

**Comprehensive Interview with Mr. Bachir Issac Sa'adi Chairman of
(ADO) Assyrian Democratic Organization's political bureau,
carried out by electronic bulletin "Syrian Democratic Forum" in Arabic
language**



The "Syrian Democratic Forum Bulletin" has met Eng. Bachir Issac Sa'adi, member of general secretariat of Damascus Declaration and chairman of Assyrian Democratic Organization's political bureau. He has thankfully and patiently answered all our questions openly without embarrassment, and in our attempt to get more from our guest to present it to our readers, Mr. Bachir did not give us the chance to elucidate or speculate, instead he spoke with notable clarity and courage, knowing that he is living and working in Syria .. we thank him for his patience .. We had this comprehensive interview with him which tackled all general issues in Syria.

Excerpts from the interview

- Part of the grievances of the Assyrian people in Syria is due to the fact that they are not being constitutionally acknowledged as a national minority and as indigenous people on one hand, and because of the existence of some constitutional and legal articles that openly discriminate between Muslims and Christians on the other. These articles hurt the feelings of the Christians and makes them feel that they are second rate citizens. ...Article second of the constitution bans the Christians from becoming president of the state, further, the Muslim has the right to marry a Christian whereas a Christian is prohibited to marry a Muslim girl.
- Some Kurds consider Al-Jazira region a Kurdish territory and a part of Kurdistan, we view this differently. Al-Jazira region throughout the history has been an essential part of Mabein Al-Nahrein (Mesopotamia) region on whose territory the great empires of Babylonians, Assyrians and Aramaeans were founded.
- There can not be an ideal autonomous or federal region in al-Jazira neither for the Kurds nor for the others
- America is using the investigation file into Hariri assassination as a means to pressure Syria to improve its behavior, but after the naturalization and peace with Israel it will be an unimportant card in the American agenda.
- The Muslim Brothers in Syria have committed acts of violence and posed a threat to the regime in the beginning of the eighties, hence, it was equally repressed and has become regime's archenemy.
- HesbAlla is originally an Iranian product and its powerful arm in Lebanon
- The only available alternative at present is Political Islam ...and the US has seen examples of this in Iraq and Palestine ..
- The alliance with dissenters as Khadam is a great mistake, and the allied national forces would lose their credibility.

- I don't think than Khadam and other dissenters who follow suit are true in the democratic slogans that they reiterate , because democracy does not serve them and is not in their interest after having practiced repression and corruption in their countries .
- We do not have any communication with Khadam .
- We are against the outside funding , those who accept these funds become easy tools for these sources . The opposition is not in need of funding , but further completing its restructuring and deepening their grassroots .
- Rifa'at al-Assad's propoganda machine has declared for more than a year that all the Syrians are impatiently waiting for his returnall Syrian know that these are only hot air ...
- To my view , Banouni's relationship with Khadam is temporary and based on mutual interests and is never ideological .Every one seeks to make use of the others assets for his own interest and then differences would emerge .
- Banouni's rhetoric has not change and never will . If they come to power they will establish a religious state and he thinks there is no harm of the ballot boxes as long they serve their ultimate goal which is Islamic and Sharia'a law and a Religious State ..

Part I

Q1-what is ADO's political demand ?

A1- Since inception ADO has put forward its concept of the political system it strives to achieve . It is democratic , secular system based on the principles of justice , equality , human rights and citizenship . A system that constitutionally guarantees the rights of ethnic minorities within the framework of the unity of the state and society , under the umbrella of one Syrian national identity that contains and recognizes national , cultural , religious and political diversity . We also demand that the Assyrians (Syriacs) be recognized as indigenous people in Syria ,consequently , to acknowledge the syriac language and culture as a national culture and language . Further , our Organization believes that the peaceful democratic struggle is the only way for achieving political ends , rejecting all forms of violence , extremism , fanaticism and terrorism , as well as all kinds of justifications for such acts.

Q2-Is there any difference between Assyrians and Syriacs , and is there any other Syriac organization with political goals different from yours ?

A2-The designation Syriac is rather a linguistic expression derived from the Assyrian name . Starting from the fourth century B.C. all the territories of Fertile Crescent(al-Hilal al-khasib) under the rule of the Assyrian Empire were called "Syria " ,this passed on to us from the Greek language , and because the Greek language has no (sh) sound , all Mesopotamia till the shores of the Mediterranean sea , was called by them as Assyria and its people Assyrian . And through the Aramaic language which was the language of all the Assyrian empire this new name has become "Souroyo" or "Souraya", from which came the name of "Syrian" in Arabic . Consequently , the name "Suriani" or Syriac is derived from the Assyrian name , it means one people , and thus from the fourth century B.C. , all Assyrian , Syriac and Aramaic inhabitants of Syria and Mesopotamia (al-Rafidein) were called "Seryan" Syriac and their language "Seryani" which consists of many dialects . Regrettably, many , even now , are not aware of this reality .

In Syria there is no party bearing Syriac name . It was the national elite of the Syriacs who established the first political organization and called it "Athoury" which exactly means "Assyrian" according to the syriac pronunciation.

Q3-Do the Assyrians in Syria suffer from ethnic or religious repression on the hand of Moslems of Arab and Kurdish origin , we mean by the public not the state ?

