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Guest Editorial

The Kurdish Threat to The Yezidis of North Iraq

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(AINA) -- The Yezidis, an ethnic and religious minority, suffered greatly for decades under the dictatorial and brutal regime of Saddam Hussein. His government's policy aimed to replace Yezidis with Muslims of Arabic ethnicity, driving us from our agricultural lands with the aid of an embargo. This campaign, as one might imagine, severely affected Yezidi social and economic institutions. The Yezidi's plight has been largely ignored by mankind and in recent years particularly by the west. Under the Kurdish political system, which has been in place since the removal of previous regime, the Kurdish question has over-shadowed the Yezidi issue. The Kurds have tried to assimilate the Yezidis, to obscure our identity and culture, has been in the area for thousands of years. The Yezidi religion developed in Mesopotamia 6758 years ago. Many other religions including Mithraism and Zoroastrianism were born in the same area. And Yezidis and Chaldo-Assyrians use the same calendar.

After the removal of the previous regime we, the Yezidis of Iraq, had high hopes that the new government would be a democratic one giving all minorities' equal rights and freedom to participate in the new government of our native land. We hoped that we would have equal cultural, political and religious rights and freedom to participate as the majority of Kurds, and Sunni and Shiite Arabs do. Unfortunately these hopes have not been realized. We remain stuck in the middle, without even basic human rights.

I urge world leaders and members of international communities to act immediately, to do something about the innocent minorities of Iraq, to work toward the provincial and upcoming federal elections to deal with our plight. The Iraqi government agreed on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2008, to give one parliamentary seat to each of the minority groups in Mosul/Nineveh Plain province. This is hardly democratic.

Iraqi majority groups will select members of parliament. Also, these pitifully few members will be hardly proportional to the 'minorities' populations in the province. They are approximately 70% of the province's population in the Nineveh plain. As a group, they are hardly a minority. Yezidis alone number more than one half million people.

The minorities' situation is extremely dangerous in the Nineveh Plain Province because the three new governments in the newly federated Iraq (which is emerging) will be hardly able to give them equal human, religious, cultural and political rights. This is because the Kurds and their militias (under whose power Nineveh plain will fall) do and shall see the other governments in the federation as weak, and under no international pressure to rectify the situation. The Kurdish government has been waiting for their opportunity to force Yezidis and Chaldo-Assyrians to assimilate into Kurdish culture. We foresee that those who resist will suffer discrimination, torture and even annihilation. Such policies were stated openly in a radio interview with one of the chiefs of Kurdish militias in the city of Mosul in 2007.

It should be clear to the international community that the newly emerging federated Iraq of Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite political entities will do nothing about injustice and atrocities perpetrated on Iraq's indigenous minorities.

Overall, one may say that the minorities' situation in Iraq will not be solved in a manner consistent with human rights and dignity, democracy and freedom unless the Nineveh Plain province becomes a separate Administrative unit within Iraq, with direct ties to Baghdad's federal government and under UN protection.

The Yezidis' Current Problems

We are experiencing and facing oppression, conversion, and forced assimilation under the power of the Kurdish political system. Some of incidents we report include:

- Kurdish authorities force Yezidis to register as Kurds
- Kurdish militias control the Yezidis areas illegally and by force
- Two competing Kurdish political parties are preventing any development in Yezidis areas
- The KRG is expanding Kurdish settlements in the Yezidi regions illegally and by force
- Yezidi political leaders have been receiving threats since 2003
- There are not enough Secondary schools or hospitals in any of Yezidi villages in the Sinjar regions, and if there are, there are no teachers, doctors and or nurses
- There are no colleges or universities in any cities of the Yezidi, such as in Sinjar, Shiekhan, Bahshika and Bahzani
- The KRG is forcing Yezidis to study the Kurdish language in schools in Yezidi regions, and Yezidis have no right to study their own language in schools. These acts are hardly democratic and are in fact crimes against human rights
- Since the terror attacks in the two Yezidi villages of Kahataniya and Al-Jazeera on Aug. 14, 2007, many Yezidis have been held in a Kurdish detention. Numerous other Yezidi public officials have been tortured and jailed when they told the Kurdish militias to leave the Yezidi areas, because there are documentary evidence that Kurd militias were partners with this terror attacks and crimes against humanity
- Dr. Kifah Mohammed, director of the Sinjar hospital, along with Officials of the local authority associated with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is threatening Yezidi Families to leave Sinjar city or face severe consequences and torture. These acts are crimes against basic human Rights and human freedom

- The horrible atrocities and injustice against the minorities such as the Yezidis, Assyrians, Sabeans, Turkmen, Shabaks etc. These are crimes against humanities and must be put to an end
- Food products have never reached to the Yezidis in Sinjar region in the right amounts based on their residency and food stamps
- The Kurdish politicians block any International missions into the Yezidis region to see the truth in this areas, and if is one it has to be guided by Kurds, so nobody has the right to ask any questions. These brutal acts have been happening since 2003
- The Kurdish militias force the Yezidis to vote for KRG or face severe consequences and torture

