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## Guest Editorial

### The Marginalization of Iraq's Minorities Was Expected

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(AINA) -- There is no doubt that Christians and other minorities are being overrepresented among Iraqi refugees.<sup>1</sup> The persecution of minorities is well known and has been subject to intense debates during the past year. While visiting Sweden last year, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki promised to protect returning Iraqis, including Assyrians. No one believed him -- except for the Swedish government. The Swedish cabinet ministers allowed themselves to be manipulated, with the implication that the Swedish Migration Board started to deport Assyrians and other Iraqi minorities back to Baghdad. "This is the same as being the executioner's henchman", said an Iraqi bishop to me during a dinner in the capital city of Syria, Damascus, whereto many Iraqis have fled.

On July 22, the day after the bishop's statement, a bill was introduced to the Iraqi parliament proposing to allocate seats in the provincial governments by quotas to Assyrians and other minorities. This was done in order to try to keep minorities in the country and give a sense of hope back to these people. It was also to show that they were serious about protecting the returning refugees.

"Perhaps Nuri al-Maliki and other Iraqi leaders are serious about this, perhaps they are really trying to defend the security for Iraq's indigenous people", I told the bishop. His answer was: "One for the show, they need to show the world that they care and that they have done something against the persecution. None of it will actually be put in place, once things have calmed down a little bit they will change their mind."

"Bitter old man", I was thinking about him and went on hoping for a more democratic Iraq. On September 24 the proposed bill about the allocated seats went up to the Iraqi government, which instantly refused it. No thanks, according to the president Jalal Talabani. But there was still another chance for its survival: there would be a last vote about it in the parliament. However, many of the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish parliament members, representing the three largest Islamic groups in Iraq, chose not to vote, claiming the minorities did not have anything to fear and so the voting could be done at a later stage. Representatives for Iraq's indigenous people, who had mobilized to protest, could relax as none of the planned protests would be needed. A big demonstration outside the Iraqi embassy in Stockholm was cancelled.

But this was just a matter of underhand games. The voting was sneaked in anyway instead of being postponed to a later stage and all the MPs from the three majority groups voted against it (AINA [9-25-2008](#), [9-29-2008](#)). "Now Christians, Mandaean, Yezidis, Turkmens and others will never trust in any democracy in Iraq, never ever. Both the Iraqi national and the Kurdish provincial governments disappoint, both have promised to protect the minorities, but both have now shown that it was all just empty promises", says the bishop when I get hold of him in Baghdad.

On September 26th the American presidential candidate Barack Obama reacted to these developments and sent a letter (AINA [9-29-2008](#)) to the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, asking what the American government is planning to do to stop the persecution and oppression of Assyrians and other minorities in Iraq. My friend the bishop and I are eager to hear the answer. I will now also take the opportunity to ask the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt the same thing. The Swedish cabinet members were promised that the returning minority refugees would be protected. Will the Swedish minister of Foreign Affairs tolerate having been fooled by the Iraqi government? And, yes this is a Swedish dilemma. The Swedish Migration Board will no longer be able to deport Assyrians, Mandaean and Yezidis to Iraq since that would violate Swedish laws stating that anyone who as an individual is subject to persecution has the right to asylum in Sweden. All non-Muslims in Iraq are as individuals being persecuted.

The Swedish town Södertälje has received as many Iraqi refugees as the entire US nation, which I have already reported about several times. The municipal commissioner Anders Lago has since spoken before the US congress (AINA [4-21-2008](#)) to testify about the need of safe havens for Assyrians and other minorities. I have reported about this too several times, however without any apparent ramifications -- quite the opposite. In one of Södertälje's churches, yesterday I met with Iraqis who have been refused asylum by the Swedish Migration Board. But none of them, none, will leave Sweden and Södertälje voluntarily. They could only do that if a safe haven was to be put in place -- a functioning safe haven.

The next demonstration in front of the Iraqi embassy in Stockholm will probably not be cancelled.

<sup>1</sup> See [here](#) and [here](#)

*Nuri Kino is a journalist in Sweden specializing in investigative journalism, and is one of the most highly awarded journalists in Europe (CV). He is an Assyrian from Turkey. His documentary, Assyrska: a National team without a Nation, was awarded The Golden Palm at the 2006 Beverly Hills Film festival.*

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