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Guest Editorial

Democracy in Iraq or Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians?

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(AINA) -- For the last 100 years, the Kurds, through wars and rebellions against their neighbors, have driven the Christian Assyrians out of their land and have occupied it. The Christian Assyrian history is replete with massacres inflicted on them by the Kurds who lived primarily in the Zagros mountains north of Mosul, bordering between Iran and Turkey. From there they descended into the valley to plunder the Christians who were unable to defend themselves because as Dhimmis they had been prohibited from bearing arms since the invasion of Mesopotamia by the Moslem Arabs in the 7th century AD. They lived as subservient to the Islamic laws and were not allowed to defend themselves even when attacked by Moslems.



The major Kurdish massacres of the Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Syriacs) happened between 1828-1833 in northwest Iran, the plain of Nineveh in Iraq, and southwest Turkey. The Badr Khan massacres between 1843-1847, the Assyrian and Armenian massacres in Turkey between 1895-97 and the massacres of the Assyrians during World War I, when three-fourths of population, amounting to 750,000 people, was wiped out.

In 1933 some Kurdish tribes participated in the Massacre of Semail, where more than three thousand Assyrians were killed. Kurdish rebellions in Iraq and Turkey during the 20th century caused the destruction of Assyrian villages in the two countries and the driving out of their inhabitants who were not allowed to return. The number of Assyrians killed during the 19th and 20th centuries by the Kurds or in cooperation with Turkey is estimated at one million.

Since World War I, Kurds in great numbers have migrated from the Kurdistan mountains and Iran into northern Iraq displacing the Assyrians who, because of massacres, had been reduced in number. The Barzani tribe lived in the Hakkari mountains before descending into Iraq. During World War II, Mostafa Barzani and his fighters moved to Iran where he became commander of the army for the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in that country, where the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was organized. The Kurds' flag in Iraq is a slightly modified Iranian version. The wars between the Kurds and the Iraqi government during 1960 to 1990, the first invasion of Iraq by the US in 1991, which provoked Saddam's persecutions of the Assyrians, Kurds and the Shiites, and finally the second invasion of Iraq by the US, which incited terrorism against Christians has resulted in driving out more than a million Assyrians out of their homeland in northern Iraq, making it possible for the Kurds to claim it as Kurdistan.

Recent report by the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees reveals that almost half of the 500,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria who have asked for temporary asylum through the UN refugee agency are Christian Assyrians, even though Christians constitute an estimated 5% of the population in Iraq. Tens of Thousands of Iraqi Christians are stranded in Jordan also.

The reasons for the Iraqi Christian flight was explained by Halfath Hamama, an Iraqi refugee in Syria, as follows : "Our children, wives, and family members are kidnapped every day. They send us a note telling us to give them fifty thousand dollars or they will kill our family. They send us their fingers or toes, pictures of them beaten and bruised, and tell us we bring this on our head because we are Christians and collaborate with the Christian Americans," Muslim terrorists in Iraq threaten to abduct or kill people whose families refuse to pay amounts ranging from \$100,000 to \$150,000 for Mafia-style protection. Families must beg for cash, sell their homes and belongings, leave the country or face death.

More than a quarter of a million have left their homes, businesses, jobs and have fled to neighboring countries. In one neighborhood of Mosul alone 30 Christian houses remain abandoned because their owners fled. Muslim religious leaders instigate violence and extortions against the Christians hoping to drive the entire community out of the country. They have also advised their followers not to buy Christian property so that they can own it for free when they flee.

Those who were forced out brought with them only what they could carry. They live in terrible conditions because neither the Iraqi nor other governments have shown any interest in helping them. The United Nations reported that if their numbers increases beyond 250,000 the results could be catastrophic for the region. Since they have been driven out of their homeland

they may need a safe haven as soon as possible.

While millions of American dollars were spent before these elections to bring the Kurdish refugees to northern Iraq including others from Iran, Turkey and Syria, not a penny is allocated to do the same with the Christian refugees. How can these elections be considered equitable to the Christians if hundreds of thousands of their people have been driven out of the country? Most did not participate in Iraq's out-of-country elections because they have lost all hope of being able to return to their homeland. Given such facts, Assyrians cannot be faulted for considering the recent elections as another opportunity for the Kurds to dispossess them of their rights and land.

The IECI has received hundreds of complaints, accusing the Kurds of not allowing others to vote in the recent elections, they inflated their voting numbers by bussing voters from Iran, multiple voting and other fraudulent practices. In two previous elections Kurds openly prevented tens of thousands of Assyrians from voting. In this election Kurds have been able to garner tens of thousands of Assyrian votes through intimidation and fraudulent practices. The election posters of the Assyrian Democratic Party were routinely defaced. The Kurdish political posters included pictures of the Cross and Assyrians in their traditional costumes to confuse Christian voters in believing that they were voting for a Christian slate. One of their posters included the picture of the Assyrian slate leader's daughter falsely implying that she endorsed voting for them. Since the Kurdish military rules the region no one can stop or penalize them for illegal practices.

Preliminary reports indicate that Kurds have won about 70 seats in the Iraqi parliament which means 2,800,000 Kurds had to vote to make such a number of seats possible [70 X 40,000 votes per representative], however since the population of Kurds is about 3,000,000 2/3rd of the population or 2,000,000 Kurds would have been eligible to vote since the other one third is under 18 years old let alone the fact that it would have been impossible for the hundred percent of the eligible Kurdish voters to have participated in the elections.

It is obvious that Kurds will continue their predatory practices to dominate northern Iraq and drive out non-kurds from the region by any means possible. If there is any hope for the historically oppressed and dispossessed Christians of Iraq to continue to live in their historic homeland their voices need to be heard in the Iraqi parliament. Kurds so far have done everything in their power to prevent them from doing so. To overcome such oppressions, Christians should be assigned a specific number of seats in the Iraqi Parliament, otherwise how can they be assured of their rights in their homeland? Even in the Islamic Republic of Iran Assyrians are allowed a seat in the parliament though their population is less than 20,000.

William Warda is an Assyrian from Iran. He attended Roosevelt University in Chicago and has written various articles about Assyrian history and their present situation for the Assyrian Star, Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society, and other publications. He is the webmaster of [Christians of Iraq](#) website.

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