



Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Visit to Iraq (Focusing on Mosul and Nineveh Province)

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Terror Reigns over Mosul's Christians CSI & Hamorabi Deliver Emergency Relief

Between the end of September and mid-October, over two thousand Christian families – approximately 13,000 out of a total Christian population of roughly 25,000 people – fled Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. They fled in response to a three-week, well-organized terror campaign targeting Christians. Terrorist acts included the murder of 13 Christians, the bombing of three homes, harassment, and the circulation of printed death threats. Mosul has been the scene of many acts of terrorism against Christians since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. The most highly publicized were the murder of Fr. Ragheed Ganni and four sub-deacons in 2007 and the kidnapping and subsequent death of Archbishop Paulous Faraj Rahho in March 2008. Mosul is Iraq's most violent city, and has become the center of the Islamic insurgency against the US-led Coalition Forces and the Iraqi Government. Since the United States launched "Operation Freedom Iraq" in 2003 to replace Saddam Hussein's dictatorship with a democracy, about 40% of Iraq's one million Christians have been forced to seek refuge abroad, while many of those who remain in Iraq are internally displaced. Iraq's Christian community is threatened with extinction.

The recent anti-Christian terror campaign in Mosul coincided with dangerously heightened tension between the Arab majority (40%) and the Kurdish minority (30%) in Nineveh Province and its capital city, Mosul. Kurds support the annexation of the Province to the neighboring autonomous region of Kurdistan. They are backed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. Arabs reject the KRG's claim on Nineveh. Both Arab and Kurds have powerful armed forces behind them, including organs of the state – e.g. units of the national army and the police, and illegal militias and terrorist cells. Caught in the middle of this brutal tug-of-war are the small religious and ethnic minorities that have no armed forces to promote their interests. They are the Christian, Yezidi, and the Shabak communities. Together, these minorities hold an electoral balance of power and are therefore subjected to vigorous efforts by both Arabs and Kurds to use them politically for their purposes. The means of instrumentalization include violence and non-violent political action.



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Debate in the Iraqi Parliament over the provisions an electoral law in advance of provincial elections are due to take place at the end of January 2009. At the center of the debates stood the issue of how many seats the Christians and other powerless minorities would automatically receive in Parliament and in the Nineveh Provincial Assembly.

Some of the displaced Christians from Mosul went to relatives and friends the cities of Erbil and Dohuk in the neighboring autonomous Region of Kurdistan. But most of them sought refuge in nearby towns and villages in the Nineveh Plain, just to the north and east of Mosul. Nineveh Plain towns and villages, such as Hamdaniya (Karakosh, Bakhdeda), El Kosh, Keremlesh, Bartella, Teleskuf and Tel Kaef, are either predominantly Christian or have large Christian populations. They constitute the heaviest concentration of Christians in the whole of Iraq. Given peace and security, the Nineveh Plain villages could be the nucleus of a thriving Christian community in Iraq.

Christian Victims of Recent Violence in Mosul

All the displaced with whom we spoke were still traumatized and fearful of reprisals should their identities be made public. There were, however, some who boldly gave their testimony, and, in some cases, allowed their photographs to be published. Among them were:



Mann Hazim Toma: *My father, **Hazim Toma**, was shot dead on the 4th of October, the day after the Muslims ceased celebrating Ramadan (Eid Fitir). A man walked into his store, pulled out a pistol, shot him and fled. I rushed to help my father, but I could not save him. The killer wore no mask or any other disguise. Our family, together with other relatives, fled Mosul. We cannot live there anymore. It is too dangerous. Twenty of us, all relatives, are now crammed into one small rented house, about 15 miles from Mosul.*

Ginna Jacob Yonnan, retired school teacher: *A group of armed, masked men burst into our home at 7:00 pm on the 11th of October. My husband and I were having an evening meal with my daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. One of the gang put a gun to the head of one of my grandsons to keep us quiet and obedient. They ordered us out of the house. Meanwhile they were looting all our valuable possessions. Then they carried a bomb inside the house, and warned us not to go back in. After they fled, the police eventually arrived. Then the bomb exploded. It must have been detonated by a timer or remote control. The whole house was destroyed. We lost everything. I fled with just the clothes on my back and a packet of tissues. Now we are living in a church, together with other displaced people.*





Hanna Petrous Selim: *On the 7th of October, my husband, Amjad, and son, Hosam, went to renovate a neighbor's house. They were specialists in marble work. I was preparing lunch when I heard gunshots. My youngest son ran in the house and said he saw a gunman leave their work site. My oldest son went there and found the bodies of his brother and father. Both were shot in the head. Seven Muslim workmen were also at house, but none of them were harmed.*



They said three gunmen - one masked - entered the property, and performed the killings. Now we are displaced. All our property is in Mosul, but we dare not go back to repossess it.

