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Terrorist Attacks on Assyrians Intensify

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On the morning of June 7th a civilian sedan containing four masked men drove into the Christian Assyrian Quarters (Hay Al-Athuryeen) of the Dora district of Baghdad, where the masked men opened fire on Assyrians on their way to work. Four locals were killed and several others seriously wounded. The three men and one woman who were murdered were identified by the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) as Isho Nissan Markus, Youkhana, Duraid Sabri Hanna, Hisham Umar, and Ramziya Enwiya (female). On the same day and in the same district, at approximately 5 P.M. another drive by shooting occurred, targeting Assyrians returning from work, mostly with the Coalition Provisional Authority. Three women, Alice Aramays, Ayda Petros Bakus and Muna Jalal Karim, were shot and killed, along with their driver.



This incident is the latest in a series of crimes and acts of terror and intimidation against the Christian Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) of Iraq since the liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein. On March 22nd an elderly Assyrian couple, Ameejon and Jewded Barama, was brutally murdered in the district of Dora; the husband's throat was slashed in the same manner as Nicholas Berg, and the wife was repeatedly struck on the head with a blunt instrument. In the southern city of Basra, on December 24th, 2003 Bashir Toma Elias was killed by a single gun shot to the head, as he prepared to head home for Christmas celebration with his wife and five children. On November 18, 2003 Mr. Sargon Nano Murado, the ADM representative in Basra was assassinated. In North Iraq, the Assyrian mayor of the Telkepeh district, Wathah Gorgis, survived an assassination attempt on January 24, 2004. On October 7th, 2003 Mr. Safa Sabah Khoshi, owner of a liquor store in Mosul, was shot and killed in his store, and his brother, Meyaser Karim Khoshi, was severely injured in the attack.

For the Assyrians, liberation has not brought the level of security they had hoped for. Instead, it shifted the politically motivated losses caused by the Saddam Regime to the more dangerous religiously motivated crimes. ([AINA report](#)). Of special concern to Assyrians and their community leaders is the nature of these attacks, the overwhelming majority of which have been religiously motivated. Often these attacks are accompanied by notes demanding that the Christian Assyrians follow the rules Islam or face the consequences. This has created an atmosphere of fear in the Assyrian community, not so different, ironically, from the fear they felt under Saddam's regime, though the nature of it is different. Saddam Hussein ruthlessly suppressed any expression of national or ethnic identity, and by and large did not concern himself with religious issues. With the removal of Saddam, Assyrians -- whose population in Iraq out-numbers the national individual populations of Kuwait, Qatar, Cyprus, and UAE -- have finally succeeded in asserting their unique ethnic and cultural identity, and have been active participants in the political process, yet, in an ironic flip-flop, now they find their religious institution under attack by Islamists.



The Reverend Ken Joseph, an Assyrian Evangelist currently based in Baghdad, [reports](#) that applications for baptismal records have soared in recent weeks. He quotes an Assyrian deacon saying, "We have been flooded with parishioners desperate to leave the country and as they cannot get an exit permit without a Baptismal Certificate from the Church we have been swamped with requests." The Assyrians did not expect the liberation of Iraq to precipitate an exodus from their ancestral lands, yet this is the effect to date of the liberation of Iraq combined with unchecked Islamic aggression.

Assyrians are the only indigenous group of Iraq; they are also Christians, are ethnically distinct, and their language is

neo-Syriac (modern Aramaic). As such, they see themselves as the [litmus test](#) of any democracy that is established in Iraq, which must guarantee, above and beyond reasonable expectations, their ethnic, religious and cultural rights. This has not happened to date, as the Transitional Administrative Law ([English](#), [Arabic](#)), while making some historic concessions with regard to Assyrians, also declared Islam as the official religion of the Iraqi State. An Assyrian in Iraq, Robert, [said](#), "We love the Americans! We are so grateful for them removing Saddam and giving us back our freedom. We do not want their effort to be a failure if the dictatorship of Saddam is replaced by the dictatorship of Islam."

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