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## Guest Editorial

### Genocide Unfolding: Death of a Catholic Assyrian Archbishop in Iraq Rosie Malek-Yonan

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Los Angeles (AINA) -- While leaving Mosul's Holy Spirit Cathedral on February 29, 2008, gunmen abducted Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, killing his driver and two bodyguards (AINA [2-29-2008](#)). Twelve days later, the kidnapped archbishop was found dead, buried in a shallow grave near Mosul (AINA [3-13-2008](#)).

The widespread condemnation of last week's death of the 65 year-old Assyrian Archbishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Mosul, Iraq has been reverberating around the world. From Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan to Pope Benedict XVI, the expression of outrage has been heard. There's no shortage of statements issued by various Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac groups, individuals and journalists. Various Christian groups around the globe have also been lending their voices in support of the Christians in Iraq. Stories of Archbishop Rahho's death streaming the news for the past two weeks, clearly attest to the fury.

Pope Benedict XVI issued an urgent request during his Sunday sermon this week to end the massacre in Iraq. Will an abstract plea of peace in Iraq bring about change? Will the Pope's cry of "enough to the violence in Iraq" stop the brutality? Or will the words of the pontiff quickly fade into oblivion by his next Sunday's Vatican sermon? The Pope has made similar pleas in the past that have gone unanswered.

Did the U.S. government show enough concern to quickly and actively look for Archbishop Rahho while he was fighting for his life in the hands of his capturers? It was repeatedly reported that he suffered from a heart problem and was dependent upon medication for survival that he was deprived of by his kidnapers.

Clearly the outrage was not enough to prompt the U.S. government to take immediate action while the archbishop was held for ransom.

But what if it had been an American, European, or Israeli abducted for ransom? Would the world have reacted differently?

Alone and abandoned, Iraq's rapidly declining Assyrian Christian nation is left to fend for itself while besieged by daily terror. Unarmed and isolated, this small nation cannot fight the extreme terrorism that is targeting its people. Not even in retaliation do the minority Christians in Iraq strike back against their aggressors. These systematic violent attacks have now turned into a full-blown genocide against the Assyrians, the indigenous people of Iraq that includes the Chaldeans, Syriacs, and all the other various Christian denominations.

With millions of dollars vested in the Iraq War and with all its sophisticated war machinery, the U.S. has no handle on this conflict that has been erupting in the battlefields of Iraq since 2003. How then can an unarmed and unprotected small minority with no funding and no weaponry expect to survive under the same conditions?

After more than four years of deliberate attacks on the Christian population in Iraq, there seems to be a "momentary outrage" about the death of an archbishop. But time and time again, we have witnessed the emergence of a "momentary outrage" that



Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho

falls short on impulsion. On October 11, 2006, Fr. Paulos Eskandar, a Syrian Orthodox priest was beheaded with his arms and legs hacked off. Surely that crime should have been enough to capture the world's attention and to bring about change in the treatment of the Christians in Iraq.

But how long will these cries of unjust against this latest offense last? Now that Archbishop Rahho has been laid to rest, will he, too, fade from memory like all the others before him? Or will the "momentary outrage" continue long and loud enough for the good citizens of the world to take on a more proactive role to save this nation from extinction? Will President Bush have the courage to take off his blinders or will he continue to stumble in the dark until his final day in office?

With every attack on the Christians in Iraq, I ask, "Have we reached the blistering point? Will this be the turning point for the Assyrians?" I usually find my answer when I see the stories rapidly fading.

Certainly the death of Archbishop Rahho is a great tragedy but by no means is it an isolated case and should not over shadow the [systematic and targeted murder](#) of countless other innocent Christians in Iraq.

In June of 2006, my American government, the same government that attacked Iraq, invited me to [testify](#) on Capitol Hill about the persecution of the Assyrians in Iraq since 2003. There was a promise of hope in the air. I witnessed the "momentary outrage" on the part of the members of the Congressional Committee of the 109th Congress I appeared before. My testimony even brought Representative Betty McCollum to tears.

The "momentary outrage" lasted long enough to prompt Congressman Christopher Smith to visit Iraq and meet with Assyrian Christians including Pascal Warda, a former minister in the Iraqi transitional government, and turned in my report to U.S. Officials in Iraq.

Believing to be a man of his word, I have since been holding Congressman Smith accountable for his promise to me when on the record he stated:

"I thank you for that very powerful testimony. I just want you to know that you point out no one's taking notice. The reason why we invited you and wanted you here was to try to begin to rectify that. To raise this issue with our own government and other coalition partners, especially the Iraqis. Your testimony will be used, I can assure you, to try and rectify things."

But even though the atrocities committed against Assyrian Christians were brought to the attention of Washington and my report went full circle when Congressman Smith returned it to the "scene" of the crime, it did not reduce the amount of violence perpetrated against Assyrians in Iraq. On the contrary, the brutality escalated into an unstoppable frenzy while the West continued to turn a blind eye. The promise of hope vanished.

