

Assyrian Christians form battalion to combat ISIS

by [Therese Apel](#) in the [April 1, 2015](#) issue

Assyrian Christians in the Nineveh plains, with the help of a group of Americans, are building a battalion to combat the so-called Islamic State.

The Nineveh Plain Protection Units, or NPU, is composed of 350 to 500 men trained by Sons of Liberty International, an American-led nonprofit organization aimed at “stepping in where governments in the international community have failed.”

Its founder, Matthew VanDyke, a New York filmmaker who fought in the Libyan civil war and spent six months as a prisoner of war under the Muammar Qaddafi regime, said when the group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, executed his friends James Foley and Steven Sotloff he started to focus on stopping its spread.

When the Kurdish Peshmerga withdrew from the area, the people of the Nineveh plains were left to be killed or kidnapped, VanDyke said.

The Nineveh plains lie northeast of Mosul in Iraq’s Ninawa Province. The population is majority Christian but also includes Yazidis, Shabaks, Kurds, and Turkmens.

“We have rights to defend our land and to preserve our holy land, and to preserve our habits and traditions,” said Kaldo Oghanna, an NPU official.

The people of the Nineveh plains say they must fight to protect themselves from extinction. But they also say that they should be funded and treated like any other tribal army, many of which are receiving funds and supplies to fight terrorism in the area.

“If you give us half what you give to Peshmerga or other military forces, we will do double what they’re doing now,” said Gevara Zaya, NPU Military Committee director.  
—*USA Today*

*This article was edited on March 17, 2014.*