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Dear friends,

Thanks to the organisers for their invitation. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be among people who are interested in dialogue.

We live in depressing times. Depressing for us as we are struggling to survive in that particular region of Asia Minor and other regions in the post-Ottoman space. Since long it has not been a matter of claims, but to preserve our mere existence as a minority in the Near and Middle East. Will that be possible in the area under scrutiny here?

I was born in Syria. My parents originated from Turkey, my mother from Mardin, my father from Ma'asarte. The latter is now called in Turkish Ömerli and is located close to Mardin. My grandparents lost their lives during the genocide against Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Together with all male Christian residents of the village of Ma'asarte, my grandfather was beheaded and thrown into the well. Until today, this well is called in Arabic "*Jub al-Nasara*", "Well of the Nazarenes".

Two years ago, I visited with my daughter the Southeast Turkey. We wanted to see that well and made inquiries. We were told that the well was cleansed a year ago. The owner of the land on which the well is situated, had asked the last two Christian families of the village what he should do with the relics of the murdered. He was terrified to find out that the teeth in the skulls were completely intact which indicates that the beheaded persons that were thrown into the well had been still very young.

The fact that the remaining Christians of Ma'asarte did not want to get involved with the crimes of the past, had shocked my daughter and me deeply. After all, we had hoped to find our ancestors among the relics. We both could understand why the relics were not buried at least in the yard of the restored local church. Only later I understood how great until today is the fear of the local Christian minority, which is too scared to talk about the incidents of 1915 or to be even confronted with them.

This experience makes me wonder, how, in the presence of lasting silence we can regain mutual trust.

My grandfather from my mother's side died during forced labour. He was among those Non-Muslims who were conscripted for road construction during the First World War, and eventually died of exhaustion and starvation. His body was buried like the others along the roadside. My grandmother received the news of his death while she was nursing my mother. It didn't take a year before she died out of grief for her husband.

The fate of my grandparents and my parents has become an integral part of my own identity. Their live stories have been passed on to me by my parents and they shared it in their own ways. My parents were told about the events from older relatives, since at that time they were still very young. Even today, I admire my parents, how they were able to start a family and take care of us despite their traumatizing experience.

I am grateful that I can talk to you today and share my story with you. I do not take it for granted that I live in a country where it is allowed to talk about the genocide. In order to save the stories of my ancestors and their brothers in faith, the Syro-Aramaic Christians, from oblivion, I published two books of translated into German testimonies of survivors. All in all these reports testify the suffering and destruction of our communities in Tur Abdin. The book "The persecution and destruction of the Syro-Aramaic Christians in Tur Abdin" contains contemporary testimonies of witnesses from the Southeast Turkey.

Anyone who travels today through the region will discover further traces which, even after hundred years of silence, cannot be erased. The Christian heritage in South-Eastern Turkey is still visible in the many monasteries and churches, which date back to the early middle Ages.

We must preserve these sites as part of the World's Cultural Heritage, particularly at a time, when the Christian heritage in Turkey and the Middle East is threatened by state and radical Islamic forces.

The second book that I published in translation bears the title "Blood Shed" and is also about the genocide against the Syro-Aramaic Christians in the villages around Mardin and Diyarbakır. In this part of the Tur Abdin region, five Syriac dioceses were almost completely eliminated, among them the dioceses of Urfa, Gizre, Amid (Diyarbakır), Beth Zabdai (Idil) and Adiyaman. Of all the Syriac-Orthodox dioceses that existed in the Southeast of Turkey, only the diocese of Tur Abdin and Mardin survived.

The third book that I edited bears the title "The history of Syriac science and literature". It informs about the rich literary legacy that the Syro-Aramaic Christians left behind. Particularly impressive are the amount of traditional medieval literature and the fact that it was written by a people without state sovereignty. The textual content focuses not solely on theology, but on all sciences that were then known and practised. As outstanding translators, the Syro-Aramaic Christians ensured the transfer of philosophical works to Europe. Among others, they translated the ancient Greek philosophers first into Aramaic, which is a Semitic language, and then into Arabic, which is also a Semitic language. Due to the Syro-Aramaic Christians as mediators, the Arabs were able to bring the translated texts to Spain and Europe.

During the genocide against the Christians of Tur Abdin not only humans, but also manuscripts of the before mentioned literature have been destroyed. We owe our knowledge of the erstwhile wealth of this Aramaic literature to the scholar Mor Ignatios Aphrem I. Barsaum, who had visited all towns, villages and monasteries of the area before the genocide and recorded all existing manuscripts. From his book we learn which irreplaceable manuscripts we have lost.

The genocide has depopulated whole villages and towns. Of the previously 250,000 Syro-Arameans in Tur Abdin, there are only about two thousand left who continue to practice and preserve their tradition under difficult conditions and despite state reprisals.

The famous monastery Mor Gabriel still exists today, serving as the centre of Syriac-Orthodox Christians in the area and as an educational institution for priests and teachers of religion. Two years ago, I visited the monastery together with my daughter. It is an oasis in a very rocky and dry landscape. If you are in the area, I highly recommend you a visit. For years, the monastery has been struggling to survive and had to face several court cases. Its land possession is threatened by confiscation claims of the Turkish state in order to expel the last Arameans.

I am disappointed by the local civilian population, which does not raise their voices in protest against the current displacement strategies. Thus, the claims of reparation that were raised by the preceding presenters in my view seem to reflect desires far from reality. For many local Kurds and Turks, reparation is an unknown word. Even in Europe, the acknowledgment and commemoration of the genocide in the Ottoman Empire came very late. Therefore, I would like to appeal to the conscience of political decision-makers in Germany and Europe. Relations between people consist not only of economic advantages, but of shared fundamental values. I hope that Turks, Kurds and Arameans will one day re-establish mutual trust. I wish that Turkey honours the courageous righteous, who helped to prevent the worst with their intervention during the genocide. I wish that mosques, streets, and centres are not named, as it is still the case today, after genocide perpetrators, but after these righteous people. This would be a signal and perhaps a prelude to reach out to one another.