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## Kurds Prevent Assyrian Representation, Continue Divisive Formula in Iraq

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(AINA) -- The convening of the Iraqi National Assembly on March 16 symbolized a bitter realization for Iraqi Assyrians that the Iraqi road to democracy remains dotted with pitfalls. Assyrian Christians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) were left reeling following the final [certification](#) of the elections on February 17 by the Iraqi High Election Commission (IHEC). Despite formal worldwide protests<sup>1</sup> by over a dozen Assyrian organizations regarding vote fraud, threats, and killings targeting Assyrians, the [IHEC final report](#) white washed any protests by Assyrians and failed to accommodate demands for voting rights for disenfranchised minorities in the Nineveh Plain including Assyrians, Yezidis, Shabak, and Turkman. Even the UN report, eager to move ahead with a semblance of governance in the new Iraq, ignored all minority complaints of nearly total disenfranchisement.



For Assyrian Christians, referred to as ChaldoAssyrians in the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, [English](#), [Arabic](#)), democracy in Iraq has remained elusive and, at times, downright dangerous in some areas. A pre-election [terror campaign](#) by warlord Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), as well as [beheadings](#), [beatings](#), [mutilations](#), [kidnappings and church bombings](#) in Baghdad and Mosul, succeeded in drastically reducing Assyrian voter turnout in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Mosul. On election day, when thousands of would be voters defied threats in the Nineveh Plain, armed thugs of the KDP simply stole the ballot boxes destined to the towns and villages of the Nineveh Plain (AINA, [01-31-05](#), [02-27-05](#)). [Voter lockout](#) of Assyrians in and out of Iraq was also suspected.

The end result for Assyrian Christians was an abysmal showing in the National Assembly. The disenfranchisement of Assyrians was to a level perhaps never before seen in Iraq, including during the reign of Saddam Hussein. Out of all of the independent Assyrian Iraqi slates including the Assyrian National Gathering (139), the Rafidain Democratic Coalition (148), the Rafidain National list (204) and the Chaldean Democratic Union Party (223), only one representative reached the necessary minimum threshold level of 29,000 votes, Mr. Yonadam Kanna of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM). That one single representative was all that could be mustered from a population of 1-1.5 million Assyrian Christians inside Iraq, not including the several hundred thousand outside the country.

Another Assyrian Christian representative succeeded to the National Assembly through the secular Iraqi List slate (285), headed by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. Mrs. Wijdan Mikhael, although not part of an independent Assyrian political organization, has none the less received hopeful praise by some Iraqi Assyrians as someone who is aware of and sensitive to the critical issues facing indigenous Assyrian Christians in Iraq. Mrs. Mikhael's election through the Iraqi List slate reflects support given by some Iraqi Assyrian Christians to the moderate secular leadership of Ayad Allawi.

In marked contrast, the election of four other Christian representatives from the Kurdish slate (Mrs. Jacklin Qawsan Zomaya, Mr. Ablahad Afram Sawa, Mr. Salim Petros Elias, Dr. Goriel Isho Khamis) poses a grave and ominous threat to legitimate Assyrian Christian aspirations in Iraq. The four Kurdish list Christians represent smaller fringe groups who, according to one analyst "have no standing in the communities they claim to represent." Moreover, "these groups knew they had no chance of garnering support; as a result, they allied themselves with Kurds simply to gain a presence in the National Assembly."

Mr. Ablahad Afram remains one prime example. A self-described member of the KDP, Mr. Afram established the Chaldean Democratic Union under the explicit direction of the KDP in order to create a sectarian split between Christians from the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. One analyst summarized "Mr. Afram's organization is an artificial creation and, were it not for direct support from the KDP, would not exist at all. It has no platform or mission other than to periodically declare -- at the behest of the KDP -- that Chaldeans and Assyrians are separate people."

Another representative on the Kurdish list is Dr. Goreal Esho Khamis of the ChaldoAssur Organization, an affiliate of the Kurdish Communist Party. The third Christian member on the Kurdish list, Mr. Salim Petros Elias was elected as a representative of the Chaldean Cultural Society, another front organization sponsored by the KDP. Rounding out the list, Ms. Jacklin Zomaya was elected to the Assembly as a member of the Assyrian Patriotic Party. The APP likewise allied themselves

with the Kurdish list because as one observer noted "fearing elimination and irrelevance, they joined with the KDP. In their calculus, they could not have won on their own."