From 2003 to 2008, 48 churches have been attacked, bombed, burned and destroyed. In January 2008, seven simultaneous attacks were made again on churches and monasteries. Assyrian children and clergy beheaded and dismembered. Assyrians kidnapped for ransom and murdered. Young Assyrian boys crucified. Women and young girls raped. Assyrian men and boys tortured. Infants burned. Assyrians intimidated and threatened. Land and property confiscated. Business destroyed. Forced migration in a large-scale exodus from Iraq that at one point escalated to 2,000 Assyrians each day. Muslims carrying out threats of Convert or Die. Forced Islamization by way of Assyrian Christians ordered to pay a jeziya, a tax levied on Christians, a practice that is entrenched in ancient Islamic practice. Despite all the crimes against the Assyrians in Iraq, this small nation has continued to remain peaceful, patient and tolerant witnessing its own demise through a modern day ethnic cleansing with the full knowledge of the U.S. and the Coalition Forces making them silent accomplices to these crimes.

Today's Assyrian Genocide in Iraq is reminiscent of the Assyrian Genocide of 1914-1918 in Ottoman Turkey and northwestern Iran where two-thirds of that nation were exterminated. Silent accomplices to those crimes were plentiful.

Since the liberation of Iraq, hundreds of thousands of Assyrians, who were once productive members of society in their homeland in Iraq, have become refugees, stranded and now abandoned in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. They once owned businesses, homes, communities, schools, and churches. Now they live in absolute poverty, forsaken with no hope on the horizon as they face deportation from those respective countries.

Perhaps Congressman Donald Payne's June 30, 2006 comment on the record to me was more apropos when he stated, "The wheels of justice sometimes grind slowly." In the case of the Assyrians, the wheels of justice have stopped.

In June of 2007, a year after my Congressional Testimony, the U.S. Congress approved a \$10 million aid through a Sub-Committee on State and Foreign Operations to assist the minorities in the Nineveh Plain in Northern Iraq, namely the Assyrian Christians. Compared to the destructions of lives brought upon the Assyrians in Iraq by the U.S. invasion, a \$10 million aid is a band-aid solution to a much deeper, and far more serious problem.

The Leave or Die message regularly delivered to the Assyrians of Iraq by the Muslims is a daily reminder of the instability the U.S. has created for that Christian nation. Unless an immediate plan is put into action to establish an Assyrian administered region in Iraq, with a police force drawn from Assyrian towns and villages in the Nineveh Plains, this ancient civilization will without a doubt disappear.

The simple fact is that when the United States, a Christian country, attacked Iraq, it was seen as an attack on Islam. The Assyrian Christians of Iraq including all the various religious denominations have become a target of retribution against the western Christian invaders. The reluctance on the part of the U.S. to save the Christian minorities in Iraq may stem from the simple fact that the Muslim Iraqis will view this as the U.S. "helping one of its own." Could this be one of the reasons the U.S.

government chooses to not deal with this embarrassing disaster?

The Christians in Iraq did not start the war in Iraq. Today they are caught in the line of fire while the U.S. continues to evade the human tragedy of the genocide it is directly responsible for when President Bush first ordered the attack on Iraq.

The actions of the U.S. government are nothing less than irresponsible. Why should the Assyrians have to pay the price of this war with such heavy losses? These losses will never be recouped.

As an American citizen and as an Assyrian, I am outraged at the callousness of my government in addressing the predicament it has placed my Assyrian nation in. If the intention of the U.S. is to continue to act as though it does not notice this problem, then before washing its hands completely of the chaos it has created in the Middle-East firstly it must train and arm the Assyrian Christians fully so that they can combat and cope with the daily attacks. Secondly, it is imperative that the U.S. and Iraqi governments immediately deal with the Assyrian issue in the same manner as they did in dealing with the Kurds back in 1991, by establishing an "Assyrian Safe-Zone." With the help of the United Nations, the prosperity of this region can slowly begin, and perhaps finally the Assyrians will be able to once again become a thriving nation on their own, much like the Kurds.

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*Rosie Malek-Yonan is an Assyrian actor, director and author of [The Crimson Field](#). She is an outspoken advocate of issues concerning Assyrians, in particular bringing attention to the Assyrian Genocide and the plight of today's Assyrians in Iraq since the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in 2003. On June 30, 2006, she was invited to [testify](#) on Capitol Hill regarding the genocide and persecution of Assyrians in Iraq by Kurds and Islamists. She is on the Board of Advisors at Seyfo Center in Europe that exclusively deals with the Assyrian Genocide issue. She has acted opposite many of Hollywood's leading actors and has received rave reviews both as an actor and director. Most recently, she played the role of Nuru Il-Ebrahimi, opposite Reese Witherspoon in New Line Cinema's "Rendition," directed by Oscar winning director Gavin Hood. To schedule an interview with Rosie Malek-Yonan, please send your request to [contact@thecrimsonfield.com](mailto:contact@thecrimsonfield.com).*

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