A3-Assyrians do not suffer from direct ethnic and religious repression from their Moslem partners in Syria . Nevertheless , part of the grievances of the Assyrians in Syria is due to the fact that they are not being constitutionally acknowledged as a national minority and as indigenous people on one hand , and because of the existence of some constitutional and legal articles that openly discriminate between Muslims and Christians on the other . These articles hurts the feelings of the Christians and makes them feel that they are second rate citizens in a country where Christianity preceded Islam by seven centuries and until the fifties of the last century Christians formed 30% of the population . For example, article two of the constitution bans the Christians from becoming president of the state , further , the Muslim has the right to marry a Christian whereas a Christian is prohibited to marry a Muslim girl.

Q4-Why do we always hear about disagreement and difference in opinion between the Assyrian and Kurdish demands regarding the historical priorities and political claims?

A4-As a matter of fact there are differences in assessment and interpretation of al-Jazira region's history among most of the Kurdish parties on one hand , and ADO and the Assyrian's general opinion on the other . Some Kurds consider Al-Jazira region a Kurdish territory and a part of Kurdistan , based on the allegation that Mittans , Khaches and Medians , who were Arian people and ruled al-Jazira region in the ancient past , were the ancestors of the present Kurds , so come to conclusion that the Kurdish presence is as old as history in the area and they go to the extent that their presence is even older than that of the Assyrians Aramaean and Babylonians !!

We view this differently . Al_Jazira region throughout the history has been an essential part of Mabein Al-Nahreïn (Mesopotamia) region on whose territory the great empires of Babylonians , Assyrians were founded . Moreover , all the excavated hills and the historical monuments and ruins (their number is in hundreds) come to confirm its Assyrian and Babylonian origin . No doubt , many other people have settled in this region during successive historic periods like Arabs ,Kurds , Armenians and others , therefore the region belongs to these people , but more importantly it is a part of Syrian territories consequently , home for all the Syrians .

As for the national rights of the Assyrians and the Kurds in al-Jazire region it has nothing to do with the historic claims . Needless to say that Kurds have the right to have cultural , political and administrative rights in the places where they live in Syria as much the other minorities have, and these rights must be acknowledged and guaranteed constitutionally and through democratic solutions and as we have said earlier under the umbrella of one unified national Syrian identity that would contain all religious and national diversities .There are some Kurdish parties who consider themselves a component of the Syrian society and raise their issues as a part of national problems in general . They believe that their national rights would be resolved as a part of general democratic solution in the country . But there are other parties that adopt nationalistic extremist slogans and allege that al-Jazira region is a Kurdish territory that has been annexed to the Syrian map since Saix –Beco agreement , they further put forward the idea of right of self determination on their historical land namely Syrian al-JAZira region .

Q5-Do you think that the autonomy or federalism as some Kurds strive to achieve is the best solution to the problems of peaceful coexistence in the north of Syria ? To what extent this contradicts and affects the presence of religious and ethnic minorities in the area ?

A5-Syrian al-Jazira is a multi-ethnic region , Arabs , Kurds , Assyrians (Syriacs) and Armenians live there , they are mixed and interwoven in towns villages and

governorates , that is why there is no ideal region for autonomy in al-Jazira for the Kurds or others . Demands like this may cause endless coexistence problems . No minorities can be given rights over the others or on account of the others , and the best solution to me is the constitutional acknowledgement of the political , cultural and administrative rights of the minorities , and thus Kurds or others when they constitute a majority in any area , have the right to become major partners in the administration of their areas ,off course through ballot boxes , I mean that , democracy would solve the problem of the administrative representation for any ethnic minority , and when this condition is fulfilled there will be certainly a sort of autonomy in this or that region as a direct outcome of ballot boxes . Nevertheless we have always confirmed the unity of the Syrian identity and its unifying factor that would assimilate all the ethnic multiplicities , as well as the unity of the Syrian society and homeland a permanent home for all its sons .

Q6-Do you think that federalism is the ideal solution to the issues of the Kurds ,Assyrians , Syriacs ,Turkmen and other ethnic groups living together in Syria ?

A6-No, I don't think so , and I have explained myself in your previous question.

7-How do you view the question of peace , coexistence and national unity in view of the successive changes in Syria ?

A7-I think this is a very important question and it concerns every patriotic Syrian , we are all worried about internal security and stability and very keen on the national unity , but this is a sentimental issue and can not be solved through slogans . The country is going through a real crisis ,as a matter of fact a lot of crisis , political , social , economic in addition to serious external threats . Now before everything is lost , we have to seriously reconsider our situation , the regime has to take a bold and serious step towards a real political reform through a reform program that all the national democratic political forces would take part in shaping , via a national congress that would lay the foundation for a better future in a democratic free Syria .

PART II - THE WAR IN LEBANON AND ITS REPERCUSSION

Q1-Is the waging war now in Lebanon or about Lebanon ?

A1- It is in Lebanon and about Lebanon at the same time .

Q2-Is Hasan Nasrallah going to achieve what Abdul Nasser failed to do and will drown the Jews in the Dead Sea ?

A2-I don't think that he is going to gain a victory over Israel in the long run , on the contrary, his approach may provide Israel with pretexts to wage new wars pretending that she is being threatened by Hesbullah and those supporting her.

Q3-Didn't Syria's presence in Lebanon come to an end ? Who is manipulating the pawns there ? Is what is happening in Lebanon now confirms the return of Syrian – Iranian hegemony over the Lebanese policy making circles ?