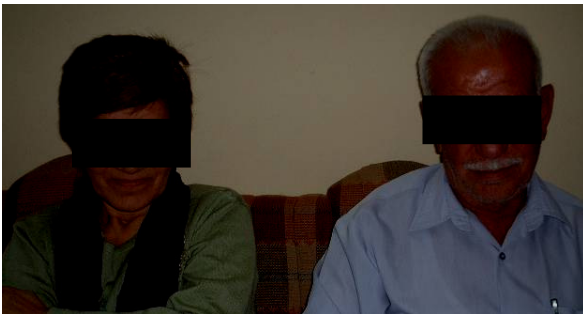
The above mentioned families have vowed not to return to Mosul. Some are determined to flee to neighboring Syria, Jordan or Turkey in the hope of finding a way to get to North America, Europe or Australia. Others professed a firm intent to remain in Iraq, and aim to rebuild their lives in one of the villages in the Nineveh Plain where the Christian presence is strong and security is good by Iraqi standards. But some of the displaced intend to return to Mosul. A few have already done so. We encountered the following displaced Christians in Mosul, within eyeshot of one of the reconstructed gates of the ancient city of Nineveh and a section of the wall that serves as a dumping ground for the mangled remains of bombed cars:



G.N. I am a shop owner. I fled Mosul on the 10th October with my wife and four children after six Christians were murdered and the burning of a Christian shop. What is so terrible about this situation is that the enemy is invisible. He is faceless. Violence is not new to us Christians have always been targets here. This is because they are the original owners of the country. We are the indigenous people. They want to kick us out. I can't say who 'they' are. It is too dangerous. The Government should say who 'they' are, but the authorities never do. I want to stay in Iraq. We are now just checking on the condition of our property, but I expect we will soon move back into our house. Why do we stay? This is our land. I also have four children in Mosul University. If we leave, were will they get an education. There is no chance we will survive financially if I give up my business and live as a displaced person. I have a

right to be here. We should stay and not give in to the persecution. (GN's wife said she does not want to live in Mosul any longer. She had already lost her father and three brothers in the Iran-Iraq war.)

I. I.: *My first direct encounter with terrorist came six months ago. I was in my car with my wife and two daughters. We were approached by two cars with mounted BKC automatic weapons. Two men with guns ordered us out of the car. We obeyed. They then asked if we were Christian, and told me they wanted to take the car. They claimed they wanted it because the church leaders were no longer paying the jizya (a Shariah sanctioned tax on submissive Christians and Jews). I told them they could have the car, but pleaded with them not to touch my wife and daughters. I reported this to the police. They told me: 'Yes, we know you are a target. The same thing has happened to many other Christians.' This experience shook me up. But I did not leave Mosul then. I decided to leave when Deacon Jamal ? was murdered near the PUK headquarters. That was the 9th of October. We then fled for Keremlesh. We have now returned to Mosul.. I don't see the future clearly, but I put my trust in God. Stability will return to Mosul only after the Kurds have left the city.*



S.A.N. *My ancient ancestors were from Mosul. When I was young, there was a very big Christian presence in Mosul. Our family has suffered a lot from persecution. Two years ago, they killed my wife's cousin. He was active in a Protestant church. On the 30th of July this year they killed another cousin of my wife. Soon afterwards, they killed my cousin and his son. When the latest killings took place, I fled with my wife and two daughters. But we have returned to stay. One of my*

daughters studies at Mosul University. Mosul is our city. (S.A.N.'s wife added: In 2004, our house was robbed by American soldiers during a search operation. They took all our money and jewelry. I am a cancer patient. We need all our resources for treatment. When I protested, one of the soldiers threw six dollars at me. They could see from the cross in our house that we are a Christian family.)

O.I.: *I also recently fled Mosul, but have now returned. I live in fear, especially when I leave the house. Religious fanatics gained the upper hand after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Since that time I always dress like a Muslim woman whenever I leave the house. It is dangerous to be easily identifiable as a Christian.*



Sources of Anti-Christian Violence

Violence against Christians in the Mosul area comes primarily from the insurgency against the Iraqi Government and the US-led occupation forces. It is primarily Arab Sunni in character and is based on Islamic jihad terror cells linked loosely with Al Qaida, and allied criminal gangs, together with die-hard loyalists to Saddam Hussein's now banned Baath Party. The insurgency also includes some Sunni Kurdish cells adhering to the Al Qaida-linked Ansar Al Islam group. The dominant ideological strand of the insurgency is based on traditional concepts of *jihad* and Islamic law, drawing heavily from the Quran, and the words and deeds of Islam's Prophet, Mohammed. According to this religious-based political ideology, violence is a legitimate instrument of coercion for the purpose of inducing infidels - Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims - to submit to Islamic political authority. Compliant non-Muslims who submit are called *dhimmis*, or protected people. Protection comes in return for obedience, including the

payment of a special tax – the jizya. In return for submission the *dhimmi*s are to be protected from the catastrophic fate of non-submissive infidels, who may be killed, enslaved or otherwise abused with impunity. Refusal to pay the jizya and other forms of disobedience, including political opposition, terminates the state of protection. The declared goal of the insurgency is to make Iraq the nucleus of a global Islamic state, unadulterated by the influence of Western political, cultural and moral norms. This is the major source of violence that has already driven most Christians out of Baghdad, Basra and other cities and towns in central and southern Iraq. One consequence of the partial success of the U.S. military’s “surge” in central and southern Iraq has been the heavy concentration of insurgents in Mosul



