

IRAQ

The Struggle to Exist



Rights Situation in the New Iraq

Assyria Council of Europe

Hammurabi Human Rights Organization



The Struggle to Exist

Part I:

An Introduction to the Assyrians and their Human Rights Situation in the New Iraq



February 2010

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Violence and Discrimination against Assyrian Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

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METHODOLOGY

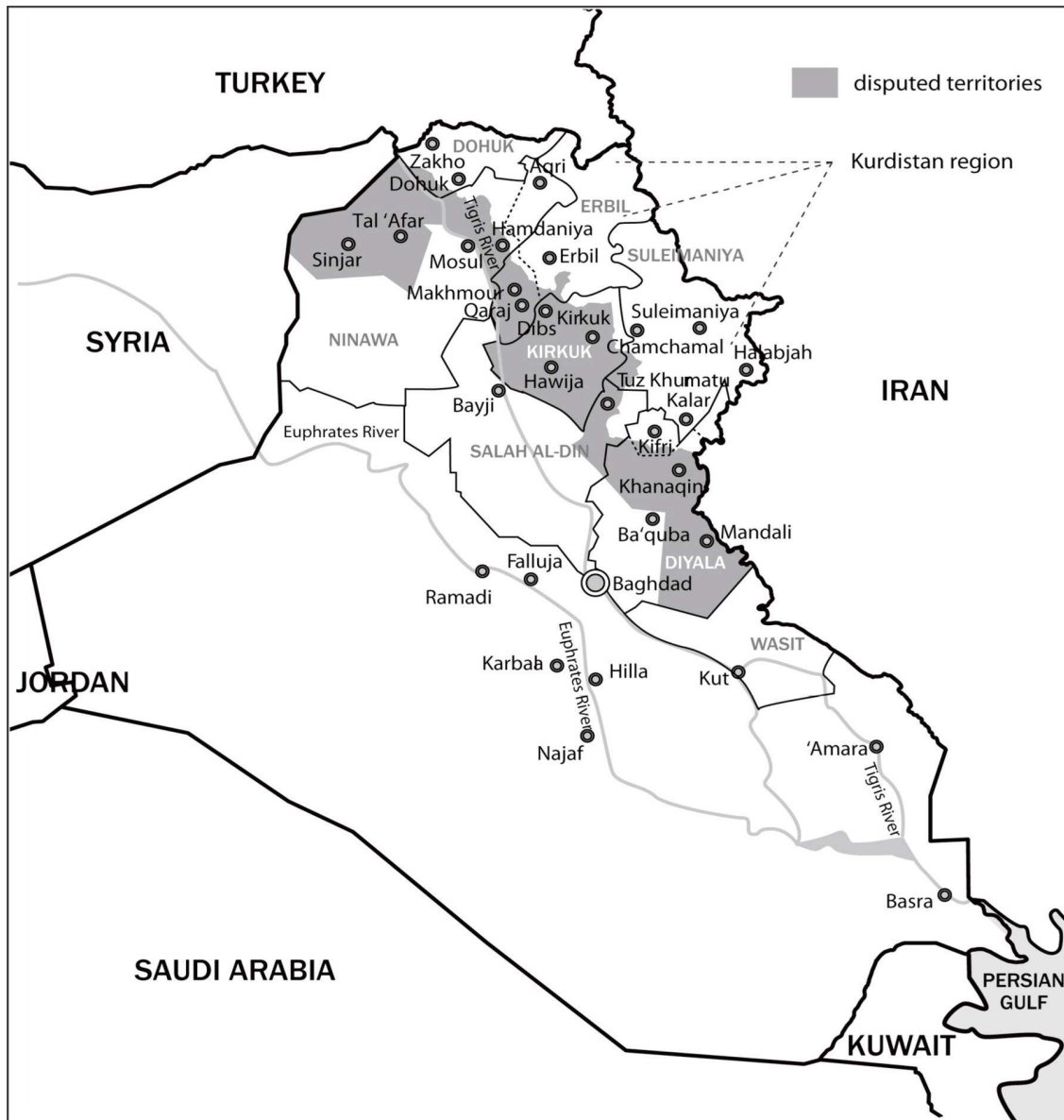
This report is based on a six-week fact-finding mission in the northern Iraqi cities of Arbil, Kirkuk and Dohuk, the regions of Barwari-Bala, Sapna, Simel, Zakho and Nahla, and the towns or villages of Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Tall-Kepe (Tell-Kayf), Tisqopa (Tell-Isquf), Batnaya, Beqopa (Baqofah), Alqosh, Ba'shiqa, Bahzani, Karimlish (Karemles), Baritleh (Bartillah), Sharafiyah, Bahindawaya, 'Ayn-Baqrah, Karanjok, Dashqotan, Pirozawah, 'Ayn-Sifne, Shaqlawa and Diyana.

The fact-finding mission was conducted between November and January 2010 to investigate abuses against Assyrians in the disputed territories of the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraq Kurdistan Region. For security reasons the Assyria Council of Europe did not visit the city of Mosul.

Assyria Council of Europe interviewed over 70 men and women of the Chaldo-Assyrian community, both privately and in group settings. Interviews were conducted mainly in Syriac and Arabic, without a translator, persons having been identified for interview largely with the assistance of Iraqi nongovernmental organizations serving Assyrian groups. In addition, Assyria Council of Europe conducted follow-up telephone interviews and consulted official documents provided by Assyrian representatives. All of these interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the data would be collected and used, and verbally consented to be interviewed. The names and other identifying information of many of them have been withheld in the interests of their personal security.

The report also draws on meetings in Arbil with senior Assyrian official and Iraqi Parliament member Yonadam Yousif Kanna. Assyria Council of Europe also interviewed Nineveh Provincial Council elected representative Jevara Zaia, who in the 2008 provincial elections won the Christian minority quota seat.

Map: The Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the Disputed Territories Claimed by the Kurdistan Regional Government



Courtesy of the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch

THE STRUGGLE TO EXIST

The purpose of this report is to give the facts regarding the situation of Assyrians in northern Iraq, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). It also outlines the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) policies towards Assyrians and other Christians of all denominations, as well as other minorities in the region. The report also outlines the reality of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leadership's policies towards these groups. Additionally, it examines and responds to the seriously misleading report presented in December 2009 by Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG's High Representative to the UK in retaliation to allegations of Kurdish involvement in the killing and displacement of Mosul's Christians, and lends its support to the November 2009 report by Human Rights Watch on violence against minority communities in Nineveh province's disputed territories.

Essentially at issue is the status of the Assyrians in the disputed territories immediately south of the semi-autonomous IKR, as well as those Assyrians residing within the IKR. For nearly three decades previous Iraqi governments attempted to "Arabise" northern Iraq, forcibly driving out hundreds of thousands of non-Arabs such as Assyrians and Kurds from their homes and settling ethnic Arabs in their place. Currently, since Saddam Hussein's overthrow, the leadership of the KRG insists that it is entitled to claim this land as part of an ever-expanding Kurdish territory, stretching from the Sinjar area near the Syrian border in the west all the way to Khanaqin near the Iranian border to the southeast.

Vast segments of these disputed territories claimed by the Kurdish authorities are historical regions of other indigenous Iraqi peoples. Kirkuk, for example is historically Assyrian and Turkmen, Mosul is Assyrian and Arab, and the Nineveh Plains are home also to Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen and Kaka'is. Turkmen and Arabs also predominate and outnumber Kurds in the north of Diyala province. Furthermore, the Kurdish presence in most of these territories is not ancient and the non-Kurdish communities dominate. It would not be practical to thus construct boundaries and regions along ethnic lines.

The KRG has also intensified its Kurdish nationalist outlook since 2003, which through "Kurdification" is threatening the very existence and way of life of Assyrians indigenous to those areas presently under their control. The KRG authorities have been in power since 1991, governing with semi-autonomy. They hold a significant number of posts in the Iraqi state and the Iraqi constitution, grants the IKR powers almost equal to those of the central government. This impedes the state's functionality.

While both Kurd and Arab leaderships claim the 'disputed territories,' such as the Nineveh Plains or Kirkuk, the actual facts on the ground differ from the ethnically exclusive narratives they portray. These territories are historically one of Iraq's most ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse areas, and for centuries they have been home to indigenous Assyrian Christians, as well as Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and other minorities. The same is true for the IKR, which is not only home to communities of indigenous Assyrians and Yazidis, but also to considerable Turkmen, Arab and Armenian communities.

Of course, Iraq's Kurds deserve to be compensated for the atrocities committed against them by the various Iraqi governments, among them genocide and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. This issue though should be considered separate from the Kurds' current struggle for political control over the disputed territories, and does not justify one ethnic group controlling the area exclusively. All victims of Saddam Hussein's Arabisation campaign should be able to return to, and rebuild, their historic communities – including Assyrians. Kurds also should not claim exclusivity of suffering, especially since, historically Kurds have been the victimisers of indigenous groups less numerous than themselves, such as Assyrians and Yazidis. In a sense nowadays, history is once again regrettably repeating itself.

The competing efforts of Arabs and Kurds to resolve their territorial disputes over northern Iraq's future have left the Assyrians, and other communities who live there in an uncertain situation. It is they who ultimately bear the brunt of this conflict and come under growing pressure to declare their loyalty to either one side or the other, or face the consequences. They are being victimised by the heavy handed tactics of the Kurdish authorities, not the least arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and intimidation, directed at anyone resisting Kurdish expansionist plans. The Kurdish thrust into the region has also created an opportunity and reason for Arab ultra-nationalists and Sunni extremists to continue killing members of minority groups, especially non-Muslims. It is precisely this segment of society, the shade of grey being neither Arab nor Kurd, which is struggling to exist in the new Iraq.

I. Relevant Legal Standards

Before describing the conditions of Assyrians and members of other minority communities in northern Iraq, it may be helpful to remind the reader of the Iraqi central government and its responsibilities towards its minorities, as well as an outline of their legal rights, as stipulated by the relevant international, regional and national standards, including the country's new constitution. Much of this relies on information presented by Human Rights Watch in their November 2009 Report,¹ and serves as a useful background.

Iraq and International Standards Protecting Minority Rights

On gaining independence and joining the League of Nations in 1932 Iraq made a declaration that it would protect the rights of minorities. Even though it was the first non-European state to so declare, it went back on its word with the massacre of roughly 3,000 Assyrians in the Simel area in August 1933, forcing the flight of 12,500 refugees to neighbouring Syria and the abandonment of over 60 villages. This campaign of terror inflicted by the Iraqi monarchy has been described by modern-day scholars as genocidal.

When the United Nations was formed after the Second World War, the international community recognised that minorities around the world were particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses. In December 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.² This was followed by others affirming the rights of minorities within international law. In 1971, Iraq was one of the first countries in the world to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.³ Article 26 of the Covenant bans discrimination on grounds of race, religion, and language, and article 27 is set aside exclusively for the rights of minorities, "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language."

Since then Iraq has assumed the obligation to take action to protect minority rights through other notable UN conventions, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁴ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵ The latter specifically requires the education of a child to be directed to the "development of ... his or her own cultural identity, language and values" and gives a child of a religious minority the right "to enjoy his or her own culture, [and] to profess and practise his or her own religion."⁶

Other UN Standards Protecting Minority Rights

Additionally, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has passed declarations that detail best practices and human rights standards for protecting minorities. In the UNGA Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981),

¹ Human Rights Watch, "On Vulnerable Ground," November 2009, pp. 14-17.

² Genocide Convention, adopted by Resolution 260(III)A of the United Nations General Assembly, December 9, 1948, G.A. Res. 260 (III) A, entered into force January 12, 1951.

³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, GA. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, ratified by Iraq on January 25, 1971.

⁴ International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted December 21, 1965, G.A. Res. 2106 (xx), annex, 20, U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 14) at 47, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966), 660 U.N.T.S. 195, entered into force January 4, 1969, ratified by Iraq on January 14, 1970.

⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167 U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1980. Iraq acceded to the Convention on June 15, 1994.

⁶ *Ibid.*, arts. 29 and 30.

the “freedom to have a religion ... and freedom ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching” is protected, and “coercion which would impair [t]his freedom” is prohibited.⁷ More specifically, assembly for worship, observance of religious holidays, maintaining and erecting buildings for worship, acquiring items for use in religious rituals, religious teaching and appointment of religious leaders, fundraising for religion and communication with coreligionists are activities that fall within the protection of freedom of religion.⁸ According to the UNGA’s Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1993), states are obliged to protect minorities by taking “measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs.”⁹ The declaration also says that states must protect the identity of minorities within their respective territories by encouraging “conditions for the promotion of that identity” and measures allowing minority members to “participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.”¹⁰ It states that minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations. Minorities also have “the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority.”¹¹

Regional Standards Protecting Minority Rights

Protecting the rights of minorities is also incorporated into international law through regional instruments and standards, such as the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Minority Languages, and the Arab Charter on Human Rights.¹² The Arab Charter, adopted in 2004 by the Council of the League of Arab States (of which Iraq is a founding member), states the following: “minorities shall not be deprived of their right to enjoy their culture or to follow the teachings of their religions.”¹³ Further, the Arab Charter prohibits denying an individual’s rights because of his or her “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status and without any discrimination between men and women.”¹⁴

National Standards Protecting Minority Rights

Iraq’s constitution,¹⁵ adopted in October 2005 by popular referendum, has various provisions guaranteeing the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. The constitution specifically “guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandeans Sabians.”¹⁶ Article 3 explicitly recognizes that Iraq is a country of multiple nationalities, religions, and sects.¹⁷

⁷ Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, G.A. res. 36/55, 36 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 171, U.N. Doc. A/36/684 (1981), art. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 6.

⁹ Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, G.A. res. 47/135, annex, 47 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 210, U.N. Doc. A/47/49 (1993), art. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, arts. 1 and 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, art. 2.

¹² Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted February 1, 1995, ETS No. 157, entered into force

February 1, 1998; European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted May 11, 1992, CETS No. 148, entered into

force January 3, 1998; Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights, May 22, 2004, reprinted in 12 Int’l Hum. Rts. Rep. 893 (2005), entered into force March 15, 2008.

¹³ Arab Charter, art. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 2.

¹⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Iraq (Dustur Jumhuriyyat al-‘Iraq), 2005, http://www.uniraq.org/documents/iraqi_constitution.pdf.

¹⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Iraq (Dustur Jumhuriyyat al-‘Iraq), 2005, art. 2(2). The identity of Chaldean-Assyrian Christians and Yazidis, as well as Shabaks, is explained in Chapter II. Mandeans Sabians worship John the Baptist as their central prophet and belong to one of the oldest surviving Gnostic religions in the world, dating back to the Mesopotamian civilization.

¹⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Iraq (Dustur Jumhuriyyat al-‘Iraq), art. 3.

Article 4 guarantees the right to educate children in their mother tongue (such as Turkmen, Syriac, and Armenian).¹⁸ Despite this many members of minority groups have claimed that it is discriminatory and attempts to emphasise the ethnic role of Arabs and Kurds, differentiating between them and other indigenous Iraqis. Article 4.2 for example unreasonably dictates the huge numbers of governmental official documents to be published in Kurdish. Article 4.4 also complicates mother-tongue education for many indigenous groups. It demands a population density before recognising a particular language as official in any region, though it does not describe what constitutes population density.¹⁹ This is dangerous for the Assyrians who, because of the vicissitudes of history, do not really have a large population density in one area.

According to article 14, all Iraqis are “equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief or opinion, or economic or social status.”²⁰ The constitution has its shortfalls though, in that it disturbs the function and viability of the Iraqi state with serious restrictions on its authority, and granting independence to regional authorities in important state issues, authority and decision-making. Up to now though, the constitutional review committee has yet to realise any amendments.²¹ Federalism and related paragraphs (the power of the federal and central authorities, the boundaries of the IKR, and underground wealth) remain the most controversial subjects to be amended.²²

Iraq’s New Constitution and the Disputed Territories

The Iraqi constitution also stipulates a national law must be passed to “guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents.”²³

The constitution takes up the language of article 58 of its predecessor, the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), which specified steps the government must take to “remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime’s practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kirkuk, by deporting and expelling individuals from their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.” These steps, now required by article 140 of the constitution, include the following:²⁴

Restore expelled and deported residents to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, provide just compensation;²⁵

Promote employment opportunities for persons who were previously deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force their migration out of the regions;²⁶

Repeal all decrees relevant to “nationality correction” and permit affected persons the right to determine their own ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress;²⁷

¹⁸ Ibid., art. 4.

¹⁹ Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), “SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq,” February 2010, p. 2.

²⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Iraq (Dustur Jumhuriyyat al-Iraq), art. 14.

²¹ “Amendment of Iraqi constitution is still pending”, PNA, July 16, 2009, <http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/54268/>.

²² Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), “SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq,” February 2010, p. 2.

²³ Ibid., art. 125.

²⁴ Ibid., art. 140; Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL), March 2004, art. 58.

²⁵ TAL, art. 58(a)(1).

²⁶ Ibid., art. 58(a)(3).

²⁷ Ibid., art. 58(a)(4). Saddam Hussein’s government policy of Arabization, which continued right up to April 2003, forced many Kurds and other non-Arabs in parts of northern Iraq to change their declared ethnic identity (commonly referred to as “nationality correction”) to Arab or face expulsion from their homes.

Appoint a neutral arbitrator to make recommendations concerning the administrative boundaries that were modified by the previous regime;²⁸ and

Conduct a fair and transparent census followed by a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories “to determine the will of their citizens” by a date not later than December 31, 2007.²⁹ (This referendum has yet to take place.)

²⁸ TAL, art. 58(b).

²⁹ “Normalization” refers to the removal of Arab settlers and the return of Kurds expelled from the region by former regimes as part of their Arabization policy. Constitution, art. 140 (2).

II. Background Information

Northern Iraq, and especially Nineveh province, is a microcosm of Iraq and its society. The area has been inhabited by Assyrians, Yazidis, Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Kaka'is and Shabaks for centuries and is indeed the most multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual part of the country. The complex interwoven network of villages, each with their own churches, mosques and temples, stretching from the plains north and east of Mosul to the mountainous border with Turkey bears witness to the wealth of the area's human history. The table below, as well as appendixes I and II, are good examples that show the amount of cultural and linguistic diversity present in the Nineveh Plains.

Ethnic Group	Pop.
Sunni Arabs	60,000
Yazidis	35,000
Assyrians	30,000
Turkmen	15,000
Shabaks	7,000
Kurds	5,000
Kaka'is	3,000
Total:	155,000

Table: Ethnic makeup of Tell-Kayf District³⁰

A note on the usage of the term “Kurdistan”:

The geographical term Kurdistan derives from a Persian word meaning “land of the Kurds” and was first mentioned in 1062 by an Armenian historian describing a battle near modern-day Diyarbakir. A map by Mahmud al-Kashgari from 1074 shows the “land of the Kurds” as an area adjacent to modern Iraq, Iran and Syria. In fact the term is said to have been coined in 1150 by the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar to denote a portion of present-day western Iran, which is held to be the original Kurdish homeland, and the term was thereafter sparingly used, next attested in Armenian and Persian texts from 1200 and 1340. Contemporary use of the term refers to parts of northwest Iran, northern Iraq, southeast Turkey and northern Syria, which in the last few hundred years have become home to a Kurdish majority, but were once inhabited mainly by Assyrians or Armenians.

Due to constant campaigns of massacre and Genocide by Kurdish princes and warlords in cooperation with Ottoman and Persian Muslim rulers under the old feudal system, the Christian Assyrians have gradually been bled into the ground in their historical homeland of Assyria and Northern Mesopotamia. At present they are an endangered indigenous minority with large Diaspora communities. It is thus quite offensive for Assyrians that their traditional lands now be called Kurdistan, in the name of the people who over the last thousand years have gradually culled them into being a minority in their own home. It is also seen by them as exclusive since, as “land of the Kurds,” it leaves little place for other ethnic groups who call the region home, and disputes their rights as indigenous people.

Thus the term Kurdistan in this report is only used in an official capacity to denote the official terminology in place for areas currently known as the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (abbreviated here to

³⁰Information supplied by District Governor (*Qaimaqam*) Basim Bello, interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe at Alqosh in December 2009.

IKR), and the ruling Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In no way does use of the term Kurdistan here lend it credit or justify their use of it to denote historically Assyrian lands.

A note on identities of northern Iraq's ethnic minorities:

Assyrians constitute Iraq's indigenous Christian population and now number between 600,000 and 800,000.³¹ In 2003 their population was estimated at 1.4 million, and they now constitute a third of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries.³² Close to two-thirds of them belong to the Chaldean Catholic Church, and roughly one-fifth belong to the Assyrian Church of the East. The rest belong to the Syriac Orthodox Church, Syriac Catholic Church, Ancient Church of the East, and various protestant denominations. They call themselves *Suraye*, which is descended from the ancient term denoting a citizen of the Assyrian Empire. They are descendants of the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia, speak Aramaic, and originate from and live mainly in northern Iraq, with communities all over central and southern Iraq as well as adjoining parts of Turkey, Iran and Syria. They tend to be successful professionals, skilled workers, and businesspeople or independent farmers.

Yazidis practice a 4,000-year-old religion which focuses on *Malak Ta'us* (the 'Peacock Angel') as well as other deities. Numbering between 550,000 and 800,000, Yazidis live mainly around Sinjar, with smaller communities in the Shaykhan district and in the IKR cities of Arbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah.³³ Much mystery surrounds their origins and ancestry, and they are also to be found in adjoining regions of Turkey and Syria. They include Kurdish as well as Arabic speakers, though they claim neither as their original mother-tongue. The Yazidis are for the most part impoverished cultivators and herdsman, and their community tends to be off-limits to outsiders. Historically, the Yazidis have been subject to acute persecution by Islamic fanatics who have misconstrued their beliefs and practices as satanic.³⁴

Shabaks are an ethno-cultural minority that have been in Iraq since the beginning of the 16th century. They are descended from Turco-Persian elements and their name derives from *Shah* (Persian for 'King') and *Bey* (Turkish for 'Lord'). Their language is a mix of Turkish, Persian, Kurdish, and Arabic. They are mainly farmers and are all Muslim, with 70 percent of them belonging to the Shiite sect and the rest being Sunni. They number between 200,000 and 500,000, and are largely located in Mosul and some 35 towns and villages east of the city in the Nineveh Plains.³⁵ They have been recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Iraq since 1952.

Kaka'is (also known as Kikis, Yarsan or Sarlis) are a tiny minority in Nineveh province, numbering about 50,000. They are concentrated in Mosul, as well as a handful of villages at the confluence of the Upper Zab and Khazir rivers, in the eastern part of the Nineveh Plains. Their origins are unknown and they profess to be Muslims, though their beliefs are related to the Ahl-e-Haqq sect in neighbouring Iran. Like the Shabak, their language is a mix of Turkish, Persian, Kurdish, and Arabic and they are mainly farmers.

Armenians are a tiny minority in northern Iraq, numbering about 16,000 in the whole country. Apart from the descendants of a tiny merchant community from Iran dating from before the First World War, they are largely descended from refugees that fled the Genocide in eastern Turkey between

³¹ Other Christian denominations to be found in Iraq (especially Baghdad) include the Armenian Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the Latin Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Greek Orthodox and Melkite Catholic Churches and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

³² Frances Harrison, "Christians besieged in Iraq," BBC News Online, March 13, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7295145.stm; and Andrew Harper, "Iraq's Refugees, Ignored and Unwanted," International Review of the Red Cross, March 2008, [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/review-869-p169/\\$File/irrc-869_Harper.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/review-869-p169/$File/irrc-869_Harper.pdf).

³³ Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1997), p. 387.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, "On Vulnerable Ground," November 2009, pp. 18, 41.

³⁵ US Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2008," <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108483.htm>.

1915 and 1918. Their handful of villages is concentrated mostly in the area between Zakho and Simel in Dohuk province, and their common vernacular is Kurdish, with the younger generation more proficient in Armenian. They have been used in northern Iraq to alter the region's demography and their presence has often been used as an excuse to dilute the Assyrians' ethnicity and brand them solely as Christians, presumably in an effort to be inclusive to Armenians.

“Arabisation” Policies

Since the 1930s, and particularly in the 30-year period between 1961 and 1991, Iraqi central governments have attempted to alter the demographic makeup of northern Iraq by expelling hundreds of thousands of Kurds, Assyrians and others from their homes, and repopulating the areas with Arabs transferred from central and southern Iraq.³⁶ This government policy, known as “Arabisation” (*ta'rib*), intensified from 1974 with the aim of reducing minority populations whom authorities considered to be of questionable loyalty in this strategic area. In response to constant Kurdish insurgencies the government mounted a concerted campaign to change the ethnic composition of northern Iraq, especially in areas bordering Turkey and Iran. The government, using military force and intimidation as the primary methods, completely depopulated entire non-Arab villages which they then bulldozed or exploded. By the late 1970s the Iraqi government had forcibly evacuated as least a quarter of a million Kurds, Assyrians and other non-Arabs. Amongst the 4,500 villages in northern Iraq obliterated by the end of the Anfal campaign in 1988, more than 150 of them were Assyrian villages containing more than 60 historical churches.³⁷

The government followed up these expulsions with legal decrees meant to consolidate this displacement. First, the government invalidated the property titles of the displaced non-Arabs, often with nominal or no compensation. The government then nationalised agricultural lands, making them Iraqi state property (known as *islah zira'i*). They then embarked on a massive campaign to resettle the formerly non-Arab areas with Arab farmers and their families from other parts of Iraq, thus completing the process of Arabisation.

Finding a supply of settlers was not difficult. The Mesopotamian desert southwest of Mosul was then home to hundreds of thousands of nomadic Sunni Arab Bedouin who largely supported the government. These Bedouin tribespeople, lured with free, irrigated land, and encouraged by their tribal sheikhs, abandoned their difficult lives in the desert and moved north en masse. Although the land was declared property of the state, it was leased on annual contracts only to the new Arab farmers.

The Anfal Campaign

Between February 23 and September 6, 1988, as Iraq was nearing the end of its eight-year war with neighbouring Iran, government forces launched a military campaign against Kurdish insurgency which they officially codenamed Anfal (“the spoils”), derived from a passage in the eighth surah of the Qur'an. This infamous series of operations reached genocidal proportions and included the use of aerial bombardment, ground offensives, destruction of villages, mass deportation, and chemical weapon attacks. The campaign resulted in the “disappearance” of about 100,000 Kurds and thousands belonging to other ethnic groups; since the previous regime's overthrow, countless human remains have been recovered from mass graves in various parts of Iraq. By the time this operation was declared over by an amnesty in September 1988, northern Iraq was devastated. A large segment of the

³⁶ Information in this section is largely summarized from Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground,” November 2009, pp. 19-21.

³⁷ CAPNI, “Introductory Report on Iraqi Christians,” http://capni.net/articles_10_Introductory-Report-on-Iraqi-Christians.html.

population was displaced, with refugees and those who survived forbidden from returning to their destroyed homes.

After the amnesty, some Assyrians and members of other minorities who had fled alongside Kurds, or had joined the Iraqi opposition's guerrilla war in the mountainous north, surrendered to Iraq forces only to "disappear." It is presumed that they were bused out to remote desert sites, executed en masse, and buried in mass graves.³⁸ In one known incident 26 Assyrians from Gunde-Kosa were taken from a concentration camp at Baharka near Arbil, never to be seen again. These were among the 250 Assyrians known to have perished in the Anfal campaign and its aftermath.³⁹ Baath officials considered them to be traitors who were "worse than Kurds" – not only because they acted like Kurds but they also rejected governments attempts to designate their ethnicity as "Arab."⁴⁰



An Assyrian woman in Gunde-Kosa who lost most of her family in the Anfal campaign

“Arabisation” and “Nationality Correction” between 1991 and 2003

From the end of the first Gulf War in 1991 the no-fly zone and the unofficial boundary known as the Green Line kept majority Kurdish areas of northern Iraq effectively outside Baghdad's control. Despite this, Arabisation continued to the south. The Iraqi government expelled about 120,000 people from Kirkuk and other areas under their control during the 1990s, continuing up to the regime change in April 2003.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds*, pp. 315-317.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.317; Human Rights Watch, *Iraq's Crime of Genocide*, 1995, p. 209.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.317.

From 1997 onwards the Baath Party government formally introduced another Arabisation policy, pressuring non-Arabs living in areas under their control such as Kirkuk, Khaniqin, Sinjar, and other districts to “correct” their ethnicity by registering as “Arabs.” This was done on so-called “nationality correction forms,” which were distributed by the government. Furthermore, those who did “correct” their nationality were compelled to participate in loyalist activities, including volunteering for paramilitary forces such as the popular army (*jaysh sha’bi*). The Iraqi government also refused to register newborns with non-Arabic ethnic or religious names. The government justified this practice labelling these names “foreign,” “socially unusual” and “alien to the heritage of Iraqi society.”⁴¹ For those who resisted these demands, officials simply ordered their expulsion, forcing them and their families to leave their homes for the KRG-controlled areas, or they were pressured to leave the country.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, Iraq – Forcible Expulsion of Ethnic Minorities, pp. 16-17.

III. POST 2003: CONFLICT IN ASSYRIA

With the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003 came a new and unprecedented era of persecution for Iraq's indigenous minorities most notably in the Nineveh province, already mentioned as one of the country's most diverse areas and host to different cultures and civilisations over the centuries. Under the current state of affairs, with Kurdish nationalists and Sunni Arabs exchanging blows in a tit-for-tat struggle over the disputed territories and their resources, it is precisely the members of these minorities who stand the greatest risk of loss and face the most difficult challenges.

Regime-Change and Civil War

After the regime-change in Iraq in 2003, KRG authorities, close allies of coalition forces, with US support effectively took control of much of the disputed area south of the Green Line. As the *peshmerga* (Kurdish forces) moved south in cooperation with US and coalition troops, thousands of Arabs who had been settled during Saddam's Arabisation campaign up to thirty years previously quickly fled the area and most of them remain displaced. A number of those that have since returned now receive various forms of support from Kurdish authorities in return for their cooperation.⁴²

The vacuum created by Saddam's fall, and the chaos that followed drew Iraq deeper and deeper into sectarian violence as conflict between Shiite and Sunni Arabs took hold of the centre and south of the country, intensifying in 2005 and 2006. Whilst the rest of Iraq was occupied with quelling this intermittent conflict, Kurdish leaders quietly continued to secure their military and political grip on northern Iraq's disputed territories by moving their security forces into the area while simultaneously building Kurdish political and administrative structures to control it. Inside the IKR the outward show of Kurdish nationalism has become more pronounced and it is now rare to see Iraqi flags displayed, even though it was changed at the behest of the Kurds. Increasingly non-Kurds in this area, as well as those not belonging to the major Kurdish parties, are becoming marginalised and discriminated against.

After the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis had quieted in 2007, Arab politicians in the central government began to realise that while they were busy fighting one another, the Kurdish leaders had consolidated their control over much of the disputed territories. The fear that the KRG may possibly annex these areas by force now unites them against this perceived common threat. Furthermore, the neglect in providing proper redress for the victims of Saddam's Arabisation policies, many of whom were impoverished Kurds who have not been able to return to their former homes, has only widened the gap between them and Arabs. With the US accelerating towards full withdrawal from Iraq, these tensions threaten to explode into another full-scale conflict, this time not sectarian but ethnic – threatening to entice the involvement of neighbouring states and destabilising the entire region. Sunni Arabs see Kurdish claims as expansionist and illegitimate, threatening Iraq's unity and territorial integrity.⁴³ This has also provided fuel for the insurgency in the area, where Iraqi insurgents and groups like al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia seek to make use of Sunni Arab anger, finding recruits especially among the Arabs displaced by the reversal of Arabisation.