Q3- Although Syria pulled out of Lebanon , nevertheless its political influence on the overall political arena continued though indirectly through her allies , like HezbAllah , Libanese al-Baath Party , Syrian National Party , Palestinian factions , organizations and political figures . It is an oversimplification to think that the pullout of the Syrian army would end its political influence there ,hence , I think that the last war in Lebanon does not mean the return of the Syrian or Iranian influence there , but rather it points out to the continuation of their political

presence which was only partly influenced by the pullout of the army.

Q4-can we consider what is going on in Lebanon is in the interest of the democratic transformations in both Syria and Lebanon ?

A4-It may be so if the events moved into the direction of a permanent solution to the pending problem between Lebanon and Israel , that is the return of occupied Lebanese territories – Shaba'a Farms and Kafer Shouba as well as a consensus amongst all Lebanese parties to implement 1559 resolution and extend the Lebanese sovereignty over all Lebanese territories in addition to agreeing on a workable formulas for implementing Taef agreement . I think if this happened it may provide a conducive atmosphere for the restoration of stability and security in Lebanon , and this would be in favor of the democratic transformations in Lebanon . But I don't see any direct connection or influence between the transformations in Lebanon and that of Syria.

Q5-Syria and Iran...Who is exploiting the other ? And what cards Syria currently possess ?

Q5-There is an alliance between Syria and Iran based on mutual interests , and don't think that any party is exploiting the other one . As for the Syrian cards , it is firstly , its internal potentials as a state and its close relationship with the Palestinian jihadist factions , Hamas , Jihad , Hezbollah and other Lebanese forces and parties , in addition to its excellent relation with Iran .

Q6-Do you think that syria's compliance with some international demands pertaining to the Lebanese file as well as acknowledging some reforms would be as a security valve , or the findings of al-Hariry investigation commission would reverse everything ?

A6-Syria is being pressured by the US , France and probably Europe , these countries want her to improve her conduct , i.e. they want her to help implement resolution 1559 , delineate the border , to close the file of Sheba's farms and give up its alliance with Iran , in another words , to be a friend of US and carry out some political reforms . If Syria fulfilled these conditions , I think , there would be no problem with America , relations between them would improve and this might pave the way to negotiations with Israel that could lead to the return of Golan Highs and making peace with Israel . After that , the investigation in Hariri assassination would become an unimportant point on the American agenda . This file is only used to pressure Syria in order to improve its conduct according to the American terms.

Q7-The Syrian regime supports Hezbollah one way or another knowing that it is an Islamic party , whereas it banned the Moslem Brothers party and imposed harshest punishments on its members . Why ?

A7-Simply because Moslem brothers is a Syrian party , they have committed acts of violence and posed a threat to the regime in the beginning of the eighties , hence it was equally repressed and has become regime's number one enemy . The case of Hezbollah is completely different , it is a Lebanese party , it is an ally and friend to the regime and has no special agenda regarding Syria , so there is big difference between them.

Q8- How do you view the present pressures on Syria ? Will this lead to regime change or change of conduct ? And what are the possibilities of introducing change from outside as in the case of Iran's Shah ?

A8-Pressures weigh on the regime to make it change its opposition to the American policy in Iraq , Lebanon and Palestine . I think all problems with the American administration will disappear once the regime changed its policy , even more , America may support the regime as it does with Saudi Arabia , Egypt and Jordan and recently Kazzafi . So the crux of the matter is not exporting democracy as a neutral product ,but as a product conditional on American terms . I think the continuing of outside pressures would not change the regime as they have not changed any other regime in the world , change would come when forces inside the country are prepared for it , the current situation can not be paralleled to that of Iran , we do have neither Syrian Khoumaini outside , not the ground is prepared for a change inside.

Q9-The Syrian mass median particularly the TV has become a propaganda tool for Hezbollah these days . How do you view this ?

A9-It's a natural thing , Hezbollah is a major ally to the regime , besides , it has been

subjected to an Israeli aggression , so this support is normal.

Q10- What do you say about not opening the Golan front and dodging demarcation of Shaba'a Farms while Israel is fighting in South Lebanon ? Don't you think that Golan front is nearer and more important ?

A10-The opening of Golan front would mean the outbreak of a regular war with Israel the outcome of which would not be in Syria's interest , because the balance of power is in Israeli's favor , this is the formal excuse of the Syrian policy . Avoiding demarcation with Lebanon means one thing , dodging the question of Shaba'a and Kafar Shouba Farms , because the settlement of this issue would strip Hezbollah of their raison d'etre - armed resistance , whereas keeping it unsettled would provide Syria and Iran with tools to pressure Israel and America as well as maintaining political influence in Lebanon.

Q11- some say that Hezbollah is not a Syrian card and that both Syria and Lebanon are tools in the hand of Iran to exploit them in her nuclear crisis against America and the West . Others say that this is a Syrian –Iranian deal aiming at reassessing both regimes calculations . What is your position on what is happening ?

A11- I Think Hezbollah is originally an Iranian product and its long arm in Lebanon , and a strong ally of Syria at the same time . I don't think that Syria is an Iranian tool , rather , there is mutual interest and alliance between them . Further , the use of Hezbollah , alongside the other Lebanese political allies , by Syria and Iran in their conflict with Israel and America looks very realistic , besides , the confusion and chaos may come up with political conditions favorable to Syria and Iran and thus stave off dangers and pressures on them.