As far as the KDP is concerned, directing 4 out of 6 of the total Assyrian representatives in the Assembly virtually assures them near total control over Assyrian political aspirations. With Assyrians being a troublesome obstacle to Kurdish expansion into the Nineveh Plain, the KDP scheme hopes to capitalize on two important points regarding Assyrian Christians: institutionalizing a formal legal split amongst various Assyrian Christian communities based on self-identifying terms and the subversion of calls for an Assyrian self-administered area in the Nineveh Plain.

Following the fall of the Baathist regime, the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO) and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) cosponsored the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Conference in Baghdad during October, 2003. The two most important points of agreement that emerged from the conference were the consensus decision by all of the communities to legally refer the "Chaldean Syriac Assyrian" people as "ChaldoAssyrians," and to demand the establishment of an Assyrian self-administered area in the Nineveh Plain. Through perseverance, both points were incorporated into the TAL, with article 53D guaranteeing administrative rights for ChaldoAssyrians.

The KDP strategy is geared to attack these major Assyrian political objectives head on. First, by propping up groups who maintain fabricated sectarian-ethnic identities and declare that Assyrians and Chaldeans are separate people, the KDP hopes to fragment the third largest demographic group in Iraq -- the Christians -- into smaller, less significant fragments. As one Iraqi noted, "Mr. Ablahad Afram has evolved into the point man to drive the KDP wedge into the consensus position."

Secondly, the Assyrian desire for a self-administered area outside the direct control of the Kurdish occupied region is anathema to the larger Kurdish vision of an ever expanding "Kurdistan" reaching west through the Nineveh and Dohuk provinces to the Syrian border. As one Assyrian analyst noted "They (the KDP) have drawn their map and it includes the whole of the Nineveh Plain." Furthermore, in response to independent Assyrian calls for a self-administered area, the analyst added "it is widely believed that the four Christian representatives on the Kurdish list have foresworn any ambition for administrative rights in the Nineveh Plain except as a wholly owned and subjugated portion of the Kurdish occupied area." For Assyrians, that leaves only one or at best two representatives, themselves under threat, to fend for themselves in an Assembly of 275 controlled by much larger blocs.

For the KDP, appointing the bulk of the Assyrian Christian representation in the Assembly has kept alive KDP dreams of incorporating the Nineveh province into the Kurdish occupied region. For the Assyrian leadership, the move has been a predictable continuation of the ongoing policy of KDP expansion, then consolidation, and then homogenization of adjacent areas by ethnic cleansing. One analyst summarized the KDP strategy by noting "The KDP has executed a carefully orchestrated 3 pronged strategy of violently terrorizing the Assyrian community, deliberately blocking any real ability to participate in the democratic process, and finally, cynically propping up illegitimate organizations to be our official representatives."

One activist adamantly summarized the widely held mainstream Assyrian view by saying "Mr. Barzani can add as many Christians to his list as he likes. These so called leaders are Barzani's representatives, not ours. They don't have the backing of the community and are widely known to be there simply to subvert our genuine and legitimate aspirations as a people." For the indigenous Assyrian Christians as a whole, the very process that produced this scenario remains at its root undemocratic and illegitimate.

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#### <sup>1</sup> Worldwide Protests

[Assyrians to Protest At UN on Iraq Voter Lockout](#)  
[Australian Assyrians Protest Iraq Voter Lockout](#)  
[European Assyrians Protest Iraqi Vote Lockout](#)  
[Chicago Assyrians and Turkmen Protest Lack of Voting Access](#)  
[Assyrians Protest in US, Canada, Sweden, Iraq on Voter Lockout By Kurds](#)  
[Assyrian Christians Protest Against Voting Irregularities](#)  
[Iraq Voters Protest Poll Lockout](#)  
[Assyrians, Turkomen, Yazidis Protest Outside Green Zone](#)  
[Radio Interview With Yezidi Prince At Election Lockout Protest](#)  
[Assyrians Worldwide Protest Lockout of Assyrian Voters in Iraq](#)  
[Assyrians in England to Protest Assyrian Voter Lockout in North Iraq](#)  
[Iraqis Protest 'Deliberate' Lack of Ballot Papers](#)  
[Assyrian Democratic Movement Protests ChaldoAssyrian Vote Lockout in North Iraq](#)  
[150,000 ChaldoAssyrians Protest Their Exclusion From Voting](#)  
[Assyrians Protest Iraqi Election With Crucifixion, Fast in New York](#)