The KRG in turn is impatient and unyielding in its demands that a 'constitutionally-mandated' referendum on the future of the disputed territories be implemented. The referendum is mandated by article 140 of the Iraqi constitution⁴⁴ and its December 31, 2007, deadline has long passed and there

⁴² A case in point is the village of Badriya, which is dominated by a fortress manned by Kurdish peshmerga and surrounded by Kurdish checkpoints.

⁴³ Corey Flintoff, "Shift in Power Heightens Tensions in Iraqi City," NPR, February 27, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101248555>.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, "On Vulnerable Ground," p. 22.

are no plans on the horizon for holding it due to the violence it may unleash.⁴⁵ Of course, with their political and security presence in these areas it is obvious that Kurdish officials will do their best to ensure that its outcome will be in their best interests. If this occurs, Iraq's central government stands to lose 10% of Iraq's total area (including much of the country's most valuable agricultural lands) to the KRG, doubling the size of the IKR.

Not only that, more than half of Iraq's large oil and natural gas reserves are located in northern Iraq, with many in these disputed territories (such as 'Ayn-Zalah and Gayyarah near Mosul, Naftkhana in Diyala, and Baba-Gurgur near Kirkuk), and they also contain the highest-quality oil in the country. The main problem is that these fields are found in regions where Kurds are either a minority, or are equal in size to other ethnic groups.⁴⁶ In the Nineveh Plains alone are nine strategic oil fields worth hundreds of billions of dollars, some of which (especially in the Shaykhan district) Kurdish authorities have already begun to illegally exploit.⁴⁷ It is precisely this access to these high-quality oil fields which could inevitably lead to an enlarged IKR seceding from Iraq and thus causing an even greater regional problem drawing in neighbouring states with restive Kurdish populations.

The lucrateness of what lies under these disputed lands thus serves as a motive for the current process of ethnic cleansing, intimidation and forced control being implemented by Kurdish authorities on indigenous Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak and other communities. They are especially trying to rid the area of non-Kurdish elements, or at least sufficiently contain them, in an effort to ensure that the Kurds alone benefit from these natural resources. Their unpragmatic and provocative approach delays constitutional amendments, disturbs the post-war reconciliation process, worsens the already bad security situation, and consciously brings the region closer to war. It is also a significant move towards creating a 'Kurdistan for the Kurds' – a process which has already been started in the IKR and which, if other nationalist states are considered, may see disastrous consequences.

⁴⁵ Sam Dagher, "New Kurdish Leader Asserts Agenda," July 28, 2009, New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/29/world/middleeast/29kurds.html>.

⁴⁶ Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), "SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq," February 2010, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Letter addressed to the sub-district governor of Alqosh, dated November 21, 2007, kept on file by Assyria Council of Europe.



Map of Nineveh province showing its Districts. Shekhan and Aqra have been under KRG administration since 1991. Al-Hamdaniya, Tel Kaif and Al-Shikhan comprise the area referred to as the Nineveh Plains. Fighting over Nineveh

So far the world's attention has remained focused on the conflict between Kurds and Arabs over oil-rich Kirkuk, a historically Assyrian and Turkmen city with a long history of multiculturalism. Despite that, one of the other main arenas in this clash is Nineveh, one of Iraq's largest provinces and the second most populous after Baghdad. Here also there is a unique concentration of diverse and largely indigenous ethnic groups who live mainly to the north and east of its capital, Mosul, in an area known as the Nineveh Plains.

Even though Nineveh is constitutionally and legally under the jurisdiction of Iraq's central government and Kurds here are a minority, Kurdish authorities have been active in reshaping the reality in the province and altering its demography. Travelling through the Nineveh Plains, it gradually becomes apparent how all-encompassing the Kurdish military and political presence has become. Security offices and checkpoints dot the landscape, each flying the Kurdish flag, or decorated with paintings of it, and bearing Kurdish slogans and instructions solely in Kurdish such as *mobayil qadaghaya* ("mobiles are forbidden"). These are all manned by well-armed Kurdish *peshmerga*, sometimes reinforced by local militia funded by the KRG, controlling village after village which, more often than not, are inhabited by non-Kurds. The KDP, the stronger of the KRG's two main parties, has offices complete with intelligence officers (*Asayish*) in even the smallest of these towns.⁴⁸ Many also have offices of the second Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), or others such as the Kurdistan Communist Party or even the Kurdistan Islamic Union.

⁴⁸ The KDP office in the purely Assyrian town of Tisqopa (population 11,000), in the Tell-Kayf district, was the target of a car bombing in 2007. Local Assyrians had previously pleaded with Kurdish authorities to remove the office due to the risk it placed many of the townspeople in, and since they did not want to jeopardise their friendship with local Arabs. Their calls went unheeded. Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) in Tisqopa, December 2009.



Left: The KDP office in Baritleh; Right: An official Kurdish School sign on the boys’ school in Tall-Kepe.

The checkpoints affording access into many towns in the Nineveh Plains fly both the Iraqi and Kurdish flags, even though it is not right for the Kurdish flag to be displayed in such a manner outside the IKR, especially in non-Kurdish areas. Kurdish flags also fly high above many schools, government buildings, and from people’s rooftops in these towns, while the flag of the central Iraqi state is seldom seen. The largely Yazidi and Assyrian municipalities of Ba’adre, ‘Ayn-Sifne and Faida all bear large welcome signs in Kurdish and English, marked with the Kurdish flag, which are standard for municipalities in the IKR. Many schools as far south as the Assyrian town of Tall-Kepe now bear the standard signage in Kurdish which marks schools in the IKR. Even bus shelters marked in Kurdish as belonging to the province of Dohuk are placed as far south as the Assyrian village of Beqopa.



A brand new school in the Assyrian and Yazidi town of Bahzani flies the Kurdish flag.



Left: A Dohuk bus shelter at the Assyrian village of Beqopa in the Tell-Kayf district; **Right:** A sign welcoming people to the Yazidi town of Ba'adre in the Shaykhan districts.

Political Developments and the Situation in the Province

In the years following the collapse of the Baath regime, the rebuilding of administration in northern Iraq developed under the chaotic, unstable, insecure and unmonitored authority of coalition forces, Kurdish political parties, and the *peshmerga*. This almost complete lack of monitoring, and a security-first approach, paved the way for the *peshmerga* to work on their parties' political agendas and soon control 75 percent of Nineveh province, 20 percent of Salah al-Din, 90 percent of Kirkuk, and 50 percent of Diyala, with little regard for universal human rights.⁴⁹ Being well armed, motivated and powerfully supported by coalition forces in those early years, Kurdish parties ensured absolute superiority over all other ethnic communities in the area, whose land they claim in order to expand their own region. With this security shift also came a demographic shift, which resembled that used by Kurds to change the ethnic makeup of Assyrian areas within the IKR. Hundreds of thousands of Kurdish families were brought to the newly controlled regions, building houses on all types of land - including municipal, government, and the land of original inhabitants. Newly appointed government works also brought their families in from other provinces. Hundreds of Baath party buildings and government institutions have been occupied by the newcomers and used for housing or offices for Kurdish political parties. So far, most lawsuits presented to the Property Claims Commission come from members of indigenous ethnic communities and are still not completed.

Due to their positions of privilege and power under previous Iraqi governments Sunni Arabs (the majority ethnic group in the province), as well as Christians and members of other communities, have come to resist what they perceive as Kurdish domination over Nineveh. It was largely the refusal of the Sunni Arabs to participate in the political process after the regime change, and their support for the insurgency which allowed the Kurds to dominate Nineveh's provincial assembly after a large Kurdish turnout at the 2005 elections. During these elections the Kurdish authorities were also found to be guilty of electoral fraud and tampering with votes which would have secured more seats for Assyrian representatives – Assyrians were in effect blocked from voting.⁵⁰ Some towns and villages never received ballot boxes or ballot papers, or were allowed to vote only when it was already too late. This was not surprising since the man in charge of the delivery of these was Mr. Khasro Goran, a high-ranking member of the KDP. This leverage gave the Kurdish leadership almost exclusive

⁴⁹ Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), "SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq," February 2010, p. 7, fn. 19.

⁵⁰ "Assyrian Christians say Kurds wouldn't let them vote", Christians of Iraq, January 30, 2005, <http://www.aina.org/news/20050130200448.htm>.

political and military dominance in the province, further alienating Sunni Arabs and turning Mosul into a powder-keg for the insurgency.

Kurdish domination of the local security and administration has disrupted the norm in favour of the Kurds. Most of the politicised appointments to government offices in Kirkuk have been Kurds, as well as contracts granted, decreasing those from non-Kurdish communities. Also, thousands of Kurdish teachers from Dohuk were appointed in the Mosul region, and Kurds constitute about 80 percent of the two Iraqi army divisions in Nineveh province. The security system in Kirkuk has almost been completely replaced by Kurds. Tens of thousands of *peshmerga* fighters were despatched in 2004 and 2005. The KRG receives 17 percent of the Iraqi budget, whilst other ethnic communities have no share in this budget. Since 1991, the KRG and its two main parties receive a huge income from border posts and customs, as well as selling oil to Turkey, which occurred even under Saddam. Thus, with their military and economical powers, it is much easier for Kurds to suppress of the already vulnerable ethnic communities (minorities).

Sunni Arab extremists have brutally attacked the vulnerable Assyrian, Yazidi and Shabak communities as part of this insurgency, labelling them crusaders, devil-worshippers and unbelievers. Truck bombings in August 2007 killed more than 300 Yazidis, and since 2004 Shabaks have reported that more than 750 of their community have perished.⁵¹ Since 2009 bombings targeting Yazidi and Shabak areas have increased. In November 2008 an orchestrated campaign of targeted bombings and killings in Mosul also left about 40 Assyrians dead and over 12,500 people internally displaced. The provincial elections which followed in January 2009 saw the ascendancy of the al-Hadba nationalist Sunni party which utilised widespread resentment against the Kurds to campaign against the KRG. It won against the Nineveh Fraternal List (i.e. the Kurdish coalition), blocking it out of all senior positions in the new administration. As a result of this tension the Kurdish coalition has since boycotted the provincial council. Even Assyrian representative elected to the council Mr. Tanios Iyou, member of the Ishtar Patriotic List (Assyrians, including many KDP members, aligned with the KRG), has boycotted it in compliance with the Kurds.

Kurdish officials have threatened to resort to military force to annex what they call “Kurdish-majority” areas in the province unless they are offered senior posts in the provincial administration.⁵² Sunni Arab leaders refuse to negotiate until the Kurds recognise Nineveh’s administrative borders and pull their security forces north of the Green Line.⁵³ Even Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has branded this “unconstitutional” and demanded that Kurdish forces withdraw from areas outside the KRG’s borders.⁵⁴ In response, Kurdish authorities have blocked Arab officials from carrying out their duties in the areas of Nineveh province under their control. They have even pressured many of these districts to boycott the new Sunni Arab governor Athil al-Nujayfi.⁵⁵ In one incident on May 8, 2009, Kurdish forces (presumably under orders from the KRG) blocked governor al-Nujayfi from entering the Assyrian-Yazidi town of Ba’shiqa, which is under their control. When Mr. al-Nujayfi recently crossed the unofficial boundary on his way to Tell-Kayf, his convoy was pelted with stones and tomatoes and briefly held up by the *peshmerga*. With encouragement from the Kurdish authorities,

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground,” pp. 37, 41.

⁵² Sam Dagher, “Tensions Stoked Between Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis,” New York Times, May 17, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/18/world/middleeast/18nineveh.html?ref=middleeast>; “Mosul teeters on brink of conflict,” UPI, August 17, 2009, http://www.upi.com/Emerging_Threats/2009/08/17/Mosulteeters-on-brink-of-conflict/UPI-49091250544442/; Ned Parker and Usama Redha, “Arabs, Kurds take their fight to the polls,” Los Angeles Times, January 25, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/25/world/fg-iraqmosul25>.

⁵³ Dagher, “Tensions Stoked Between Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis,” New York Times.

⁵⁴ “Transcript: Iraq’s Maliki on the Kurds,” Wall Street Journal, July 9, 2009, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124715056156618319.html?mod=googlenews_wsj (accessed August 17, 2009). Also Ali Al Windawi and Ned Parker, “Iraq bombing kills 70, injures 182,” Los Angeles Times, June 21, 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iraq-bombing21-2009jun21,0,1042986.story>.

⁵⁵ Dagher, “Tensions Stoked Between Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis,” New York Times; Nada Bakri, “Dispute Over Land Simmering in Northern Iraq,” Washington Post, May 18, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/05/17/AR2009051702210.html>; T. Christian Miller, “In Nineveh, tensions between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs simmer,” Los Angeles Times, June 23, 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iraq-kurds23-2009jun23,0,3375847.story>.

sixteen towns and districts under Kurdish control in the Nineveh Plains have severed contact with the provincial council and announced plans to create their own administrations to run local affairs.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “Looming U.S troop withdrawal creates alarm in Mosul”, Kurdish Globe (Erbil), June 14, 2009, <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/displayPrintableArticle.jsp?id=4AFCC243889260A2CBF073509560064C>.

Recommendations

To the Kurdistan Regional Government:

Modify the constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to recognise Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Syrians) as one group, and as an indigenous population; and accord legal recognition to Shabaks, Yazidis and Kaka'is as distinct ethnic groups.

Repeal all decrees relevant to “nationality correction” and “Kurdification”, and permit affected persons the right to determine their own ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of indigenous non-Kurdish ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations.

Remedy the injustice caused by the Kurdistan Regional Government’s practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Recognise non-Kurdish IDPs with ancestral roots from villages in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as locals and refrain from making them apply for residence permits.

Restore all expelled and deported non-Kurds to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, provide just compensation. Cease placing obstacles in their search for employment and sources of income and crack down on discrimination and corruption.

Promote employment opportunities for non-Kurds who were have been deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force their migration out of the region.

Cease repression of political and civil society organisations that oppose Kurdish nationalist policies in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories. Allow such organisations to operate freely and without intimidation and fear.

Cease funding political and civil society organisations that divide ethnic communities and support the KDP’s nationalist policies by undermining and challenging existing ones which do not.

Ensure that independent non-Kurds can fully participate in public affairs without fearing retribution for differing political views. Cease arbitrarily arresting and detaining non-Kurdish activists.

Transfer detainees originating from Nineveh and Kirkuk Provinces from prisons in the IKR to Nineveh and Kirkuk prisons supervised by local judicial bodies, and allow treatment of such detainees according to due process of law.

Initiate independent and impartial investigations of individuals, including Kurdish security forces, alleged to be responsible for carrying out killings, kidnappings, beatings and torture against minorities. Make the results public and discipline or prosecute, as appropriate, the criminals and even officials who authorised or used excessive force.

Recognise Nineveh Province’s 19 March 2003 boundaries until such time as the status of the disputed territories may be altered by constitutional means, and take steps to resolve bilateral issues

with the Iraqi Government, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric concerning mutual relations, the status of disputed territories and the issuance of oil and gas contracts in these areas. Also, seek to minimise security risks by refraining from military manoeuvres in disputed territories without pre-notifying the other side.

Cease funding private militias to carry out public security responsibilities in non-Kurdish towns and villages located in the disputed territories outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Consult with the representatives on non-Kurdish communities to put in place policies for their protection. Allow municipalities to hire police officers from among their own communities, in accordance with existing procedures outlined by Iraq's Interior Ministry.

Increase funding to non-Kurdish immersion schools and cease the obstacles placed in their operation.

Cease the indoctrination of non-Kurdish children through educational programs in which they are made to glorify Kurdistan at the expense of their own ethnic identity.

Cease the obstacles placed before non-Kurds claiming lands they have lost to Kurdish squatters and conduct proper inquests into incidents of non-Kurds being abducted or murdered in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Cease electoral fraud and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.

Allow independent Iraqi and international human rights organisations to work unfettered in the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and to provide unbiased information.

Invite the UN independent expert on minority issues to provide an impartial assessment of the situation of non-Kurdish ethnic communities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and in the disputed territories.

To the Government of Iraq:

Facilitate rebuilding the Iraqi state by reducing violence in the country and instituting stability in the region, to create a powerful and viable centralised Iraq.

Amend the Iraqi Constitution to: Reduce the restrictions on the state authorities, remove contradictory articles, clearly define and strengthen the power of central government, and grant priority to the central government in shared authorities and all future decisions.

Article 4 of the Iraqi constitution should be rephrased so that it ensures protection of minority groups' linguistic and cultural rights, removes discrimination between the ethnic communities in Iraqi society, improves the access of ethnic communities to education in their own mother tongue, and prevents the publication of immense Iraqi state documentation in Kurdish.

Implement joint administration in educational matters in disputed districts' educational facilities through the creation of a committee comprising members of all ethnic communities in the education directorates of Nineveh and Kirkuk.

Transfer teachers in the disputed districts who receive their salaries from the KRG to the authority and payroll of Nineveh and Kirkuk's education directorates.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations. Ensure protection of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in the disputed territories through security measures, by ceasing discriminatory resource and service allocation to areas with heavy minority presence, halting efforts to manipulate such groups or enlist them to their side and providing fair political representation.

Local recruitment into Nineveh's security forces and especially integration of members of diverse ethnic groups in security forces deployed in disputed territories.

Implement, as the new provincial governments are formed, an ambitious economic recovery program focused on infrastructure repair and revitalising the agricultural sector. Pressure the Nineveh Provincial Council especially to pledge to release \$500 million in unspent past budget funds to the local government sector.

Facilitate the effective involvement of Iraqis in rebuilding of the state on a democratic basis – NGO laws should be instituted to international best practice.

Encourage international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to open offices in northern Iraq.

Create an independent inquiry to determine who was responsible for the carefully-planned systematic campaign of killings and bombings that targeted Assyrians in Mosul between September and November 2008, and November 2009 and February 2010, and the subsequent displacement of over 12,500 Assyrians. The inquiry should not only identify the killers, but also underline why the security services failed to prevent the attacks.

Restore the rule of law and the control of the Iraqi central government, police and military in all areas outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Initiate independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Pressure the Kurdistan Democratic Party to cease electoral fraud in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories. Invite and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the area, as well as count the votes.

Look into the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To the United States, Coalition Countries and the United Nations:

Urge the government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to investigate allegations of human rights abuses of minorities by Kurdish and Arab officials.

Assist relevant Iraqi parties to reach the necessary compromises in Nineveh, primarily by: a) pressing the Iraqi government to reintegrate certain members of the Baath party and the insurgency in local civilian and security institutions; b) pressuring local allies that rely heavily on the U.S., notably tribal forces, to promote a power- and security-sharing agreement; and c) insisting on the necessary protection of the diverse indigenous ethnic groups.

Seriously consider adding U.S. military officers to Arab and Kurdish patrols as a transitional confidence-building measure to improve communication, coordination and cooperation.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Emphasise to the Iraqi government the need for a thorough and independent inquiry into the September-November 2008, and November 2009-February 2010, killings of Assyrians in Mosul, as well as independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Do not cooperate with the Kurdish Regional Government until the Kurdish authorities stop the suppression of other indigenous Iraqi communities, abandon claims to lands inhabited mainly by non-Kurds, and abandon the use of militias, intimidation and violence.

Encourage the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To UNAMI and International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Aid Organisations:

Complete the institution of offices in the disputed territories, such as Kirkuk, Mosul, the Nineveh Plains, Tell-Afar, Tuz Khurmatu and Diyala, and provide them with sufficient staff and experts.

Initiate regular fact-finding missions independent of the Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to discover what is really happening to minority communities on the ground.

Cease employing minders, guides or translators that have links to the governments and ruling parties and ensure that all guides or translators employed belong to the same community as that being researched. Otherwise informants will be too scared to provide accurate statements regarding abuses against them.

Offer to act as foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.

APPENDIX I:

Tables showing the number of Assyrians and other Christians killed, wounded and kidnapped, as well as targets of terrorist attacks, in 2009 and 2010

Murders and Targeted Killings

In total the Hammurabi Human Rights Organisation (HHRO) has counted up to 730 Christians, including Assyrians and Armenians, who have been killed all over Iraq since the regime change in March 2003 due to the following circumstances:

- 537 people killed by unidentified gunmen
- 126 people killed in by terrorist bombings and explosions
- 30 people killed by fire from American or Multi-National forces
- 21 people killed in exchanges of fire between Americans and insurgents
- 10 people killed in American military operations before 9 April 2003
- 6 people killed by the Iraqi National Guard forces

The following 23 cases are those most recently documented, having occurred within the last seven months, and alarmingly show a concentration in the northern city of Mosul.

Name	Date	Details	Location	Other Information
Samir Rasho Azo	20 September 2009	43 years old	Baghdad	
Imad Eliya Abdalkarim	5 October 2009	55 years old,	Kirkuk	
Bashar Samir	15 October 2009	Policeman	Industrial area, Mosul	From Baritleh
Rami Khachik	13 November 2009	16 years old, High School Student	Hay al-Tahrir, Mosul	Armenian
Ranko Najib Patros	10 December 2009	24 years old, newly-wed	Hay al-Baladiyat, North Mosul	
Rimon Najib Patros	10 December 2009	18 years old	Hay al-Baladiyat, North Mosul	
Zaid Majid Yusuf al-Qazazi	17 December 2009	39 years old	17 Tammuz neighbourhood, Mosul	
An Assyrian (name unknown)	23 December 2009	?	Khazraj quarter of Mosul's old city	Chaldean Catholic
Basel Isho Yohanna	24 December 2009	23 years old	Hay al-Jaza'ir, Mosul	
Hikmat Saadoun Sleiman	12 January 2010	75 years old, Grocer	al-Saaah quarter, Mosul	
Saadallah Youssif Jorjis	17 January 2010	52 years old, married with 2 sons	Thaqafah neighbourhood,	Syriac Catholic

		and 2 daughters, Shop-owner	near Mosul University	
Abdullahad Amjad Hazim	18 January 2010	Married, Grocer	Hay al-Baladiyat, North Mosul	Syriac Catholic
Rawand Zakir Hedo	8 February 2010	17 years old	Alqosh	
Rayan Salem Bashir Elias	14 February 2010	43 years old, married with children, businessman	Hay al-Mishraq, East Mosul	Chaldean Catholic
Fattuhi Munir	15 February 2010	40 years old, greengrocer	Sahaba district, West Mosul	Syriac Catholic
Najim Abdallah Fattuhi Rahimo	15 February 2010	50 years old, Shop- owner	17 Tammuz, Mosul	
Zia Toma Soro	16 February 2010	21 years old, Engineering Student	Hay al-'Arabi, North Mosul	
Wissam George Yousif Malki Jarjour	17 February 2010	20 years old, Education Student	Wadi al-'Ayn, South Mosul	
Adnan (Sabah) Yaqoub Hanna al-Dahan	20 February 2010	57 years old, married with children, shopkeeper	Hay al-Baladiyat, North Mosul	Syriac Orthodox
Ishoo Maroki	23 February 2010	59 years old	West Mosul	Syriac Catholic
Mokhlas Ishoo Maroki	23 February 2010	31 years old	West Mosul	Syriac Catholic
Bassim Ishoo Maroki	23 February 2010	25 years old	West Mosul	Syriac Catholic
Sabah Yaqoub Adam	16 March 2010	54 years old, married with one son, glassworker	al-Saah quarter, Old Mosul	

In relation to these killings and other attacks, a number of Assyrians have been badly wounded, some of them with little chance of recovery. Among them are the following six cases, all of them in Mosul:

Name	Date	Details	Location	Other Information
Raniya Hanna al- Qas Toma	10 January 2010	Student	Mosul University	
Assyrian girl (name unknown)	10 January 2010	Student	Mosul University	
Assyrian boy (name unknown)	10 January 2010	Student	Mosul University	
Raghid Sabah Tobia	26 January 2010	Young man, store owner	Dawwasa, Mosul	
Thaer Salem Bashir Elias	14 February 2010	Married with children	Hay al-Mishraq, East Mosul	Chaldean Catholic
Ramsin Shmael Lazar	16 February 2010	22 years old, Pharmacy Student	Hay al-'Arabi, North Mosul	Badly wounded to the head

Kidnappings

In total the HHRO has counted up to 182 cases of kidnappings of Christians all over Iraq since the regime change in March 2003. The following five cases are those most recently documented, having occurred within the last seven months, and alarmingly show a concentration in the Nineveh Province.

Name	Date	Details	Location	Other Information
Firas Behnam Ishaq Hanna	14 September 2009	Shop-owner	Bashiqah	Kidnapped, robbed, released six days later.
Mahasin Bashir Toma	26 September 2009	Doctor, married	Baritleh	Kidnapped, released a day later.
Samir Giwargis	October 2009	Paediatrician	Kirkuk	Kidnapped, tortured, released after three weeks.
Sarah Edmond Youkhana	28 December 2009	20 years old, Education Student	Mosul University	Kidnapped, still missing
Johnny Mikhael	15 February 2010	12 years old	al-Dawrah, Baghdad	Kidnapped, presumed dead

Terrorist Attacks and Bombings

In total the HHRO has counted more than 51 terrorist attacks on churches and monasteries all over Iraq since the regime change in March 2003. The following 13 cases are those most recently documented, having occurred within the last six months, and alarmingly all of them are concentrated in Mosul and Assyrian towns in the Nineveh Province.

Date	Target	Location	Casualties
October-December 2009	Assyrian House	Hay al-Wahdah, Mosul	
October-December 2009	Assyrian House	Tall-Rumman, Mosul	
October-December 2009	Assyrian House	Matahin, Mosul	
October-December 2009	Assyrian House	al-Hadba, Mosul	
15 October 2009	Mayor of Baritleh, returning from a meeting in Mosul	Industrial area, Mosul	One Assyrian killed.
26 November 2009	St. Ephrem's Chaldean Catholic Church and St Theresa Convent of Dominican nuns	Western New Mosul	
15 December 2009	Annunciation Syriac Catholic church	New Mosul, Majmu'ah al-Thaqafiyah quarter	Five people killed, including a newborn infant. Another 40
15 December 2009	Mary Immaculate (al-	al-Shifa' quarter of	

	Tahirah) Syriac Orthodox church	Mosul's old city	wounded.
23 December 2009	Chaldean Catholic church of St. George and Syriac Orthodox Cathedral of St. Thomas	Khazraj quarter of Mosul's old city	Three dead, including one Chaldean Catholic and two Muslims, and five injured.
4 January 2010	Town Centre	Baritleh	Many wounded.
10 January 2010	Bus for Christian University Students from Bakhdida	Mosul University	Two girls and a boy wounded.
26 January 2010	Two liquor stores	Dawwasa, Mosul	One Assyrian man wounded.
1 February 2010	Town Centre	Bakhdida (Qaraqosh)	12 wounded, including a woman, a child and a policeman.

APPENDIX II:

Assyrian IDPs and Refugees

According to the HHRO 2009 Report on the Situation of Christians in Iraq an average of 300 Christian families leave the country every month. This figure is staggering when we see that many of them are skilled workers, professionals and people with significant intellectual and monetary capital. The vast majority of them have no intention of returning due to the hardships they have experienced.

The report also states that out of the roughly 1,300 Christian families that fled Mosul in the wake of the autumn 2008 terror campaign before the 2009 provincial elections, only 800 have returned to their former homes in the war-torn city. More than 500 families refuse to return and remain internally displaced in towns and villages in the Nineveh Plains and in the IKR.

The more recent terror campaign in the lead up to the March 2010 parliamentary elections, and the spree of killings, kidnappings, bombings, led to another 154 families from Mosul joining the 500 existing IDP families. The following is a breakup of these families and where they have found refuge:

Town/Village	Number of IDP Families
Bakhdida (Qaraqosh)	25
Baritleh	20
Karimlish	3
Tisqopa	15
Ba'shiqah and Bahzani	3
Batnaya	8
Dohuk	2
Our Lady Monastery, Alqosh	33
Mar Mattai Monastery	23
Mar Behnam Monastery	22
Total:	154

The following is an almost complete list, compiled by the ADM, of the number of Assyrian IDPs living in Dohuk Province in early 2009:

Town/Village	District	Number of IDP Families	Number of IDPs
Dohuk Centre	Dohuk	226	981
Ba-Gaire	Doski	4	16
Rumta*	Doski	34	165
Babilo	Doski	10	40
Simel	Simel	20	80
Shiyoz	Simel	39	51
Mar Yaqou	Simel	34	155
Bakhitme	Simel	62	248
Mansuriyah	Simel	42	149
Sorka	Simel	23	77
Bakhluja	Simel	30	120
Sorya	Simel	11	41
Mawana	Simel	80	?

Zakho Centre	Zakho	130	680
Peshabur	Zakho	139	780
Bersive	Zakho	187	817
Levo	Zakho	39	621
Derabun	Zakho	133	466
Be-Daro	Zakho	68	244
Qarawilla	Zakho	67	288
Shiranish	Zakho	59	243
Hizawa	Zakho	37	174
Mergasor	Zakho	14	46
Dashtattakh	Zakho	9	67
Bajidda	Zakho	18	70
Pirakka	Zakho	20	81
Nav-Kandala	Zakho	40	181
Sarsang	Sapna	35	113
Araden	Sapna	72	234
Inishk	Sapna	30	107
Benatha	Sapna	61	223
Badarrash	Sapna	27	102
Dawudiyah	Sapna	43	153
Be-Bede	Sapna	19	62
Kani-Balav	Sapna	19	72
Dehe	Sapna	25	86
Blejane	Sapna	6	23
Hamziyah*	Sapna	19	85
Sardarawah	Sapna	18	69
Tin*	Sapna	21	60
Lower Deralok	Sapna	1	6
Derishke	Barwari-Bala	3	9
Dure	Barwari-Bala	3	10
Bishmiyaye	Barwari-Bala	5	9
Ayn-Nune	Barwari-Bala	9	23
Iqri*	Barwari-Bala	2	5
Malikhtha*	Barwari-Bala	1	2
Sardashte*	Barwari-Bala	8	23
Khwara	Barwari-Bala	1	1
Jedide	Barwari-Bala	2	7
Bas	Barwari-Bala	7	2
Tuthe-Shemaye	Barwari-Bala	1	2
Lower Challik	Barwari-Bala	1	6
Musakan	Barwari-Bala	5	30
Azadi and Shahidan Collectives	Aqrah	60	260
Malla-Birwan	Aqrah	62	233
Hazarjot	Aqrah	34	127
Banasora	Aqrah	85	324
Nuhawa	Aqrah	20	94
Be-Boze	Atrush	4	?

Adhekh	Atrush	6	25
Armashe	Atrush	1	3
Tilla	Atrush	20	90
Bilmand	Nahla	2	3
Kashkawa	Nahla	10	27
Meruke	Nahla	8	42
Hizane	Nahla	10	29
Zhoule	Nahla	9	29
Cham-Rabatke	Nahla	4	17
Khalilane	Nahla	10	33
Total:		2,364	+9,780

* denotes villages that had not been rebuilt prior to 2003 and their inhabitants consist entirely of IDPs who originate from there.