Q13-Some Israeli analysts say that the war served the interests of Iran's nuclear file and that Hezbollah is Iranians military arm , used as a pressure tool to deter America and Israel from striking its nuclear installations , what is your comment ?

A13-I think the war was in Israel's favor in spite of the great loses it suffered , because resolution 1701 fulfills what Israel wants ; distancing Hezbollah from the south , far away from its positions , military bases and territories , then later on imposing its disarming in the hands of the Lebanese government through implementing resolution 1559 , creating an atmosphere conducive to civil war . Therefore the war was not in the interests of Hezbollah nor the Iranians , what is more , I think this has created an international atmosphere sympathetic to Israel and showed her as a victim country defending itself against the Iranian-made rocket attacks of Hezbollah on its towns and villages. Besides , the abduction of two of its soldiers gave her the excuse to declare that she is defending her population against what it calls " Arab and Islamist terrorism " who want to destroy Israel.

Q14-Some analysts and observers have agreed that the Iranian and Syrian regimes and their instrument Hezbollah have given Israel and the international community the excuse to disarm Hezbollah and marginalize its role and transform it into a political organization as they did with Muktda al-Sadder in Iraq. What do you say about this ?

A14-I don't think that Syria and Iran's interest lie in disarming Hezbollah in Lebanon , but the outcome of the last war made the issue of disarming as settled according to resolution 1701.

Q15-In your opinion why the Lebanese army did not fire any bullet especially after Kanna Massacre ?

A15- For two reasons I think , first , to keep away from waging a lost war , secondly , to portray the war as between Israel and Hezbollah and that the Lebanese government has no connection with it and further , to put the responsibility for the war on both Hezbollah and Israel.

Q16- How do you see the future of the region ? Greater , broader or a new middle east?

A16-The result of the war was resolution 1701 . In principle the outcome was in Lebanese government's favor in helping her to extend its sovereignty over its territories and this means disarming Hezbollah and thus weakening its role and transforming it to a political party subject to the Lebanese law . But in case the state wont be able to do this task , the situation will complicate further and there will be fear of another fiercer war in the area , beside , the possibility of a civil war and chaos can not be ruled out.

Q17-What if Hezbollah won ? How the Arab states are going to deal with it ?

A17-The war has ended now , and Huzballah considers itself victorious emotionally . He is victorious because he was able to resist a strong army and deal strong painful blows to it . Nevertheless , considering the political outcome of the war , he is a loser . The result was keeping Hezbollah off the South as well as weakening its role in the overall Lebanese political life , as a result Iran's and Syria's influence too will weaken there , and this , I think is a defeat for Hezbollah and its allies . I do not think that Hezbollah was so much interested in liberating the South as in his military role in the regional equation.

Q18-If Israel wins in this war , will they impose on the Arab regimes to recognize her and demarcate her border ?

A18-Israel failed militarily but won politically through resolution 1701 if implemented , besides she could win international sympathy through portraying herself as a victim and further she might invest this sympathy in launching more attacks on Lebanon , if the UN resolution is not implemented , or on Syria or Iran in a attempt to restore her prestige after her moral defeat.

Q19-The Syrian Opposition expected a lot from Brammertz report , some expected the downfall of Syrian regime by Summer , but the results were just the opposite . Does the opposition misjudge things ? Why ?

A19-People who gave this interpretation were wrong . Even if the Report leveled charges against Syrian officials , the matter would be referred to the International court and would take a long time , may be years not months , and after all this long investigation they may not reach any verifiable results.

Q20-What is your opinion about the extension of Brammertz mandate for another year ?

A20-The extension practically is connected with completion of the investigation on one hand , and dragging out the case longer as a means for exercising more political pressure on Syria on the other.

II : Syrian regime and the opposition

Q1-How do you view the future of Syria in the light of the continuous pressures that included different political files ?

A1- I think the future depends on how the crises and the pressures are being manipulated . In my view the opportunity is conducive to get rid of all these pressures. Having failed in Iraq the US has realized that the people of the region are nor qualified for democratic rule , whereas other political , secular and democratic alternatives are not available as yet , the only alternative is political Islam , as in Palestine and Iraq , and this is rejected by America for fear of its recurrence in Syria as well , that is why , I think America and Europe prefer the existing regimes with changes in their antagonistic policy towards their projects in the area .What is required now is to improve the conduct of these regime as voiced by US Secretary of State . Therefore, if the Syrian regime could find an opening and solution through introducing political reforms inside and disassembling her alliance with Iran as well as improving her relations with the US , Europe and the Arab World , if this could be done I think It may find a way out of this crisis.

Q2-In your opinion what is required from Syria as a regime and opposition to avoid great losses and disasters ?

A2-I think it is possible to achieve safe and democratic changes provided the regime is convinced that there is no way to stop the oncoming changes or to resist them . Amidst this situation , I think , the best and the safest means is that the regime initiates a program for reform defined by constitutional amendments . First and foremost revoking article 8 of the constitution , Secondly , drafting a new law for political parties as well as an election law both acknowledging ethnic and political diversity and exchange of power , Thirdly , calling for the convening a national conference with the participation of all national forces without exception to agree upon a workable reform program which will consist of : 1-calling for a new parliamentary and presidential elections that would secure the right of participation and competition for all .2- Releasing from prisons all poetical detainees and prisoners of conscious and closing the file of political detention forever . 3-Freezing the emergency law

as a first necessary step. I think the Syrian opposition should welcome these initiative and cooperate positively with it . This , to my opinion , would be the best and safest way of transformation to the status of democracy without losses.

