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## **Sweden to Investigate Finding of Assyrian Mass Graves in Turkey**

By Afram Barryakoub

The finding of a mass grave in south eastern Turkey, believed to date from the 1915 genocide of Assyrians and Armenians, and the Turkish government's silence regarding the finding has prompted a debate in the Swedish parliament on the matter.

It was on October 17 this year that villagers from Xirabebaba (Kuru) in south eastern Turkey came across a mass grave when digging a grave for one of their deceased. The villagers took pictures of the skulls and bones in the mass grave before Turkish military came and blocked the site. The villagers were certain that they had found remains of victims of the 1915 genocide. The military personnel forbade the villagers to tell anyone about the site and then closed it. Some of the villagers chose not to follow the orders of the military and told the story to a local newspaper who followed up on the story. As soon as the military learned that someone has leaked this information to the press, they pressed the villagers to give the names of those responsible for this. Since then journalists trying to get near the mass grave have been denied access by the military.

Turkey still denies that its Christian population of Assyrians (also called Chaldeans and Syriacs), Greeks and Armenians were subjected to genocides. That could explain why the Turkish state and most of the Turkish media has remained silent about the finding. But now one of Turkey's most popular weekly magazines, *Nokta*, has highlighted the mass grave finding with a cover story in the latest issue with the main heading "Again acting the three monkeys—a mass grave was found one month ago in Nusaybin and the jurisdiction, execution and legislation bodies as well as the media are silent." The writer, Talin Suciyan, accuses the Turkish state of turning a deaf ear to the mass grave finding. "None of the three 'powers' of our democracy, legislation, jurisdiction or execution made a move to deal with the issue. And when the fourth power—the media—swept the bones under the carpet (the Turkish) public remained completely unaware of the issue." she writes.

In fact, the only Turkish group that has reacted to the finding is the Turkish Human Rights Association who sent an open letter to the ministry of interior calling for an investigation into the matter. The mass grave finding has yet to enter Turkish politics but in Sweden the matter has stirred up a debate on the highest levels, much due to the efforts of the Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Association (ACSA). The news about the mass finding was distributed by *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* (TT), Sweden's top news agency and was thereafter published in several Swedish media, including the two leading morning papers *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (Svd). As a result of the above the mass grave issue has now entered Swedish politics as MP Hans Linde from the left party recently submitted an interpellation to the Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt, asking for an independent commission of scientists and historians to examine the findings. The foreign minister must now ask the foreign ministry to launch an investigation into the

matter before he can respond to MP Hans Linde. The response of the foreign minister on this issue is due to be presented on the 12 of December before parliament.

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