The following is a list of Assyrian IDPs in the towns and villages of the al-Shaykhan district of the Nineveh Province in 2007, compiled by the Assyrian Aid Society:

Town/Village	Place of Origin	Number of IDP Families	Number of IDPs
Ayn-Sifne	Mosul	8	31
	Baghdad	94	436
	Kirkuk	2	7
	Total:	104	474
Pirozawa	Baghdad	15	63
	Kirkuk	2	12
	Total:	17	75
Garmawa	Baghdad	7	36
Karanjok	Mosul	1	5
	Baghdad	3	13
	Total:	4	18
Ayn-Baqre	Baghdad	3	5
Grand Total:		135	608

The following is a list of Assyrian IDPs in the towns and villages of the Shaykhan district of the Dohuk Province in 2007, compiled by the Assyrian Aid Society:

Town/Village	Place of Origin	Number of IDP Families	Number of IDPs
Tilla	Mosul	4	19
	Baghdad	26	120
	Total:	30	139
Adhekh	Baghdad	9	56
Armashe	Baghdad	12	46
Be-Boze	Mosul	2	4
	Baghdad	4	25
	Total:	6	29
Grand Total:		57	270

The following is a list of Assyrian IDPs in the towns and villages of the al-Shaykhan district of the Nineveh Province in 2009, compiled by the Assyrian Aid Society. It is interesting to compare the figures, and see the increase in the number of IDP families – more significant is the pronounced increase of IDPs from Mosul:

Town/Village	Place of Origin	Number of IDP Families	Number of IDPs
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Ayn-Sifne	Mosul	57	258
	Baghdad	48	188
	Kirkuk	5	18
	Total:	110	464
Pirozawa	Mosul	11	52
	Baghdad	8	31
	Kirkuk	1	1
	Total:	20	84
Garmawa	Mosul	4	26
	Baghdad	3	20
	Total:	7	46
Dashtqotan	Mosul	5	12
	Baghdad	3	14
	Total:	8	26
Karanjok	Mosul	2	6
	Baghdad	10	41
	Total:	12	47
Ayn-Baqre	Mosul	2	9
	Baghdad	16	62
	Total:	18	71
Grand Total:		175	738

The following is a partial list showing examples of the distribution of Assyrian IDPs in villages and towns of the Nineveh Plains, gathered from locals on the ground in late December 2009 and early January 2010:

Town/Village	Number of IDP Families
Bashiqah	100
Bahzani	70
Mergi	40
Alfaf*	49
al-Barakah*	75
Magharah*	28
Tisqopa	618
Baqopa	20
Sharafiyah	10
Dashtqotan	11
Karanjok	17
Ayn-Baqre	39
Pirozawa	15

* denotes villages that had not been built prior to 2007 and their inhabitants consist entirely of IDPs.

The following is another partial list showing examples of Assyrian families from villages and towns of the Nineveh Plains and the IKR that have left Iraq altogether in the last two to three years, gathered from locals on the ground in late December 2009 and early January 2010. The figures are quite disturbing:

Town/Village	Families that have left Iraq	Persons
Bashiqah	30	300
Tisqopa	456	?

Baqopa	30	?
Sharafiyah	9	40
Ayn-Sifne	22	103
Pirozawa	6	?
Be-Boze	3	?
Tilla	7	39

IRAQ

The Struggle to Exist



Against Assyrian
neveh
Province's Disputed Territories

Assyria Council of Europe

Hammurabi Human Rights Organization



The Struggle to Exist

Part II:

Violence against Assyrian Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories



February 2010

The Struggle to Exist

Part II: Violence against Assyrian Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories

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METHODOLOGY

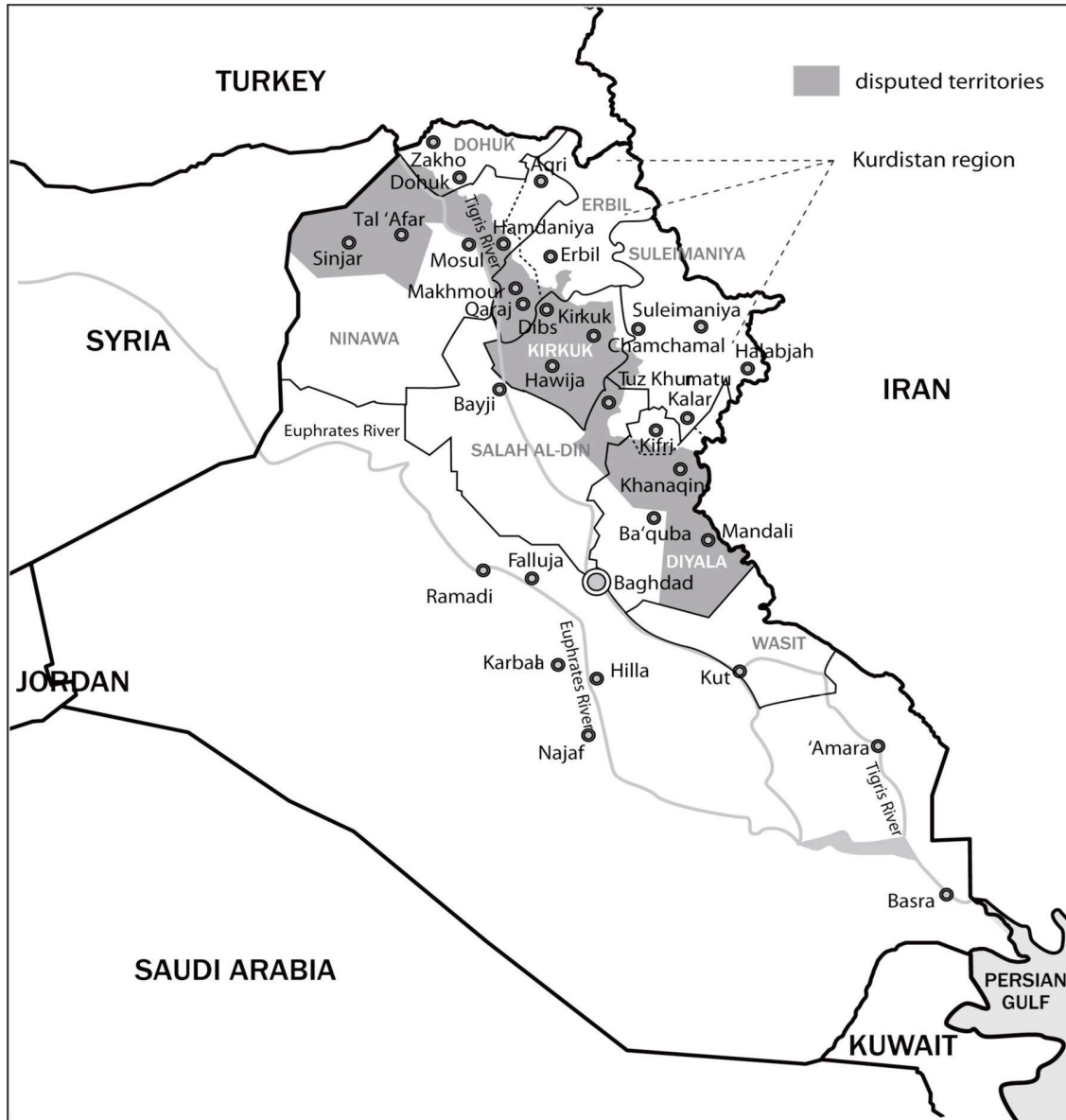
This report is based on a six-week fact-finding mission in the northern Iraqi cities of Arbil, Kirkuk and Dohuk, the regions of Barwari-Bala, Sapna, Simel, Zakho and Nahla, and the towns or villages of Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Tall-Kepe (Tell-Kayf), Tisqopa (Tell-Isquf), Batnaya, Beqopa (Baqofah), Alqosh, Ba'shiqa, Bahzani, Karimlish (Karemles), Baritleh (Bartillah), Sharafiyah, Bahindawaya, 'Ayn-Baqrah, Karanjok, Dashqotan, Pirozawah, 'Ayn-Sifne, Shaqlawa and Diyana.

The fact-finding mission was conducted between November and January 2010 to investigate abuses against Assyrians in the disputed territories of the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraq Kurdistan Region. For security reasons the Assyria Council of Europe did not visit the city of Mosul.

Assyria Council of Europe interviewed over 70 men and women of the Chaldo-Assyrian community, both privately and in group settings. Interviews were conducted mainly in Syriac and Arabic, without a translator, persons having been identified for interview largely with the assistance of Iraqi nongovernmental organizations serving Assyrian groups. In addition, Assyria Council of Europe conducted follow-up telephone interviews and consulted official documents provided by Assyrian representatives. All of these interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the data would be collected and used, and verbally consented to be interviewed. The names and other identifying information of many of them have been withheld in the interests of their personal security.

The report also draws on meetings in Arbil with senior Assyrian official and Iraqi Parliament member Yonadam Yousif Kanna. Assyria Council of Europe also interviewed Nineveh Provincial Council elected representative Jevara Zaia, who in the 2008 provincial elections won the Christian minority quota seat.

Map: The Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the Disputed Territories Claimed by the Kurdistan Regional Government



Courtesy of the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch

THE STRUGGLE TO EXIST

The purpose of this report is to give the facts regarding the situation of Assyrians in northern Iraq, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). It also outlines the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) policies towards Assyrians and other Christians of all denominations, as well as other minorities in the region. The report also outlines the reality of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leadership's policies towards these groups. Additionally, it examines and responds to the seriously misleading report presented in December 2009 by Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG's High Representative to the UK in retaliation to allegations of Kurdish involvement in the killing and displacement of Mosul's Christians, and lends its support to the November 2009 report by Human Rights Watch on violence against minority communities in Nineveh province's disputed territories.

Essentially at issue is the status of the Assyrians in the disputed territories immediately south of the semi-autonomous IKR, as well as those Assyrians residing within the IKR. For nearly three decades previous Iraqi governments attempted to "Arabise" northern Iraq, forcibly driving out hundreds of thousands of non-Arabs such as Assyrians and Kurds from their homes and settling ethnic Arabs in their place. Currently, since Saddam Hussein's overthrow, the leadership of the KRG insists that it is entitled to claim this land as part of an ever-expanding Kurdish territory, stretching from the Sinjar area near the Syrian border in the west all the way to Khanaqin near the Iranian border to the southeast.

Vast segments of these disputed territories claimed by the Kurdish authorities are historical regions of other indigenous Iraqi peoples. Kirkuk, for example is historically Assyrian and Turkmen, Mosul is Assyrian and Arab, and the Nineveh Plains are home also to Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen and Kaka'is. Turkmen and Arabs also predominate and outnumber Kurds in the north of Diyala province. Furthermore, the Kurdish presence in most of these territories is not ancient and the non-Kurdish communities dominate. It would not be practical to thus construct boundaries and regions along ethnic lines.

The KRG has also intensified its Kurdish nationalist outlook since 2003, which through "Kurdification" is threatening the very existence and way of life of Assyrians indigenous to those areas presently under their control. The KRG authorities have been in power since 1991, governing with semi-autonomy. They hold a significant number of posts in the Iraqi state and the Iraqi constitution, grants the IKR powers almost equal to those of the central government. This impedes the state's functionality.

While both Kurd and Arab leaderships claim the 'disputed territories,' such as the Nineveh Plains or Kirkuk, the actual facts on the ground differ from the ethnically exclusive narratives they portray. These territories are historically one of Iraq's most ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse areas, and for centuries they have been home to indigenous Assyrian Christians, as well as Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and other minorities. The same is true for the IKR, which is not only home to communities of indigenous Assyrians and Yazidis, but also to considerable Turkmen, Arab and Armenian communities.

Of course, Iraq's Kurds deserve to be compensated for the atrocities committed against them by the various Iraqi governments, among them genocide and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. This issue though should be considered separate from the Kurds' current struggle for political control over the disputed territories, and does not justify one ethnic group controlling the area exclusively. All victims of Saddam Hussein's Arabisation campaign should be able to return to, and rebuild, their historic communities – including Assyrians. Kurds also should not claim exclusivity of suffering, especially since, historically Kurds have been the victimisers of indigenous groups less numerous than themselves, such as Assyrians and Yazidis. In a sense nowadays, history is once again regrettably repeating itself.

The competing efforts of Arabs and Kurds to resolve their territorial disputes over northern Iraq's future have left the Assyrians, and other communities who live there in an uncertain situation. It is they who ultimately bear the brunt of this conflict and come under growing pressure to declare their loyalty to either one side or the other, or face the consequences. They are being victimised by the heavy handed tactics of the Kurdish authorities, not the least arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and intimidation, directed at anyone resisting Kurdish expansionist plans. The Kurdish thrust into the region has also created an opportunity and reason for Arab ultra-nationalists and Sunni extremists to continue killing members of minority groups, especially non-Muslims. It is precisely this segment of society, the shade of grey being neither Arab nor Kurd, which is struggling to exist in the new Iraq.

I. TORMENTING NINEVEH'S "MINORITIES"

The current events and political climate of the region are dangerous for the Assyrians and other communities because they are caught in a dilemma between two larger and more powerful ethnic rivals who have over half a century of animosity between them. Many members of these communities are mentally exhausted after years of oppression under the Arabs, and they also bear the emotional baggage of persecution, massacres and raids under the Turks and Kurds in Ottoman times. They now fear again being oppressed by the Kurds who under previous Iraqi governments also shared oppression, but now have returned as the oppressors. To strengthen their hold on Nineveh and to ease its inclusion into the IKR, Kurdish leaders are campaigning on two fronts. They offer incentives such as protection and financial support, whilst repressing them to keep them under control. The aim of this is to divide the Assyrians, who will not easily identify as Kurds, and get them to agree with the KRG's plan of expansion into the disputed territories by 'referendum,' as well as pushing Yazidis, Shabak and Kaka'i communities to identify as ethnic Kurds.

Kurdish Patronage and Control

Kurdish leaders are currying favour with minority communities by spending hundreds of millions of Iraqi dinars building a pro-Kurd system of patronage amongst them, and financing organisations and even political parties to compete against, undermine and challenge existing, well-established ones – most of whom oppose Kurdish control. For about five years prior to the setback of losing the 2009 provincial elections in Nineveh, the KRG had flooded the largely non-Kurdish communities in the Nineveh Plains with money to gain their support. This patronage system fosters and aggravates political divisions within these communities by creating and funding alternative civil society organisations that favour Kurdish rule, while blocking those that do not. This tactic of suppression, classically known as divide and conquer, has been used successfully in the IKR since 1991 and has served to undermine and hinder the affairs of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) with the establishment of rival Assyrian and separatist Chaldean political parties in the region. The ADM is basically the only independent Assyrian political organisation, in north Iraq, but its functioning is severely restricted. The Turkmen in the IKR have also been treated similarly.⁵⁷

The former KRG finance minister and deputy prime minister, Mr. Sargis Aghajan Mamendu, himself an Assyrian Evangelical, is known to have spent millions of dollars from the KRG's coffers in the disputed territories.⁵⁸ These developments include the construction of new housing units (of cheap quality and in bad areas), newly-built and renovated churches (destroying their historical character), aid distribution (only to those who agree to support the KRG's ambitions), and newly formed youth sports clubs and cultural associations (to undermine and challenge already existing ones that do not agree with the KRG's expansionist policies). Aid is distributed through the local "Christian Affairs Committee," a network recently established by Mr. Aghajan to undermine the work of the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS), which has existed since 1991.⁵⁹ It has also been reported that the KDP has been pressuring needy Assyrians to

⁵⁷ Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), "SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq," February 2010, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld), Arbil, Dohuk, Bakhdida, and Alqosh, December 2009 and January 2010; Sam Dagher, "Iraqi Christians cling to last, waning refugees," Christian Science Monitor, March 6, 2008, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0306/p01s05-wogn.html?page=1> (accessed August 17, 2009); Leila Fadel, "Kurdish expansion squeezes northern Iraq's minorities," McClatchy, November 11, 2008, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/iraq/story/55711.html>.

⁵⁹ "Christians Face Extinction in Northern Iraq," Newsmax.com, April 24, 2008, http://www.newsmax.com/timmerman/christians_mosul_iraq/2008/04/24/90555.html.

sign forms pledging their support for the Nineveh Plains to be annexed to the IKR and placed under KRG rule – in return for much needed assistance, rations and emergency housing.⁶⁰



A soccer field built for the young people of the purely Assyrian town of Alqosh by the KRG, notice the Kurdish flags attached to it.



Exterior and Interior views of the *Mahabbah* (“Love”) apartment complex on the outskirts of Baritleh, near the Shabak village of Khazna.

Mr. Aghajan has (with KRG funding) created a widespread refugee housing program throughout Assyrian areas of the Nineveh Plains. In Karimlish for example, he purchased land from the local Chaldean Catholic Church to erect 50 prefabricated housing units he named “Martyrs of Faith”. A new “exemplary

⁶⁰ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Iraq Report 2008,” http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2331.

village” of 20 houses was also established between Karimlish and Bakhdida for Armenian refugees and named Aghajanian in his honour, as well as another established beside the Monastery of St. Abraham near Batnaya. Two other apartment blocks, each with 150 units and named *Mahabbah* (“Love”) and *Hayat* (“Life”) were established near Baritleh, and there are even some on the outskirts of Bakhdida. These housing units are often built close together with cheap materials, have poor infrastructures, and are miserably located far from the main Assyrian settlements, with no pastoral care, no privacy, little access to services or basic supplies – sometimes near garbage dumps or in areas where non-Assyrians predominate making them unhealthy slums and turning them into virtual prisons. More disturbingly, some of these units are placed under the control of Churches who rent them out to the refugees, who have barely enough to survive on. If anything needs fixing in these units, the tenants must do this at their own expense.

The KRG has done everything in its power to control the Assyrians within the IKR and the disputed territories, and to keep them loyal to themselves. In the Assyrian villages of the Nineveh Plains, the *peshmerga*, the official army of the KRG, are in charge of this. The KRG illegally funds private militias ultimately loyal to it, instead of allowing members of minority communities to join the police force or Iraqi military – providing them with equipment and support, such as rifles, radios and meagre salaries. Without the KRG’s support for this militia, they could not exist. Officially these are created not to provide a police role but to protect the minorities from exterior violence. In reality, though, they ingrain Kurdish dominance through creating a local armed group of mercenaries.⁶¹ The militia are illegitimate since they fall outside the structure of official Iraqi government security forces and are more likely to support certain political parties and their KRG paymaster rather than uphold the rule of law.⁶² In short, these militias known as “Church Guards” or even “Sargis’ Guards,” who guard the checkpoints at the entrance of each Assyrian town and village in the Nineveh Plains, are another means of KRG control on the region. The militia, funded by Mr. Aghajan, has at least 1,200 members deployed in Bakhdida and surrounding villages.⁶³ Kurdish authorities insist that if they and Kurdish security forces were not present to secure the Nineveh Plains, the ethnic communities in the area would be more easily exposed to infighting, and devastating attacks by armed Sunni Arab extremist groups. The KRG has even asked the federal government in Baghdad to incorporate them into the local police forces but this suggestion has been duly refused.

It was the KRG in the first place (through Mr. Khasro Goran) which vetoed the establishment of a local Iraqi police force in these villages since 2006⁶⁴ to ensure Kurdish control of the area, and insisted on creating this system of KRG-loyal “Church Guards,” similar to the Kurdish “Village Guards” used by the Turkish government against Kurdish civilians during its war against the PKK. Even Shabaks made a written request proposing the establishment of their own community police force of 500 men to protect their towns and villages, but a local Kurdish official dismissed it even though it had been approved by Prime Minister al-Maliki.⁶⁵ Under international law there is no right for minorities to set up their own security force, but rather the government has a duty to provide reasonable protection without discrimination. The Kurdish authorities though have set up militia, but refuse the idea of Iraq’s armed

⁶¹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Arbil, Alqosh and Bakhdida, December 2009 and January 2010.

⁶² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Alqosh and Bakhdida, December 2009.

⁶³ Ernesto Londoño, “In Iraq’s North, Ethnic Strife Flares as Vote Draws Closer,” Washington Post, January 28, 2009, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/27/AR2009012703436_pf.html.

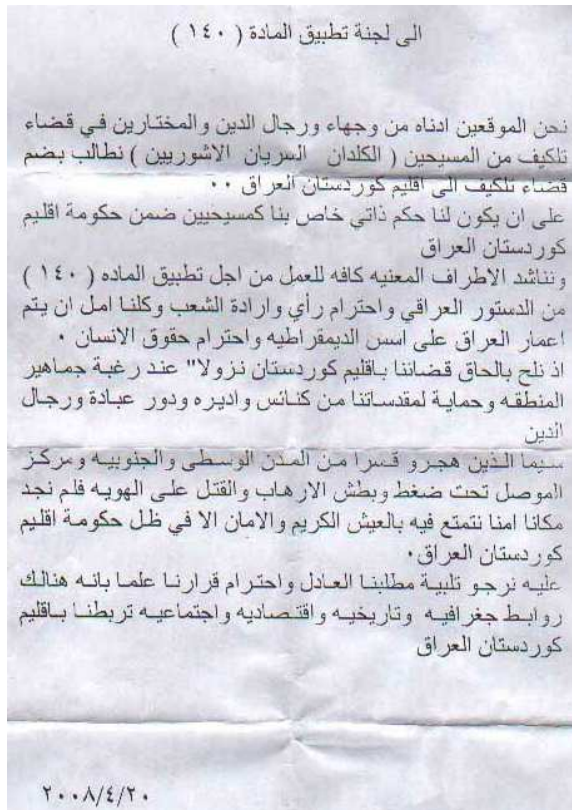
⁶⁴ “Kurdish Militia, Iraqi Police Terrorizing Assyrians in North Iraq,” AINA July 7, 2006, <http://www.aina.org/releases/20060706111253.htm>.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground,” pp. 38-39; and Sam Dagher, “Minorities Trapped in Northern Iraq’s Maelstrom,” New York Times, August 15, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/world/middleeast/16khazna.html>.

forces protecting minorities and have rejected the idea of allowing them to establish their own police forces to protect their people.

More disturbingly, the Kurdish authorities have favoured and enriched many religious leaders of the minority communities, paying for expensive new places of worship and facilities in a bid to win over the support of their religious establishments.⁶⁶ In return, community leaders, village heads and clergymen have sent numerous requests to Iraqi officials requesting their areas to be added to the IKR:

“We, the signatories below, leaders, clergymen, and village heads of the Christians (Chaldeans-Syriacs-Assyrians) in the Tell-Kayf district request the adding of the Tell-Kayf district to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. So that we may have autonomy as Christians included in the Government of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.



We also call on the relevant sides to all work for the enforcement of Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution and to respect the views and wishes of the people, and we all hope that Iraq's rebuilding will be completed on a foundation of democracy and respect for human rights.

If we are asking for the addition of our district to the Kurdistan Region, it is only because of the desire of the local populace, and the protection of our sacred sites, such as churches and monasteries, chapels and clergymen.

Considering those who were forced to emigrate from the cities of the centre and south, and Mosul centre, under the pressure and attack of terrorism, and killing by Identity Card, no place is safe any longer where we may enjoy a dignified existence and security, except under the shadow of the Government of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

We must plead that you recognize our just request and respect our decision knowing that there are geographical, historical, economic and social ties binding us to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.”⁶⁷

A copy of the original letter quoted above.

The KRG denies many Churches and Christian aid organisations funding for assistance programs geared at Internally Displaced People (IDPs) for the simple reason that they have not pledged support to the KDP. The Kurdish authorities have also spent a significant amount of money on the cultural and religious activities of Yazidis, and pay the salaries of the employees of the Lalish Cultural Center, which has branches in most Yazidi towns.⁶⁸ Most of these towns also have uniformly built Lalish Halls and temples built with KRG funding.

⁶⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Arbil, Dohuk, Alqosh, Bakhidida and Baritleh, December 2009 and January 2010.

⁶⁷ Letter to the committee enforcing Article 140, dated April 20, 2008, and kept on file by Assyria Council of Europe.

⁶⁸ Middle East Institute, “Social Change Amidst Terror and Discrimination: Yazidis in the New Iraq,” no. 18, August 2008, <http://www.mei.edu/Portals/0/Publications/Yezidis-in-the-New-Iraq.pdf>.



Left: A Yazidi Lalish Hall at Deraboun, note the Kurdish flag above its main entrance; Right: A lavish new convent locals have dubbed the “five-star hotel,” built above Alqosh by the local Chaldean Catholic Bishop, with KRG funding.

Since Nineveh’s disputed territories represent some of Iraq’s poorest, most under-developed, and neglected areas, which lack many basic services and employment opportunities (various estimates put the unemployment rate between 30 and 40 percent!); many impoverished families in the north have welcomed this Kurdish patronage and financial aid, which for most is the only support available to them. Some of them feel they are entitled to it after a long history of being oppressed by Kurds, not knowing that they are actually being used for their numbers and votes.

Kurdish Threats and Intimidation

Through their patronage Kurds are also working to Kurdify the local population. During the Arabisation and Anfal campaigns, all non-Arabs suffered together and were similarly forced to “correct” their nationality to identify as Arabs or risk expulsion from their homes. Today, members of these ethnic communities speak of their fear of being forcibly assimilated once again, this time by the Kurds. In a similar fashion to the “nationality correction” policy of Saddam’s former Baathist government, members of ethnic groups in the Nineveh Plains have reported that they were forced to not identify themselves as a member of a minority community since the two registration options provided are Kurd or Arab, in order to access education or healthcare services.⁶⁹ Yazidis and Shabaks are not recognised as separate ethnicities and Assyrians that originate from northern Iraq are encouraged more and more to identify as Kurdistanis or Kurdish Christians. At checkpoints and in all levels of administration in the IKR and Kurdish-controlled parts of the disputed territories, Assyrians are called Christians with no recognition of their distinct ethnic identity.

⁶⁹ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, “Human Rights Report: 1 January – 30 June 2008,” pp. 19-21.



Left: Bishop Isaac of the Assyrian Church of the East in Dohuk, prays over the coffin of Ammo Baba, notice the Kurdish and KDP flags draped over it; **Right:** An Assyrian lady in 'Aqrah, member of the Kurdistan Women's Union, wears a golden map of "Kurdistan" presented to her as a gift from the KDP for her many years of devoted service.

When Ammo Baba, the father of Iraqi soccer coaching and a proud Assyrian, passed away in at a hospital in Dohuk in mid-2009 after a long illness, not only was his coffin transported to Baghdad draped in the Kurdish and KDP flags, but the local bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East was forced to pray over it with them in place. The late Ammo Baba was neither a Kurd, nor was he a KDP member.⁷⁰ Those who reject this imposed Kurdish identity pose a direct threat to the Kurdish authorities' claim that Assyrian, Yazidi and Shabak territories belong in "Kurdistan", and are thus prone to harsh attacks and discrimination by Kurds. Those that do not reject it are targeted by insurgent Sunni Arab groups that view them as pro-Kurdish.

The KRG has also engaged in discriminatory behaviour against non-Kurdish minorities. Many Assyrians and Yazidis living in the Nineveh Plains claim that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and that it has begun building settlements on their land. The KDP also dominates judiciary in Nineveh province, routinely discriminating against non-Kurds and failing to enforce judgments in their favour. Many Assyrians and Yazidis also face restrictions when entering the IKR and must obtain KRG approval to find jobs in areas within Nineveh province administered by them, or under the security protection of the *peshmerga*. Early reports from the area also mentioned killings of Assyrians by agents of Kurdish political parties.⁷¹

In the two towns of Ba'shiqa and Bahzani the Kurdification process has been more pronounced. Here the original inhabitants are Assyrians and Yazidis who for centuries have spoken neither Syriac nor Kurdish, but Arabic. Here, not only have Kurdish authorities renamed the towns Bashik and Barzan in the local

⁷⁰ Interview conducted in Dohuk by Assyria Council Europe with an Assyrian journalist (name withheld) who was present at the ceremony, December 2009.

⁷¹ "Kurdish Resolution Threatens Assyrian Lands in Iraq", AINA November 3, 2003, <http://www.aina.org/releases/landtransfer.htm>; and "Kurdish Mob Viciously Murders Two Assyrians," AINA December 2, 1997, <http://www.aina.org/releases/murder.htm>.

signage, but most street and shop signs in and around the towns are now also written in Kurdish. On entering the towns one is greeted with yellow signs (yellow being the colour of the KDP) bearing the slogans: “Bashik and Barzan, heart of Kurdistan” in Kurdish, and “Ba’shiqa and Bahzani support al-Barzani!” in Arabic. The sign welcoming visitors to the municipality is also in Kurdish.

Taking for granted that Yazidis must be Kurds, the Kurdish authorities controlling Ba’shiqa and Bahzani have embarked on a campaign to force the Yazidis of these towns to learn and speak Kurdish. This is reminiscent of the “Citizen, speak Turkish!” campaign conducted in Kemalist Turkey where non-Turkish citizens were publicly shamed into speaking Turkish. They have also adorned the landscape below the local Yazidi shrines visible above the towns with a large Kurdish flag, and erected a statue of a Mirza Beg Daseni, a Yazidi Emir who governed Mosul in 1649, again with a Kurdish flag fluttering next to it. This statue has enraged local Sunni Arabs from Mosul who see this as separatist move taken to disrespect them.



The Entrance to Ba’shiqa, and the yellow Kurdish signs to be seen there.



More yellow signs in Kurdish and Arabic at the square before entering Ba’shiqa.



Left: Kurdish flags compete with Yazidi shrines in the landscape; **Right:** The infamous statue of Mirza Beg Daseni.



Left: The former public image of Saddam, now part of Barzani’s propaganda machine; **Right:** The sign at the entrance to Batnaya, marked in Syriac, Kurdish, then Arabic.

A former public portrait of Saddam Hussein, whitewashed since 2003, in the Assyrian town of Tall-Kepe is now adorned with an Arabic slogan which illustrates the length to which the Kurdish authorities are trying to Kurdify the region: “al-Barzani, an historic elected leader for the people of Kurdistan. Congratulations to the people of the Tell-Kayf district on their *Kurdistaniness* and their loving support for this leader.” Three consecutive frames around the central panel of this former portrait bear the graffitied slogan: “Peace, freedom, democracy” (the motto of the KDP) in Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac. Here Kurds number only 15 families, whilst Sunni Arabs now comprise about 60% of the population. The signs welcoming visitors to Assyrian towns in the same district are all written in Syriac, Kurdish and Arabic – despite the fact that they neither lie within the IKR, nor do they have any Kurdish residents.

