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Assyrians Prevented By Kurds From Voting in North Iraq

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(AINA) -- In a brazen and nearly unbelievable move, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by warlord Masoud Barzani has [prevented](#) voting by Assyrian (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) Christians of the Nineveh Plain in northern Iraq. According to a series of [reports](#) from inside Iraq, the KDP effectively blocked the delivery of ballot boxes to six major Assyrian towns and villages in the Plains around Mosul including Baghdeda, Bartilla, Karemlesh, Shekhan, Ain Sifne and Bahzan.

Thousands of would be voters were left stranded outside polling places awaiting an opportunity to cast their ballots. Inquiries to voting authorities brought frequent promises that the ballot boxes were en route only to result in a series of disappointments throughout the day. Infuriated

Assyrians filled the streets of Baghdeda- the largest Assyrian town in the Nineveh Plain-and demonstrated against the KDP's overt disenfranchisement of Assyrians.



According to Iraq sources, the ballot boxes had been stored in Arbil, the stronghold of the KDP. The resulting unavailability of ballot boxes affected up to 100,000 Assyrian voters and tens of thousands of Yezidis, Shabak, and Turkman voters. The outright denial of voting rights to Assyrians and other non-Kurdish minorities culminates several months of intimidation, beatings, beheadings, burnings, and mutilations of Assyrian Christians in the Nineveh Plain. Just two weeks before the elections, Archbishop Basil George Casmusa of the Syriac Catholic church was also kidnapped. Although he was released one day later, his abduction and the series of escalating attacks were earlier reported by numerous sources (AINA, [09-13-2004](#), [08-07-2004](#), [06-20-2004](#)) as an attempt to drive out Assyrians from their homes and to intimidate potential remaining voters into staying home on election day.

However, to the KDP's dismay, thousands of Iraqi Assyrians defied the KDP's terror tactics and ventured out to vote only to discover that ballot boxes never arrived. Assyrians in other areas of Iraq such as Mosul, Baghdad, and Karkuk were not expected to turn out in large numbers due to threats and a deteriorating security situation. The lack of voting in the Nineveh Plain has left Assyrians worldwide



reeling. As one observer summarized "Not only was the in country vote prevented to a large extent by the KDP and the overall security situation, but the out of country voting was abysmal due to discriminatory placement of polling places by the IOM (International Organization for Migration) in areas favoring Kurds and others at the expense of Assyrians (AINA, [01-18-2005](#)). In the US, less than 10% of eligible voters were registered by the IOM, a complete failure on their part."



Assyrians in Ankawa, north Iraq, waiting to vote

The KDP's specific targeting of the Nineveh Plain is no mere coincidence. The Nineveh Plain contains the last remaining stronghold of predominantly Assyrian towns and villages in the immediate environs of the ruins of Nineveh, the ancient Assyrian capital. The Nineveh Plain has been touted by a wide spectrum of Assyrian political leaders -- including foremost among them those of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) -- as the center of a self-administered area as recognized in Article 53d of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) and what has been described as the "[Last Stand of the ChaldoAssyrians](#)".

In their latest maneuver, the KDP effectively eliminated any possible Assyrian representation from the Nineveh Plain in the upcoming National Assembly. Whereas the KDP had earlier masked their ambitions to fully cleanse the area of Assyrian Christians, recent reports have uncovered stepped up and overt acts of terror and intimidation by self-described KDP operatives determined to drive away Assyrians.

The KDP is also targeting other communities including Turkman, Yezidis, and Shabak in a bid to suppress non-Kurdish balloting in the region. One report suggested that up to 250,000 non-Kurds may have been prevented from voting by the KDP. The obvious intent remains to electorally and "democratically" show that the area is predominantly Kurdish by preventing any other political or demographic expression. As one analyst noted, "to defacto Kurdify the area on paper by suppressing any countervailing political assertion."

The Kurdish scheme is widely seen as an attack on the integrity of Iraq as a whole. Alluding to KDP occupation of the historically Assyrian provinces of Arbil and Dohuk, a leader noted "this is simply another land grab aimed at expanding the Kurdish occupied area into Nineveh province at the expense of a sovereign and integrated Iraq...they're simply trying to split off as much territory from Iraq as they possibly can, while they can."

Angry Assyrian Americans have begun to ask what the US administration's response will be this attack on democracy in Iraq. Assyrian Americans make up 85-90% of all Iraqi Americans. Due to disproportionate persecution, nearly half of all Iraqi Assyrians live outside the country. One enraged activist noted "Assyrians have been the most fervent proponents of secular democracy and pluralism in Iraq." Referring to Masoud Barzani, he added "has all of our effort been to help prop up a tribal and antidemocratic despot in the north? Did we unknowingly support a policy that will lead either to the total subjugation or elimination of Assyrian Christians and other minorities at the hands of Kurdish terrorists?"