One Christian victim of the insurgency in Mosul, who narrowly escaped with his life in 2006, was **Fekri Toma**. We met him in a predominantly Christian village outside Mosul, where he and his family sought refuge. His son, Ghandy, told us what happened: *Two masked men broke into our house at about mid-night on the 1st of November in 2006. We were asleep. They went into my father’s bedroom, and looked the door from the inside. We woke up when we heard the commotion. My father was screaming and the intruders were shouting “Allahu Akhbar”. My aunt and I rushed to the bedroom door. I broke the door down. There was blood everywhere. They were trying to behead my father. His throat was cut wide open. I pick up an object with which to beat the intruders. They ran out the house before they could completely detach his head. A neighbor helped get him to the hospital. He had four operations. It is a miracle he survived. It is very likely that the perpetrators were people from the neighborhood. With a strict curfew in force, it would have been very difficult for terrorists to come from outside and find their way around without being detected. Our home was in the western part of Mosul, where there is a particularly heavy concentration of Arabs. The Kurds live mainly in the eastern part of the city. On the same day that my father was attacked, a Catholic church in our neighborhood was bombed. This appeared to be in response to the Pope’s critical words about violence in Islam. We left Mosul and came to this Christian village. We have security here. The persecution we faced in Mosul comes from Muslims. We have come to the conclusion that we will never be safe when living in Muslim neighborhoods. (Fekri Toma still suffers from an inability to swallow properly.)*

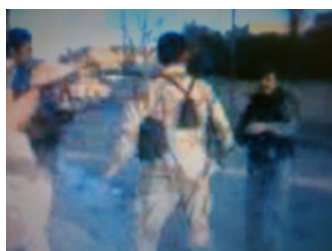


K.B. was kidnapped by Arab terrorists belonging to the insurgency: *It was 6:00 pm on September 16. Four men barged into our house. My son, was there. They said: Where is your father? The boy said: ‘He’s not here. Take me instead’. But they wanted me. So they put a gun to his head and forced him to lead them to me. I was in the kitchen. They demanded the key to my car. I gave it to them. They then robbed me of the cash in my pocket, blind-folded me, tied up my hands and put me in the trunk of my car. The car went only a short*

distance before it stopped. They transferred me to another car. A bomb was put in my car. It was blown up a little while after the second car drove away. My family saw the wreck and believed at first that I had died in the blast. They told me three policemen who had come to investigate the abandoned car were injured in the blast. After driving some more, the car stopped. They took me out and let me into an apartment. The kidnappers told me I should convert to Islam. I told them, I already believe in a religion that Islam recognizes as a 'Heavenly Religion'. They also said my family would have to raise a ransom of \$50,000. I told them: "My family doesn't have that kind of money. If you are going to insist on that, you may as well shoot me now and finish the whole ordeal." They did not beat me, but they threatened to kill me if I were to try to make noise or get away. They also insulted me, calling me names like: 'kafir' (infidel), 'relative of Bush', 'believer on the sign of the cross' and 'falsifier of the Bible'. The kidnappers spent a lot of time watching the Rafidian TV channel. This is an Islamic channel that reports a lot on the killings and other violence of the insurgents. I spend two day there under these conditions. On the third day, I sensed that no one was in the apartment. I waited for a long time, and then managed to free myself from the bonds. After this experience, I fled Mosul, together with my wife and three children.

A second source of anti-Christian violence is more shadowy and has virtually no profile in the international media. It is based on underground death squads, rogue military and intelligence units, and allied criminal groups who share ultra-nationalistic goals with the Kurdish Regional Government – i.e., independent statehood and the incorporation of Nineveh Province, together with neighboring oil-rich Kirkuk and huge swathes of neighboring Turkey, Syria and Iran. The KRG, which has many characteristics of a fascist police state, is based on a monopolization of power by two tribal-based guerilla armies and their corresponding political wings– the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They played the leading role in Kurdistan in the armed opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime. In 2003, these Kurdish militias, collectively known as *peshmerga* (meaning those who face death), were allied to the USA and assisted in the occupation of the Nineveh and Kirkuk Province. Since then, Kurdish forces loyal to the KDP and PUK continue to act as an unlawful occupation force in Nineveh and Kirkuk Provinces. To give a veneer of legality to this Kurdish occupation, in 2006 thousands of *peshmerga* militiamen, but far from all, were incorporated into the Mosul-based Division II of the Iraqi Army. Division II, and all other Iraqi military forces in the area, are under the control of the Kurdish Commander of Nineveh Operations, Brig. Gen. Thia Jalal Tofiq. Many Kurdish soldiers in the Iraqi Army make no secret of their ultimate loyalty to the KRG, rather than to the Iraqi Government in Baghdad.

In Nineveh Province, we received an undated DVD of the extra-judicial execution of an unarmed Arabic-speaking man by a group of Kurdish-speaking men in national army uniforms. The execution was apparently recorded by a cell phone. The identity of the victim is not clear. He may have been an Arab. But he may also have been a member of a minority community. Few Christians in Nineveh province speak Kurdish. Most speak Arabic. Christians only use their mother tongue, Aramaic, when communicating with members of their own community. This disturbing DVD gives credence to the accusation that the Iraqi national army harbors Kurdish death squads that are not under the control of Minister of Defense or Prime Minister in Baghdad.