Q3- All opposition groups have agreed upon safe and peaceful democratic transformation , what is currently detaining their unifying efforts and why all the attempts to converge their different views in a general national convention has failed so far ?

A3-Most Syrian political forces have unified their efforts through a framework on 10/10/2005 under the banner " Damascus Declaration for Democratic change " and most Syrian opposition forces as well as figures outside the country joined this forum , they are now preparing for convening a national congress after completing the structural organization of the Declaration , there was a little delay because of some subjective and objective circumstances regarding the Declaration . Nevertheless the signatories to the Declaration were able to consolidate their position in the political arena and win the public's support and sympathy , besides , they held some political activates recently . Generally speaking , I think the existence and continuance of the Declaration forces in these difficult circumstances ,is in itself a success.

Q4-Do you share the Moslem Brothers' view on changes in Syria , as they are now the strongest alternative to the regime according to the analysts .do you wager on another alternative? You , for example ? Do you find yourself an appropriate alternative ?

A4-We are in favor of establishing a democratic secular system based on the principles of citizenship and human rights , under the umbrella of a national Syrian identify encompassing all the components of the Syrian society with all its ethnic , religious and political diversity . I don't think that Moslem Brother's political platform comes closer to ours nor do I think that they are supposed alternative or better alternative. At the same time , I think that the democratic national alternative currently is not ready yet , it is actually under formation throughout "Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change" . If the regime could be convinced of the new initiative for change , as you put it in the previous question , it will save the country from possible chaos that nobody wants . An initiative like this whose chances of success is diminishing day after day is the safest and fastest means of introducing or initiating chance.

Q5-You are one of the parties which welcomed Damascus Declaration , Do you view it as the ceiling of opposition's demands in the current stage ?

A5- Damascus Declaration together with its proclaimed documents and later statements is actually an intersection of many differing political views and programs and is further the summary of consensuses on these programs and in our opinion it is the right option and further , the only option in the current circumstances.

Q6-Where lies the opposition's strength? What are its advantages and disadvantages ?

A6-The opposition strength lies in its determination to openly proclaim its political options and platform within Damascus Declaration framework, as well as in the continuity of its consensual activities that are being consolidated day after day despite the fact that it embraces the diverse components of the political spectrum in Syria. What unifies the opposition is the need for democratic change and their agreement on a document that summed up all their consensuses . As for the shortcomings , I thing the shortcomings of any party lies in its extremism and lack of political realism as well as the inability to cope with emerging conditions practically and sensibly .In fact I see that the Declaration forces all demonstrate realism and political wisdom , and this is an asset.

Q7-Some opposition groups -that call for a change in Syria- have gone to the extent of asking for foreign help , don't you think that this is a cause for worry to the citizens that you are seeking to support ?

A7-I have not heard such calls , nevertheless , if there are some , they represent the individuals who voice them . I don't think that the Syrian people who is known for its patriotism , would accept to entreat the foreigners for help to introduce changes in his country.

Q8-How do you assess the question of forging alliance with everybody who opposes the regime , following the saying " the enemy of my enemy is my friend " including the

adversaries of the recent past like Khadam ? To what extent do you agree with Khadam in his embracing the democratic values , a fact that he was opposing so much in the recent past ? Do you have contacts with him ?

A8-I think political alliance should be based on principles i.e. it should include forces who have relatively close political approach or general political principles , and not on agreement on regime change and then start fighting over power . Secondly there should be among the allies a certain degree of credibility , sincerity and morality , there is no justification for an alliance based only on temporary interests . Therefore , alliance with dissenters like Khadam is a great mistake , it will make the national allied forces lose the public's credibility and trust . The dissenters can forge alliance among themselves and work separately with each others in the way they like , this is not our concern , but before this or that they must apologize to their people for their previous offences as a first step before thinking of opposition work . Concerning Mr.Khadam and other dissenters , I don't think that they are sincere in what they say about democracy , because democracy does not serve them and is not in their favor , after their long history of corruption and repression . Further , We do not have any contacts with Khaddam.

Q9-Some considered the acceptance of Khadam among the opposition a change in positions and contradiction of the accepted directions . Do you actually act according to your theories or turn to the Syrian street ? Or what ?

A9-I don't understand your question , which opposition do you mean ? If you mean Damascus Declaration, Kaddam is not a part of it , if you mean his formation ,together with some Syrian opposition forces months ago in Brussels , of an opposition front called " National Salvation Front " , this actually has nothing to do with Damascus Declaration , it only concerns those people acting under its banner . In my opinion there is more than one opposition , each has its own platform , in the end , it is the people who is going to trust this or that one.

10-There are some people who ask Khaddam to apologize for his history which was full of human rights violations , as well as for the radioactive waste deal and others , are you going to forgive him or enter into deals with him ?

A10-It is for the people to decide this man's fate , not we . But I think any dissenter before presenting his platform should first apologize for his offences and corruption . The dissenters should learn to respect the feeling and intellect of the people . They should forever forget the psychology of the ruler . I think they should give up public life and leave off politics . They shouldn't ever think of returning back to their positions by putting on new masks.

Q11-The opposition is calling for peaceful dialogue and the regime is responding with violence and detention . What solution is there, to make the regime listen to the internal calls as it does with the external orders.