It is apparent that whilst at the same time providing financial assistance to Assyrians and other communities (albeit at a price), the Kurdish authorities resort to heavy-handed tactics in response to dissidents amongst them who challenge the control of the KRG and especially the KDP. The *peshmerga* forces and their specialised *Asayish* intelligence units (who often disguise themselves as the police or military) rely largely on intimidation, threats, restriction of access to services, random arrests and extrajudicial detentions, to persuade their political opponents and ordinary members of these communities to support the KRG's plan to expand into the disputed territories.⁷² In late 2004 an armed group of KDP militia attacked St. John the Baptist Syriac Catholic church in Bakhdida, and several residents were gathered up, severely beaten, insulted, and finally taken away. On another occasion an armed KDP group attacked an Assyrian family in the same town.⁷³ On February 17, 2008, KRG authorities arrested and held incommunicado for four days Assyrian blogger Johnny Khoshaba al-Raykani,⁷⁴ a resident of Tall-Kepe, based on articles he had posted attacking KRG-linked corruption within the Assyrian Church of the East. For most of his ordeal he was kept in a makeshift prison in the village of Sikrine within the IKR. Also of note is the arbitrary arrest and detainment of Mr. Hazim Nuh, a member of the ADM, Hammurabi Human Rights Organisation, and Tell-Kayf District Council, in 2009.⁷⁵ Besides this fear factor Assyria Council of Europe found that in some extreme cases they often resorted to violence, and even torture. The victims are then threatened with death if they report the incident.⁷⁶

According to many people who spoke with Assyria Council of Europe these tactics, combined with the financial and security incentives, have so far kept these groups in tow. The Kurdish authorities and their security forces are thus seen to be the tools of an overbearing, all-pervading and highly-effective authoritarian regime which, through its reach controls ordinary people through fear. KRG officials, in turn, have vehemently denied allegations that they have been responsible for these acts of intimidation and violence, blaming them solely on Sunni Arab extremists. Part of this blatant denial was the KRG's desperate response in December 2009 to the Human Rights Watch report of November that year, a one-sided report presented by Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman titled, "The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."⁷⁷

Intimidation ahead of the 2009 Provincial Elections

According to the UN, allegations of Kurdish intimidation of other ethnic groups in the Nineveh Plains increased at the approach of provincial elections toward the end of 2008. The votes of the non-Kurdish communities were crucial to Kurdish hopes of winning the elections and thus boosting their territorial claims. The UN even reported death threats being used to warn people off voting in favour of candidates who were running against the KDP.⁷⁸ Firas Josef, Ramzi Audisho and Sabri Shaya were verbally insulted,

⁷² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Arbil, Dohuk, Alqosh, Baritleh and Bakhdida, December 2009 and January 2010.

⁷³ "Armed Kurdish Groups Terrorize Assyrian Town in Iraq," AINA January 4, 2005, <http://www.aina.org/releases/20050117124917.htm>.

⁷⁴ Assyria Council of Europe interview with Johnny Khoshaba in Tall-Kepe, December 2009. Johnny's blog is in Arabic and may be accessed at: <http://alsarkha.uv.ro/>.

⁷⁵ Assyria Council of Europe interview with Hazim Nuh in Batnaya, December 2009.

⁷⁶ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 July – 31 December 2008," pp. 15-16.

⁷⁷ Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, "The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq," December 2009, p.2.

⁷⁸ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Arbil, Alqosh and Bakhdida, December 2009 and January 2010.

tortured and fired from their jobs because they did not vote for the pro-Kurdish Ishtar slate in the provincial elections,⁷⁹ and in another report, Kurdish forces confiscated ration cards from Assyrians.⁸⁰ In Baritleh and Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Assyria Council of Europe spoke with members of the Assyrian militia financed by the KRG as well as residents of the slum-like housing complexes built by Mr. Aghajan to house IDPs (and for which many pay rent). They said that representatives from the Ishtar Patriotic Slate and the allied Kurdish list told them they would lose their jobs, aid and could face eviction if they did not vote for either of them.⁸¹ They were also instructed to inform other Christian IDPs living in their complexes that they too would face the same fate if they did not comply. Similar tactics have been used within the IKR during elections at all levels of administration to discourage Assyrians from voting for the ADM, as well as participating in the Assyrian New Year march which is organised by the ADM annually on April 1, and to which tens of thousands of Assyrians flock. The 2009 march in Dohuk deliberately did not receive permission from Kurdish authorities until the night before it was to be held, and was thus renamed the “March of Defiance.” To further dilute the turnout, supporters of Ishtar and Aghajan staged their own celebration at the nearby village of Shiyoz, enticing attendees with promises of money and free food.⁸²

Some representatives from the various ethnic communities, as well as Arab officials and some eyewitnesses, have even claimed that Kurdish authorities were directly involved or complied with mass bombing attacks against Nineveh’s minorities and the brutal 2008 campaign that saw nearly 40 Christians killed and over 12,500 displaced during a period of about three-weeks. They have also been implied in similar attacks against Yazidi and Shabak communities, and have been suspected as the instigators of the 2009 Christmas Day violence between Shabaks and Assyrians in the town of Baritleh. This incident saw dead and wounded on both sides, and was used by Kurdish security forces as an excuse to take complete control of that strategic town. It has been suggested that the Kurdish authorities are even working in cooperation with Sunni Arab extremist groups in order to keep the disputed areas outside the KRG in constant turmoil, and in need of *peshmerga* protection, while at the same time providing an obvious target at which to point the blame. The KRG, which has the weapons and the urgent desire to control the disputed territories, is also suspected of having covertly carried out these attacks and others to “persuade” fearful members of these groups that they are better off under the protective aegis of the IKR which, as we shall see below, has been disastrous for Assyrians that have lived there since 1991.

⁷⁹ “Assyrians in North Iraq Fired for Not Voting for Pro-Kurdish Slate”, AINA, February 20, 2009, <http://www.aina.org/releases/20090220154846.htm>.

⁸⁰ “Kurdish Forces Confiscating Ration Cards, Weapons From Assyrians in North Iraq”, Christians of Iraq, October 23, 2008, <http://www.christiansofiraq.com/kurdconfiscationofassyrianweapons.html>.

⁸¹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with residents of an IDP housing complex, as well as two militia members, in Baritleh and Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Arbil, Dohuk, Alqosh and Bakhdida, December 2009 and January 2010.

⁸² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

II. Targeting the “Minorities” for Murder

With such diversity in its population and such wealth of natural resources, as well as a rich history replete with enmities centuries old, and a background of wrongs between the different ethnic groups, the Nineveh province was the most likely to become the battleground of the various factions fighting each other for control of the country. As this slowly has become the reality in the province, it has left the members of minority communities vulnerable to brutal attacks which have shaken them to the core. Faced with politically or religiously motivated killings by unknown assailants, threats and intimidation, some areas are seeing the last indigenous Assyrians leave forever.

A Violent Cocktail

Soon after 2003, when US-led coalition forces entered Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) dispersed Iraq’s entire military, police force and security apparatus – except for the Kurdish *peshmerga*. Sunni extremist groups took advantage of this chaotic situation, recruiting from amongst the thousands of battle-hardened, disappointed, and newly unemployed Iraqi military and security personnel, as well as many Arabs displaced by the Kurds’ reversal of “Arabisation.” Their objective was to sow disorder throughout Iraq and initiate sectarian violence. The number of Sunni and Shiite men drawn into the fray increased as the fighting spread.⁸³ The sectarian conflict reached its height in mid-2006 with an unparalleled proportion of killings, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, torture, and attacks on places of worship, including mosques and churches.⁸⁴ While all Iraqis have suffered from the devastating bloodshed in the years that followed the regime-change, the smaller ethnic communities have been predominantly the ones at greater risk of attack. They also stand to lose more than the larger ethnic and religious groups in the country.

As one man interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe in Bakhdida stated, “Non-Muslim minorities represent about five percent of the country’s total population. Christians alone count for three percent. If one of us is killed, then that is equal to nearly 32 of the others – 20 Shiite Arabs, seven Sunni Arabs and five Kurds. By comparison, that would put our loss of 40 Christians in the 2008 Mosul killing campaign equal to about 800 Shiite Arabs, 280 Sunni Arabs, 200 Kurds – or 1,280 Muslim lives – all this in the space of a few weeks. I am unaware of this having happened to any of those larger ethnic groups.”⁸⁵

Despite achieving security in many parts of Iraq by early 2008, Nineveh was still among those most dangerous and unstable. The attacks in the city or the province were not even swayed by a major military offensive in the spring of 2009, when 4,000 US and more than 25,000 Iraqi security personnel swept through each of Mosul’s neighbourhoods.⁸⁶ As part of a security agreement with the Iraqi central government, most US forces withdrew from the cities to their bases on June 30, 2009. After this date attacks in Nineveh, particularly against minorities, saw a considerable increase, and they continue even as this report is being prepared. In July and August, 2009, attacks against Yazidis, Shabaks and Turkmen at Tall-A’far, Shirakhan, Khazna and Sinjar, killing in all about 140 of their number and injuring nearly 500.⁸⁷

⁸³ Thomas Wagner, “Wall to Divide Shi’a and Sunnis in Baghdad,” Associated Press, April 20, 2007.

⁸⁴ “Gunmen Blow Up Mosques,” Reuters, June 20, 2007.

⁸⁵ Assyria Council of Europe interview with an Assyrian community leader (name withheld) in Bakhdida, December 2009.

⁸⁶ Steven Lee Myers and Campbell Robertson, “Insurgency Remains Tenacious in North Iraq,” New York Times, July 9, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/10/world/middleeast/10iraq.html>.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground,” p. 30.

While other cities in Iraq have seen improvements in their security situation, accompanied by a reduction in the number of armed attacks by Islamists, Mosul's situation has grown desperately worse, with bombings and shootings nearly every day, and streets littered with rotting corpses.⁸⁸ The city has become a strategic centre for many enduring Sunni insurgent groups. In part this is because of Sunni Arab fears regarding the increase in Kurdish control over the region, but this is also strengthened by resentment over the displacement of fellow Sunni Arabs due to the reversal of Arabisation. Their continued disillusionment has made way for extremist safe havens to operate in their neighbourhoods, persecuting members of minorities at will.



Left: Destruction is still visible at Khazna even four months after the devastating explosion of August 2009; Right: Due to the constant threat of bomb attacks, makeshift roadblocks have been constructed in Assyrian towns and villages to protect Churches.

The attacks by Sunni Arab insurgent groups have caused direct damage to the social infrastructure of the minority communities, leaving their victims and others affected in shock – too scared to continue their day to day business. Despite the fact that deep political divisions exist within each of these groups, i.e. between those who suggest union with the KRG and others who prefer remaining under Iraq's central government, members from both sides that Assyria Council of Europe interviewed conceded that their current situation has become desperate. Most believe they are now being faced with the ultimatum of either extermination or emigration– both of which would see the end of their centuries-old existence. Between August 2008 and August 2009 about 1,050 Assyrian families from the Tell-Kayf district alone left Iraq (120 from Tall-Kepe, 310 from Batnaya, 60 from Beqopa, 420 from Tisqopa, 90 from Alqosh, and 50 from others),⁸⁹ and many more are waiting their turn.

Killings of Assyrians

Since 2003 armed groups of often masked assailants have repeatedly attacked Assyrians in Iraq. The first churches were bombed on June 24, 2004 and since then the total has amounted to 61 churches. Hundreds

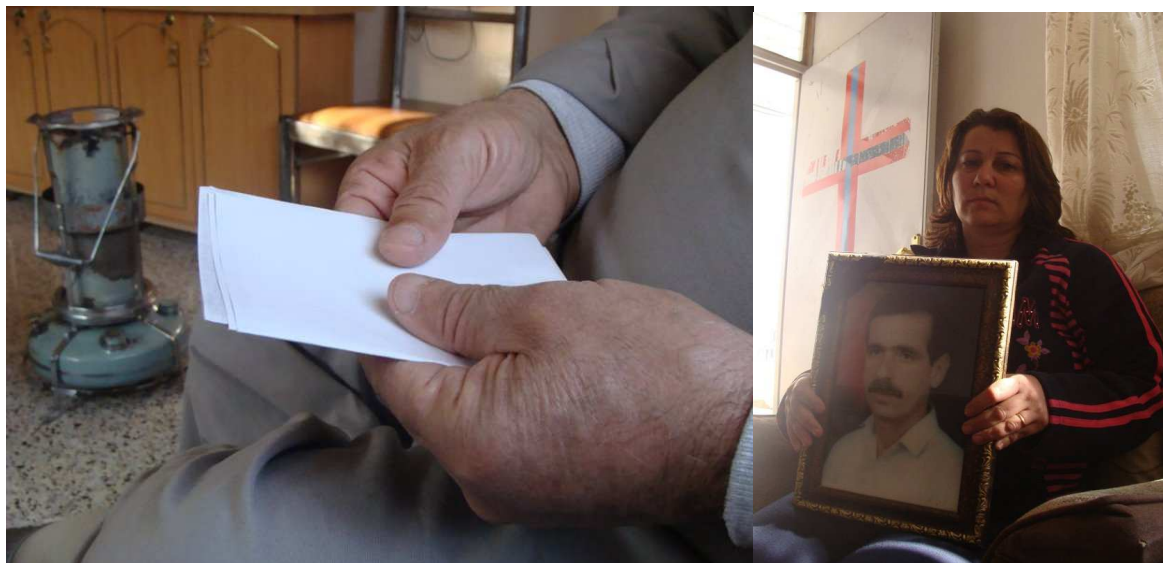
⁸⁸ "Al Qaeda shows resilience in N.Iraq-US commander," Reuters, August 11, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/featuredCrisis/idUSN11532842>.

⁸⁹ Assyria Council of Europe interview with Basim Bello, Alqosh, December 2009.

of Assyrians have been kidnapped (especially in Mosul's Hay al-Sina'ah quarter) and between 730 and 2,000 killed throughout Iraq,⁹⁰ including at least 5 clergymen; and hundreds of Assyrian businesses have been firebombed, leaving hundreds of thousands of Assyrians internally displaced, or living as refugees in neighbouring countries. It is estimated that up to 50% of Assyrians have fled Iraq to Syria and Jordan. Of the 750,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan up to 150,000 are Assyrians. Of the 1.2 million Iraqi refugees in Syria, between 70,000 and 500,000 are Assyrians.



Left: Imad, an Assyrian IDP from Baghdad now living in Bakhdida, lost his son and brother in to kidnappers near Abu Ghurayb in late July 2004. The day after their abduction, his brother in law was also taken as they were searching for them. He and his family still do not know whether or not they are still alive; **Right:** Practically an orphan: This Assyrian girl's mother died of fear during heavy fighting between warring factions in Mosul during 2004. She is now being cared for by her grandparents.



⁹⁰“Christians feel heavy loss in Iraq war,” DPA, February 24, 2010; and “Report: 1,960 Christians killed in Iraq since 2003 invasion,” DPA, December 26, 2009.

Left: A grieving Assyrian father in Baritleh holds papers from US forces concerning his two young daughters who worked for them as cleaners at Mosul Airport, and were murdered by terrorists in 2004; Right: Iman, an Assyrian IDP from Baghdad currently living in Baritleh, clutches a photo of her husband who was murdered in the desert near Ramadi in 2005.

The assailants are apparently Sunni Arabs opposed to communities of different faiths living near them, especially ones with supposed ties to the West, which is perceived as Christian. The Assyrians are also targeted due to their perceived ties with US and coalition forces in Iraq, with many of them accounting for a large number of translators, cooks and cleaners. The Christians are also seen as supporting the KRG's claim to the disputed territories, and media networks such as Ishtar TV have not helped by publicly broadcasting Assyrian calls for their own autonomous region in the Nineveh Plains, under KRG administration. Christians are also seen as a soft target for organised crime (under the guise of jihadist extremism), due to their perceived wealth and a traditional lack of tribal or militia ties and protection, making them prone to extortion and thievery.⁹¹ Many Christian businessmen, doctors, lawyers, academics, and especially jewellers and gold traders, have been targeted for ransomed kidnappings and killings. Many Christians also suspect the complicity of other community members in informing these extremist groups of the whereabouts of "wanted people" in exchange for money or protection, or out of genuine fear for their own lives.



Left: A grieving mother from Mosul, now a refugee in Bakhdida, clutches photographs of her murdered son and daughters in law who died in 2004, 2005 and , as she wears the *hijab* she was required to wear in public to conceal her identity; Right: An Assyrian IDP at St. Abraham's Monastery near Batnaya displays his scar from an attack on his sewerage tanker at Hillah in 2006.

Under the former regime (as is current practice under the KRG), only Christians and Yazidis were allowed to sell liquor because their religions do not forbid alcohol consumption. This trade, which is frowned upon by most religious Muslims, both demonised them and made them easily identifiable as members of minority groups. Another trade which singled them out was driving sewerage tankers which empty out septic tanks and dispose of the waste – practised almost exclusively by Assyrians from the

⁹¹ Preti Taneja, Minority Rights Group International, "Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's minority communities since 2003," February 11, 2007, <http://www.minorityrights.org/2802/reports/assimilation-exodus-eradication-iraqs-minority-communities-since-2003-arabic-edition.html>.

town of Batnaya. Extremists have bombed, looted, and defaced liquor stores all over Iraq, and murdered their owners.⁹² Also, many truck drivers have been brutally attacked and killed.

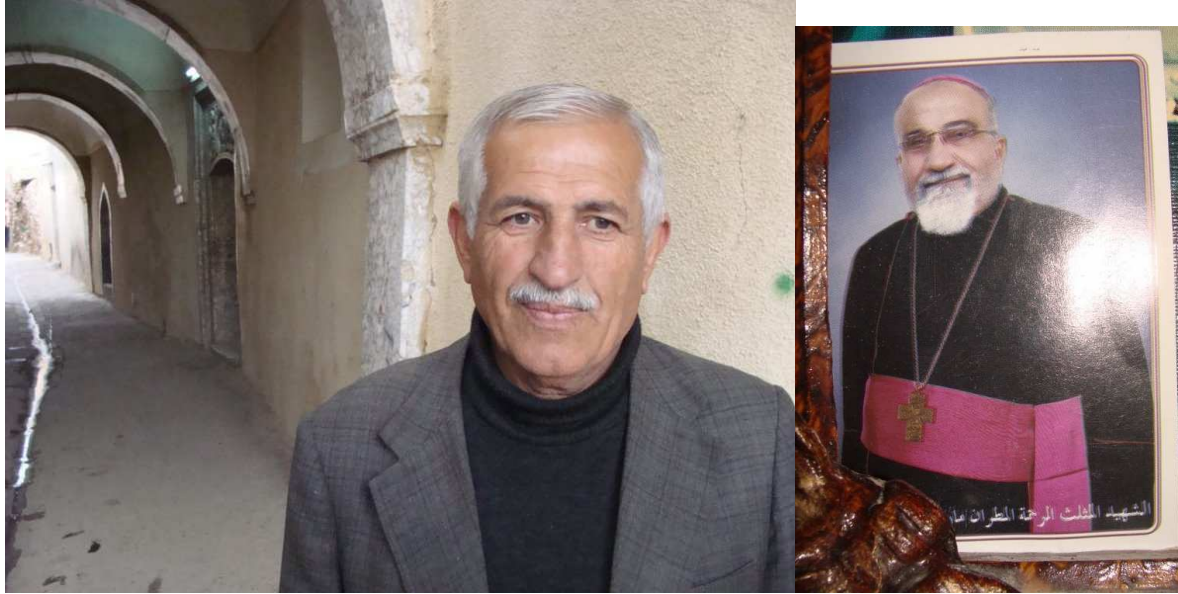
In Mosul, Assyrian women and girls are forced to adhere to Islamic dress codes when leaving their homes. Assyrian students travelling to Mosul University by bus from the surrounding towns are also subject to random searches by armed Islamic extremists, who beat boys are found sitting next to girls, and chastise girls who do not wear the *hijab*, which they only need to wear on the bus, though on campus they must also dress in long sleeves and ankle-length skirts. “They [the terrorists] would tell us, ‘Iraq is an Islamic country, and we must adhere to its ethics and principles.’” A student’s father recounts, “I call my daughter literally hundreds of times a day to make sure she is alright. We die a thousand times inside every time she goes to University, and we can only rest when she returns.”⁹³ Recently, up to 2,000 Assyrian students have refrained from attending the University due to the deterioration of the security situation ahead of the March 7 national elections.



An Assyrian student of Mosul University (left), and an Assyrian grandmother from Mosul (right), both in Bakhdida, demonstrate how they dress in public when in town.

⁹² According to government sources, roughly 95 percent of the Iraq’s alcohol shops have closed after attacks and threats by Islamic extremists; Ibid.

⁹³ Assyria Council of Europe interview with an Assyrian Student of Mosul University and her father (names withheld) at Bakhdida, December 2009.



Left: Aziz Matti Toma, father of murdered priest Fr. Ragheed Ganni, in Karimlish; Right: An image of Archbishop Rahho displayed in the home of a Syriac Orthodox man in Baritleh

Probably the most significant attack targeting the Assyrian community was the kidnapping of Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulus Faraj Rahho in Mosul as he was leaving the Holy Spirit Church on February 29, 2008. The reason stated was that he failed to pay protection money or "jizya" to Islamic insurgents. His driver and bodyguards were shot and his body was found 10 days later. He is presumed to have died in captivity.⁹⁴ Iraqi officials duly captured the alleged leader of the kidnappers, Ahmad Ali Ahmad (known as Abu Omar), an al-Qaeda leader, and he was convicted in May 2008 and sentenced to death.⁹⁵ On October 9, 2006, Fr. Paulus Iskandar of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Mosul was kidnapped and his dismembered and beheaded corpse was found three days later. On November 30, 2006, Pastor Mundhir al-Dayr of the Protestant Church in Mosul was kidnapped and killed with a bullet shot to his head. On June 3, 2007, Fr. Ragheed Ganni and three deacons of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Mosul were shot in their car as they left a church after conducting mass.⁹⁶ These killings remain largely unresolved, like most other similar killings of Assyrians, but they fit the pattern mostly used by Sunni Arab Islamists.

Between late August and November 2008 the Christian community in Mosul was shaken by a series of orchestrated killings by armed assailants, most likely Sunni Arab extremists, targeting them specifically. This wave of killings led to a mass exodus of about 2,500 Christian families from that city. No place was safe, with Christians being targeted in their homes, workplaces, and in places of worship. This began shortly after the community lobbied the Iraqi parliament to pass a law that would increase the quota of seats set aside for minorities in the upcoming provincial elections.⁹⁷ The attacks intensified after Christians held demonstrations in Nineveh and Baghdad on September 28 opposing the Iraqi parliament's decision to drop a provision of the provincial elections law ensuring political representation for minorities

⁹⁴ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 January – 30 June 2008," pp. 19-21. According to witnesses (names withheld) interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe, in December 2009, Archbishop Rahho was an ex-Baathist and his corpse was found in a Kurdish-controlled part of Mosul.

⁹⁵ "Death penalty over Iraq killing," BBC News Online, May 18, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7407489.stm.

⁹⁶ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 January – 30 June 2008"; and Assyria Council of Europe interview with Fr. Ganni's father Aziz Matti Toma Be-Ganni at Karimlish, December 2009.

⁹⁷ "Terrified Christian Families Flee Iraq's Mosul," FoxNews.com, October 11, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,436481,00.html>.

(which was later amended).⁹⁸ These killings left 40 Christians dead and displaced about 12,500 from their homes within a matter of weeks.⁹⁹ These were accompanied by the bombing of churches and Christian homes in Mosul, threatening graffiti in Christian neighbourhoods with messages such as “get out or die,” and anti-Christian messages, threatening Christians if they did not leave, blasted from loudspeakers mounted on cars.¹⁰⁰ Most of the killings were based on the victims’ identity cards, which the assailants would as for before they shot them dead, to make sure that they were Christian. This style of murder has known as “ID-based Killing” to the frightened local Christian community.¹⁰¹

According to most interviews conducted by Assyria Council of Europe, the victims had not received any direct warnings or threats prior to their murders, although other Christians may have been warned to leave by Muslim neighbours or received threatening mobile phone text messages and bullets in envelopes left on their front doorsteps. During this campaign of violence, the Kurdish-dominated security forces controlling the area were apparently unable to prevent or stop the killings.¹⁰² After this Prime Minister al-Maliki replaced the Kurdish-dominated army units in Mosul with Arab units and sent in non-Kurdish policemen from Baghdad.¹⁰³ By mid-November roughly 80 percent of displaced Christians were reported to have returned to their homes in and around Mosul, partly because of an improvement in the security situation, but primarily for job security, and so as not to jeopardise their children’s schooling.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Erica Goode, “Violence in Mosul Forces Iraqi Christians to Flee,” New York Times, October 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/11/world/middleeast/11iraq.html>.

⁹⁹ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, “Human Rights Report: 1 July – 31 December 2008.”

¹⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008), November 6, 2008, http://www.uniraq.org/FileLib/misc/SG_Report_S_2008_688_EN.pdf, p. 11; and Corey Flintoff, “Some Displaced Iraqi Christians Ponder Kurds’ Role,” NPR, October 28, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96103301>.

¹⁰¹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian IDPs (names withheld) in Bakhdida, Dohuk, Alqosh and Batnaya, December 2009.

¹⁰² UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, “Human Rights Report: 1 July – 31 December 2008,” pp. 15-16.

¹⁰³ ICG, “Iraq’s Provincial Elections: The Stakes,” <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5883>, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ UNHCR, “Iraq: Displaced Christians return to Mosul,” November 11, 2008, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7LAGWG?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=irq>.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَنْ تَرْضَى عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَى حَتَّى تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْهُدَى
وَلَكِنْ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

صدق الله العظيم

تنبيهة الى من يحاول ابتزازنا

اننا نحذر وننبه كل من يحاول ابتزازنا من خلال التعامل مع الامريكان ونشر قوات امريكية شرطة لحماية
العتبات المقدسة في دولة العراق الاسلامية وبهذا ستبقى هذه العتبات هدف المجاهدين
واننا نذكر اهل الذمة بان العراق للعراقيين الشرفاء لا كما انتم عليا الان
والله من وراء القصد ولقد اعذر من انذرة



This is just one of the many letters received in Arabic by Assyrians and other Christians in Mosul, threatening them with certain death if they choose not to leave the city. It was sent by the “Phalanges of Just Punishment” of the “Base of the Jihad in Mesopotamia.”



Left: An Armenian IDP at Aghajanian shows the only photo she possesses of her late husband, who was murdered during the 2008 killing campaign in Mosul; **Right:** A grieving Assyrian man reminds himself daily of his late brother, shot dead at their factory near Mosul in July 2009.



Left: Many Assyrian IDPs, like this one in Batnaya, still keep the keys to their homes in the hope that one day increased security will allow them to return and live normal lives again; **Right:** *Mukhtar* George Ya'qub of Karimlish displays some of the files in his office related to IDPs that have sought refuge there.

On July 21, 2009, British Member of Parliament Edward Leigh made an Early Day Motion (EDM) regarding the “Killing of Christians in Mosul” (EDM 1964). In this EDM, Leigh notes that:

“ ... a Washington Times news report dated 26 October 2008, stated that on 17 October 2008 Iraqi security forces arrested six men in connection with the killings of Christians in Mosul and found that four of them had links to the Kurdish Regional Government militia, not Al Qaeda; further notes that the Kurdish Regional Government and its militia are dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party and that on 29 October 2008 Gulf News reported that investigations had been completed, and proved the involvement of Kurdish militias in the displacement and killing of Christians, a claim which was re-stated by Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki during a discussion with Iraqi lawmakers, according to Osama Al Nojaifi, a deputy in the Iraqi parliament...”¹⁰⁵

Suspicion and accusations of intent and accountability have been traded by representatives from the different communities. Some Arab and Assyrian community leaders have laid the blame on the KRG, stating that the attacks had taken place in areas where there was no insurgent activity and which whose security was controlled by the Iraqi army, dominated by a high percentage of Kurdish officers. This suggests that the terror campaign was designed to undermine the minorities' confidence in the central government's security apparatus.¹⁰⁶ Some of the murders occurred in parts of Mosul secured by Iraqi army checkpoints and, in some cases, in their immediate vicinity, leading some Assyrian and Arab representatives to believe that Kurdish officers or their proxies had a hand, or rather stood to benefit, in the attacks.¹⁰⁷ Immediately after the killings, Former KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani stated, “Those who accused the Kurds of driving the Christians and others out of Mosul are the same people who earlier accused the Kurds of an expansionist policy in Mosul and other areas.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, this leads one to speculate, in the light of the obvious Kurdish plan for expansion into the disputed territories, whether or not this may be seen as a confession of responsibility by Kurdish authorities.

The murders created for the KRG an opportunity to emerge as the benefactor of the Christian community in the eyes of the world by subsequently providing them with shelter, security, and financial assistance in the Nineveh Plains and the IKR. After the Iraqi central government promised the equivalent of about US\$127 to each displaced family, Mr. Aghajan offered each family \$212.¹⁰⁹ This would further strengthen Kurdish influence in any referendum or election that followed – as was the case with the victory of the Ishtar Patriotic Slate in January 2009 and the election of Mr. Tanios Iyou to the Nineveh provincial council. Kurdish authorities have vehemently denied these allegations and instead accused Sunni Arab extremist groups of carrying out the attacks to encourage sectarian strife.¹¹⁰ Despite this, the Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella organisation including many insurgent groups such as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, has rejected any allegations of responsibility.¹¹¹ Frustratingly, none of these allegations against the Kurds, or by the Kurds against Arabs have been backed up by evidence.

Whoever was responsible, these attacks were clearly orchestrated and widespread. Assyria Council of Europe interviewed family and friends of nine Christian victims murdered in Mosul between August and November 2008. While other Christians have returned to Mosul since, these beleaguered families remain

¹⁰⁵ Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq,” p.12.

¹⁰⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld), Arbil , Bakhdida, Dohuk, and Alqosh, December 2009 and January 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld), Arbil , Bakhdida, Dohuk, and Alqosh, December 2009 and January 2010.

¹⁰⁸ KRG.org interview with Prime Minister Barzani on attacks against Iraqi Christian community, 5 November 2008, <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?smap=02010100&lngnr=12&asnr=&anr=26340&rnr=223>.

¹⁰⁹ Fadel, “Kurdish expansion squeezes northern Iraq's minorities,” McClatchy, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/iraq/story/55711.html>.

¹¹⁰ ICG, “Iraq's Provincial Elections: The Stakes,” Middle East Report No. 82, January 27, 2009, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5883>.

¹¹¹ “Iraq: Al-Qaeda denies Christian murders in north,” Adnkronos International, October 13, 2008, <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=3.0.2579084505>.

in Assyrian villages in the Nineveh Plains, too frightened to return to their homes there. Some of them witnessed the murders first-hand, while others were able to obtain information from witnesses. They are few since many witnesses do not dare to speak, out of fear. Often bodies of murdered Christians would remain where they were killed or dumped, with notes explaining that they were to remain so as an example to others, and threatening anyone who moves them with immediate death. Families would also be too frightened to collect their loved ones' sadistically dismembered remains from morgues for the same reason, or to bury them. Many families were not present at their deceased's burial and do not even know where many are buried. Many still suffer from the effects of shock and trauma.¹¹² The survivors' harrowing depositions suggest a systematic and pinpointed campaign of terror, intending to devastate Mosul's Christian community with maximum impact.

