



Opinion Editorial

Iraq's Shabaks Are Being Oppressed By Kurds

By Hunain Al-Qaddo

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(AINA) -- Shabaks are originally Aryans, they settled in the Nineveh plain during the Safavid Empire (1502-1736) and they live in a strategic strip of land between the Khazir and Tigris rivers, in 72 scattered villages; some of them live on the eastern side of Mosul. The approximately 400,000 members of the community live within the administrative boundaries of Nimrod, Qaraqosh, Bartilla, Basheqa, and Telkep. Currently they comprise a third of the inhabitants of the town of Bartilla. Shabaks enjoy different norms, values, traditions, recipes and clothes from Kurds and Arabs. They are **neither Arabs nor Kurds** and they do not intermarry with Kurds. Their language, Shabaki, is a mixture of Farsi, Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish and cannot be understood by Kurds.

Shabaks are a peace loving people and have been living peacefully with their Assyrian brethren, with whom they have cooperated and worked to preserve the character of the area. Shabaks are identified as "Shabaks" by their Assyrian, Yezidi and Arab neighbors, and even by the Kurds. They are an industrious and trusty people and as a result have become very wealthy in recent years. Shabaks are Muslims but they are not fanatics or extremists, and are neither aggressive nor commit violence. About 70% of them are Shiites and the rest are Sunni.

Iraq recognized the Shabaks as a distinct ethnic group in 1952 but they suffered badly under Saddam's regime, which destroyed 22 of their villages and deported 3000 families to North of Iraq. Many Shabaks were falsely accused by the former regime of being members of the Islamic Call Party and were tried and executed.

Shabaks welcomed the political changes in Iraq and supported the coalition forces in the Nineveh region, hoping that Iraqis would be able to experience a new era of democracy and freedom. They have now their representatives in the Nineveh governorate, in the Qaraqosh, Bartilla, Basheqa, Telkep and Nimrod municipalities.

Since the liberation of Iraq, Kurdish militias have assumed control of the Shabak areas and are attempting to Kurdify the people by calling them "Kurd Shabaks", in order to annex the eastern side of Mosul into the Kurdish territory. Kurds have detained Shabaks and Assyrians and their armed militia roams the towns and villages terrorizing the people and raising the Kurdish flag over schools in Fadilia, Basheqa, Khorsabad, Daraweesh and other towns. The Kurds, particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party, have opened party offices even in the smallest villages.

Kurds have opposed the recognition of Shabaks as a distinct minority in Iraq, and they have co-opted their identity, under the umbrella of democracy and in full view of the world.

Dr. Hunain Al-Qaddo is the General Secretary of the Democratic Shabak Assembly and the Shabak representative in the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly. He is a member of Iraq's Constitution Committee and Chairman of the Iraqi Minorities Council.

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