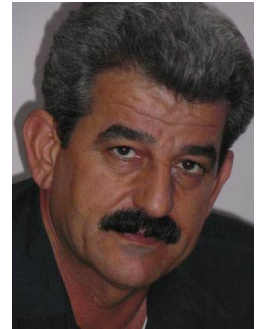




We spoke with two Christians who were prepared to tell us about the violent abuse they received from illegally stationed Kurdish militiamen in Nineveh Province.

Johnny Koshaba, journalist: *One night last March, the Kurdish militia kidnapped me and took me to Sarsing. I was under interrogation for two days. They roughed me up and threatened me with death. They forced me to sign a statement in Kurdish – a language I can't speak - promising not to write any more about their use of bribery as a means to secure the support of church leaders for the Kurdish land grab. Just a few weeks ago, they renewed the death threats, conveying them to me by word of mouth through distressed relatives. They want to silence me.*

Louis M. Ayoub, member of Hamdaniyi Town Council: *During the last provincial elections in 2005, Kurdish militias prevented the distribution of ballots to my town, Hamdaniya. They did this because most of the people are Christians, and most of them don't want to be incorporated into Kurdistan. There are several reasons for this: The occupying Kurdish forces behave badly and harass people. They always demand political loyalty to their own political parties. Most of the Christians in the Nineveh Plain, unlike those that live in Kurdistan, do not speak Kurdish. We speak our own language (Aramaic) and Arabic. When they ballots did not arrive on voting day, I contacted the American Consul in Mosul, and asked how we could get them. He told me where we could collect some. I was authorized by the Council to pick them up. On the way, I was arrested by seven Kurdish secret policemen. They punched my face and broke my teeth.*



The policy of the KRG to persuade the Christians and other minorities to support Kurdish claims on Nineveh Province includes not only sticks, but also carrots. Operating largely through a Christian politician belonging to the Kurdish Democratic Party, the former KRG Finance Minister Sargis Aghajan, the KRG has dispensed millions of dollars to Bishops and priests for the building of new churches and cemeteries, for the establishment of a private, pro-Kurdish Christian militia, and for the provision of humanitarian displaced people to displaced Christians. However, we heard from many different people a set of disturbing allegations: 1) The KRG's non-transparent financial patronage system in the Nineveh Province is riddled with corruption. 2) Financial resources are made conditional upon political loyalty. 3) The KRG does not provide what the Christian community most needs – i.e., security and investment in provincial economic infrastructure. The KRG hopes that its carrots and sticks will cause Nineveh's Christian community to vote for parties representing Kurdish interests in forthcoming provincial elections. This policy of patronage is resented by many Christians. It also gives Arabs the impression that the Christian community in Nineveh Province sides with the Kurds. The ostentatious Kurdish patronage makes the situation of the vulnerable Christian community even more precarious.

It is not yet known to the public which of the two sources of violence orchestrated and executed last month's anti-Christian violence in Mosul. However, Iraq's Prime Minister, Nuri Al Maliki, initiated a high level investigation into the recent terror. According to Iraqi Vice-President, Abdel Abdul, the investigators' report has been submitted to the Prime Minister. Some members of the Iraqi Parliament, such as the Sunni Osama Al Nejefi from Mosul, claim that the report pins responsibility on Kurdish terrorists, three of whom have reportedly been arrested. Only the declassification of the report can clarify the issue. However, what is confirmed is that during the terror campaign Al Maliki had sufficient reason to believe that the strong presence of the Kurdish-dominated Second Division was contributing to instability and ordered the transfer of units to central and southern Iraq and of thousands of Arab policemen to Mosul in an effort to improve security. But the Kurdish-dominated Iraqi Army units have mutinied and refused to leave Mosul.

An article published in the Kurdish Globe - an English language mouth-piece of the KRG - reported the mutiny in the following terms:

“Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has ordered to transfer Kurdish forces, which are part of the Iraqi Defense Ministry to the provinces in the south and middle. But Kurdish forces have rejected the order; they said there is a political purpose behind al-Maliki’s order. The Kurdish forces in Ninewa [Nineveh] see the order as an insult, since they were the only and first forces who were ready to fight insurgents in Ninewa after toppling Saddam’s regime in 2003. They say a lot of their lives were taken and blood spilled trying to sustain security in Ninewa.” (Qassim Khiddir – assim.durishglobe@gmail.com – “Iraqi Provincial Elections are Crucial”, *Kurdish Globe*, Erbil, November 6, 2008.)

The New York Times also reported on the KRG’s refusal to allow the execution of al-Maliki’s order for the transfer of Kurdish forces. Below are a few key passages:

“Mr. Barzani [the President of the KRG], sensing a plot to purge the Iraqi Army in the north of its Kurdish leadership, personally intervened recently to freeze a ministerial order to transfer 34 Kurdish officers, said Col. Hajji Abdullah, a battalion commander in the Second Division. ‘If the Arabs do not change now, things will get worse and I see confrontation,’ Colonel Abdullah said. In the turmoil, he and another officer in the division, Brig. Gen. Nadheer Issam, say their loyalties are first and foremost to Kurdistan. ‘If I were made to choose, I would not even think for a second — I would leave the army,’ General Issam said. “We have sacrificed too much fighting the Baathists,” he added, referring to Mr. Hussein’s political party.