A11- Damascus Declaration's opposition groups have got no way but peaceful struggle , this struggle though may take long time and demand sacrifices but it will bear fruits in the end and the regime can not ignore the opposition forever . I think the regime will be convinced of the necessity of reform , and the only means to this is through dialogue with the opposition and active national forces .

Q12 – To what extent the slogan of overthrowing the regime , as Mr.Riad al-Turks calls for , is serious and practical ? What are the means of putting this slogan into practice ?

A12-In Damascus's Declaration there is no slogan such as this , or in this context , what is being said is peaceful struggle for national democratic change , and I have already answered as to how to achieve this goal.

Q13-What are the chances of coordination between regime's and opposition's agendas for speedy real reforms ? What are the barriers to such a cooperation as long as all call for these reforms ?

A13-I have already answered this question . The regime's concept of reform does not include political reform , what is being said is economic and administrative reform , and it seems that the circles that block the reforms till now in the country are the strongest.

Q14-What do you say about external funding ? What are the conditions of accepting it as means of boosting the opposition since it is penniless ?

A14--We are against the outside funding , those who accept these funds become easy tools for outside sources . The opposition is not in need of funding , but it needs to complete its restructuring and broadening its grassroots , besides , determination and political realism . I see it is growing day after day.

Q15-What is your position on exporting revolution as the Bolsheviks did and exporting and importing ready -made democracy from the sophisticated West ?

A15-The promulgation of ideas is something normal and human . Throughout the ages the religious thought was promulgated either through evangelists or military campaigns . Spreading of thoughts is normally connected with political and economic interests and influence . The promulgation of democracy nowadays is very much like that of communism and socialism in the past . The powerful Europe and America have accomplished a democratic system which is the best , and they are trying to spread it across the world as their own model that would serve their own interests only . Promulgating new thoughts requires conducive and favorable environment . It is a mistake to transfer this experiment mechanically without taking into consideration the values , customs and the cultures of the new settings , as well as the time it would take for these new ideas to be taken in by this new reality . By the way , the Syrian reality is still capable of digesting national , democratic ideas , besides , it has practiced these experiment successfully in the 50ies of the last century before the era of totalitarianism that started with the union with Egypt and is continuing up till now.

Q16-Why the opposition did not succeed in convening a national conference including all groups ? Is it that each tries to present himself above the other ? Or the regime divides to rule ? What are the chances of convening a national conference and what is the criteria for representation ?

A16-The real opposition is inside the country , it is the force of Damascus Declaration , and the idea of convening a national convention is underway now and it is a matter of time , the delay was because of reasons I have already explained , but it will be convened in the appropriate time.

Q17-Some argue that the opposition comprises mainly of the elite and has no grass roots and has so far failed to polarize the street , beside , it is discordant and lacking any applicable real programs . What is the reason of this distance from the people ? does it mean the regime is closer to them ?

A17-It is true that it is still an elite opposition and unable to polarize the street , with exception to ethnic minorities' parties who have broader bases . I agree that all these parties lack clear and workable political programs partly because there is no freedom for political activities . and the reason for the distance between the people and the opposition is the fear of politics . The regime is not closer to the people , people generally refrained from political activities because of frustration and distrust of regime's empty promises of change and reform.

Q18-The opposition does not have freedom of movement , most of its leaders are prevented from travel , they have neither the money , nor outside connections , nor the charisma , neither do they have applicable reform programs , nor have any respect by the regime .. Can this opposition be depended on for a change ?

A18-Revolutions and transformations sometimes begin with small incidents in a remote village or a street , then grow larger like a snow ball when the circumstances are ripe and ready for change , and when the people have become tired of waiting . Therefore , I don't see any reason for despair , sooner or later change would come and the opposition , I think , is the mechanism and the promising snow ball for this change.

Q19-In the West ,people who have the capital become politicians , in the East people become politician to line their pockets . With exception to Mr.Akthm Barakat , there is no wealthy Syrian who has joined the opposition .What is your opinion on investing money in politics and engaging political capital in the process of change ?

A19-Politics is the administration of the society's overall affairs , in the West where democracy prevails , all sections of the society practice democracy each in his own way , whether through parties or civil society organizations . In totalitarian countries , politics is a monopoly of the ruling class and its allies whether parties or forces , so practicing it as an

opposition becomes risky , that is why it is as elite practice and only those who are ready to risk their lives take it up . Further , businessmen and wealthy people , except for those who live abroad , are unable to combine between the two , in spite of the importance of their participation.

Q20-Briefly , what is your view on the change in Syria ? Are you an opposition per se , or you have a vision of an alternative ?

A20- Our goal is to achieve a democratic secular system based on the human rights and principle of citizenship , under the wing of a Syrian national identity that encompasses and acknowledges national , ethnic and political diversity . We further think , that this goal could be accomplished through a long peaceful struggle , transformations , achievements and reforms . We further believe , that the available mechanism at present before the opposition forces of Damascus Declaration is , consolidating the alliance among themselves , as well as coordinating with the other Syrian political forces who have the same vision , for with the growing forces of the opposition , they will have better chances of convincing the regime to begin real reforms . I wish the regime had this conviction and determination for reform , because this would save the country great chaos and crisis that nobody wants.

