30,185 |
| NTOTM 2020 | \$87,004 |
| Travel & Meetings | \$1,103 |

Disbursements Subtotal **\$677,732**

Operating Expenses

| | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Payroll | \$60,504 |
| Printing | \$505 |
| Postage + Mailing Services | \$4,084 |
| Insurance | \$4,749 |
| Office Supplies + Expenses | \$2,118 |
| Telephone + Telecom | \$1,931 |
| Bank Fees + Wire Charges | \$8,686 |
| Memorial Expenses | \$250 |
| Media Expenses | \$11,900 |
| Advertising | \$300 |
| Filing Fees | \$88 |

Operating Expenses Subtotal **\$92,670**

TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS \$770,402

NET SURPLUS OR <DEFICIT> \$259,851

AASA Chapter News

CENTRAL VALLEY CHAPTER PUTS ON A CRAB FEED

On Saturday, March 27 the AASA Central Valley Chapter held its third annual *Claws for a Cause* public crab feed, serving over 220 dinners in a safe “drive thru” event and raising nearly \$10,000 for AASA humanitarian projects.

Our thanks to Chef Mike Ortiz and Burly’s California Bistro in Modesto, CA, and to all of our sponsors and donors.

Chapter volunteers included Sargon Alkurge, Elizabeth Purto Bahner, Del Bahner, Jilbert Gervargizi, Natasha Hermis, Arbella Maisom, Mari Tamimi, the Varani family, and Sharill Youkhaneh.



MESOPOTAMIAN NIGHT SHOW AND DIRECTORS MEETING SLATED FOR ARIZONA

The AASA Arizona Chapter has a full schedule later this year as it has been tapped to both host the 2021 annual AASA Board of Directors meeting in August as well as stage its first Mesopotamian Night cultural production in October.

The Mesopotamian Night project, originally founded by the Central Valley Chapter and later moved to the Santa Clara Valley Chapter, has previously seen out-of-town performances only in Chicago and Los Angeles.

The Arizona Chapter last hosted a Board of Directors meeting and weekend in May 2016.

The Board of Directors will meet on August 21, with Mesopotamian Night scheduled for October 23, all contingent upon Arizona’s ongoing COVID-19 response and mandates.

DR. GEORGIS LIFE COMMEMORATED IN CHAQALA

In memory of the late Dr. Rouel Georgis, beloved AASA Board Director and former President of the Chicago Chapter, and to honor his humanitarian legacy, AASA, in collaboration with the Assyrian Cultural Foundation in Chicago and individual donors, has committed to rebuilding the village of Chaqala, to restore life in the area for generations to come and preserve its rich Assyrian culture and history.

Dr. Georgis was an active AASA Director until his final days, working tirelessly to spread its mission. A true community leader, he not only helped raise financial assistance for his Assyrian people in the Homeland, he was also a health advocate in his city of Chicago. He established a popular charity health clinic in Skokie.

A stone commemorating Dr. Georgis’ life will be erected in the village of Chaqala.

CLASSIC ASSYRIAN NECKTIES RETURNING SOON TO CHAPTERS

They’ve been out of stock for a couple of years but now, by popular demand, they are coming back.

The classic Assyrian alphabet silk neckties were first custom designed, manufactured, and sold by AASA in 2000. The ties will be available to purchase online and via your local



chapter, possibly including one new design in the group

AASA has been seeking a manufacturer since last year but, due to the global pandemic, the project was put on hold until this spring.

AASA Directors Spotlight: Karmella Borashan

AASA DIRECTOR TAKES LEAD ON GRANTS, DC CHAPTER

Karmella Borashan was born in Iran and came to the U.S. on a student visa when she was 18 years old. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Biology and Master’s degree in Clinical Science. Karmella has been a health care employee, and in management for 30 years. She has worked with various humanitarian organizations throughout the world. Her hobbies are reading, swimming, bike riding, and now feeding her love for nature through her RV travels. Advocacy has been her main focus, speaking at various American churches and collaborating with various NGOs. Karmella currently serves on the Assyrian Aid Society of America Board of Directors and its Executive Committee. Her AASA portfolio includes grants, advocacy, and advising the recently reconstituted Washington D.C. Chapter.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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ASHUR SARGON ESKRYA, RIP 1974-2021

It is with great sadness that we announce and mourn the loss of a dear friend, true humanitarian, and one of our greatest Assyrian leaders, Mr. Ashur Sargon Eskrya, President of the Assyrian Aid Society – Iraq.

Rabi Ashur did much to make Assyrian Aid Society what it is today. His energy and passion fueled and propelled the work on a daily basis. He was known and respected for his achievements and his depth of knowledge in Assyrian history and all of its current affairs. Rabi Ashur's tireless efforts in bringing international attention to the plight and struggle of Assyrians is commendable and will be remembered and honored for generations to come.

Our entire Assyrian Aid Society family offers its condolences to Rabi Ashur's beloved wife, Rosena; his son and two daughters; his four brothers and other family; and all of his friends across the world. The world has lost a true leader and, most importantly, a great human being. We will honor his memory by dedicating ourselves to continuing the work he loved so much, of helping those in need and helping the Assyrian nation thrive in our ancestral lands.

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I want to join the Lifeline Pledge Program and make regular tax-deductible donations to the Assyrian Aid Society. I authorize monthly contributions to be automatically charged to my credit card. Alternately, I can choose to send a monthly check.

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You can also donate online at www.assyrianaid.org/donate