The United States has relied on Kurds from the very beginning in Mosul. Ignoring longtime enmities between the city and Mr. Barzani’s party, American Special Forces units accompanied pesh merga fighters beholden to the party when they took Mosul in April 2003. The United States drafted more pesh merga units into the city in 2004 and 2005 when the whole provincial government and the police force collapsed at the hands of insurgents. Although many of the pesh merga units in Nineveh were merged into the national army, an estimated 5,000 men remained from an elite Kurdistan corps in the province’s north. All these actions have stoked anger in Mosul toward Americans and Kurds.

Karam Qusay, who works in the Zuhoor neighborhood of Mosul, said he wanted the city to be free of the Kurdish military presence, both in the army and outside of it. ‘We wish they would leave,’ he said. ‘We despise them’.” (“Fractures in Iraq City and Kurds and Baghdad Vie”, *The New York Times*, October 28, 2008)

Other Powerless Minorities

Christians are not the only victimized community in Iraq. All communities have suffered enormously from one of the world’s worst humanitarian disasters. The victims include the largest Iraqi communities, the Shiite and Sunni Arabs and the Kurds, all of which have armed militias and strong positions within the state to defend their interests. But there are other small, powerless religious and ethnic minorities, who, together with the Christians, face the short-term prospect of extinction if the present trends of persecution continue. Nineveh Province is the home to two such groups, the Yezidis and the Shabaks. The Yezidis have their own language and religion. The Shabakhs are Muslim, with about 60% adhering to the Shiite branch of Islam, with the remaining 40% identifying themselves as Sunni Muslims. They have their own unwritten language.



In Baghdad, we met with the Shabak parliamentarian, **Hunain Al Qaddo**, who represents Shabakhs in Nineveh Province: *Shabaks came to Nineveh about 500-600 years ago. Some believe they came from Anatolia, while others think they came from Persia. Our language is a distinct Indo-European language. The Shabaks were simple, illiterate farmers. To this day our language is unwritten. The Shabaks are Muslims, about 60% Shiite and 40% Sunni. Historically, Shabakhs have never had problems with our Christian neighbors. The inter-communal problems have tended to be with Arabs. More recently, we have had problems with the Kurds. All the minorities in Nineveh Province were elated with the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime. But it all turned sour very quickly. In 2003, there were about 60-70,000 Shabaks in Mosul. Now there are less than 10,000. Terrorist have driven most Shabaks out of the city. Like the displaced Christians, most have sought refuge in villages in the rural Nineveh Plain. Over 1,000 of our people have been killed in Mosul. My own house in Mosul was burnt down. I think the perpetrators of most of the acts of terrorism are Arab insurgents. The Shiite Shabaks have been targeted by Sunni terrorists. But Kurds are involved too. Minorities are victimized because of the Kurdish authorities' passion to incorporate Nineveh Province into Kurdistan. There is strong evidence that there is a major Kurdish dimension to the recent attacks on Christians in Mosul. The leadership of Kurdistan, tries to boost the percentage of Kurds in Nineveh Province by claiming that Shabaks and Yezidis, who are distinct peoples, are Kurds because we all belong to the Indo-European language groups and share some vocabulary. But no Kurd can understand me if I speak to him in the Shabak language. The Kurdistan Regional Government has invested a lot of money to organize and empower a group of Shabaks who are prepared to say they are Shabak Kurds and support the annexation of Nineveh Province to Kurdistan. We believe terrorism is also one of their instruments. Kurds sometimes pay Arab criminals to commit acts of terrorism. For the past five years, the American occupying forces have been unable to change this situation.*

We reproduce here an interview with a Yezidi member of the Iraqi Parliament from the Nineveh Plain, **Ameen Jijo**. It was given to CSI during a fact-finding visit to Iraq in November 2007.



I am the only Yezidi representative in the Iraqi Parliament. The Yezidis are one of the most ancient of Iraq's religious communities. We have been persecuted repeatedly in the past. We are still persecuted today. Over 250 Yezidis were murdered by car bombs in several Yezidi villages on the 15th of August, 2007. Our religion is not regarded by Muslims as a "heavenly religion". We are therefore thought of as mere infidels, who have no rights under Islamic law. Our people have been Arabized by force. We are happy that Saddam is gone. But we have been shocked to see how the Kurds now try to impose their nationality on us. We represent an ancient civilization and have the right to stay in our country. There are about one million Yezidis. 90% are from around Mosul. Most of the rest are from around Dohuk. About half a million have fled abroad, and more leave every day. In the North, they are subjected to Kurdification. All the administration, the police, the army, the bureaucracy is all Kurdish. The Kurds also confiscate our lands. The Kurds play a trick in their attempt to annex the Mosul and the Nineveh Plain to Kurdistan. It is to claim that there are a lot of Kurds living there. But the 90% of these so-called "Kurds" are really Yezidis who don't want to be Kurdified. The Kurds are now reorganizing their system for their own exclusive benefit, and the United States is supporting this because the Kurds are influential allies. This American policy is paving the way for the destruction of all Iraq's religious minorities, including the Christians. I don't understand what the United States is doing. They will spend millions to preserve the artistic treasures of ancient civilizations, but they have no interest of

the people who are the heirs of those civilizations. The Turkoman minority are vigorously defended by Turkey. But we have no one on the outside to protect us. We want Mosul and the Nineveh Plain to be organized into an administrative unit for minorities, especially non-Muslims. But the Kurds don't want this. Even though these areas are not in Kurdistan, they are occupied by Kurdish militias. The Iraqi army is nowhere to be seen. It is asleep.