Q21- There is no mechanism to survey the number of opposition members , and every complainer builds a website on the internet and gives it a name and then boasts that demonstrators –his supporters - would sweep the governorates and Syrian cities soon , these are hot air and lies To what extent can the opposition rely on Gandhi's means of peaceful resistance - demonstrations and sit-ins etc..- at a time when the regime can rally tens of thousands of supporters around behind her ?

A21-I think what you mean is Rifa'at Asad's propaganda machine that announced since the beginning of the year that the Syrian Governorates would welcome his return .Everybody knows that these are mere lies . As for Gandhi's option or any other similar peaceful political resistance means , I don't think that this is impossible to happen.

Q22-Who is the Syrian opposition member? How is he different from the non-opposition member or an neutral person ?

A22-The true opposition member is one who is committed to an opposition political party , or is an independent having an opposing political thought and becomes activist through his writings or supporting various political activities , or he may be a supporter of an opposition party.

23-Rumours spreading in Syria say that Khadam is mere a political pawn used to foil the plans of the national opposition ?To what extent this is true ?

A23-I have not heard this rumor , and I think that it makes no sense.

III- THE KURDISH AND OTHER ETHNIC MINORITEIS' ISSUE

Q1-In your opinion what are the dimensions of the Kurdish file in Syria ? Has it got national extensions or it is a case of denied human rights ?

A1-The Kurdish cause in Syria is the cause of a people who have a distinct identify , culture and language of its own . It constitutes a numerical minority like other minorities , Assyrians (Syriacs) , Armenians and Turkmen . It has the right to its national , political cultural and administrative rights within the framework of unity of the state and Syrian society and under the umbrella of a Syrian national identity that acknowledges, off course constitutionally , the diverse ethnic , political and cultural rights , equally for all ethnic minorities in Syria . I think there is intersection between the national and human rights issues , besides , the human rights charter including the Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant international Conventions and agreement s all recognize minority rights.

Q2-Where is your position amongst the political activities in the Kurdish street? Do you have public extension within their circles ?

A2-We have contacts with all the Kurdish parties and are close to them , our people , both Assyrian (Syriac) and Kurdish have been living on the same land and in the same country for a long time , we share with our partners Arabs , Armenians and others the same worries and issues . Our relations with the Kurdish movement was boosted since mid 80ies , we have

together run for the parliamentary as well as Governorate and unions councils' elections , we have mutual contributions in various national or political occasions , we hold meetings and dialogues from time to time to exchange views and assess what is going on around us , and to further consolidate relationship between our people and other partners . Together with "Kurdish Democratic Alliance " and " Kurdish Democratic Front " we are members in the Damascus Declaration , and we have been able through our good relations with most Kurdish parties to strengthen the bonds between our two people and bypass many negative points that were disturbing our relationships in the past.

**Q3-How do you assess the Kurdish reality with its different extensions and expectations ?
The advantages and disadvantages ?**

A3- I think you mean the Kurdish reality in Syria . The Kurdish reality can be understood through their parties. These parties fall into two alliance frameworks , first , "Kurdish Democratic Alliance " and " Kurdish Democratic Front " each comprises of three or four parties , these parties view the solution of their issues as Kurds living in Syria and components of the Syrian community and within the framework of the Syrian situation . They are both involved in the Syrian opposition political activities and Damascus Declaration and their approach is moderate and realistic . There are other Kurdish parties , some of them have intransigent and nationalistic views, some say that parts of Syria are originally Kurdish and demand right of self determination for the Kurds . Some other factions are in fact extensions of PKK Kurdish Workers Party in Turkey . We see that the Kurdish arena is divided between the "Alliance " and the " Front " , they have support at grass roots level .As a matter of fact, What is positive about the Kurdish movement in general is , its being secular and democratic , there is no room for religious parties in their political arena.

Q4-Some Kurdish parties signed Damascus Declaration , some others completely rejected and considered it as a liquidation of the Kurdish issue . You are one of the parties that welcome it , do you think that it has the best solution to the Kurdish problem or it needs reconsideration as far as Kurds are concerned ?

A4-I think the formulation regarding the Kurdish issue in the Declaration is a good one and guarantees equal rights for Kurds pertaining citizenship, civil , political and cultural rights . I think it was better for the other Kurdish parties to accept it and engage, from inside , in national opposition work and seek to improve better formulas for the future . suffice is to say that the Declaration has recognized the term Kurdish Issue , and this is a positive thing , while it has ignored to mention other ethnic minorities such as Assyrians , Armenians and Turkmen.

Q6-In comparison to Damascus Declaration , do you consider The Kurdish National Council the best what the Kurdish movement has achieved since its inception ?

A6- I think The Syrian National Council which is supposed to include all components of the Syrian society and its political forces including the Kurdish parties members of Damascus Declaration , is the right choice, demonstrating the importance that the Kurds present themselves as a part of the Syrian people and the Syrian national case.

Q7-How do you view the future of the Kurdish file in Syria , and what are the means and prospects of its solution in the near foreseeable time ?

A7-The only solution to the Kurdish and the minorities' issue in Syria in general ,and to the issue of our people , Assyrian (Syriac) in particular, is through the recognition of its being an indigenous people in Syria , therefore , acknowledging its language and culture as national language and culture (it is well – known that the name Syria is derived from Assyrian language) , as well as through guaranteeing its national rights constitutionally in a democratic real system that recognizes national and cultural diversity , a system that depends on the principle of citizenship , human rights , within the framework of the unity of the state and the country and under the umbrella of a unifying national identity.