Based on the interviews conducted, Assyria Council of Europe found no clear evidence suggesting that Kurds were directly involved in the killing campaign. According to most witnesses, the armed assailants spoke fluent Iraqi Arabic, which appeared to be their mother tongue, though it was most often not the dialect of Mosul but that of Arab tribesmen. Most of the gunmen were also of Arab appearance and dress, and made it clear that they were attacking Christians for religious reasons. One Assyrian witness interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe, though who has withheld her identity for fear of retribution, watched in horror from her second storey window as two armed men, dressed as Arabs and speaking Kurdish and broken Arabic to one another, proceeded to invade the home of her neighbour in a Christian neighbourhood of Mosul and attack its occupants.¹¹³

In October 2008, whilst the atrocities against Christians in Mosul were still being perpetrated, Iraq's Human Rights Ministry created a committee to look into these crimes and the resulting displacement.¹¹⁴ The unpublished report did not conclude who was responsible for the killings, or whether Iraqi security forces could have prevented them. It did state though that evidence indicated this campaign was "targeted" "systematic" and "pre-arranged." It also stated that the "killings, targeting and threats were practiced in the eastern side (left) of the city, which was previously the safe side where security forces could move freely and smoothly as opposed to the west side (right) which is considered by the people of Mosul as the domicile of armed groups."¹¹⁵

Intimidation ahead of the 2010 National Elections

In November 2009 Iraq had seen the lowest amount of civilian deaths since the regime-change over six years previously,¹¹⁶ and the Chaldean Catholic community also celebrated the appointment of a new archbishop to replace the late Mgr. Faraj Rahho.¹¹⁷ Despite this apparent calm, members of minority communities in the Nineveh province began in mid-November to appeal to local and national authorities for protection amid warnings of increased attacks in the lead-up to the national elections, scheduled for March 2010.¹¹⁸ These appeals were not unwarranted. On November 26, 2009, St. Ephrem's Chaldean Catholic Church and St Theresa Convent of Dominican nuns in Western

¹¹² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders and IDPs (names withheld), Dohuk, Bakhdida, Shiyoz, and Alqosh, December 2009 and January 2010.

¹¹³ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian IDP (name withheld), Tell-Kepe, December 2009.

¹¹⁴ Administrative order no. A/15178 dated October 14, 2008.

¹¹⁵ Iraq Ministry of Human Rights Fact-Finding Committee, "Report on Displacement of Christian Families in Nineveh Governorate," see "Human Rights Watch, On Vulnerable Ground," p. 36.

¹¹⁶ "Iraq Civilian Deaths Drop to Lowest Level of War," Reuters, November 13, 2009.

¹¹⁷ "Mosul Celebrating the Appointment of New Archbishop After the Death of Mgr Rahho," AsiaNews, November 30, 2009.

¹¹⁸ "Minority Communities in North Iraq Appeal for Protection," IRIN, November 16, 2009.

New Mosul (an area under the control of Sunni Arabs and previously safe) were subjected to bombings.¹¹⁹ Local Christian sources reported that the "attack was like a Mafia warning", a message to Christians "to get out of the city," and suggested that Kurds might be involved in the action in order to get Christians out of the area and into the Nineveh Plains.¹²⁰ In fact, the Church had already received threats calling for them to leave before the elections.¹²¹

The first killings began on December 10, 2009 (nearly three months ahead of the elections), with the shooting that night of two Assyrian brothers - Ranko, 24, a newly-wed, and Rimon, 18, sons of Najib Patros from Batnaya – in the northern Mosul district of Hay al-Baladiyat. They had been working in Mosul driving sewerage trucks – a job which made them easy targets as Christians – and had received no prior warning that they would be prone to attack. When interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe, their father expressed how disappointed he was that he and other family members were unable to obtain any information from witnesses regarding the assailants. "They are too scared to talk," he said, "I guess they fear for their own lives too." Patros is planning to leave Iraq with the rest of his family since he is too frightened to remain in the country, and his community is facing an uncertain future if they remain and their rights are not secured.¹²²

¹¹⁹ "Iraq Attacks Hit Christian Sites," AFP, November 26, 2009.

¹²⁰ "Christian Buildings Attacked in North Iraq," AsiaNews, December 1, 2009.

¹²¹ "Iraqi Christians Flee Pre-Election Violence," DPA, December 11, 2009.

¹²² Assyria Council of Europe interview with Najib Patros at Batnaya, December 2009.



A Grieving father. Najib Patros of Batnaya holds up photos of his two murdered sons, Ranko, 24 (left), and Rimon, 18 (right).

Amidst this tide of uncertainty, the Hammurabi Human Rights Organisation and Christian Solidarity International held a conference in Baghdad on December 11 and 12, 2009, researching the future of the Christian presence in Iraq under the slogan “a dignified return for Iraqi refugees.” It was a successful meeting attended by Christian community and government representatives from all over Iraq, and abroad. Most significant was the attendance of Assyrian IDPs and refugees that had been the victims of violence in Mosul and Baghdad, and who were brave enough to tell of their harrowing experiences.

On December 15, 2009, two more explosions targeted the Annunciation Syriac Catholic church in New Mosul’s Majmu’ah al-Thaqafiyah quarter, as well as the centuries-old Mary Immaculate

(al-Tahirah) Syriac Orthodox church and a Christian school in the al-Shifa' quarter of Mosul's old city.¹²³ Five people were killed in the attacks in Mosul, including a newborn infant, and another 40 wounded. The US Military issued a statement to the effect that they had detained several al-Qaeda members responsible for the attacks. On December 17, 2009, Assyrian Zaid Majid Yusuf, 30, was killed in a drive by shooting as he was walking to his home after parking his car. The gunman had first asked him if he was a Christian and even got out of the car to make sure that Zaid was dead. On the morning of December 23, 2009, another set of explosions struck the historic Chaldean Catholic church of St. George and the eighth century Syriac Orthodox Cathedral of St. Thomas in the Khazraj quarter of Mosul's old city leaving three dead, including one Chaldean Catholic and two Muslims, and five injured. By this time the Christian death toll had reached five.¹²⁴ On December 24, Basel Isho Yohanna, 23, was shot at point-blank range in front of his home in the Mosul neighbourhood of Hay al-Jaza'ir. On December 28, 2009, Sarah Edmond Youkhana, an Assyrian student in the Faculty of Education at Mosul University, was kidnapped. Sarah's kidnappers contacted her family and informed them they are an Islamic front, calling themselves "Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaeda organization." No demands were made. Between October and December 2009, two Assyrians had been killed in Hay al-Tahrir and one in the 17 Tammuz neighbourhood, as well as four Christian homes bombed in Hay al-Wahdah, Tall-Rumman, Matahin and al-Hadba.

It was not until January 2010, though, that the attacks against Christians and other minority groups began, intensifying in February with a slowly-escalating campaign of "targeted executions" that have horrified the community in Mosul. On January 12, an armed group killed Hikmat Sleiman, 75, who owned a small grocery store. On January 17, Saadallah Youssif Jorjis, a 52-year-old Syrian Catholic, was shot dead. The man, married and father of two daughters, was the owner of a shop selling fruit and vegetables in the Thaqafah neighbourhood, near Mosul University. His murder coincided with the arrival of the new Chaldean Catholic archbishop, Msgr. Emil Shimoun Nona, in the city.¹²⁵ At noon on January 18, an armed commando executed Abdullahad Amjad Hamid, a married Syriac Catholic, who owned a small grocery store in the al-Siddiq neighbourhood, in northern Mosul. He was killed outside his home in the suburb of Hay al-Baladiyat, not far from his workplace. Local witnesses reported that the murder took place in front of the security forces, who saw all the phases of the attack, but did not intervene. On January 26, Raghid Sabah Tobia, a young Assyrian, was badly wounded when his store, not far from the Chaldean Catholic church, in the Dawwasa neighbourhood, was attacked. That same afternoon another shop in the same neighbourhood, but owned by a Yazidi and near the Syriac Catholic chapel of Qasr al Mutran, was also attacked.¹²⁶

On February 14 armed assailants killed Rayan Salem Elias, 43, a Chaldean Catholic who ran a business dealing in a traditional meat dish, outside his home in Mosul's east on Sunday. On February 15 greengrocer Fattuhi Munir, 40, a Syriac Catholic, was gunned down inside his shop in a drive-by shooting in the city's western Sahaba district.¹²⁷

On February 16, a gunman accompanied by two others emerged from a car in Mosul's northern neighbourhood of Hay al-'Arabi and fired at two Assyrian university students they waited at a bus stop

¹²³ John Pontifex, "Churches come under attack in Iraq," ACN, December 15, 2009; and "Iraqi Christians fear more attacks after two church bombings in Mosul," Catholic News Agency, December 16, 2009, http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/iraqi_christians_fear_more_attacks_after_two_church_bombings_in_mosul/.

¹²⁴ "Mosul attacks on two Christian churches, three dead and several injured," AsiaNews, December 23, 2009; also Hamed Ahmed, "1200 year old church bombed in Mosul," AP, December 23, 2009.

¹²⁵ "Two Christians killed in Mosul, Iraq," AsiaNews, January 18, 2010.

¹²⁶ "Young man wounded in new anti-Christian attack in Mosul," AsiaNews, January 26, 2010.

¹²⁷ "Gunmen kill two Assyrian shop owners in Iraq," AFP, February 16, 2010.

with an automatic weapon. Speaking in Arabic, the assailants asked them for their identity cards.¹²⁸ After Zia Toma, a 21-year-old engineering student, produced his card, one of the assailants shot him point-blank in the head, killing him instantly. Ramsin Shmael, a 22-year-old pharmacy student, tried to run but was shot twice; one bullet shattered his teeth. The assailants fled the scene, apparently assuming they had killed both students, although Shmael is seriously wounded with little hope of survival.¹²⁹ The students and their families had escaped to northern Iraq from Baghdad in the summer of 2007 after receiving threats to kill them unless they converted to Islam. Now their family members plan to move again - this time out of Iraq.¹³⁰

At around 1:00 pm on February 17, the bullet-riddled body of Wissam George, a 20-year-old Assyrian, was recovered on a street in the south Mosul residential neighbourhood of Wadi al-‘Ayn. He had gone missing that morning on his way to his institute, where he was studying to be a teacher.¹³¹

By February 20, at least 10 Christian families known to the new Chaldean Catholic archbishop had fled Mosul.¹³² That same day police found the body of Assyrian shopkeeper Adnan Hanna al-Dahan, 57, Syrian Orthodox, in Hay al-Baladiyat, shot to death with bullet wounds to his head. He had been kidnapped by unknown assailants from inside his grocery shop in the neighbourhood of al-Habda, also in northern Mosul, the week before.¹³³

On February 23, a Syriac Catholic man, Ishoo Maroki, 59 and his two sons, Mokhlas, 31, and Bassim, 25, were gunned down in their west Mosul home by unknown assailants. The gunmen also stole the family's gold before escaping on three motorcycles.¹³⁴ They were the family of Fr. Mazin Ishoo, who had despite being kidnapped in 2007 and released upon payment of ransom had decided to stay in Mosul to serve the community. In one Christian house in Mosul all the family members were killed - five people. First the attackers drove by and shot from their car, they then forced themselves into the house and gunned them down, throwing two bodies outside as a cruel warning for others.

It has been estimated that in the previous week, 40 to 50 Christian families, consisting of an average of five members per family, had left Mosul and, since the previous weekend, one or two families left the city every day. Between February 24 and 26, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Emil Shimoun Nona stated that Mosul is going through a "humanitarian emergency" and that "hundreds of Christian families" have left the city in search of shelter, leaving behind their homes, property, commercial activities.¹³⁵ The fleeing families are heading for the string of Assyrian villages, towns, churches and monasteries to the east and north of the city,¹³⁶ as well as Dohuk and Ankawa in the IKR. The majority of those remaining in Mosul are those who cannot afford to leave, such as the poor, elderly and handicapped. Estimates from less than 10 years ago enumerated well over 100,000 Christians in Mosul, though today they vary from 150-300 families (or 2,000 to 3,000 people) living in the city. As some observers have described, Mosul has become "a graveyard for Christians."

¹²⁸ Although identity cards in Iraq do not indicate religion or ethnicity, assailants have often used the victim's name as a marker of his or her religious or ethnic affiliation. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Protect Christians from violence," February 24, 2010.

¹²⁹ "Three Christians killed in north Iraq," AFP, February 17, 2010.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Protect Christians from violence," February 24, 2010.

¹³¹ Mujahid Mohammed, "Fourth Assyrian killed in northern Iraq in as many days," AFP, February 18, 2010; and "Spate of Christian killings before Iraq March vote," Reuters, February 18, 2010.

¹³² Simon Caldwell, "Mosul Archbishop says Christians live in panic, targeted in killings," CNS, February 20, 2010.

¹³³ "Fifth Assyrian killed in a week in north Iraq," AFP, February 20, 2010.

¹³⁴ "Five dead, including three Assyrians, in Iraq attacks," AFP, February 24, 2010.

¹³⁵ Edward Pentin, "Mass media ignore Iraq Christian emergency," February 27, 2010, <http://www.ncregister.com>.

¹³⁶ Jareer Ahmad, "Christians flee Iraq's Mosul," February 25, 2010, <http://www.azzaman.com>.

The authorities do not have the power to put a stop to the deteriorating situation. The governor of Mosul and the police chief are reported to have even warned certain individuals that they should leave Mosul because they could not guarantee their safety and could not protect them from the killers.¹³⁷ Reports also state that Kurdish and Arab security forces were looking on as several were killed in front of the last checkpoint before leaving the town in northern Iraq.¹³⁸ At the same time, Kurdish militias are reported to have mounted a politically motivated arrest campaign ahead of the general elections, imprisoning Hussain Hamadi, head of the municipal council in the Hamdaniyah district and the head of the police force in the Tell-Kayf district.¹³⁹ Also on February 24, Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan addressed a letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki reminding him of the Iraqi government's responsibility towards its citizens, blaming Iraqi authorities for the slaughter of Christians in Mosul and demanding justice and a proper investigation.

It is obvious here that the events that have occurred in Mosul between November 2009 and February 2010 are linked to the March 7, 2010, national elections.¹⁴⁰ In a way mimicking the events of 2008, this campaign has seen the bombing of five churches, a convent, and a school; as well as the kidnapping of an Assyrian girl and the murders of between 15 and 20 Christians. As a result hundreds more Christian IDP families have fled Mosul to the Nineveh Plains and the IKR, adding to those already seeking relative safety in those areas. The situation is drastic and, if proper steps are not taken by authorities to mend it, not only will Mosul be empty of Christians but also, faced with discrimination by Kurdish authorities in the IKR and disputed territories, many will choose to leave their ancestral homes in Iraq forever.

¹³⁷ Jerry Dykstra, "Five family members gunned down in Mosul," February 25, 2010, <http://www.christiannewswire.com>.

¹³⁸ Allie Martin, "Iraq's Mosul perilous for Christians," February 23, 2010, <http://www.onenewsnow.com>.

¹³⁹ Zeena Sami, "Kurdish militia tighten grip on non-Kurdish districts in Iraq's Mosul," February 19, 2010, <http://www.azzaman.com>.

¹⁴⁰ "Politician says Iraqi Christians targeted in pre-election violence," DPA, February 23, 2010.

III. Conclusions

The situation regarding land-control in Nineveh province and other disputed areas teeters on the edge of full-scale violence. Kurdish leaders demand their incorporation into the IKR through an ultimately controlled referendum, whilst Sunni Arabs and Iraq's central government insist that the Kurdish forces withdraw from lands outside the KRG's jurisdiction. Most Kurd and Arab political leaders even refuse to consider the option of sharing power in these areas. Indeed, the disputed Nineveh Plains are neither exclusively Kurdish nor Arab. As arguably Iraq's most multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious area, any solution to this its future must recognise its diversity and the right of human beings not only to live in security and dignity, choosing their identity and which language, religion, and culture they will choose to practice, but also to have a say in their own political future, free of any external influences.

Recommendations

To the Kurdistan Regional Government:

Modify the constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to recognise Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Syriacs) as one group, and as an indigenous population; and accord legal recognition to Shabaks, Yazidis and Kaka'is as distinct ethnic groups.

Repeal all decrees relevant to "nationality correction" and "Kurdification", and permit affected persons the right to determine their own ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of indigenous non-Kurdish ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations.

Remedy the injustice caused by the Kurdistan Regional Government's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Recognise non-Kurdish IDPs with ancestral roots from villages in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as locals and refrain from making them apply for residence permits.

Restore all expelled and deported non-Kurds to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, provide just compensation. Cease placing obstacles in their search for employment and sources of income and crack down on discrimination and corruption.

Promote employment opportunities for non-Kurds who were have been deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force their migration out of the region.

Cease repression of political and civil society organisations that oppose Kurdish nationalist policies in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories. Allow such organisations to operate freely and without intimidation and fear.

Cease funding political and civil society organisations that divide ethnic communities and support the KDP's nationalist policies by undermining and challenging existing ones which do not.

Ensure that independent non-Kurds can fully participate in public affairs without fearing retribution for differing political views. Cease arbitrarily arresting and detaining non-Kurdish activists.

Transfer detainees originating from Nineveh and Kirkuk Provinces from prisons in the IKR to Nineveh and Kirkuk prisons supervised by local judicial bodies, and allow treatment of such detainees according to due process of law.

Initiate independent and impartial investigations of individuals, including Kurdish security forces, alleged to be responsible for carrying out killings, kidnappings, beatings and torture against minorities. Make the results public and discipline or prosecute, as appropriate, the criminals and even officials who authorised or used excessive force.

Recognise Nineveh Province's 19 March 2003 boundaries until such time as the status of the disputed territories may be altered by constitutional means, and take steps to resolve bilateral issues with the Iraqi Government, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric concerning mutual relations, the status of disputed territories and the issuance of oil and gas contracts in these areas. Also, seek to minimise security risks by refraining from military manoeuvres in disputed territories without pre-notifying the other side.

Cease funding private militias to carry out public security responsibilities in non-Kurdish towns and villages located in the disputed territories outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Consult with the representatives on non-Kurdish communities to put in place policies for their protection. Allow municipalities to hire police officers from among their own communities, in accordance with existing procedures outlined by Iraq's Interior Ministry.

Increase funding to non-Kurdish immersion schools and cease the obstacles placed in their operation.

Cease the indoctrination of non-Kurdish children through educational programs in which they are made to glorify Kurdistan at the expense of their own ethnic identity.

Cease the obstacles placed before non-Kurds claiming lands they have lost to Kurdish squatters and conduct proper inquests into incidents of non-Kurds being abducted or murdered in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Cease electoral fraud and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.

Allow independent Iraqi and international human rights organisations to work unfettered in the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and to provide unbiased information.

Invite the UN independent expert on minority issues to provide an impartial assessment of the situation of non-Kurdish ethnic communities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and in the disputed territories.

To the Government of Iraq:

Facilitate rebuilding the Iraqi state by reducing violence in the country and instituting stability in the region, to create a powerful and viable centralised Iraq.

Amend the Iraqi Constitution to: Reduce the restrictions on the state authorities, remove contradictory articles, clearly define and strengthen the power of central government, and grant priority to the central government in shared authorities and all future decisions.

Article 4 of the Iraqi constitution should be rephrased so that it ensures protection of minority groups' linguistic and cultural rights, removes discrimination between the ethnic communities in Iraqi society, improves the access of ethnic communities to education in their own mother tongue, and prevents the publication of immense Iraqi state documentation in Kurdish.

Implement joint administration in educational matters in disputed districts' educational facilities through the creation of a committee comprising members of all ethnic communities in the education directorates of Nineveh and Kirkuk.

Transfer teachers in the disputed districts who receive their salaries from the KRG to the authority and payroll of Nineveh and Kirkuk's education directorates.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations. Ensure protection of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in the disputed territories through security measures, by ceasing discriminatory resource and service allocation to areas with heavy minority presence, halting efforts to manipulate such groups or enlist them to their side and providing fair political representation.

Local recruitment into Nineveh's security forces and especially integration of members of diverse ethnic groups in security forces deployed in disputed territories.

Implement, as the new provincial governments are formed, an ambitious economic recovery program focused on infrastructure repair and revitalising the agricultural sector. Pressure the Nineveh Provincial Council especially to pledge to release \$500 million in unspent past budget funds to the local government sector.

Facilitate the effective involvement of Iraqis in rebuilding of the state on a democratic basis – NGO laws should be instituted to international best practice.

Encourage international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty international to open offices in northern Iraq.

Create an independent inquiry to determine who was responsible for the carefully-planned systematic campaign of killings and bombings that targeted Assyrians in Mosul between September and November 2008, and November 2009 and February 2010, and the subsequent displacement of over 12,500 Assyrians. The inquiry should not only identify the killers, but also underline why the security services failed to prevent the attacks.

Restore the rule of law and the control of the Iraqi central government, police and military in all areas outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Initiate independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Pressure the Kurdistan Democratic Party to cease electoral fraud in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories. Invite and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the area, as well as count the votes.

Look into the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To the United States, Coalition Countries and the United Nations:

Urge the government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to investigate allegations of human rights abuses of minorities by Kurdish and Arab officials.

Assist relevant Iraqi parties to reach the necessary compromises in Nineveh, primarily by: a) pressing the Iraqi government to reintegrate certain members of the Baath party and the insurgency in local civilian and security institutions; b) pressuring local allies that rely heavily on the U.S., notably tribal forces, to promote a power- and security-sharing agreement; and c) insisting on the necessary protection of the diverse indigenous ethnic groups.

Seriously consider adding U.S. military officers to Arab and Kurdish patrols as a transitional confidence-building measure to improve communication, coordination and cooperation.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Emphasise to the Iraqi government the need for a thorough and independent inquiry into the September-November 2008, and November 2009-February 2010, killings of Assyrians in Mosul, as well as independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Do not cooperate with the Kurdish Regional Government until the Kurdish authorities stop the suppression of other indigenous Iraqi communities, abandon claims to lands inhabited mainly by non-Kurds, and abandon the use of militias, intimidation and violence.

Encourage the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To UNAMI and International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Aid Organisations:

Complete the institution of offices in the disputed territories, such as Kirkuk, Mosul, the Nineveh Plains, Tell-Afar, Tuz Khurmatu and Diyala, and provide them with sufficient staff and experts.

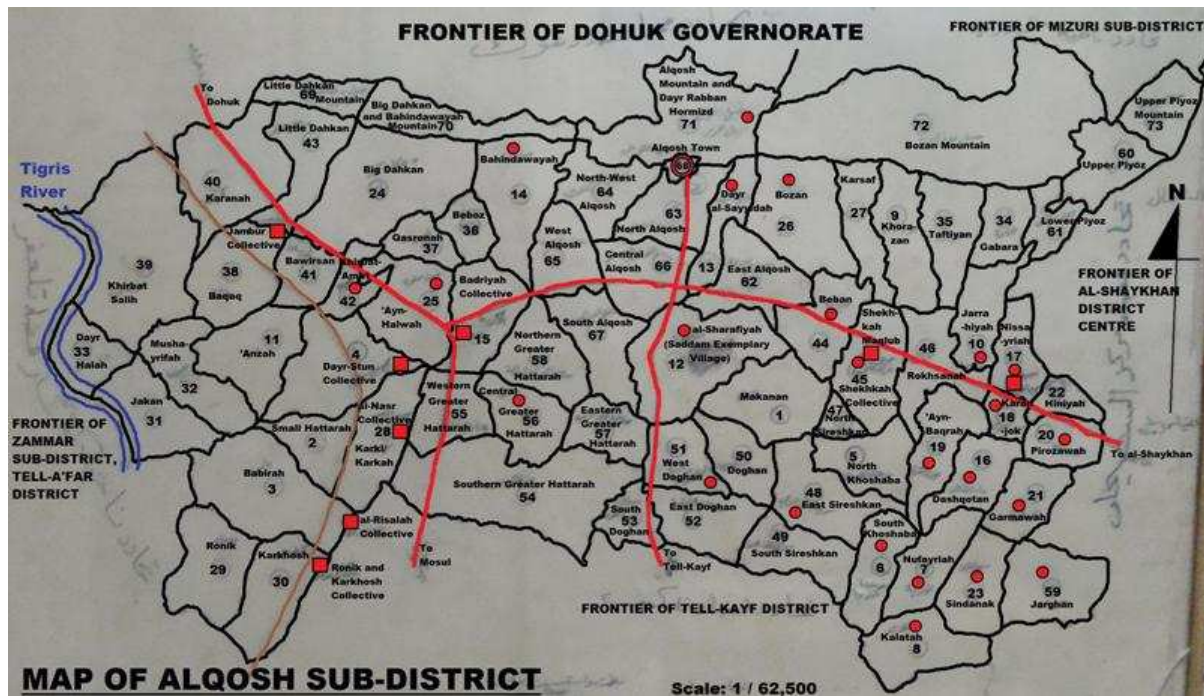
Initiate regular fact-finding missions independent of the Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to discover what is really happening to minority communities on the ground.

Cease employing minders, guides or translators that have links to the governments and ruling parties and ensure that all guides or translators employed belong to the same community as that being researched. Otherwise informants will be too scared to provide accurate statements regarding abuses against them.

Offer to act as foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.

APPENDIX I:

The Alqosh Sub-District of the Tell-Kayf District and its Sub-Divisions, with a note on the ethnicities of their inhabitants:



Sub-Division	Name	Ethnicity
1.	Makanan	Assyrian, uninhabited
2.	Small Hattarah	Yazdi
3.	Babirah	Arab, originally Assyrian (name derived from Assyrian Beth-‘Bira)
4.	Dayr-Stun Collective	Yazidi, Arab and Assyrian (name derived from a ruined monastery)
5.	North Khoshaba	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name derived from an Assyrian

		personal name meaning Sunday)
6.	South Khoshaba	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name derived from an Assyrian personal name meaning Sunday)
7.	Nufayriah	Arab
8.	Kalatah	Arab
9.	Khorazan	Yazidi, originally also Assyrian
10.	Jarrahayah	Yazidi and Assyrian
11.	‘Anzah	Arab, now underwater
12.	al-Sharafiyah Exemplary Village	Assyrian, originally also Yazidi
13.	Dayr al-Sayyidah	Assyrian
14.	Bahindawayah	Assyrian, originally also Yazidi, now also some Kurds
15.	Badriyah Collective	Arab, originally Assyrian
16.	Dashqotan	Assyrian
17.	Nissairiyah	Yazidi and Assyrian
18.	Karanjok	Assyrian
19.	‘Ayn-Baqrah	Assyrian
20.	Pirozawah	Assyrian
21.	Garmawah	Assyrian
22.	Hindiyah	Yazidi
23.	Sindanak	Yazidi
24.	Big Dahkan	Yazidi
25.	‘Ayn-Halwah	Assyrian, Yazidi and Arab
26.	Bozan	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name derived from the Assyrian Bozaye)
27.	Karsaf	Yazidi, originally also Assyrian (still home to an ancient church called Beth-Mariam)

28.	Karki/Karkah	Yazidi
29.	Ronik	Yazidi, now underwater
30.	Karkhosh	Yazidi
31.	Jakan	Yazidi, now underwater
32.	Mushayrifah	Arab, now underwater
33.	Dayr-Halah	Arab, originally Assyrian (named after a ruined monastery), now underwater
34.	Gabara	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (its name is of Assyrian origin)
35.	Taftiyan	Yazidi, originally also Assyrian
36.	Beboz	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name is derived from the Assyrian Beth-Boze)
37.	Qasronah	Assyrian and Yazidi, also some Arabs
38.	Baqaq	Yazidi, Assyrian, Arab and Kurdish (name derived from the Assyrian Beth-Qaqa)
39.	Khirbat-Salih	Arab and Assyrian, now underwater
40.	Karanah	Yazidi
41.	Bawirsan	Yazidi
42.	Khirbat-'Amiri	Arab
43.	Little Dahkan	Yazidi
44.	Beban	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name is derived from the Assyrian Beth-Bane)
45.	Shekhkah Collective	Yazidi and Kurdish
46.	Rokhsanah	Yazidi and Arab
47.	North Sireskhan	Yazidi
48.	East Sireskhan	Yazidi
49.	South Sireskhan	Yazidi
50.	Doghan	Yazidi

51.	West Doghan	Yazidi
52.	East Doghan	Yazidi
53.	South Doghan	Yazidi
54.	Southern Greater Hattarah	Yazidi, originally Assyrian (name derived from Khattara)
55.	Western Greater Hattarah	Yazidi, ditto
56.	Central Greater Hattarah	Yazidi, ditto
57.	Eastern Greater Hattarah	Yazidi, ditto
58.	Northern Greater Hattarah	Yazidi, ditto
59.	Jarghan	Shabak
60.	Upper PiyoZ	Assyrian, uninhabited
61.	Lower PiyoZ	Yazidi, originally Assyrian
62.	East Alqosh	Assyrian
63.	North Alqosh	Assyrian
64.	North-West Alqosh	Assyrian
65.	Central Alqosh	Assyrian
66.	West Alqosh	Assyrian
67.	South Alqosh	Assyrian
68.	Alqosh Town	Assyrian
69.	Little Dahkan Mountain	Yazidi
70.	Big Dahkan and Bahindawaya Mountain	Yazidi and Assyrian
71.	Alqosh Mountain and Dayr Rabban Hormizd	Assyrian
72.	Bozan Mountain	Yazidi, originally Assyrian
73.	Upper PiyoZ Mountain	Assyrian, uninhabited

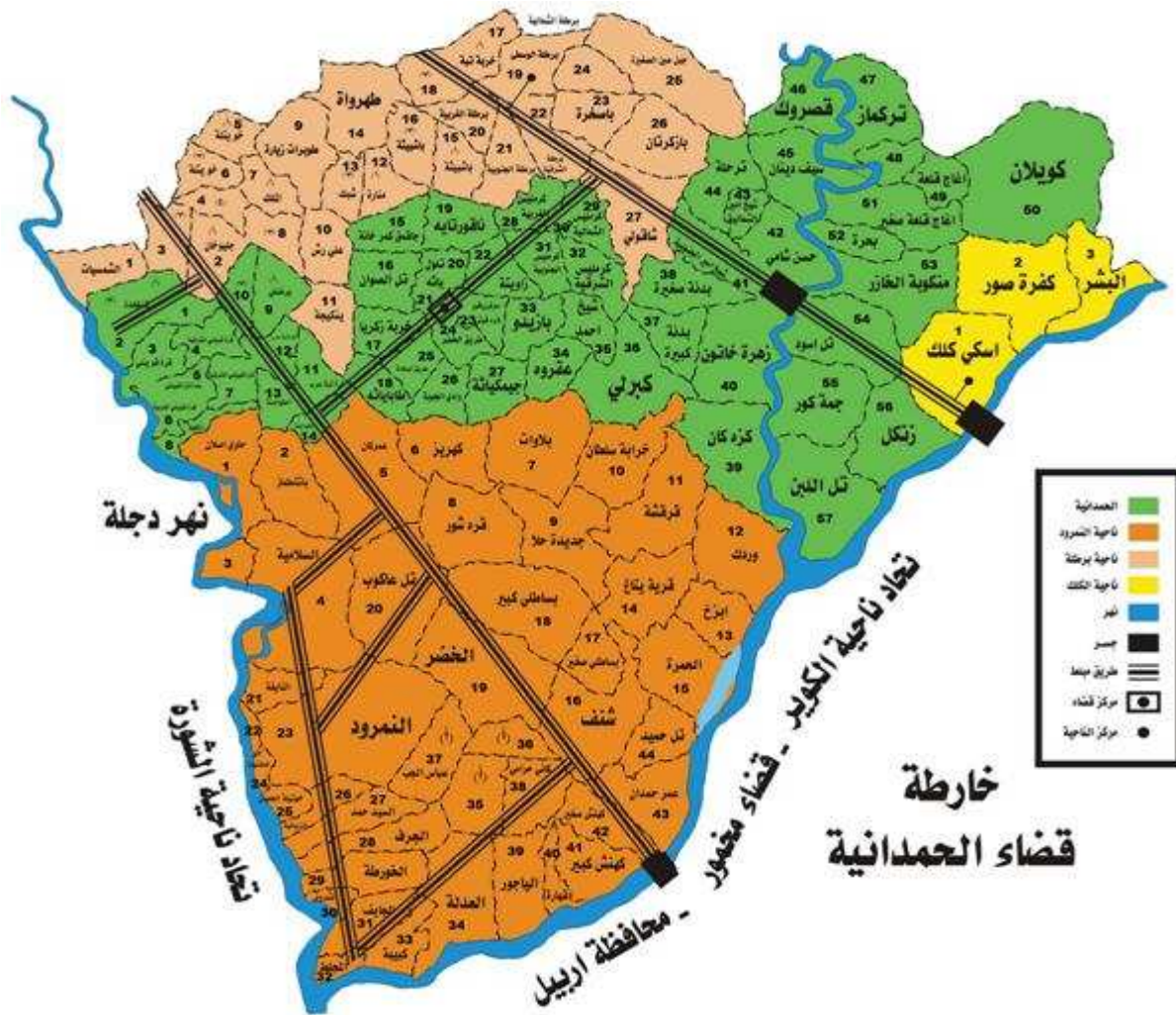
Notes:

Out of the 73 sub-divisions of the Alqosh Sub-District, roughly 17 are inhabited exclusively by Assyrians, 12 shared by Assyrians and Yazidis, 29 mostly by Yazidis (13 of these were historically Assyrian, as can be gleaned from their name derivation), eight by Arabs (three of these also bear Assyrian names), six are mixed and include members of various ethnic groups (though two have clearly Assyrian names), and one is inhabited by Shabak. Six sub-divisions are under the waters of the Mosul Dam. Ethnic Kurds here are a minority and are only found in three of the sub-divisions.

