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Assyrians Reject Iraq Constitution

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(AINA) -- Assyrian opposition to the Iraqi draft Constitution has solidified after statements of rejection by the [Assyrian Democratic Movement](#) (ADM) and the [Assyrian General Conference](#) (AGC). The statements in opposition to the Constitution follow an earlier rejection (AINA [9-16-2005](#)) by the [Assyrian Democratic Organization](#) (ADO) as well as widespread grassroots demonstrations in opposition by Assyrian Christians (also known as Chaldeans and Syrians) in the Nineveh Plain (AINA [8-24-2005](#)).

According to the September 19th ADM statement ([English](#), [Arabic](#)), the Constitution falls short from the Assyrian perspective on several counts including:

- *"The unjustified concealment of our Assyrian Babylonian civilization in the preamble. In addition, the preamble unjustifiably neglected to mention the oppression, mass murders especially in Simele and Sooriya, the destruction of hundreds of villages and tens of monasteries and churches by the past dictatorial regime against our people, especially when the preamble included similar examples committed against other components and fabrics of the Iraqi people."*
- *"Article 122 affected the unity of our people at its core when it divided our people into Chaldeans and Assyrians contrary to fact and history."*



The AGC statement ([English](#), [Arabic](#)) noted that "the Constitution did not meet the Iraqi people's ambitions in general and the Assyrian people in particular." In apparent reference to the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) expansionist and secessionist ambitions, the AGC statement added "The Constitution came full of separatist intentions dealing with different Iraqi sects, according to the principle of numbers...not on basic principles and laws of a nation." Specific points of contention from the Assyrian perspective included "limiting to two the official languages of Iraq and ignoring the existence of other ancient and indigenous languages." Again in apparent reference to KDP tactics, the AGC statement criticized "race based ideologies and separatist views that threaten the integrity of Iraq." Referring to the Constitution's separate recognition of Assyrians and Chaldeans, the AGC decried the division "as two Nations...as opposed to one, ignoring the historical, social, geographical, and linguistic facts that emphasize our existence as one Nation."

The draft Constitution marked a drastic shift from the earlier Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, [English](#), [Arabic](#)) where all Assyrian Christians (including Chaldeans and Syrians) were recognized collectively and singly as "ChaldoAssyrians." The departure from the unifying formula of the TAL is believed to have been a key demand of -- and subsequent gain by -- KDP warlord Masoud Barzani (AINA [3-28-2005](#), [9-16-2005](#)). A major element in the KDP's policy towards Assyrian Christians has been their formal division into smaller, demographically less significant, rival communities.

A solid Assyrian rejection front towards the Constitution may prove to be the critical swing vote in the eventual rejection of the Constitution on October 15. Although the Assyrians now only constitute 7-10% of the Iraqi population (including those in the Diaspora), a significant portion still reside in the Province of Nineveh. According to referendum law, for the Constitution to be rejected, three provinces must vote "no" with a supermajority or two-thirds majority. To date, Sunni Arabs who are already steadfastly against the Constitution enjoy a majority in four provinces including Salah al-Din, Anbar, Nineveh and Diyala. However, in only two provinces, Salah al-Din and Anbar, do they hold a super majority. The province of Nineveh, the ancient Assyrian capital and heartland, has a majority Sunni population but also has sizeable Assyrian Christians, Yezidis, Turkoman, Shabak, and Kurdish minorities as well.

KDP hostility and expansionism coupled with a widespread fear of marginalization and subjugation of Assyrians, Yezidis, Turkoman, and Shabaks will undoubtedly drive these communities to reject the draft constitution. As one Assyrian leader noted, "KDP threats, murders, and [vote fraud](#) in the last election have galvanized the minorities of the Nineveh Plain to reject the draft Constitution." Another analyst noted that "short of another bout of KDP vote [rigging](#), election box blockages, and assassinations, Nineveh province will reject this Constitution."

For Assyrians, the prospects of a failed constitution raise real fears of a generalized deterioration in security throughout Iraq. During such times, the very same minorities who end up rejecting the Constitution will probably disproportionately bear the brunt of more civil unrest. However, as one Assyrian leader noted "We are not rejecting the democratic process, Far from it. We fully support the democratic process and are making full use of it to clearly and loudly resist our marginalization. We do not

believe this Constitution will lead to democracy in Iraq. On October 15, we will go to the polls and ask this government for a better, more democratic Constitution."

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