Nahum's Tomb, El Kosh Synagogue: The history of Jews in what is now Iraq goes back at least to the Babylonian Captivity (6th century BC). Sixty years ago, a Jewish community numbering nearly 150,000 was still in Iraq. Now there are believed to be only eight Jews remaining in the entire country. One member of this tiny remnant, now an old man, has finally given up all hope that Jews can live in peace and security in Iraq. In a recent interview with Reuters he reported that a few years ago one of his Jewish colleagues, in Baghdad was kidnapped and disappeared without a trace. Now his landlord is increasing his rent to an unbearable level simply because he is Jewish and has no one to protect him.



Now he says: *"I want to sell the house and go. I like Iraq, but I am fed up. We had very nice times in Iraq, but now we don't like it."* (Peter Graf, "Reminiscences of Old Baghdad by one of Last Jews", *Reuters*, November 9, 2008.)



The final wave of persecution that destroyed the Iraqi Jewish community began to swell in the 1930s when Arab nationalism became infected by Hitler's Nazi ideology. It intensified, reaching a climax with the June 1941 Baghdad massacres of Jews and their mass exodus following the creation of the state of Israel. (On a personal note, my earliest recollection of Iraq dates back to the late 1960s when, as a boy, I was horrified to see on TV the bodies of Jews swinging on the gallows in Baghdad during a public executions.) During our visit to the village of El Kosh, about ten miles from Mosul, we visited the ruins of the ancient synagogue on the reputed site of tomb of the Prophet

Nahum. Only two generations ago, the Jewish community in El Kosh was vibrant. Now it is extinct, and its unattended house of worship is in a state of advanced decay. This is a powerful reminder of the terrible toll religious and ethnic hatred has taken on the Jews not only in Iraq, but throughout the Arab/Islamic Middle East. It is also a powerful omen of the final fate that awaits Iraq's Christians and all other religious and minorities unless the present direction of the country undergoes a radical change.

Voices of Power

Nechirvan Barzani is the Prime Minister of the KRG. He is also the nephew of the KRG's President Massoud Barzani. He has declined repeated requests from CSI for an interview. However, during our visit, the *Kurdish Globe* published an interview with him in response to allegations of Kurdish involvement in the recent anti-Christian violence in Mosul. We reproduce below some excerpts:



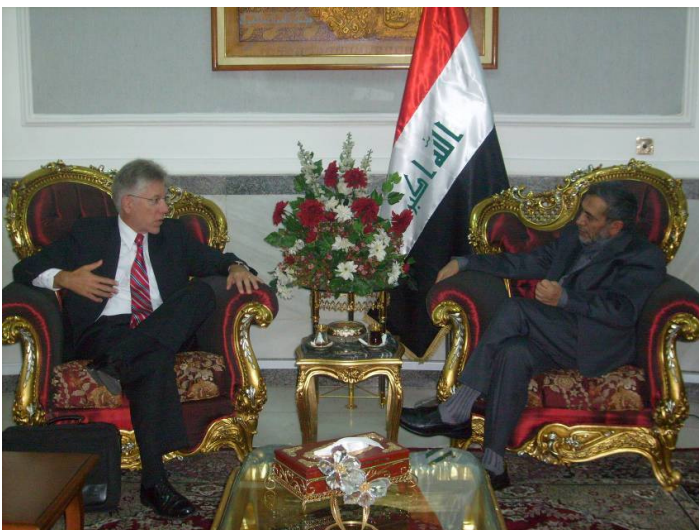
“There is an unfortunate history of attacks against Christians in Iraq by terrorists groups since the liberation of Iraq in 2003. For example, in August 2004 churches in Baghdad and later in Basra, Mosul and Kirkuk were targeted by terrorists. Christians were assassinated, abducted, and pressured to convert or pay ransom.

“The city of Mosul has today become a safe haven for many terrorist organizations and some lingering members of the former Ba’ath Regime. The so-called “Islamic State”, for example, has become an umbrella association under which all these terrorists operate. It is true most of the members are Arabs, but the groups consist of Turkomans and Kurds too. Additionally, there are even Christians who are former members of the Ba’ath Party, now calling themselves the Resistance, who actively fight against the current government and Coalition Forces. The terrorists have recruited support from a mix of ethnic and religious groups in an effort to sow doubt, fear and tension among the people of Mosul. This is a classic terrorist tactic.

“In terms of Kurdish national interests, the presence of Yezidi and Shabak Kurds and Christian within Mosul city is important for the population proportion equations of the coming provincial elections... Those who accuse the Kurds of driving the Christians out of Mosul are the same people who earlier accused the Kurds of an expansionist policy

“The Kurdistan Region has offered full support [to Christians] at a time when it has been chiefly the federal government’s responsibility to do so. We have done this in the past and we will continue to do so in the future. No one else in Iraq has offered this level of assistance to Iraq’s Christians, who were amongst the very first to have lived in this land. The KRG has taken these actions based on feelings of brotherhood and out of responsibility as a constitutionally recognized federal region of Iraq. We consider it a political and moral obligation to assist these displaced families and to work with the federal government to end terrorism against the Christian community. Now the accusers have completely changed their assertions, saying that the Kurds are driving the Christians and Yezidi and Shabak Kurds out... Those wishing to lay the blame for these incidents on our door step are enemies of democracy, enemies of a federal Iraq.