In other words Assyrians exclusively inhabit 23% of the Sub-District and Yazidis 40%. A further 17% is shared by Assyrians and Yazidis, 8% more by more than two ethnic groups. Arabs also count for 8% and Shabak for 1%. In addition to the 40% of the sub-district inhabited in whole or partially by Assyrians, a further 25% possess names of Assyrian derivation.

APPENDIX II:

The al-Hamdaniyah District, its Sub-Districts and their Sub-Divisions, with a note on the ethnicities of their inhabitants:



Bartillah (Baritleh) Sub-District (coloured pink on the map)

Sub-Division	Name	Ethnicity

1.	al-Shamsiyat	Turkmen, name derived from Arabic
2.	Jilu Khan (A)	Shabak, name derived from Turkish and Assyrian
3.	Jilu Khan (B)	Shabak, ditto
4.	Jilu Khan (C)	Shabak, ditto
5.	Khuwaytlah (A)	Shabak, name derived from Arabic
6.	Khuwaytlah (B)	Shabak, ditto
7.	Almalik (A)	Shabak, name derived from Turkish
8.	Almalik (B)	Shabak, ditto
9.	Toprak Ziyarah	Shabak, name derived from Turkish
10.	'Ali Rash	Shabak, name derived from Kurdish
11.	Yangijah	Shabak, name derived from Turkish Yenice
12.	Manarat Shabak (A)	Shabak, name derived from Arabic
13.	Manarat Shabak (B)	Shabak, ditto
14.	Tahrawah	Shabak, name derived from Persian
15.	Bashbitha (A)	Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-Shupitha)
16.	Bashbitha (B)	Shabak, ditto
17.	Khirbat Tappah (B)	Shabak, name derived from Persian or Turkish
18.	Khirbah Tappah (B)	Shabak, ditto
19.	Central Bartillah	Assyrian
20.	Western Bartillah	Assyrian
21.	Southern Bartillah	Assyrian
22.	Eastern Bartillah	Assyrian
23.	Basakhras (A)	Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-Sakhraye)
24.	Basakhras (B)	Shabak, ditto

25.	'Ayn al-Saghirah Mountain	Arab
26.	Bazgirtan	Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-Zqirta)
27.	Shaqoli	Shabak, name derived from Persian Shah-Qoli

Notes:

Out of the 27 sub-divisions of the Bartillah (Baritleh) Sub-District, roughly four are inhabited exclusively by Assyrians, 21 mostly by Shabak (five of these were historically Assyrian, as can be gleaned from their name derivation), one by Arabs, and one is inhabited by Turkmen. Ethnic Kurds are nowhere to be found here.

In other words Assyrians exclusively inhabit 15% of the Sub-District, Shabak 77%, and Arabs and Turkmen each count for 4%. In addition to the 15 % of the sub-district inhabited wholly by Assyrians, a further 19% possess names of Assyrian derivation and were originally Assyrian settlements.

Qaraqosh (Bakhdida) Sub-District (coloured green on the map)

Sub-Division	Name	Ethnicity
1.	Qiz Fakhrah (A)	Turkmen
2.	Qiz Fakhrah (B)	Turkmen
3.	Qarah Qoyunli	Turkmen
4.	East Qarah Qoyunli (A)	Turkmen
5.	Qarah Qoyunli Town	Turkmen and Arab
6.	West Qarah Qoyunli	Turkmen and Arab
7.	East Qarah Qoyunli (B)	Turkmen
8.	Zangubah	Arab
9.	Yarghanti (A)	Arab
10.	Yarghanti (B)	Arab

11.	Qarah Tappah ‘Arab (A)	Arab and Shabak
12.	Qarah Tappah ‘Arab (B)	Arab and Turkmen
13.	al-Tawahinah (A)	Shabak, name derived from Arabic
14.	al-Tawahinah (B)	Shabak, ditto
15.	Chaqmaq Gumrkhanah	Assyrian, name derived from Turkish
16.	Tall al-Siwan	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic
17.	Khirbat Zakariya	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic
18.	Tabayathah	Assyrian
19.	Naqurtayah	Assyrian
20.	Tilulyathah	Assyrian
21.	Qaraqosh (Bakhdida) Town	Assyrian
22.	Zawitah	Assyrian
23.	Mar Quryaquz	Assyrian
24.	Tariq al-Khidhr	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic
25.	Tariq al-Sallamiyah	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic
26.	Wadi al-Jubah	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic
27.	Chemikyatha	Assyrian
28.	West Karimlish	Assyrian
29.	North Karimlish	Assyrian
30.	Karimlish Town	Assyrian
31.	South Karimlish	Assyrian
32.	East Karimlish	Assyrian
33.	Bazido	Assyrian
34.	‘Aqirwah	Assyrian
35.	Shaykh Ahmad	Assyrian, name derived from Arabic

36.	Kaberli	Shabak and Kaka'i, name derived from Turkish
37.	Big Badanah	Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-Daniel)
38.	Little Badanah	Shabak, ditto
39.	Karah Kan	Kaka'i
40.	Zahrah Khatun	Shabak, originally Assyrian (possesses ruins of St. Sarah's convent)
41.	South Shaykh Amir	Shabak
42.	Hasan Shami	Arab
43.	North Shaykh Amir	Shabak
44.	Tarjillah	Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Targilla)
45.	Sayfdinan	Arab, name derived from Kurdish
46.	Qasrok	Kurd
47.	Turkmaz (A)	Arab, name derived from Turkish
48.	Turkmaz (B)	Arab, ditto
49.	Big Aghach Qal'ah	Arab, name derived from Turkish
50.	Gawilan	Arab and Kurd
51.	Little Aghach Qal'ah	Arab, name derived from Turkish
52.	Bahrah	Arab
53.	Mangubah al-Khazir	Arab
54.	Tall Aswad	Arab
55.	Chammah Kor	Arab, name derived from Kurdish
56.	Zangal	Kaka'i
57.	Tall al-Liban	Kaka'i, name derived from Arabic

Notes:

Out of the 57 sub-divisions of the Qaraqosh (Bakhdida) Sub-District, roughly 21 are inhabited exclusively by Assyrians, eight mostly by Shabak (four of these were historically Assyrian, as can be gleaned from their name derivation), 13 by Arabs, five by Turkmen, two by Kaka'is, one by Kurds. The other sub-divisions are mixed and include Shabak, Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds. Ethnic Kurds here are a minority and are only found in three of the sub-divisions.

In other words Assyrians exclusively inhabit 37% of the Sub-District, Arabs 23%, Shabak 14%, Turkmen 9%, Kakai's 5% and Kurds 2%. A further 10% is shared by Shabak, Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds. In addition to the 37% of the sub-district inhabited wholly by Assyrians, a further 7% possess names of Assyrian derivation and were originally Assyrian settlements.

al-Namrud (al-Khidhr) Sub-District (coloured orange on the map)

Sub-Division	Name	Ethnicity
1.	Hawi Aslan	Arab, name derived from Turkish
2.	Bashtitmaz	Turkmen
3.	al-Sallamiyah (B)	Turkmen, name derived from Arabic
4.	al-Sallamiyah (A)	Turkmen, ditto
5.	'Umarkan	Turkmen, name derived from Kurdish
6.	Kahriz	Arab
7.	Balawat	Shabak and Arab, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-lawatha, also possesses ancient Assyrian ruins)
8.	Qarah Shor	Shabak, name derived from Turkish
9.	Judaydat Hala	Arab
10.	Kharabat Sultan	Turkmen and Shabak, name derived from Arabic
11.	Qara-Qashah	Turkmen and Shabak, originally Assyrian (name derived from Turkish meaning Black Priest)
12.	Wardak	Kaka'i
13.	Abzakh	Kaka'i
14.	Qaryat Yatagh	Turkmen, name derived from Arabic

15.	al-Hamra'	Arab
16.	Shanaf	Arab
17.	Little Basatli	Arab, originally Assyrian (name derived from Beth-Satlaye)
18.	Big Basatli	Arab, ditto
19.	al-Khidhr	Arab, Shabak and Assyrian (location of St. Behnam's Monastery)
20.	Tall 'Agub	Arab
21.	al-Nayifah (A)	Arab
22.	al-Nayifah (B)	Arab
23.	al-Namrud	Arab, location of ancient Assyrian Imperial capital Kalhu (ruins)
24.	al-Haftiyat	Arab
25.	Khuwaytlah al-Hisan	Arab
26.	al-Zaybaniyah	Arab
27.	al-Sayyid Hamad	Arab
28.	al-Jaraf	Arab
29.	al-Khurtah	Arab
30.	al-Shuruq	Arab
31.	al-Jayif	Arab
32.	al-Makhlat	Arab
33.	Kubaybah	Arab
34.	al-'Adlah	Arab
35.	'Abbas al-Jubb (A)	Arab
36.	'Abbas al-Jubb (B)	Arab
37.	'Abbas al-Jubb (C)	Arab
38.	Kani Harami	Arab, name derived from Kurdish
39.	al-Yajur	Arab

40.	Qaharah	Arab
41.	Big Kahnish	Arab
42.	Little Kahnish	Arab
43.	‘Umar Hamdan	Arab
44.	Tall Hamid	Arab

Notes:

Out of the 44 sub-divisions of the al-Namrud (al-Khidhr) Sub-District, roughly 32 are inhabited exclusively by Arabs, five by Turkmen, two by Kaka’is, one by Shabak. The rest are mixed and include Shabak, Turkmen and Arabs. The Sub-District centre al-Khidhr is home to Arabs, Shabaks and Assyrians. Six of the sub-divisions were historically Assyrian, as can be gleaned from their name derivations. Ethnic Kurds are nowhere to be found here.

In other words Arabs exclusively inhabit 73% of the Sub-District, Turkmen 11%, Kaka’is 5% and Shabak 2%. A further 9% is shared by the various ethnic groups, including Assyrians. Furthermore, 14% of the sub-divisions were originally Assyrian settlements and possess names of Assyrian derivation.

Aski Kalak (Khabat) Sub-District (coloured yellow on the map)

Sub-Division	Name	Ethnicity
1.	Aski Kalak (Khabat)	Kurd (originally Yazidi and Assyrian), name derived from Turkish <i>Eski Kelek</i>
2.	Kafrah Sor	Kurd, name derived from Assyrian <i>Kpar-Ashor</i>
3.	al-Bashar	Kurd, name derived from Arabic

Notes:

This sub-district has been governed by the KRG since 1991 since its inhabitants are mostly Kurds. A small minority belong to ethnic groups such as Assyrians, Yazidis, etc. Most of the place names are also not of Kurdish derivation indicating relatively recent Kurdish settlement in the area.

IRAQ

The Struggle to Exist



**Part III: Treatment and
Discrimination of Assyrians in
the “Iraqi Kurdistan Region”**

Assyria Council of Europe

Hammurabi Human Rights Organization



The Struggle to Exist

Part III:

Treatment and discrimination of Assyrians in the “Iraqi Kurdistan Region”



February 2010

The Struggle to Exist

Part III: Treatment and discrimination of Assyrians in the “Iraqi Kurdistan Region”

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METHODOLOGY

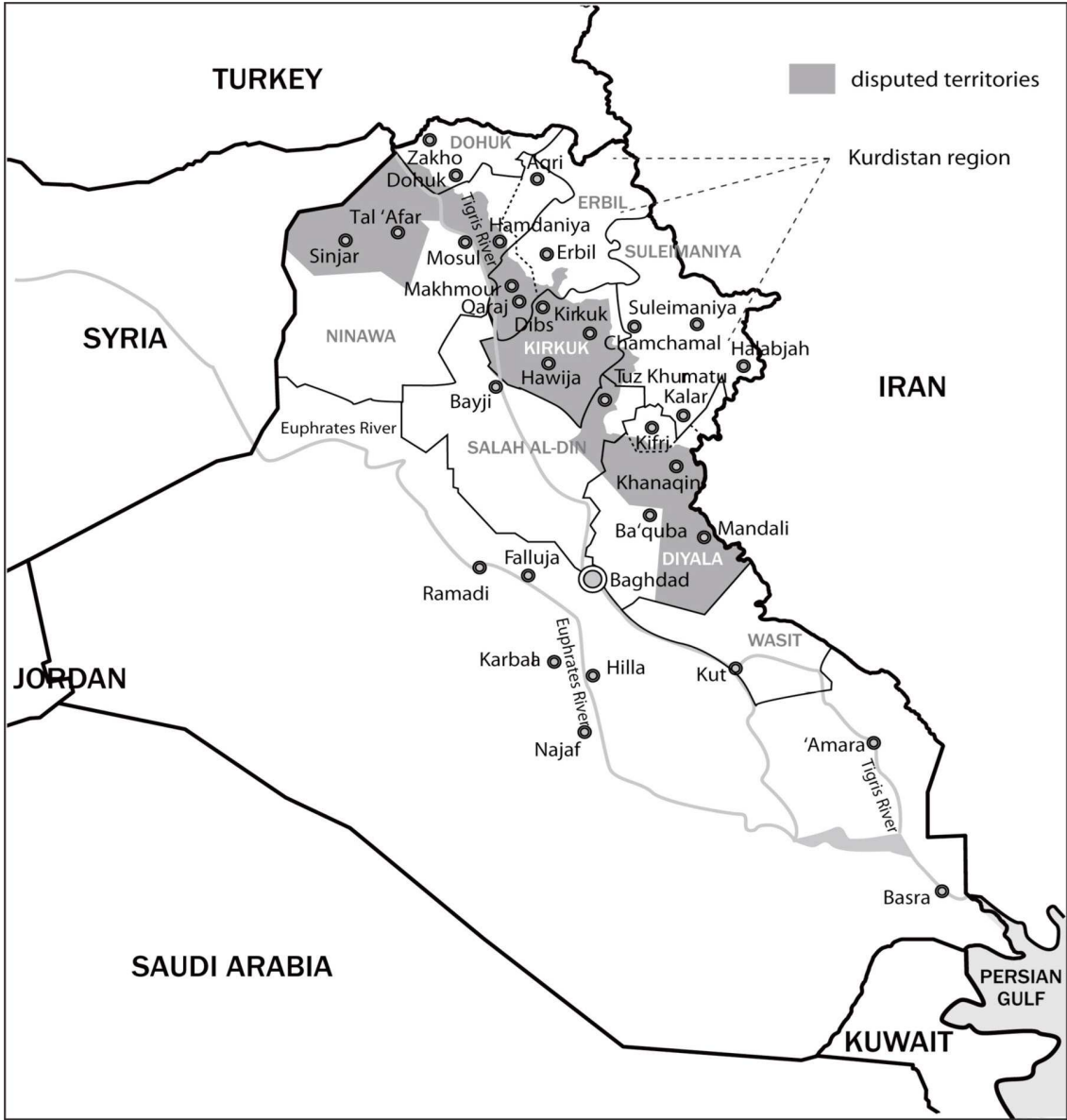
This report is based on a six-week fact-finding mission in the northern Iraqi cities of Arbil, Kirkuk and Dohuk, the regions of Barwari-Bala, Sapna, Simel, Zakho and Nahla, and the towns or villages of Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Tall-Kepe (Tell-Kayf), Tisqopa (Tell-Isquf), Batnaya, Beqopa (Baqofah), Alqosh, Ba'shiqa, Bahzani, Karimlish (Karemles), Baritleh (Bartillah), Sharafiyah, Bahindawaya, 'Ayn-Baqrah, Karanjok, Dashqotan, Pirozawah, 'Ayn-Sifne, Shaqlawa and Diyana.

The fact-finding mission was conducted between November and January 2010 to investigate abuses against Assyrians in the disputed territories of the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraq Kurdistan Region. For security reasons the Assyria Council of Europe did not visit the city of Mosul.

Assyria Council of Europe interviewed over 70 men and women of the Chaldo-Assyrian community, both privately and in group settings. Interviews were conducted mainly in Syriac and Arabic, without a translator, persons having been identified for interview largely with the assistance of Iraqi nongovernmental organizations serving Assyrian groups. In addition, Assyria Council of Europe conducted follow-up telephone interviews and consulted official documents provided by Assyrian representatives. All of these interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the data would be collected and used, and verbally consented to be interviewed. The names and other identifying information of many of them have been withheld in the interests of their personal security.

The report also draws on meetings in Arbil with senior Assyrian official and Iraqi Parliament member Yonadam Yousif Kanna. Assyria Council of Europe also interviewed Nineveh Provincial Council elected representative Jevara Zaia, who in the 2008 provincial elections won the Christian minority quota seat.

Map 1: The Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the Disputed Territories Claimed by the Kurdistan Regional Government



Courtesy of the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch

Map 2: A close-up of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region showing some of the places mentioned in the text of this report



Adapted from an official map of the region published in Kurdish by the official website of the Kurdistan Region Government (www.krg.org)

THE STRUGGLE TO EXIST

The purpose of this report is to give the facts regarding the situation of Assyrians in northern Iraq, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). It also outlines the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) policies towards Assyrians and other Christians of all denominations, as well as other minorities in the region. The report also outlines the reality of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leadership's policies towards these groups. Additionally, it examines and responds to the seriously misleading report presented in December 2009 by Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG's High Representative to the UK in retaliation to allegations of Kurdish involvement in the killing and displacement of Mosul's Christians, and lends its support to the November 2009 report by Human Rights Watch on violence against minority communities in Nineveh province's disputed territories.

Essentially at issue is the status of the Assyrians in the disputed territories immediately south of the semi-autonomous IKR, as well as those Assyrians residing within the IKR. For nearly three decades previous Iraqi governments attempted to "Arabise" northern Iraq, forcibly driving out hundreds of thousands of non-Arabs such as Assyrians and Kurds from their homes and settling ethnic Arabs in their place. Currently, since Saddam Hussein's overthrow, the leadership of the KRG insists that it is entitled to claim this land as part of an ever-expanding Kurdish territory, stretching from the Sinjar area near the Syrian border in the west all the way to Khanaqin near the Iranian border to the southeast.

Vast segments of these disputed territories claimed by the Kurdish authorities are historical regions of other indigenous Iraqi peoples. Kirkuk, for example is historically Assyrian and Turkmen, Mosul is Assyrian and Arab, and the Nineveh Plains are home also to Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen and Kaka'is. Turkmen and Arabs also predominate and outnumber Kurds in the north of Diyala province. Furthermore, the Kurdish presence in most of these territories is not ancient and the non-Kurdish communities dominate. It would not be practical to thus construct boundaries and regions along ethnic lines.

The KRG has also intensified its Kurdish nationalist outlook since 2003, which through "Kurdification" is threatening the very existence and way of life of Assyrians indigenous to those areas presently under their control. The KRG authorities have been in power since 1991, governing with semi-autonomy. They hold a significant number of posts in the Iraqi state and the Iraqi constitution, grants the IKR powers almost equal to those of the central government. This impedes the state's functionality.

While both Kurd and Arab leaderships claim the 'disputed territories,' such as the Nineveh Plains or Kirkuk, the actual facts on the ground differ from the ethnically exclusive narratives they portray. These territories are historically one of Iraq's most ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse areas, and for centuries they have been home to indigenous Assyrian Christians, as well as Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and other minorities. The same is true for the IKR, which is not only home to communities of indigenous Assyrians and Yazidis, but also to considerable Turkmen, Arab and Armenian communities.

Of course, Iraq's Kurds deserve to be compensated for the atrocities committed against them by the various Iraqi governments, among them genocide and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. This issue though should be considered separate from the Kurds' current struggle for political control over the disputed territories, and does not justify one ethnic group controlling the area exclusively. All victims of Saddam Hussein's Arabisation campaign should be able to return to, and rebuild, their historic communities – including Assyrians. Kurds also should not claim exclusivity of suffering, especially since, historically Kurds have been the victimisers of indigenous groups less numerous than themselves, such as Assyrians and Yazidis. In a sense nowadays, history is once again regrettably repeating itself.

The competing efforts of Arabs and Kurds to resolve their territorial disputes over northern Iraq's future have left the Assyrians, and other communities who live there in an uncertain situation. It is they who ultimately bear the brunt of this conflict and come under growing pressure to declare their loyalty to either one side or the other, or face the consequences. They are being victimised by the heavy handed tactics of the Kurdish authorities, not the least arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and intimidation, directed at anyone resisting Kurdish expansionist plans. The Kurdish thrust into the region has also created an opportunity and reason for Arab ultra-nationalists and Sunni extremists to continue killing members of minority groups, especially non-Muslims. It is precisely this segment of society, the shade of grey being neither Arab nor Kurd, which is struggling to exist in the new Iraq.

I. Treatment of Assyrians in the “Iraqi Kurdistan Region”

To really understand what Kurdish authorities have in store for the ethnic communities of the Nineveh Plains if they do annex the disputed territories, one must fully comprehend their current situation within the IKR since 1991 and more specifically after the 2003 regime-change when the ruling Kurdish parties, no-longer fearing retribution by Saddam, became more open with their nationalist and exclusivist rhetoric. Part of Assyria Council of Europe’s fact-finding mission was to investigate the actualities of Assyrian life in the IKR, and especially how they are treated under the KRG. The plain fact of the matter is that the IKR is practically a military dictatorship dominated by the KDP in Dohuk and Arbil provinces (where Assyrians and Yazidis predominate), controlled by its *peşmerga* forces, and closely scrutinised by its *Asayish* intelligence units which have centres in every town and district centre and strike fear into the hearts of those who oppose them. As was the norm under Saddam, portraits of Mas’ud Barzani (or his late father Mullah Mustafa) eerily smile from the walls of every shop, restaurant, hotel and government office. It is definitely not unusual to see *Kak* Mas’ud’s image paired up with that of Iraqi President and PUK leader Jalal Talabani, as well as large images of KDP “heroes” such as Idris Barzani (Mas’ud’s brother and father of former KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan) in prominent places. This is a culture which is already slowly creeping into the Nineveh Plains with Yazidi villages in the Shaykhan district displaying large images of Mas’ud Barzani at their entrances. The KDP does not even attempt to hide the fact that it is a front for the nepotism of the Barzani dynasty and thus, in many respects, Kurdish rule is no different to Baath party rule under Saddam.

Refuge for “Minorities”?

The IKR has naturally become a safe haven for Iraqi IDPs of all ethnicities, religions and sects, since violence has erupted everywhere else in the country. According to the International Organisation for Migration 39% of the 83,333 IDP families that it has assessed in the IKR belong to religious or ethnic minorities.¹⁴¹ By 2006, the KRG had accommodated and ‘welcomed’ as many as 50,000 individuals, the majority of whom are not in camps but stay with relatives and acquaintances, or in public buildings.¹⁴² This ‘welcome’ means only that they are allowed the privilege of entering the region. Muslim Arabs, if not belonging to tribes that have alliances with the Kurds, are turned away even if their lives are in danger. For all those that do enter though, residence permits are required and these must be renewed periodically, causing IDPs to feel like foreigners within the borders of their own country.¹⁴³

Many Assyrians have nowhere else to go. They feel like Iraq is their country, since they are so well-integrated into the society, and they believe that they belong there. One Assyrian IDP recounts,

*“I am a real Iraqi. I was born in Baghdad, registered in Kirkuk, my family is from Nahla, I now live in Tall-Kepe, I’ve worked for the past 10 years in Arbil, and my parents are now in Syria waiting to leave for the West... Where am I from? Where should I live? Where can I go? I don’t want to leave my country.”*¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ International Organisation for Migration, Dahuk Governorate Profile August 2009, IDP and Returnee Assessment, http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/idp_gov_profiles/2009/Governorate%20Profiles%20-%20Dahuk.pdf.

¹⁴² UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, “Human Rights Report: 1 July – 31 August 2006,” p. 13.

¹⁴³ The KRG persists to emphasise the distinct existence of a ‘Kurdistan’ separate to Iraq, despite the fact that it is in legal reality an autonomous region that is part of Iraq. This is even done in school textbooks. Kurdistan literally means “land of the Kurds,” ignoring the fact that there still exist indigenous communities of Assyrians that predate Kurdish settlement in the area. Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders (names withheld), Dohuk and Arbil, December 2009 and January 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Assyria Council of Europe interview with an Assyrian IDP (name withheld) in Tall-Kepe, December 2009.

The several thousand Christian families estimated by the UN and international NGOs to have found refuge in the IKR, are not foreigners. In reality most of them are indigenous Assyrians and originate from villages that have existed for thousands of years, even before the region was known as Kurdistan, and have begun to return to these villages which they were forced to abandon due to persecution by Kurds and Iraqi government brutality. The International Medical Corps (IMC) reports indicate that 3,800 families have moved to the city of Dohuk, and according to International Relief and Development, as of 30 September 2006, there were approximately 7,502 Christian IDP families in Dohuk.¹⁴⁵

These IDPs are officially considered outsiders, unwanted guests in Kurdistan, and are treated as such by the general Kurdish populace. They are discriminated against because they do not speak Kurdish. Many Kurds refuse to converse with them in Arabic, Iraq's official language, and will charge them double or triple the price of anything they purchase if they make the transaction in Arabic. For the same reason they are also discouraged from tertiary education in the IKR because much of the instruction is conducted in Kurdish, and they are practically unemployable since they again do not speak Kurdish. The general question presented to all of them is, "if you are originally from this region, or wish to live here, why do you not speak Kurdish?"¹⁴⁶ They ignore the fact that Assyrians have their own language and identity. For many of the poorer IDPs the price differences in the more affluent IKR are staggering since they were used to lower prices in other parts of Iraq. Faced with this ethnic and economic discrimination, and being unable to work or study, indigenous Assyrian IDP families are being forced out of Iraq completely and given the more painful and difficult option of emigrating to the West.

According to Ms. Abdul Rahman's report: "*The KRG estimates that, to date, some 20,000 Christian families from Basra, Baghdad and Mosul have found a safe haven in KRG administered governorates of Dohuk and Erbil, and in the Nineveh (sic) plains (as well as many thousands who have moved to Suleimaniah).*"¹⁴⁷ What is disturbing about this is that the KRG finds it within its duty to enumerate the exact number of Assyrian IDP families in the Nineveh Plains, along with those in the provinces of Dohuk and Arbil (which are controlled by the KDP), but not those in Suleimaniah (which is controlled by the PUK). Here it is thus obvious that KRG should be replaced with KDP in the report.

The KRG (or more correctly, the KDP) provides support and financial assistance for 11,000 of these IDP families to the sum of 40-50,000 Iraqi Dinars (less than USD\$40) per family per month through affiliated Assyrian Organisations such as the High Commission for Christian Affairs (HCCA) established by Mr. Aghajan and the Christian Aid Program – Nohadra, Iraq (CAPNI), which is aligned with the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) – both of which are allied with the KDP, receive special permission to operate by the *Asayish*, and deny Kurdish injustices against Assyrians in the IKR. In 2008, online publication Ankawa.com reported that the Department of Christian Affairs in the Kurdish Ministry of Finances, headed by Mr. Aghajan, collected signatures from IDPs in favour of the annexation of the Nineveh Plains to the IKR before handing out monthly aid to them. Those who did not sign were reportedly denied vital food rations.¹⁴⁸

Some Assyrian IDPs are employed by the KRG, mostly in defending their churches, apartment complexes and towns in the Nineveh Plain as the paramilitary "Church Guards" loyal to the KRG and KDP especially. These are also widely referred to as "Sargis' guards" (*Hirasat Sarkis*) in reference to

¹⁴⁵ National Report on the Status of Human Development in Iraq 2008, p. 69; and UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 September – 31 October 2006," p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leaders and IDPs (names withheld), in Dohuk, December 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, "The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq," p.3.

¹⁴⁸ "Pressures to annex northern Christian villages of Kurdistan," AsiaNews, May 15, 2008, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pressures-to-annex-northern-Christian-villages-to-Kurdistan-12264.html>; See also Layla Yousif Rahema, "Kurdish guns threaten to bring a new humanitarian catastrophe to Iraqi minorities," AsiaNews, November 11, 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Kurdish-guns-threaten-to-bring-a-new-humanitarian-catastrophe-to-Iraqi-minorities-16833.html>.

Mr. Aghajan. Such jobs are demeaning and allow for no continuation or acquisition of skills, reducing the quality of potentially employable young Assyrians, putting a great many of them in danger, and adapting them to a lazy work ethic.



**Left: Members of an Assyrian IDP family in Tisqopa;
Right: One of the “Church Guards” in the Assyrian village of Beqopa.**

The assistance mentioned above though is not provided to those that support independent Assyrian political parties such as the ADM, and it is not unknown for it to be withdrawn, employees terminated from their only source of income, and tenants with nowhere else to go being evicted from the housing initially offered to them – for the sole reason that they did not vote for the KDP-supported Ishtar slate, or the Kurdistan coalition in the elections (as mentioned above). These needy Assyrian IDP families are thus being psychologically abused into relying solely on the scant handouts provided to them by the KDP, and thus are put at risk of being used in order to cast votes in favour of it, in order to continue receiving aid so that they don't completely starve. Indeed, all this is far from the sugar-coated rhetoric found on the KRG official website, and in the speeches of former Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

Certainly, the relative instability of the rest of Iraq has worked to the KRG's benefit. The influx of doctors, lecturers, lawyers, traders and businessmen, flocking to the IKR's relative security may itself be seen as a motive for the KRG to not just actually wish for, but also contribute to the continuance of this situation in any way possible. The Babylon College for Theology and Philosophy, the major seminary of the Chaldean Catholic Church, was moved to Ankawa – adjacent to the Regional capital of Arbil – not through the Church's own funding, but that of Mr. Aghajan, i.e. the KRG, and more specifically the KDP. It is unbelievable that a Kurdish political body would fund an Assyrian religious organisation out of the goodness of its own heart. They used the threat of violence in Baghdad as a tool to bring this powerful intellectual institution and think tank of the Chaldean Catholic Church into its own sphere of influence. The same can be said of the new Ephremite Seminary of the Syriac Catholic Church built at Bakhdida, the newly established seminary of the Ancient Church of the East at Sharafiyah, and the new Patriarchates of the Chaldean Catholic Church and Assyrian Church of the East at Ankawa and Arbil (the latter costing ten million dollars to build), as well as the restoration and

construction of numerous churches, chapels, monasteries, convents, orphanages, etc. – all funded by the same source.