IV : the file of corruption and human rights

Q1- Everybody in Syria demands the opening of corruption files at the highest levels , and now , some corruption files of the ruling circles are being disclosed , the file of vice president Khadam and his sons . The parliament has started disclosing them . Aren't you going to

support this endeavor , and who will be the next ?

A1-I am in favor of opening all the corruption files and I do see it as the beginning of the reform process , but I am against the selective approach . Anyway , opening Khadam's corruption file will be useful , because it will disclose other corrupted figures if the process goes on seriously . I don't know who is next , nor do I care who he is, certainly there are many others.

Q2- Q2-Don't you think that , this is the true reform , when the regime itself speaks openly about it ? Is this the beginning of a crisis or the an introduction to openness ?? Why the corruption files at this time ? Who do you accuse of obscuring and covering this gross violations , embezzlement of state funds and the dirty deals of corruption ?

A2- Regardless of the political motives in the case of Khadam , I see it very important as I said before , but in order for this step to be a beginning of reform it should not rule out anyone , and no doubt those who bear the responsibility for years for covering this facts , is the regime itself.

Q3-Human rights organizations criticize the violations openly , a big number of detainees have been set free . In the light of that , how do you assess the condition of human rights in Syria ?

A3-Not good . Huge violations of human rights . Emergency and martial laws give the executive , judicial and security authorities opportunities to detain any activist or opposition member . But generally speaking , the situation has improved in comparison to the past.

Q4-What is the definition of prisoner of conscious . Apart from the statements and Internet bulletins . What have you done with regard to this issue as opposition parties ?

A4-Generally speaking there are no prisoners of conscious or opinion in Syria in the abstract intellectual , philosophical or religious meaning of the word . the prisoner of conscious practically is the political prisoner even though he may not have political affiliation . He is the person who has a political stance and thought , different from that of the state . We always, in our statements and bulletins , call for the release of all political detainees and prisoners of conscious as well as closing forever the file of political detention. We can't do more than this , neither we , nor others.

Q5- The prisons are still full of prisoners as people say . Do you open dialogue with the regime or mediate a third party for their release ?

A5-Neither we , nor others , I think , have had the opportunity to open a dialogue with the regime directly in this regard .The officials still close their doors in front of those who seek to talk to them . We hope these doors will open soon.

V : PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 2007

Q1-Some say the opposition has no vision , and the regime will issue a new law for political parties only a month after or before the mandate of president Bashar al-Assad , securing thereby another seven years for him . The law of political parties will come to undermine your power . Is it sensible that al-Baath party is going to issue a law of parties by itself ? Why haven't you opposed this move ?

A1-One of the recommendation of al-baath party's 10th congress held last year was issuing a new law for parties . Few months ago , two draft laws appeared on internet it was said that a committee of Baathists from the parliament have published them . They were disappointing and all those who read them wished there had been no law for parties , some described them as law for banning parties . This was all, and we haven't heard more about this law ! Now the crux of matter is not the form , issuance of the law , but the content . Al-Baath party and the regime can abstain from issuing the law and carrying out reforms in the country , but I think this will further complicate an already complicated situation and will deepen the frustration and the dissatisfaction among the people , and this is not in the interest of the country . In our periodicals , we have sharply criticized the draft law and called it Law of Banning Parties . In addition , this draft law denied the existence of minorities in Syria , consequently banned the formation of any party based on ethnicity . As for referendum on a new mandate for the president , I think it has nothing to do with the law of parties , it has to do with article No. 7 of the constitution which obstructs and disrupts the principle of circulation of

power and confines it to al-Baath party.

Q2-What is the use of preparing for elections if article No.8 of the constitution ,which allows only for al-Baath party members to become president, is not revoked ?

A2-I have not heard of anyone from the opposition parties who is running for the presidency . Everybody knows that the matter is settled through a referendum on one candidate recommended by the Regional Command to the parliament , which in turn nominates him as a candidate of the people . A free presidential election necessitates modification of the constitution , and unless this change takes place there will be no real reform in the country.

Q3-What are the chances of a Syrian Christian or Kurd's nomination and winning in a clean presidential elections ?

A4-3-The constitution does not allow a Christian to nominate for the presidency even if he is a Baathist and a member of the Regional Command . Regrettable , the constitution defines the president to be a Moslem , and this article hurts the feeling of every Christian , as well as the feelings of every civilized person in Syrian , where Christianity was the religion of its people 700 years before Islam , and is still deeply rooted in the history and culture of the country and is evident everywhere in the historic monuments and ruins across Syria . Off course , a Kurd can not be nominated because he is supposed to be a Baathist, namely an Arab.

Q4-Don't you think that the referendum is a farce , and the result as usual will be 99,99 in favor of the president ?

A4-The referendum itself is a democratic process , it is an expression of a non-democratic provision in the constitution related to article 8 that limits the command of state and society in the hand of al-Baath party , hence , no circulation of power.

Q5-Dr.Bashar accepted to inherit the presidency , what makes you think that he would accept the result of the ballot box , since there is nothing to oblige him to do so?

A5-The situation is changeable . No political status can continue forever , as no party or regime can rule forever . Every circumstance and phase has its conditions and rulers . Everything is changing and developing and this is the law of life . Therefore , I think change towards democracy is coming and I am optimistic.