“The reality is that the KRG is the only government organization in Iraq currently doing anything meaningful to help these threatened people. Despite our efforts, we still find ourselves, the victims of a political campaign. We will stand up to the absurd, shadowy allegations that we are somehow behind the violence against our Christian brothers.”



In Baghdad, we were received by **Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament**. He is a Sunni Muslim, who is opposed to the annexation of Mosul and Kirkuk Provinces into Kurdistan, and advocates a federal Iraq based on existing, internationally recognized internal borders. Al-Mashhadani does not see the recent violence against Christians in Mosul as a conscious effort to drive them out of the country, but as a tactic of manipulation in the struggle between the central Iraqi Government in Baghdad and the KRG for control of Mosul and Kirkuk Provinces: *There is no fundamental danger to Christians in Iraq.*

They are victims of a political game, and are being used as pawns by other more powerful groups. Christians were here before the Muslims. Iraqi Christians will keep their identity, unlike the American Indians. We must make sure they will be represented in Parliament. What happened in Mosul is part of a political game. Those events were not aimed at destroying them. I hope we can have a Christian Prime Minister one day. This is not prohibited by our constitution. We want a state based on citizenship, as opposed to religion or ethnicity. Kurds dream of having their own independent country. But the political situation both in Iraq and internationally does not allow it. They will be obliged to come back to Iraq for protection. We must amend the Iraqi Constitution so that nationality is based on citizenship. Iraq is a rich county. No one wants Iraq to become like Somalia. Our first duty is to make people feel like they belong to Iraq. The international community must help, and it must encourage Christians to participate in this. The solution is not to leave the county, but to stay and build. We need to have a democracy based on concordance. Otherwise democracy will not work.”



We met in Nineveh Province a **U.S. Government Official** (not the soldier whose photo is reproduced below), who was then conducting talks with Christian leaders about the campaign of violence. He arrived in a convoy of four huge Mine Resistant-Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs) – mandatory in Nineveh Province for all US military and civilian personnel. He noted: *Between*



September 28 and October 11, there was deliberate targeting of Christians in Mosul. Mosul this is the most violent city in Iraq. Murders and bombings are still daily occurrences, notwithstanding a significant reduction of violence since the Coalition forces began our “Mother of Two Springs Operation” there in May of last year. There was a mass exodus of Yezidis from Mosul about one and a half years ago after 23 Yezidis were hauled off a bus and executed. Shahbaks have also left because of violence. I am not aware of hard evidence to prove who is behind the recent targeting of Christians. I do not have all the facts. Christians are understandably afraid to come to me with information. Inadequate security is the main problem facing Christians and all other people in Mosul. Nineveh Province is probably the worst governed province in Iraq. This is mainly due to the refusal of the Sunni leadership to take part in elections and participate in the government of the city and province. This has left the Kurds as the dominant political force in local government. The Kurds also play an important role in security. This is tolerated. There is a fear of a vacuum of power should that influence disappear. The Iraqi Security Forces, which include two army divisions with substantial Kurdish components, are our allies in the effort to defeat the insurgency. As for the development of Nineveh Province for the benefit of the minorities, the U.S. government has designated ten million dollars for this purpose. We have recently approved the drilling of three wells at a monastery, and I expect a sewing project for Yezidi women will soon be approved.*

* Upon commencement of the offensive, Prime Minister al-Maliki announced that “The Mother of Two Springs operation aims to end the suffering of the people of Mosul, including its Christians”. (CNN, May 16, 2008)

Humanitarian Aid

Over 2,200 Christian families, or about 13,000 people, were forced to flee Mosul in the first half of October, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). About half that number found refuge in Christian communities in Nineveh Province. The rest went farther afield to towns in Kurdistan, Syria and Jordan. The displaced in Nineveh Province found refuge in the homes of relatives, friends, tents, church buildings and rented rooms and houses.



CSI and the Hamorabi Human Rights Organization provided food parcels to 400 families in the Tel Kaef, Teleskuf, and the monasteries of Mar Behnam, Raban Hurmis and Nakorthaya. The **Director of the Iraqi Government's Office for Migration and Displacement in Hamdaniya, Hussein Zenal al-Hassani** informed us about other relief efforts. He identified the International Medical Corps, Red Cross, Red Crescent, Association of Islamic Dawa, and the Group of Muqtada al-Sadr as agencies that provided aid to the displaced in the Nineveh Plain in cooperation with the Iraqi Government. He was unable to comment of the relief efforts of the KRG since they were not conducted in cooperation with his office. Al-Hassani

acknowledged that the Ministry for Migration and Displacement in Baghdad had not yet done much for the displaced. He also said that he was unaware of any involvement of the US Government or Coalition Forces in the relief efforts.