The new Seminary of the Ancient Church of the East at Sharafiyah

Political Representation of “Christians” and other Minorities

Of the 111 MPs in the IKR Parliament, five are reserved for “Christians.” Since its very beginnings, the Parliament has ensured representation of Christians. In the July 2009 IKR parliamentary elections, and as stipulated in the IKR election law, 11 out of the 111 seats were reserved for “minorities” – five for “Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian” parties, five for Turkmen parties, and one for an Armenian. By denying the Assyrians a unified ethnic designation, and instead breaking them up into 3 entities, as well as putting them on par with Turkmen and Armenian minorities in the region, the KRG also denies them the recognition of being an indigenous group. Neither do the Turkmen in the IKR have the same geographical spread as the Assyrians, nor do the Armenians even have enough numbers for a seat in parliament.

The information provided in the KRG report regarding the 2009 election law is confusingly contradicting: “... in 2009 the Kurdistan Parliament amended the provincial councils election law by adopting guaranteed seats for minorities. In Dohuk governorate, three council seats are reserved for the Assyrian Chaldeans, and one for the Armenians; in Erbil, two are reserved for Christians and three for the Turkmen; and in Suleimaniah one seat is reserved for Christians.”¹⁴⁹ It is also interesting to note that the KRG chooses to call the Assyrians of Dohuk ‘Assyrian Chaldeans,’ but those in Arbil and Suleimaniah ‘Christians.’ By denying the Assyrians their ethnic designation the KRG also denies them the recognition of being an indigenous group separate to the Kurds. According to one concerned

¹⁴⁹ Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq,” p. 5.

Assyrian in the region, “They are diluting our nationality with our religion. There are already some 8,000 Kurds that have converted to Protestant Christianity in Suleimaniah. If in the future they increase our seats in the parliament and provincial councils will be lost to them one by one since, legally they are Christians and the seats are for Christians – not indigenous Assyrians!”¹⁵⁰ Although quite idealistic in its outlook, the KRG and its Parliament does anything but ensure inclusiveness and fair representation.

Ensuring government representation for Assyrians, or ‘Christians,’ at the highest levels is not the prerogative of the main ruling political parties in the IKR (i.e. the KDP and the PUK). This is the right of an indigenous people living on its own land, not a privilege to bestowed upon them from the top down by those more powerful. It is also not incorrect to concede that any Assyrian who is a member of, or supports a party that belongs to a different ethnic group, will first owe his allegiance to his party and would not be as helpful to his people as an Assyrian that is a member of an independent Assyrian party. Indeed, one may question how Kurds would have reacted to one of their number being a member of the Iraqi Baath party under the previous regime.

Assyrian members of the KDP appointed to key government positions include the current Minister for Transport and Communications, Anwar Jabali Sabo; the KRG Finance and Economy Minister for 10 years (1999 to October 2009), and Deputy Prime Minister (2004 to 2006), Sargis Aghajan Mamendu; the Deputy Governor of Dohuk, Mr. Georgis Shlemon; former Regional Minister with responsibility for civil society affairs, George Yousif Mansour; and former Governor of Arbil, the late Franso Hariri. In addition Nimrud Baito, the former Minister for Tourism (2006 to 2009) and leader of the APP, would not have made it into the KRG parliament if he had not entered his Party under the Kurdistan slate in the 2005 elections.

The KRG (in reality the KDP) is also making efforts to recruit from minorities into the police, intelligence and security forces, not only within its boundaries, but also as far as Mosul, Kirkuk and beyond (including in the Diaspora). Often these people are working solely for the benefit and goals of the KDP and are actually doing harm to their own ethnic groups, as well as damaging their future within a united and free Iraq.

Recognition of the KRG’s “Support for Christians”

The reasons why the KRG has been recognised for “supporting Christians” by Christian patriarchs and leaders of different denominations include the following: often their knowledge regarding what is actually occurring on the ground is superficial at best; religious leaders in this under-developed and neglected part of the country are being offered vast amounts of financial support, the likes of which they have never received before; and they are also motivated by the fear of retribution by Kurdish security forces if they spoke the truth regarding what is really happening to them. Mr. Aghajan, himself an ethnic Assyrian, has thus been decorated several times for his “work for Christians.” In fact when Mr. Aghajan was Finance Minister, all such efforts were fully funded by the KRG under the instructions of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani¹⁵¹ – which leads one to wonder why Nechirvan was not the one receiving all the decorations from Patriarchs instead of Aghajan. The ultimate result of this work, in reality an investment by the KRG in Assyrian areas, is their planned annexation by the IKR.

Land Disputes

¹⁵⁰ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Assyrian community leader (names withheld), Arbil, January 2010.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Karim Sinjari, KRG minister of the interior, Arbil, February 25, 2009. Quoted in “On Vulnerable Ground,” p. 26; see also Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq,” p. 8.

The origins of land disputes between Assyrians and Kurds are not only the Arabisation policies of the Baath and earlier regimes, as the KRG claims. Rather this has always been a bone of contention between them as Kurds have gradually bled Assyrians into the ground over the centuries, not the least in Iraq, and used every opportunity to seize their villages and lands through massacre, systematic killings and intimidation. Often indigenous Assyrian communities have been driven out due to Kurdish violence and return only to finding Kurds living in their homes or benefitting from their lands years later. This has been the case during the Kurdish revolt of the 1960s, the Simel massacre of 1933, the First World War and even much earlier. It was in 1310 that Assyrians were massacred and forced out of the citadel of Arbil by Kurds and Mongol troops, and the city's Christian governor executed.¹⁵² Now it is the capital of the KRG and above it flutters an enormous Kurdish flag. Thus the myth of peaceful co-existence between Kurds and Assyrians is clearly just that.



The citadel of Arbil, which in 1310 was lost by Assyrians to Kurdish invaders.

The KRG has never officially had a policy of taking lands or properties of Christians, and at least in writing believes that land disputes between individuals must be resolved through the courts of law. Though, at the same time, the KRG makes it more difficult for Assyrians that have lost their land to reobtain it – examples of such cases abound in the IKR. The ADM is the only Assyrian political organisation that claims the rights of Assyrians to their lost or stolen property. Its Zakho branch reported on October 28, 2009, that at least 17,750 *donums* (equivalent to approximately 4,437.5 hectares) had been illegally taken from eight Assyrian villages in the region in 1980 and 1991, as well as four villages and their lands in their entirety – all up amounting to 10,000 hectares in total.¹⁵³

¹⁵² E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, (London, 1928), pp. 261-302; David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East: 1318-1913*, (Louvain, 2000), pp. 18, 169, and Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East: an illustrated history of Assyrian Christianity*, (London, 2006), p.232.

¹⁵³ Report of Mr. Ya'qub Giwargis, Assyrian Democratic Movement, Zakho Branch, October 28, 2009, copy obtained and on file with Assyria Council of Europe.

The ADM branch in Inishk also reported agricultural land, orchards, springs and other water supplies illegally appropriated from eight Assyrian villages in the surrounding Sapna district in 1965, 1976 and 1988, but mostly between 1990 and 1992, by Kurds from neighbouring villages – including 1.25 hectares from the village of Benatha and 312.5 hectares from Inishk itself. The worst case by far is Hamziyah, which was settled by Kurdish refugees from the Nerwa region bordering Turkey in 1991. They have built their houses on the village’s Christian cemetery and have taken full control of its agricultural land, water supply and orchards, routinely harassing the Assyrians that have returned since 2003. They refuse to leave unless they are paid compensation (roughly \$20,000 each family). The Kurdish authorities, despite promising to remove the Kurdish squatters after continuous complaint from the Assyrian returnees, have recently built them a Kurdish school and a new mosque – sealing the fate of the village and permanently changing its demography.¹⁵⁴



The new mosque (left) and Kurdish school (right) built by the KRG for the Kurdish squatters in the Assyrian village of Hamziyah.

Also of particular note are the regions of ‘Aqra and eastern Nahla, where there were once between 15 and 20 Assyrian settlements, and whose original Chaldean Catholic inhabitants fled to Mosul because of Kurdish brutality in the 1960s. Those who have attempted to return to their original villages since 2003 have been barred from this and instead have been forced to create artificial new settlements at Banasora (in the plain south of ‘Aqra) and Rumta (in the mountains north of Dohuk), as well as settle for residing in the mixed Azadi collective town near ‘Aqra’s town centre. Furthermore, the *mukhtars* (village leaders) of Cham-Rabatke, Hizane, Khalilane Kashkawa in the western Nahla region (which consists of seven villages still populated exclusively by Assyrians), have also reported lands illegally expropriated from their villages by Kurds since as early as 1979, but also in 1994 and 1997, and have petitioned both the Iraqi central government and KRG for their return since 2003.¹⁵⁵

The Assyrian village of Lower Chaqala in the Barwari-Bala district is a case where Kurds from neighbouring Bireefka, including high ranking KDP members claiming to represent the KRG, have blocked attempts by its inhabitants to rebuild their homes and tend their orchards since 2000. In the old village school, with no access water, electricity or roads, four lonely old men hold the fort, changing the guard with four others every 15 days. Their irrigation hoses have continuously been cut, their wells refilled and their liquor shop and bar on the main road constantly ravaged and looted in order to harass them into leaving. Even the village sign, in Arabic, has been defaced and damaged, lying in the knee-high grass to the side of the main road.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Report of Assyrian Democratic Movement, Sapna Branch, undated, copy obtained and on file with Assyria Council of Europe; and Assyria Council of Europe interview with villagers (names withheld) at Hamziyah, December 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Three letters of complaint from these *mukhtars*, undated, copy obtained and on file with Assyria Council of Europe.

¹⁵⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at ‘Ayn, Nune, Dure and Chaqala, in December 2009.



Left: Two Assyrians from Lower Chaqala warm themselves by a fire outside their makeshift bar; Right: Lower Chaqala’s vandalised and damaged village sign.

The KRG authorities have only served to strengthen the Kurdish presence in Assyrian villages that Saddam had turned into collective towns during the Anfal campaign. A case in point is Birsive, where 500 Kurdish families from 20 villages in the mountains were settled, and who since 1991 have refused to return to their original homes. Birsive has now become a municipality with a large Kurdish infrastructure, a mosque, and a sumptuous new school, putting the local Assyrian school (also government-owned) to shame. Houses have also been built on Church land in the centre of the village, for families of Kurdish “martyrs,” who died serving the KDP. Kurdish authorities have also allowed three Kurdish families from nearby Kani-Gulan to remain in the Assyrian village of Bahindawaya, west of Alqosh, despite evicting all the Arab families that had been settled there through the Arabisation policies of the previous regime.



Left: The Syriac, Arabic and Kurdish village sign of Birsive. Crudely covered with Kurdish election campaign posters; Right: The main irrigation channel supplying water the fields and mills of Birsive, now illegally dried up by Kurdish villages upstream.



Above left: The run-down Syriac school at Birsive, complete with Kurdish signs and flag; Above right: The sumptuous new Kurdish school at Birsive; Below left: Houses for families of Kurdish martyrs in Birsive; Below right: The Mosque of Birsive.



Often the KRG itself has confiscated Assyrian lands to build government offices and housing for officials and employees, as well as business ventures, providing the landowners with terribly little or no compensation – as has been the case in Dohuk (the Mazi, Dream City and Istikbal complexes built on 17.5 hectares belonging to the family of Hanna Bede), Ankawa (Erbil International Airport), Sarsing (Azadi collective town built on their land) and ‘Ayn-Nune.¹⁵⁷ They have often used the excuse that this had already been done before 1991 by Saddam’s regime and that it was impossible to return the lands since they had become government (i.e. KRG) property by default.

The same process is occurring in the Nineveh Plains town of Baritleh, once wholly Assyrian, but where they now comprise only 60% of the population. Shabaks granted land confiscated from Assyrian farmers under the Baath regime are now refusing to return to their own villages and are demanding the establishment of their own places of worship, changing the area’s demography. In addition, the Kurdish-controlled local administration is forbidding Assyrians from building on their own plots of land, neither is it responding to calls from Assyrians to have their confiscated lands returned to them (as the Kurds are currently doing in Kirkuk). This is also happening on a smaller scale in Bakhdida and Karimlish.

¹⁵⁷ Assyria Council of Europe interviews Assyrians (names withheld) at Dohuk, ‘Ayn-Nune and Arbil, December 2009 and January 2010.



Left: Azadi collective town, built on land confiscated from the Assyrians of Sarsing; **Right:** The KDP office in ‘Ayn-Nune (Kurdish: *Kani-Masi*), built on land illegally confiscated from a local Assyrian. The building in the background flying the Kurdish flag is the village school, which teaches only in Kurdish.

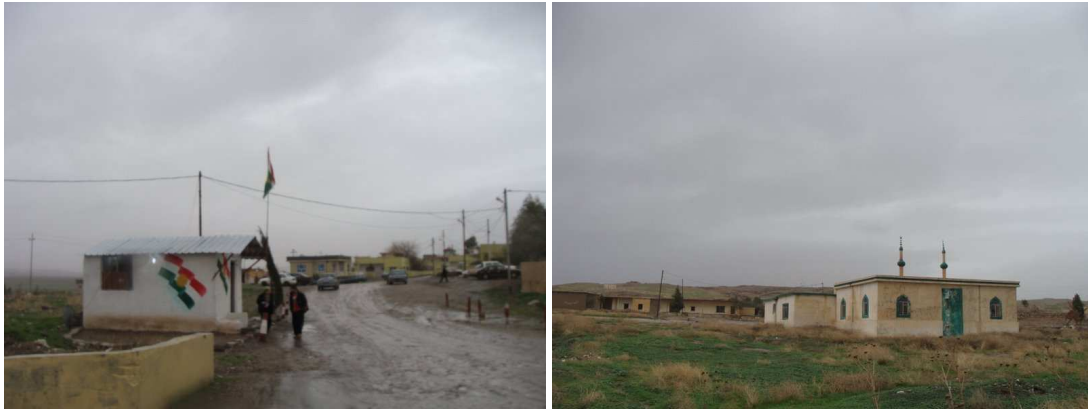


Disenfranchised, an Assyrian in Baritleh displays the title deeds to his land, which local authorities do not permit him to build on.

It only stands to reason why Mr Nimrud Baito, the leader of the APP and the KRG’s Tourism Minister from 2006 to October 2009, has continuously insisted that, “... *not even one metre has been taken by force by the KRG.*”¹⁵⁸ As previously noted, he would not have made it into the KRG parliament if he had not entered his party under the Kurdistan slate in the 2005 elections. Quite interesting is his mention in a 2006 interview with Zinda magazine of the return of the village of Peshabur (also known as Fishkhabor) – since the KRG is still refusing to demolish a mosque built illegally on the villagers’ land, and the Kurdish flag and security forces dominate this purely Assyrian

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Zinda Magazine, November 20, 2006.

village. It is also the case of Peshabur which set a precedent for other Kurdish squatters on Assyrian lands who now demand a sum of \$20,000 per family for their removal – which most Assyrians cannot afford.



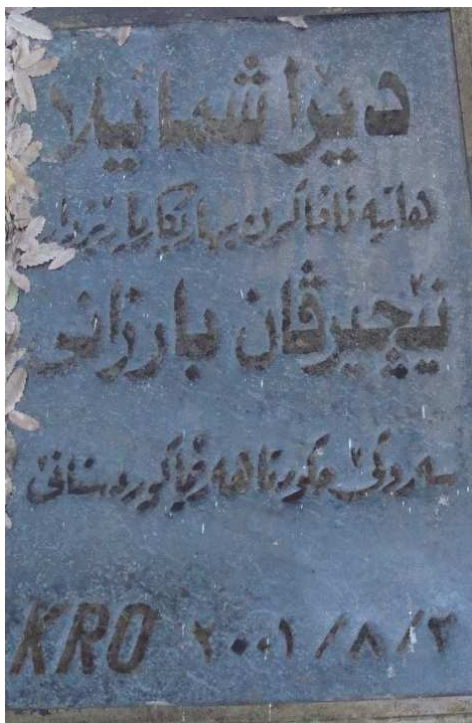
**Left: A Kurdish military checkpoint inside Peshabur;
Right: Left alone, the mosque on the outskirts of Peshabur.**

Reconstructing Churches and Villages

Since 1991, the KRG has overseen the rebuilding and renovation of over 20 churches in the IKR – often resulting in a partial or complete loss of the buildings’ historical character and detaching them completely from their context as structures providing evidence of a continuous Assyrian presence. As a result, these churches also include dedicatory plaques honouring the KRG and its leaders, making them tools in the artificial “Kurdistani” nation-building process.



Left: Our Lady Guardian of Plants Chaldean Catholic Church in Peshabur, completely detached from its historical context; Right: St. George’s Ancient Church of the East at Sharafiyah.



Signs in Kurdish, Syriac and Arabic glorifying Nechirvan Barzani, Mas'ud Barzani and Sargis Aghajan for building and restoring churches at Bishmiyaye (2001), Shaqlawa (2006), Peshabur (2007), and Karimlish (2009)



Left: The modern facade of the medieval St. Shmuni Syriac Orthodox Church in Baritleh; **Right:** All that remains of the sixth century Syriac Orthodox church of St. George at Bakhdida, with its thirteenth century fresco – the only one of its kind in Iraq. The rest of it was ruined to build a new structure with KRG money. The silhouette of the gigantic new belfry is also visible.



KRG-built water tanks at Dure (left), and Bishmiyaye (right) painted with Kurdish flags.



Left: The new KRG-built water-tank in Hazarjot; **Right:** A foundation stone, inscribed in Kurdish, at St. Shmuni Chaldean Catholic Church and cemetery, Mangesh.

The KRG has also overseen the reconstruction of more than over 100 destroyed Assyrian and villages as well as the few Armenian villages in the region. International NGOs with assistance from international governments, as well as the AAS and CAPNI, began this work in the 1990s, and later the KRG continued it under the UN oil-for-food programme and through the High Committee for Christian Affairs (HCCA). The HCCA, under Mr. Amir Goga in Zakho, is also responsible for illegally using money promised to build houses for Christians to fund new luxurious villas for Kurdish Aghas in the region, in return for their protection. Mr. Goga has also built a private school in Bedaro, with mostly Assyrian students, where the core-curriculum is taught in Kurdish, and the exterior walls gaudily decorated with Kurdish flags. Also, in keeping with its nationalist policies for Kurdification of the region, the KRG makes a clear point of painting the Kurdish flag on water tanks it provides purely Assyrian villages, as is the case in Dure, Bishmiyaye and Hazarjot. Whilst in theory the KRG believes that everyone in the IKR is entitled to return to their traditional communities and rural areas, and that villages should be maintained and supported, it is often the non-Kurds who suffer discrimination and other difficulties.



Homes by Aghajan. A worried Assyrian man in Shiyoz points to the cracks in the walls of his foundation-less, and shoddily built house.

Faced with the large influx of Assyrian IDPs since 2003 seeking security and stability, and returning to their ancestral villages and homes in the IKR, the KRG has provided them with new homes, churches and community halls. These new property developments are helping to temporarily alleviate the problem, but the long term problems which plague the foreseeable future are disastrous for the Assyrians. These houses are hastily built with cheap materials, often with poor foundations, leading them to develop severe structural damage and cracks – and costing about a third of the \$45,000 allocated to build each one. It is even estimated that many of these will collapse entirely within three years of being built. Even many of the churches are built cheaply with their paint fading and peeling, their roof tiles going from red to green, and marble wall panels and floor tiles cracking and

dislodging. The blame may be partially laid upon unscrupulous contractors, but this is not the issue at hand. If the Assyrians were able to earn a living, then fixing the houses, or building new ones would not be too much of a problem.



Churches by Aghajan and the KRG: St. George’s Ancient Church of the East in Bakhitme (left). Not only has the paint peeled off the dome, but the floor tiles have also come loose. At St. Sawa’s Assyrian Church of the East in ‘Ayn-Nune (right), the marble facade has dangerously cracked and is collapsing.



At oil-rich but impoverished Navkandala, not only have the roof tiles of the Aghajan-built church gone green (left), but many of the houses (right) are so dangerously cracked they are practically uninhabitable.

A case in point is the Assyrians of the Barwari-Bala district, which is a social disaster zone. In 21 Assyrian villages which have been repatriated 469 houses have been built, largely with KRG funding. Due to the lack of roads, schools, services, sound jobs, a recent drought and the failure of agriculture in the region, these houses are inhabited by less than 100 families, as well as 23 individuals. The Assyrian villages of Avsarke (10 houses), Tashish (14 houses) and Upper Challik (15 houses) have also been largely taken over and settled by Kurds in recent years because they are so lacking in any means to support a living that Assyrians have refused to resettle them.¹⁵⁹ This has also occurred in the Assyrian village of Meze to the south in the Gahra mountains where 20 houses were built by the KRG, and which are now inhabited by Kurds. In the

¹⁵⁹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) ‘Ayn-Nune and Dure, in December 2009.

western Nahla region, the village of Upper Hizane and some houses on the outskirts of Lower Hizane are completely empty, prompting the KDP to open up offices for it and related Kurdish organisations in two of them.



Open for business: The KDP and affiliated organisational offices in houses originally built for the Assyrians of Lower Hizane, in the purely Assyrian region of western Nahla.

Employment and Money-Earning Opportunities

At present Assyrians in the IKR face blatant economic discrimination in what can only be described as a covert campaign of ethnic cleansing. Assyrians are discriminated against in the workforce if they are not members of the KDP, and even more so if they do not speak Kurdish. Despite being indigenous to the area they are often questioned as to why they do not speak Kurdish and are thus suspected of being sympathetic to the Arabs. Assyrians and Yazidis are not allowed to open large and successful businesses unless they accept the partnership of a high-ranking KDP official, who will contribute nothing towards it. This is an unspoken rule, which if disregarded leads to mafia-style attacks and ransacking of the business by unknown assailants who are then not sought after, investigated or brought to justice. This corruption has also been noted by foreign journalists.¹⁶⁰

The only businesses Assyrians and Yazidis are permitted to open without being expected to have a KDP “partner” are those involving the sale and consumption of alcohol, since their religions do not forbid it (as was the norm under the Baath regime). This has led to their demonisation amongst religious Muslims, and may lead to future murders as have occurred in other parts of Iraq since 2003. This practice is almost identical to the way Jews were unwanted and mistreated in medieval Europe:

¹⁶⁰ Michael Rubin, “Bad to worse in Iraqi Kurdistan,” February 17, 2010, <http://corner.nationalreview.com>.

they were pushed into usury, considered an unclean job by religious Christians, which often led to them being the victims of pogroms and persecution. Because of this, Assyrian areas in the IKR are being rapidly ghettoised. For example, religious Muslim Kurds in Arbil will not dare set foot in Ankawa (the Assyrian quarter) because it is home to places where alcohol and drugs may be bought or consumed, and is also a venue for brothels, undercover prostitution, wild parties, and has a reputation for women with loose morals.¹⁶¹

This only leaves farming, which at present is an unsuccessful venture in the IKR. Most food produce in the IKR is imported from neighbouring Iran and Turkey, to dissuade local farmers from occupying themselves with agriculture, and to instead encourage them to rely solely on more lucrative employment as *peshmerga* fighters. This also affords them more rest time to attend to their homes and families since they serve on a basis of ten days on duty followed by ten days off. Since Assyrians ideally would not join the *peshmerga*, an army belonging to a Kurdish nationalist party, unless in desperate circumstances, this leaves most of them with no other option but to attempt to make a living off their land holdings. But prices for crops and foodstuffs are at an all-time low. In most cases the profit on the produce sold pays for no more than its transportation to the city.¹⁶²



Scenes of devastation at Lower Challik: July 2009.

In other cases Assyrian villagers have returned to find that the land around their villages is already being exploited by Kurds from elsewhere who demand monetary compensation (roughly \$20,000 each family) if they were to be returned. Countless petitions to the KRG have provided no outcome for scores of villages with unemployed youths watching as their ancestral lands are illegally taken from them. In the village of Lower Challik on July 7, 2009, Kurds from neighbouring Kesta¹⁶³ set fire to their crops, including their priceless apple orchards and vineyards, damaging 75 percent of their

¹⁶¹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at Arbil and Ankawa, in January 2010.

¹⁶² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at Dohuk, in December 2009.

¹⁶³ Kesta is known by villagers of Challik to have once been a mixed Assyrian Christian and Jewish village, though it is not known when it was taken over by Kurds. Its name is derived from Syriac too, and it is home to the ruins of some churches and a synagogue. Assyria Council of Europe interview with community leader (name withheld) at Lower Challik, December 2009.

land, as well as a few houses, hay and firewood, and leaving them penniless for the winter.¹⁶⁴ No inquest was made into the arson attack, which burned for three days, and neither were the culprits brought to justice. Crops and vineyards have also been deliberately damaged in Sarsing, and cases of Kurds stealing produce from Assyrian crops in the villages of Dere and Sarsing have been documented since 2002.

Assyrian villages such as Inishk and Sarsing are also being exploited by the KRG for the tourist industry with their Assyrian inhabitants standing to profit nothing from the re-development of restaurants, hotels and tourist chalets built by the previous regime. Whilst under Saddam local Assyrians shared a cut of the profits and contributed to the maintenance and operation of these facilities, the KRG now hands them over to contractors with no guarantee of employment or profit for the local Assyrians.¹⁶⁵



**Left: Developing the touristic cave restaurant at Inishk;
Right: Tourist chalets under construction at Sarsing.**

Another serious issue is the exploitation of Assyrian lands for oil drilling, as has occurred in the village of Navkandala since June 2009. The owners of the land upon which the oil has been discovered (covering roughly 175 hectares) are not allowed to visit it, and the Assyrian inhabitants of the village are not provided the opportunity of working on the oil-drilling facility operated in cooperation with Norwegian company DNO. This privilege has been reserved for Kurds from nearby Sarsulavke, with which they already have an ongoing property dispute. All the Assyrians of Navkandala have seen in return for their land and its strategic oil supply are glass souvenirs bearing the eagle representing the KRG, given to them by the company drilling the oil.¹⁶⁶

Because of their general disenfranchisement, Assyrian villages have become like some Native American reservations. Here the lack of employment opportunities has created a generation of young people with social problems fuelled by a desperate need for basic resources. Some of these serious issues now at large amongst Assyrians in the villages are drug and alcohol abuse, gambling and prostitution.

¹⁶⁴ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at Dohuk and Challik, in December 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at Inishk and Sarsing, in December 2009.

¹⁶⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) at Navkandala and Zakho, in December 2009.



Peanuts: A glass memento given to certain inhabitants of Navkandala by DNO and the KRG in return for the oil under their agricultural lands.



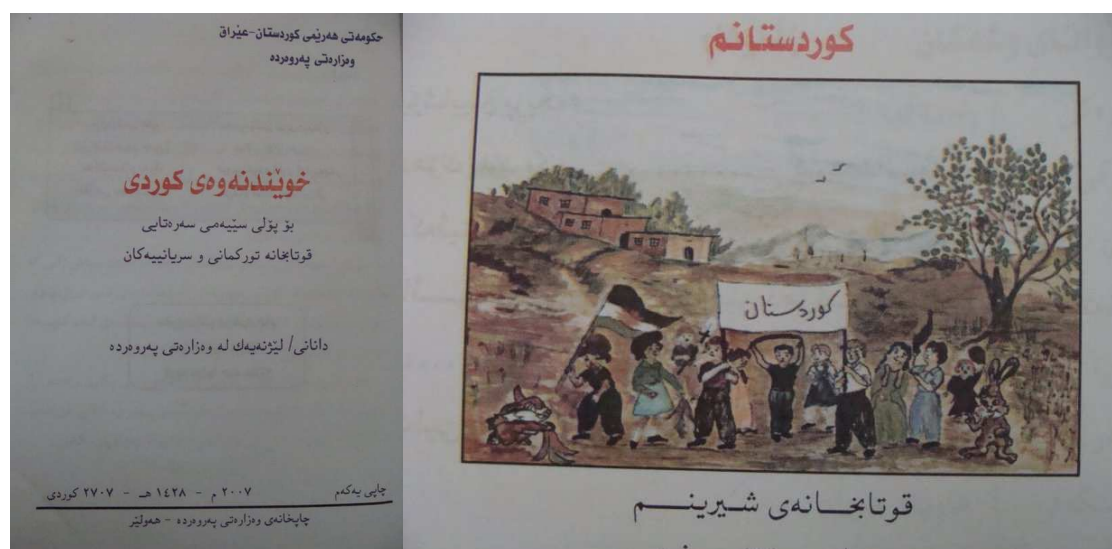
Gambling and alcoholism are two serious problems in the Assyrian community today, as a direct result of their disenfranchisement by others more powerful than them.

Education

Theoretically, the KRG believes in the right of all nationalities to learn and study in their mother tongue, and has put this principle into practice since 1992, not without creating various obstacles to impede this. That year the KRG Ministry of Education passed Article 4 in Law No. 4, establishing primary education in their mother tongue for minorities in the IKR. The first KRG-funded Syriac and Armenian primary schools were opened a year later in March 1993. There are currently 62 primary

and preparatory Syriac and Armenian schools in Arbil and Dohuk provinces, with nearly 7,000 pupils. Following the successful start of the primary schools, in 1997-1998 the KRG Ministry of Education started planning for Syriac secondary schools, and today there are more than 10 in Arbil and Dohuk provinces combined. The first round of these secondary school students graduated in 2004, and attempts are being made to open a Syriac language department in the University of Dohuk in the future after the successful establishment of one at the University of Baghdad in 2005.

Unfortunately just over half of the abovementioned Syriac schools are immersion schools, teaching all core subjects in Syriac. As an indigenous people with an endangered language, Assyrians are rightfully entitled to a complete education in their own mother tongue – and not just to study it as a language beside a core-curriculum taught in Kurdish, which is the norm for the rest of the “Syriac” schools. The former though are discouraged and left underfunded by KRG authorities, in comparison with latter; and Assyrian teachers are not encouraged to teach at those schools because, “They are set to be closed down in the future.” For those who insist, the process is made so hard for them that many just give up and consent to teaching in Kurdish schools.¹⁶⁷ Not only Assyrian, but also Turkmen education, has been deliberately neglected and since the registration of new students has significantly decreased it is reported to be closing down.¹⁶⁸ In the IKR basic linguistic human rights are tolerated, barely, but not respected for non-Kurds since this runs counter to the nationalist program of the KRG leadership. This violates Article 14.1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



Kurdish workbook for Turkmen and Syriac Schools (published 2007). One of the poems is titled “My Kurdistan” and is illustrated with a group of children dressed in Kurdish costume waving a Kurdish flag and a banner that reads “Kurdistan.”