Yezidis' Urgent Demands:

- The Nineveh Plain must become a separate Administrative unit within Iraq and has direct tie with Baghdad's federal government, and under the protection of UN peace keeping mission, if the International community wants to solve the problems of Iraq's minorities, ethnic and religious groups, this would be the only solution
- An immediate construction projects to Sinjar regions to build hospitals, high Schools, and water projects as there is no clean drinking water in these regions, under UN supervision
- We demand urgent College and University building projects in three major Yezidis cities, one in Sinjar city, Sheikhan city, Bahshika-Bahzani city. Nearly 3000 Yezidi students are waiting to attend Colleges or Universities for more than two years. As you might know in the past 2 years the Yezidi students received threats from terrorist groups in Mosul and other Iraqi cities that the Yezidi students would have to leave or die. And in the Kurdish cities of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah, they don't accept the Yezidi students unless they are Kurdified and join their political parties. So what is happening against this indigenous people of Iraq are great crimes against humanity
- Those Yezidis who have accepted and consider themselves of Kurdish ethnicity and receiving financial and militia supports are attacking the innocent Yezidis by psychological wars on the daily basis. There are thousands of innocent Yezidis who rather die and not to convert into Kurdish ethnicity. These acts by Kurds must be stopped
- The Yezidis also have the right to study their language in schools in the Yezidis regions and be supported financially and equally by the Ministry of Education in Iraq
- The security and police forces of the Yezidi regions must be from the Yezidi people, so they can take their job more seriously
- The Yezidi lands and other properties that were taken by the previous regime and were given to the Arabs must be returned to the original owners
- An immediate United Nations Investigation team of the two Yezidi villages that were attacked by terrorists on Aug. 14, 2007 that killed hundreds of innocent Yezidis. There are documentary evidences that the local Kurdish authority was a partner in these crimes against humanity. The U.N. and International communities must be able to investigate this incident, take all possible measures and remove the Kurdish authority from the Yezidi regions. The Yezidis can then live in peace and freedom
- An immediate pullout of all Kurdish militias from Yezidis regions of the Nineveh Plain and from Sinjar, Bahshika, Bahzani in regions in particular. The Kurds must be able to obey Democratic and International laws. The Nineveh Plain is not a part of KRG region
- The Yezidis must be identified as Yezidis, not as Kurds or Arabs, and their rights must protected in the Iraqi constitution and by International law
- Restoration of Article 50 of the Iraqi constitution, which was removed from the Iraqi constitution by the government in September of 2008, and that it gave the rights to the minorities to participate in the provincial election
- A fair part of the Iraq's national wealth on the basis of residency, to apply to the all minority groups and including the Yezidis
- An immediate permanent UN Office to be based in Sinjar city and Bahshika-Bahzani (the Yezidis region)
- The Iraqi elections must be monitored by UN and International Communities, so that all Iraqis can have fair elections in Federal, Provincials and Municipal. And also that the KRG teams won't be able to force people and make fraud as they did in 2005 election, that one person voted more than 10 times while oiling their finger, so the ink doesn't stick to it
- As the Yezidi ethnic and religious minority in Iraq, we need URGENT humanitarian from US AID; we believe US AID has been given to some of the minorities group, but has never reached the Yezidis in Sinjar region and Bahshika and Bahzani. US AID should deliver to the Yezidi regions and to the Sinjar region in particular, through the UN and other International agencies such as the Red Cross, Christian Peace Maker Team or the Assyrian Aid Society, and work with our people and to give the AID equally to all needy Yezidis in these regions. There are many Yezidis who cannot go to doctors, buy medicines, obtain clean drinking water and food for their families, and send their children to schools, obtain school supplies, etc. As the families have to pay for most of these services, the Sinjar region has been ignored by the governments of Iraq as well as by the international community. Sinjar should be considered as Dar Fur not Sinjar. Note: If the Aid goes through KRG and their political tactic teams, the Aid will not reach the innocent Yezidis, unless they are Kurdified and join their political parties. So please make sure the KRG doesn't get into this AID in anyway
- The Nineveh Plain and Sinjar in particular must be free of KRG militias, and then the International peace keeping urgently needed for the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar region in particular to take over the security of this region while the young men of minorities, including the Yezidis in this region, get police, security and military training by US coalition and UN peace keeping mission and as they get ready to take over the securities of the region, then US and UN peace keeping mission can go back to their bases where they are needed the most.

Mr. Mirza Ismail is the chairman and co-founder of London Yezidis Community-Canada, an advocacy group for minorities in Iraq.

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