Al-Hassani reported that he and his small staff had not been paid by the Ministry for five months. Despite this, he and his team worked around the clock for 20 days to register the displaced and coordinate relief efforts. Al-Hassani is a displaced person himself. He belongs to the Shabak community and was driven out of Mosul. Although he is a government official and should attend provincial meetings in Mosul, he is unable to travel there for fear of being kidnapped or executed.



About 400 Christian families have so far returned to Mosul. The Iraqi Government is encouraging the displaced from Mosul to go back to their homes, notwithstanding the fact that the terrorists in Mosul have given no guarantee to respect the security of the Christian community. Baghdad is offering an incentive of \$865 for each family that returns. Families who are too afraid to return will receive only \$250. (The execution of two Christian women in Mosul on the 12th of November had a profoundly disturbing effect on all the remaining Christians in Mosul, including those who returned at the urging of the Iraqi officials.)



Conclusions

- 1) The existence of the Iraqi Christian community is under threat. Since the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime, nearly half of the country's one million Christians have been forced to flee for refuge abroad. Many of those who remain in Iraq are internally displaced.
- 2) The existence of other powerless religious and ethnic minorities, such as the Yezidis, Shabaks and Mandeans is similarly threatened.
- 3) The position of Christians and other unarmed minorities has gradually deteriorated since the Arab/Islamic conquest of the 7th century. The current wave of persecution takes place during the American-led Operation Freedom Iraq.
- 4) Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Christians and other minorities experience pressure to leave their homes and country on account of violence and discrimination from two primary sources. The greatest pressure comes from the Sunni Arab-dominated Islamic insurgency. Pressure also comes from ultra-nationalistic Kurds and military and security organs.
- 5) The recent campaign of violence against Christians in Mosul (September 28 to October 11) resulted in the death of at least 13 people, the destruction of property and the flight of approximately half of the city's Christian population. This destructive assault against Mosul's Christians took place during the US-led "Mother of Two Springs Operation" aimed at clearing Iraq's most violent city of terrorists.
- 6) The high level report to Iraqi Prime Minister Nur al-Maliki on the recent campaign of violence against Christians in Mosul has been submitted, but has not yet been made public.
- 7) Heightened tensions between Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the contest for control of Nineveh Province poses a great danger to the Christians and other minorities, who find themselves caught in the middle of this contest for domination.
- 8) In Nineveh Province, Kurdish units of the national Army have mutinied against the central government in Baghdad by refusing to obey the Prime Minister's orders to leave Mosul for new posts in central and southern Iraq, while Kurdish Peshmerga militiamen under the command of the parties controlling the KRG remain in Nineveh as extra-legal occupation forces.
- 9) While local officials acted promptly and with energy to address the humanitarian crisis arising from the mass exodus of Christians from Mosul, the central government's response has been slow and inadequate.
- 10) It is irresponsible for the Iraqi Government to provide financial incentives for displaced Christians to return to their homes in Mosul before the Iraqi Army and Coalition Forces have confirmed in a verifiable way that their security will be guaranteed.

Recommendations

US President-elect Barack Obama:

- 1) Reiterate as US President the importance you attach to the Iraqi Government's and the Kurdistan Regional Government's responsibility to protect Iraq's Christian and other powerless religious and ethnic minorities and to guarantee their adequate representation in Iraqi governmental institutions.

- 2) Instruct the incoming Secretary of State to outline the step the US and the Iraqi authorities need to take to guarantee the survival of the Iraqi Christian and other minority communities inside Iraq.
- 3) Instruct the incoming Secretary of Defense to help the Iraqi Government rebuild a national army devoid of elements whose ultimate loyalty is to any power other than the Iraqi state.
- 4) Continue cooperation with the Iraqi Federal Government and the KRG in actions designed to defeat of the insurgency and achieve the rapid and orderly removal of all other extra-legal armed groups from Nineveh Province.
- 5) Establish an interagency commission to plan for the voluntary return of Iraqi refugees to Iraq, with the Nineveh Plain as a safe haven for Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks.
- 6) Intensify efforts to increase credible Sunni Arab representation in the government of Nineveh Province and to rebuild a provincial police force based on principles of local community policing.

Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri al-Maliki:

- 1) Convene a high level, inter-agency commission, in cooperation with Coalition Forces, to create a plan - including security and economic dimensions - for the protection of the unarmed minorities in Nineveh Province and oversee its implementation.
- 2) Make public the results of the Iraqi Government's investigation into the recent campaign of violence against Christians in Mosul.
- 3) Report on the steps taken by Iraqi Government, in cooperation with UNHCR and the Coalition Forces, to bring about the orderly, voluntary return of Iraqi refugees - including Christians and other minorities - to secure parts of Iraq.
- 4) Act, in cooperation with Coalition Forces, to end the presence of extra-legal mutinous armed forces in Nineveh Province.
- 5) Ensure that forthcoming elections in Nineveh Province are conducted fairly, without use of violence, fraud or bribery.

Prime Minister of the autonomous Region of Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani

- 1) Set in motion, in cooperation with Iraq and Coalition forces, an orderly withdrawal of Kurdish militias from Nineveh Province, and encourage Kurdish officers in the Iraqi Army to respect the authority of the Iraqi state.
- 2) Work towards the transformation of the three provinces of Kurdistan into an autonomous region based on the rule of law and common citizenship, as opposed to Kurdish ethnicity.

Dr. John Eibner
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