In the Syriac and Turkmen immersion schools Kurdish for non-Kurdish speakers is obligatory as a second/foreign language. Though, after a close study of the specific textbooks used in its instruction, it has been found to be replete with Kurdish flags and nationalist poems glorifying Kurdistan – alienating members of these communities who identify on the whole as Iraqis and not Kurdistanis. Kurdish flags fly above these schools and their signage is also in Kurdish. If the schools require signage in their own language this is to be provided privately at the school’s expense. Often where the school is named after the village, the village’s Kurdish name is used even though there are no Kurds living in the village, further completing the process of Kurdification.

¹⁶⁷ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with teachers (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation (SOITM), “SOITM report to the UPR of Iraq,” February 2010, p. 4.



Syriac immersion primary and high schools at Sarsing (left) and Shiyoz (right). The signage is in Kurdish, gives Kurdish names of villages, and there is always a Kurdish flag. The Syriac sign at Sarsing was privately supplied.



Left: The Syriac immersion primary school at Dehe; Right: The Kurdish flag used at the Syriac immersion primary school in Bakhitme for the weekly flag-raising ceremonies.

It is also obligatory for children educated in these schools, even though there are no Kurdish students present, to conduct a Kurdish flag-raising ceremony once a week, sing Kurdish national songs and pledge allegiance to it and the Barzani family (of course, under the watchful eyes of the Kurdish language teachers who also double as KRG agents). Many Assyrian teachers are also pressured into joining the KDP and the Kurdistan Student Union is given complete freedom to recruit Assyrian students into their ranks.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with teachers (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.



The Kurdistan Student Union office in Ankawa, notice its name written also in Syriac.

Other difficulties faced by the Syriac immersion schools include the perhaps deliberate lack of textbooks and basic facilities and services such as photocopiers. Often textbooks arrive months from the end of the school year with the excuse that the Kurdish ones had to be printed first, then the Arabic ones. Whole classes of Assyrian children work from photocopies for the rest of the year. Even janitors for the Syriac immersion schools are no longer subsidised by the KRG and now must be privately funded.¹⁷⁰

Transportation is also a big issue, with many Assyrian students in remote areas being forced to either pay up to go to school, or settle for attending a Kurdish one. The KRG's Education Ministry has clamped down on funds formerly allotted for this purpose and now demand the full details of all drivers who are employed to transport students and teachers, and even their vehicle registrations. Instead the pressure to fund this rests on the AAS, diverting it from other more important humanitarian and infrastructure building projects in Assyrian towns and villages. According to Mr. Napoleon Patto, director of the AAS, "If we do not fund the transportation of students and teachers, we may need to accept the closure of some of the Syriac schools, and this will be the beginning of the end."¹⁷¹

Within the IKR, as well as the disputed territories Assyrian community and religious leaders known to be funded by the KRG, and specifically the KDP (among them Mr. Nimrud Baito, Bishop Petros Harboli, Bishop Mikha Maqdassi and others), have publicly denounced the Syriac immersion schools voicing their concerns for the "students' futures." Assyrian families have often been offered financial incentives to enrol their children in Kurdish schools instead of Syriac ones. Sometimes social pressure has even been applied by community and religious leaders with KRG backing.

Although the December 2009 KRG report states that they are unaware of any government schools in other parts of Iraq that offer education in Syriac, such immersion schools have existed in the Nineveh

¹⁷⁰ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with teachers (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

¹⁷¹ Assyria Council of Europe interview with Mr. Napoleon Patto whilst on a visit to Sydney, Australia, November 2009.

Plains towns of Bakhdida and Baritleh, as well as Kirkuk and Baghdad, since 2004. Syriac is also offered as a language course in primary and secondary schools throughout the towns and villages of the Nineveh Plains. Most of these also receive their textbooks from the General Directorate for Syriac Education in the KRG's Education Ministry.

The Media

In Arbil as well as in Dohuk are the bases of some of the major Assyrian/Syriac language media in Iraq. Several Syriac newspapers and magazines are published in these cities, partly with KRG funding, by pro-KRG Assyrian groups. Among them are *Quyaman* (by the APP), *Bet-Nahrain* (by the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party), *Radya Kaldaya* (by the Chaldean Cultural Centre), *Simtha* (by the Union of Assyrian Writers), *Motwa* (by the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council), *Hizel* (by the Hizel Centre in Zakho) and *Ankawa* magazine.

Interestingly, the December 2009 KRG report fails to mention the ADM's newspaper *Bahra*, circulated in both Syriac and Arabic editions for nearly three decades, as well as *Kikhwa d-Beth Nahrain* by the Assyrian Cultural Centre in Dohuk – which has not been registered as an official civil society organisation by KRG authorities since its inception in 1992. On similar lines, the Assyrian Cultural Directorate in Arbil was renamed the Syriac Cultural and Arts Directorate after 2004 and its administration has gradually passed from members of the ADM to Assyrian KDP members. It also publishes a magazine called *Banipal*.

Ishtar TV was established in 2005 with KRG funding and broadcasts from Ankawa. It is the mouthpiece and propaganda machine of KDP member and former KRG minister Mr. Aghajan, and the pro-KRG Ishtar Patriotic Slate, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council and the Committee for Christian Affairs. Its sole purpose is to compete against, undermine and challenge the hugely underfunded Ashur TV, mouthpiece of the ADM, which has existed since the 1990s and went to air on satellite after 2003. Kurdistan TV, the mouthpiece of the KDP, also presents a one-hour weekly programme, called *Soraya*, in Syriac.

In the past few years, crews from Ashur TV have found it increasingly difficult to cover special events at Assyrian churches in Iraq and the Diaspora, since a monopoly is now held by Ishtar TV. Countless times Ashur TV's reporters and cameramen have been verbally and physically abused by Assyrian "Church Guards" who do not grant them access to churches or other parts of some Assyrian towns and villages – simply because of their affiliation with the ADM.

As a whole, Assyrian print media, TV and radio networks that are not aligned with the KRG and its interests are not funded and thus suffer major setbacks in terms of paying their staff and buying up to date equipment. They are also undermined by the alternative media which are amply funded by the KRG and are more numerous, thus drawing many needy professionals to them.¹⁷² In this way KRG authorities sideline the independent Assyrian media so that they are less noticed by the broader community, but as the underdog they continue to maintain popularity.

The IKR's constitution: Equality and safeguards for minorities?

The IKR's draft constitution¹⁷³ was approved on June 24, 2009, by a majority of MPs in the KRG Parliament and will be put to a referendum. The constitution, which evolved from debates by politicians, intellectuals and civil society groups since 1992, is said to guarantee religious and language rights for all nationalities and religions, and is apparently explicit about the multi-ethnic

¹⁷² Assyria Council of Europe interviews with Ashur TV staff (names withheld) in Dohuk and Bakhdida, December 2009.

¹⁷³ Constitution of Iraqi Kurdistan Region, 2009, <http://www.perleman.org/files/sitecontents/300609092607.pdf>.

identity of the Region. The constitution grants the KRG all the powers and institutions of an independent country and clearly contradicts the Iraqi constitution. The draft regional constitution also lays claim to areas within Nineveh and other disputed territories, and asserts the KRG's right to deploy *peshmerga* outside of the region.¹⁷⁴ This has provoked outrage from the various ethnic groups in the region¹⁷⁵ and the central government, and further united Sunni and Shiite politicians. In the days after it was passed, 50 Iraqi MPs from different political parties signed a petition criticising it.

Article 5 names the Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmen and Arabs, as well as the Kurds, as the people of the Kurdistan Region. In Article 35, the constitution guarantees national, cultural and administrative rights to all minorities including Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Armenians. It also gives minorities the right to self-rule in areas where they are a majority of the population. Under Article 20 on equality, all forms of discrimination are prohibited, including discrimination based on religion, origin or nationality.

At the outset, though, what seems to be a progressive move from the KRG, is in actual fact a denial of the Assyrians as the indigenous people of the region, and a further denial of their ethnic identity splintering them into Chaldeans, Syriacs *and* Assyrians, equally on par with Armenians, Turkmen and Arabs. Yazidi, Shabak and Kaka'i minorities are clearly not mentioned because the Kurdish authorities do not recognise them as anything but Kurds.¹⁷⁶ It is also interesting to note that self-rule is not possible within an already existing semiautonomous region, such as the IKR, although its new constitution supports it.



Official signage for the Assyrian villages of ‘Ayn-Nune (Kurdish: *Kani-Mase*, left), and Hamziyah (Kurdish: *Hamzike*, right).

The constitution ensures the rights of all nationalities and religions to develop their own education, media, culture, and organisations. But as we have seen, this only applies where they tow the official line of the KRG and are not independent in their outlook. It also guarantees the right to use traditional local place names, though throughout the IKR and the disputed territories all signs give place names

¹⁷⁴ Article (2)(1) states, “Kurdistan-Iraq is a historical and geographic entity that includes ... the districts of Aqra, Al-Shaykhan, Sinjar, Tall Kayf, Qarqosh; and the subdistricts of Zammar, Ba'shiqah, Aski Kalak from the Governorate of Nineveh ...”

¹⁷⁵ In a joint statement issued on July 10, 2009, four groups representing Shabaks, Yazidis, Chaldo-Assyrians, and Turkmen contended that the Kurdish constitution opens the door to further conflict and “will destabilize the Middle East for centuries and result in disastrous outcomes.” See Human Rights Watch, “On Vulnerable Ground,” p. 36.

¹⁷⁶ The KRG constitution does recognise the Yazidis as a distinct religious group though.

of Assyrian villages in Kurdish. For example: Shiyoz has become Seje, Hizane has become Hezanke, Komane has become Kowani, Bishmiyaye has become Ishmayela, Iyat has become Yate, Araden has become Aradina, 'Ayn-Nune has become Kani-Mase, Hamziyah has become Hamzike, and Badriya has become Badrike. Even the Turkmen town of Altun-Kupri near Kirkuk, in the disputed territories, has been renamed in signs to Pirde. We have already discussed Ba'shiqa and Bahzani.



Only Kurdish flags fly above the offices of the Chaldean Democratic Union Party (CDUP) at Inishk (left), and the Chaldean Cultural Centre in Zakho (right).



Only Kurdish flags fly above the offices of the Syriac Cultural and Arts Directorate in Dohuk (left), and the Chaldean-Assyrian Cultural Centre in 'Aqra (right).



Only Kurdish flags fly above the offices of the Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in Dohuk (left), and the Shemsha Group for Acting in Ankawa (right).



Kurdish flags at the entrance to the purely Assyrian village of Dehe (left), and on a bus shelter at the purely Assyrian village of Bebede (right).

On the topic of cultural equality, Assyrians in the IKR are not allowed to fly their flag publicly. Most Assyrian offices belonging to political and civil society organisations that oppose exclusivist Kurdish nationalism, such as the ADM, fly neither the Assyrian nor the Kurdish flags in protest, and those that are aligned with the KDP and KRG only fly the Kurdish flag above their buildings. It is not unusual to see the Kurdish flag hoisted by Assyrian KDP members in purely Assyrian villages such as Dehe, Shiyoz, Bebede, Tilla and others. In Shiyoz, Assyrian flags that had remained hoisted after a celebration of the Assyrian New Year organised by the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council (aligned with the KRG) were forcibly removed and replaced with Kurdish flags by *Asayish* intelligence officers, with the excuse that they represented the ADM. Even cars in Dohuk bearing Assyrian flags on their rear-view mirrors are not spared, pelted with rocks or keyed.¹⁷⁷ The only Assyrian village where not one, but three, Assyrian flags are hoisted is Jedideh, home to controversial figure Franso, chairman of the HCCA and a high-ranking KDP member.

¹⁷⁷ Assyria Council of Europe interview with Assyrian community representatives (names withheld) in Dohuk and Shiyoz, December 2009.

Many more articles of the KRG's new constitution seem excellent on paper, but there remains doubt as to whether or not, given the Kurdish leaders' current track record, they will be implemented and enforced in reality. Article 31 states, "*The obligation of the authorities to ensure equality: Authorities in the Kurdistan Region will ensure the implementation of the principle of equality, will work to achieve it for national and religious components, and will create conditions to preserve their identity and take the necessary measures to strengthen them.*"¹⁷⁸ This has already been violated numerous times in the KRG, with numerous murders and kidnappings of Assyrians since 1991 left uninvestigated – terrorising relatives and friends into leaving. The most conspicuous case is that of former KRG parliament member Mr. Francis Shabo of the ADM, who was an outspoken critic of Kurds stealing Assyrian land, and a major campaigner for unity between the various Assyrian denominations. He was shot dead in 1993, a year after he entered parliament, and his killer – a high ranking KDP member and known assassin – is still living a luxurious life in a Dohuk villa.¹⁷⁹ No attempt has been made at investigating the assassination or bringing the killer to justice.



Left: Settlements of Kurdish squatters in the old tourist village of Inishk; **Right:** The Kore-Gavana collective town built by Saddam on Assyrian land, and which the Kurds are neither leaving, nor paying compensation for.

Article 32 states, "*The Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to the prevention of deliberate change in the proportion of the population in areas inhabited by different nationalities or religions, without prejudice to the removal of the effects of Arabization and the forced displacement by the Baathist regime in Kirkuk and other areas of Kurdistan - Iraq.*"¹⁸⁰ Of course, it does not mention the deliberate demographic alterations already affected by the KDP's nationalist policies which have seen hundreds of Kurdish families from Iran settled in the Assyrian town of Sarsing. Neither does it address the continuing grievances of Assyrians from places such Komane, Birsive, Kore-Gavana, Mangesh, Hamziyya, Inishk and others where Kurds were settled in collectives under Baath party policy or found refuge after the First Gulf War. In many of these locations Kurdish authorities settled the refugee families settled as "guests," until such time as their villages could be rebuilt. Nearly 20 years on, even in cases where this has been achieved, the vast majority of these unwanted guests are refusing to leave due to their new locations' convenience and good access to land, water and basic services such as roads and electricity. They are instead keeping their homes in their original villages, harassing the Assyrians indigenous where they now live and, due to the links of many of them with the KDP, they intimidate them into leaving for good.

Despite all these injustices against them, Assyrians and members of other minority communities are largely silenced through fear and threats, being unable to freely share truth regarding their experiences in the IKR. Foreign academics, reporters and human rights advocates are often closely minded and

¹⁷⁸ Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, "The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq," p. 11.

¹⁷⁹ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

even blocked from meeting with independent Assyrian political and civil society organisations which oppose KDP policy, in order to whitewash their appalling situation. One informant from the ADM, who chose to remain anonymous, received phone call from a high-ranking Assyrian member of the KDP after it was discovered that he had been accompanying a foreigner sent by his government to compile a human rights report on Assyrians in northern Iraq. “He asked me, ‘do you want a bullet between your eyes? Why are you looking for trouble and putting yourself in danger?’”¹⁸¹ The Hammurabi Human Rights Organisation is also not registered in the IKR and thus has no permission to operate and collect data regarding human rights abuses against Assyrians in that region.

The Question of an Autonomous Region for “Christians”

The KRG states that it supports the principle of an autonomous region for minority nationalities, where they form a majority in an area. It does not stipulate the possible size of such a region, nor does it define what it may comprise of administratively. Article 35 of the IKR constitution “*guarantees the rights of national, cultural and administrative Turkmens, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians, including self-rule where any of them form a majority of the population and regulated by law.*”¹⁸²

The KRG states that it believes that this principle should apply also in the disputed territories in the Nineveh Plains, not in imposing the idea on any group or nationality, “who should decide for themselves by democratic means how they wish to be governed.”¹⁸³ Rather in reality through their two-pronged campaign of patronage, and intimidation, as well as their obvious military and administrative presence in the area, they are clearly and deliberately influencing matters in a way which would favour them.

Of the parties that stood in the IKR parliamentary elections of July 2009, the KRG backed and funded Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council (which won 54% of “Assyrian” votes in the election through fraud) is obviously in favour of the Nineveh Plains becoming part of the IKR, and Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Autonomy List wants to absorb the Nineveh Plains into the IKR as an autonomous unit (8.5% of votes). Many of these votes in fact came from Kurdish towns and villages such as Begova and Batufa where there are no Assyrians residing. The National Rafidain List of the ADM (28% of votes) is against the Nineveh Plains joining the IKR, while the Unified Chaldean List does not seem to have expressed a strong view on it (almost 9% of votes).

In the Nineveh 2009 provincial elections, Assyrian parties that are in favour of the Nineveh Plains being incorporated into the KRG administered areas fared much better than those that oppose it. Of the three main blocks fighting for the reserved Christian seats, the pro-KRG Ishtar Patriotic List won 66% of the vote, and the ADM won 28%. It should be noted that Mr. Jevara Zaia of the ADM, the Assyrian representative elected to Nineveh’s provincial council in 2005 was unable to serve his full term due to being imprisoned for two years on false charges of fraud laid by his mostly Kurdish colleagues. He was released after being found innocent, only when it was too late for him to campaign for the 2009 elections.

The election results of 2009 are quite different to previous Assyrian election trends. Election results such as these though often must be taken with some speculation due to the very real problem of Kurdish electoral fraud. In previous election campaigns it has been known not only for Assyrians being told who to vote for; but also underage voting, the dead voting, multiple votes, and non-Iraqi Kurds being allowed to vote boosting their numbers dramatically. Many Assyrian IDPs in the IKR are told that they cannot vote since they are not on the electoral registers, and instead must go to another

¹⁸¹ Assyria Council of Europe interview with an Assyrian community leader (name withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

¹⁸² Kurdistan Regional Government: UK Representation, “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq,” p. 11.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 11.

polling station or the local electoral office – a process which takes hours. In many cases these Assyrians would not make it to the polls on time, or would give up out of frustration.¹⁸⁴

In the 1992 elections of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, roughly 55% of Assyrian voters chose the ADM, giving them four seats in the Regional Parliament. Supporters of Mr. Aghajan, the Kurdistan Christian Unity, gained 23% of the vote and one seat. The following year Mr. Francis Shabo, one of the four ADM representatives and an outspoken Assyrian land rights and unity advocate, was shot dead. His killer, a high ranking KDP member and known assassin, is still at large and unapprehended.

In the January 2005 Iraqi parliamentary elections, 76% of the Assyrian vote (36,255 out of 47,515) went to the ADM. It is unknown how many Assyrian votes would have gone to three other Assyrian parties that had entered under the Kurdistan List (among them the APP, CDUP and Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party) – since they would have been counted as Kurdish votes. Despite this, only one ADM member made it to the parliament and four seats were taken by Assyrians who had entered under the Kurdistan List, undermining the influence of the ADM. In a similar fashion, an ADM member was elected to represent Assyrians in the Nineveh Provincial Council, whilst an APP member who entered under the Kurdistan List was chosen to represent Assyrians in the Kirkuk Provincial Council. That same year, in the elections for the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Parliament, three of five seats were won by Assyrians from Kurdish-backed parties and two were won by the ADM. In these elections the ADM was forced to enter under the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan, if they were to win any seats.

In the second Iraqi parliamentary elections held in December 2005, roughly 81% of the Assyrian vote (44,263 out of 54,802) went to the ADM, gaining them one representative. Five parties and an independent that have Kurdish backing entered together under a separate list, but only won 7% of the Assyrian vote and no seats. The CDUP entered again under the Kurdistan List and gained one representative in the Iraqi Parliament, along with an Assyrian member of the KDP who also won a seat. It is not known though how many Assyrians would have actually voted for these two though since they would have been counted as Kurdish votes. This result again would have further served to undermine the influence of the ADM.

It is quite amusing that the December 2009 KRG report labels the ADM as anti-KRG, probably due its insistence on the dignity and integrity of the Assyrian people even when it opposes their ambitions to expand the territory under their control and indoctrinate its citizens with Kurdish nationalism. If the ADM was anti-KRG it would have refused to participate in the IKR's political life and would have withdrawn its representatives from its parliament years ago. Rather, over the years, it has become apparent that the ADM has been bullied and gradually marginalised by the KDP, losing seats and even a ministry to KDP-backed Assyrian parties. Using their same logic, the KRG may also be termed anti-Assyrian, but this is beside the point.

Fortunately the tables have somewhat turned in the recent 2010 elections, with the ADM winning 38% of the Assyrian vote (28,095 out of 73,315), with significant victories in Baghdad, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah and Anbar provinces, and three of the five reserved "Christian" seats in the new Iraqi Parliament. The KRG-backed Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council won 30% of the vote, and three separate lists belonging to other Kurdish-backed Assyrian parties won altogether 21% of the vote. Their significant victories were in the provinces of Nineveh, Arbil, Basrah and Diyala. The Popular Council won the two remaining reserved "Christian" seats.

For most Assyrians in northern Iraq, especially in the Nineveh Plains, the question of a Christian province or autonomous region is quite touch and go. From a political point of view, such an area would make it appear to Sunni Arab extremists and Iraqi ultra-nationalists that Christians harbour ambitions for an ethnically or religiously divided Iraq, which is plainly the main cause of the current

¹⁸⁴ Assyria Council of Europe interviews with community leaders and IDPs (names withheld) in Dohuk, December 2009.

violence in Iraq.¹⁸⁵ “Many fellow Arab students tell us, if autonomy is what you want then go to the Kurdish autonomous region, we don’t want you here.”¹⁸⁶ The choice as to whether to attach such an area to either the IKR or the central government is also a dilemma, though most independents opt for Iraqi government control. If this occurs they may become a target for the resentful Kurdish leaders who have invested so much money in the area, and lost the chance to exploit its natural resources, though if it does not, it will become the first battleground in any future war between Kurds and Arabs. Assyrians and other ethnic communities living in these territories have no desire in being a buffer between these two antagonistic ethnic groups. When asked whether they sided with Kurds or with Arabs, most Assyrians interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe would reply, “Neither. We side with Iraq!”

A majority of those interviewed by Assyria Council of Europe wished instead to be able to administer themselves locally as part of the existing government structure, be able to teach all core subjects in their mother tongue, and have local Iraqi police and military forces staffed by members of their own communities protecting their towns and villages. Due to the complex ethnic makeup of the area, others suggested the establishment of a new province under the central government’s control comprising the districts of Tell-Kayf, Hamdaniyah and Shaykhan and where Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen and Kaka’is can form a system of united cantons based on their existing settlement patterns and demography, again providing the local Iraqi military and security forces with personnel. Both the above ideas seem to be feasible since they do not compromise Iraq’s territorial integrity, and they also provide sound boundaries within which each of these small and endangered ethnic groups can continue to live on lands they have inhabited for centuries, safely and securely. Such models have also been suggested for future application in the provinces of Dohuk and Arbil, though this is a long way off due the nationalist policies of the ruling KDP which is attempting to ethnically cleanse the areas under its control to create a Kurdish nation-state.

¹⁸⁵ Saad Hanna Sirop, “Kidnapped Chaldean Priest: No to the Niniveh plain ethnic project,” AsiaNews, August 6, 2007, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Kidnapped-Chaldean-Priest-:-No-to-the-Niniveh-plain-ethnic-project-9498.html>; See also Louis Sako, “Nineveh Plain: a ghetto for Iraqi Christians is an illusion,” AsiaNews, April 20, 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nineveh-Plain:-a-ghetto-for-Iraqi-Christians-is-an-illusion-15025.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Assyria Council of Europe interview with a student of Mosul University (name withheld), December 2009.

II. Conclusions

The KRG has a clear and consistent policy of ethnic cleansing through threatening and intimidating and disadvantaging members of indigenous minorities, including the Assyrians. This pressure, as well as discrimination and heavy-handed terror tactics, has prompted scores of disenfranchised Assyrian families to flee the country in the last few years. Having suffered oppression themselves in the past, the Kurdish leadership have now become the oppressors as they attempt to turn the areas under their control into a Kurdish nation-state along the lines of Kemalist Turkey and Baathist Iraq. All rights for non-Kurdish minorities to political representation, education, free expression in the media, and safety and security are tightly controlled and kept under close scrutiny. Those who openly disagree with the KRG, KDP and their nationalist policies live in constant fear of retribution.

Recommendations

To the Kurdistan Regional Government:

Modify the constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to recognise Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Syriacs) as one group, and as an indigenous population; and accord legal recognition to Shabaks, Yazidis and Kaka'is as distinct ethnic groups.

Repeal all decrees relevant to “nationality correction” and “Kurdification”, and permit affected persons the right to determine their own ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of indigenous non-Kurdish ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations.

Remedy the injustice caused by the Kurdistan Regional Government’s practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Recognise non-Kurdish IDPs with ancestral roots from villages in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as locals and refrain from making them apply for residence permits.

Restore all expelled and deported non-Kurds to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, provide just compensation. Cease placing obstacles in their search for employment and sources of income and crack down on discrimination and corruption.

Promote employment opportunities for non-Kurds who were have been deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force their migration out of the region.

Cease repression of political and civil society organisations that oppose Kurdish nationalist policies in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories. Allow such organisations to operate freely and without intimidation and fear.

Cease funding political and civil society organisations that divide ethnic communities and support the KDP's nationalist policies by undermining and challenging existing ones which do not.

Ensure that independent non-Kurds can fully participate in public affairs without fearing retribution for differing political views. Cease arbitrarily arresting and detaining non-Kurdish activists.

Transfer detainees originating from Nineveh and Kirkuk Provinces from prisons in the IKR to Nineveh and Kirkuk prisons supervised by local judicial bodies, and allow treatment of such detainees according to due process of law.

Initiate independent and impartial investigations of individuals, including Kurdish security forces, alleged to be responsible for carrying out killings, kidnappings, beatings and torture against minorities. Make the results public and discipline or prosecute, as appropriate, the criminals and even officials who authorised or used excessive force.

Recognise Nineveh Province's 19 March 2003 boundaries until such time as the status of the disputed territories may be altered by constitutional means, and take steps to resolve bilateral issues with the Iraqi Government, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric concerning mutual relations, the status of disputed territories and the issuance of oil and gas contracts in these areas. Also, seek to minimise security risks by refraining from military manoeuvres in disputed territories without pre-notifying the other side.

Cease funding private militias to carry out public security responsibilities in non-Kurdish towns and villages located in the disputed territories outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Consult with the representatives on non-Kurdish communities to put in place policies for their protection. Allow municipalities to hire police officers from among their own communities, in accordance with existing procedures outlined by Iraq's Interior Ministry.

Increase funding to non-Kurdish immersion schools and cease the obstacles placed in their operation.

Cease the indoctrination of non-Kurdish children through educational programs in which they are made to glorify Kurdistan at the expense of their own ethnic identity.

Cease the obstacles placed before non-Kurds claiming lands they have lost to Kurdish squatters and conduct proper inquests into incidents of non-Kurds being abducted or murdered in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Cease electoral fraud and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.

Allow independent Iraqi and international human rights organisations to work unfettered in the Nineveh Plains and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and to provide unbiased information.

Invite the UN independent expert on minority issues to provide an impartial assessment of the situation of non-Kurdish ethnic communities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and in the disputed territories.

To the Government of Iraq:

Facilitate rebuilding the Iraqi state by reducing violence in the country and instituting stability in the region, to create a powerful and viable centralised Iraq.

Amend the Iraqi Constitution to: Reduce the restrictions on the state authorities, remove contradictory articles, clearly define and strengthen the power of central government, and grant priority to the central government in shared authorities and all future decisions.

Article 4 of the Iraqi constitution should be rephrased so that it ensures protection of minority groups' linguistic and cultural rights, removes discrimination between the ethnic communities in Iraqi society, improves the access of ethnic communities to education in their own mother tongue, and prevents the publication of immense Iraqi state documentation in Kurdish.

Implement joint administration in educational matters in disputed districts' educational facilities through the creation of a committee comprising members of all ethnic communities in the education directorates of Nineveh and Kirkuk.

Transfer teachers in the disputed districts who receive their salaries from the KRG to the authority and payroll of Nineveh and Kirkuk's education directorates.

Protect and guarantee the dignity and empowerment of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at all levels of government, including provincial, regional and local administrations. Ensure protection of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in the disputed territories through security measures, by ceasing discriminatory resource and service allocation to areas with heavy minority presence, halting efforts to manipulate such groups or enlist them to their side and providing fair political representation.

Local recruitment into Nineveh's security forces and especially integration of members of diverse ethnic groups in security forces deployed in disputed territories.

Implement, as the new provincial governments are formed, an ambitious economic recovery program focused on infrastructure repair and revitalising the agricultural sector. Pressure the Nineveh Provincial Council especially to pledge to release \$500 million in unspent past budget funds to the local government sector.

Facilitate the effective involvement of Iraqis in rebuilding of the state on a democratic basis – NGO laws should be instituted to international best practice.

Encourage international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty international to open offices in northern Iraq.

Create an independent inquiry to determine who was responsible for the carefully-planned systematic campaign of killings and bombings that targeted Assyrians in Mosul between September and November 2008, and November 2009 and February 2010, and the subsequent displacement of over 12,500 Assyrians. The inquiry should not only identify the killers, but also underline why the security services failed to prevent the attacks.

Restore the rule of law and the control of the Iraqi central government, police and military in all areas outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of

the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Initiate independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Pressure the Kurdistan Democratic Party to cease electoral fraud in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories. Invite and allow foreign observers to monitor the election process in the area, as well as count the votes.

Look into the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To the United States, Coalition Countries and the United Nations:

Urge the government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to investigate allegations of human rights abuses of minorities by Kurdish and Arab officials.

Assist relevant Iraqi parties to reach the necessary compromises in Nineveh, primarily by: a) pressing the Iraqi government to reintegrate certain members of the Baath party and the insurgency in local civilian and security institutions; b) pressuring local allies that rely heavily on the U.S., notably tribal forces, to promote a power- and security-sharing agreement; and c) insisting on the necessary protection of the diverse indigenous ethnic groups.

Seriously consider adding U.S. military officers to Arab and Kurdish patrols as a transitional confidence-building measure to improve communication, coordination and cooperation.

Emphasise to the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to remedy the injustices caused by the it's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions by intimidating and threatening those who oppose them, causing them to flee their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the non-Kurdish inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality.

Emphasise to the Iraqi government the need for a thorough and independent inquiry into the September-November 2008, and November 2009-February 2010, killings of Assyrians in Mosul, as well as independent and unbiased investigations of all individuals, including Kurdish security forces, allegedly responsible for carrying out killings, beatings, and torture against members of minority communities.

Do not cooperate with the Kurdish Regional Government until the Kurdish authorities stop the suppression of other indigenous Iraqi communities, abandon claims to lands inhabited mainly by non-Kurds, and abandon the use of militias, intimidation and violence.

Encourage the establishment of an area where indigenous minority communities can prosper, progress and protect themselves within the framework of a united and free Iraq.

To UNAMI and International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Aid Organisations:

Complete the institution of offices in the disputed territories, such as Kirkuk, Mosul, the Nineveh Plains, Tell-Afar, Tuz Khurmatu and Diyala, and provide them with sufficient staff and experts.

Initiate regular fact-finding missions independent of the Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to discover what is really happening to minority communities on the ground.

Cease employing minders, guides or translators that have links to the governments and ruling parties and ensure that all guides or translators employed belong to the same community as that being researched. Otherwise informants will be too scared to provide accurate statements regarding abuses against them.

Offer to act as foreign observers to monitor the election process in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and disputed territories, as well as count the votes.