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Continuing Persecution Renews Calls for Assyrian Safe-Haven in Iraq

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(AINA) -- Assyrian Christians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) continue to be targeted within Iraq. Recent attacks have highlighted the varied groups perpetrating the attacks. On March 17, 2006, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) paramilitaries broke into Mr. Slewo David Simon's home in Batnaya, a Christian town in Northern Iraq. Mr. Simon had recently emigrated to the US after a series of altercations and incidents with KDP militants. As the armed assailants broke into the home, Mr. Simon's neighbors Mr. Nabil Jaro and his brother Mr. Faris Jaro interceded to prevent the break-in and looting.



Later that afternoon at 5 pm, KDP personnel dressed as Iraqi National Guards forcibly entered Mr. Nabil Jaro's home. The KDP paramilitaries ransacked Mr. Jaro's home, broke his furniture, and confiscated his gun. Mr. Jaro was then roughed up and arrested as his terrorized family looked on. Mr. Jaro was then taken to the KDP occupation center in Tel-Kaif in the Nineveh Plain on trumped up charges of terrorism. KDP officers then served Mr. Faris Jaro with an arrest warrant and indicated that his brother, Mr. Nabil Jaro, would not be released until he turned himself in as well. The next day, Mr. Faris Jaro turned himself in, accompanied by his terrified elderly mother and another brother. Two KDP officers along with two other KDP personnel proceeded to severely beat both brothers for several hours while shouting derogatory anti-Christian and anti-Assyrian insults.

Fearing that her sons may be killed, the mother pleaded with her sons to apologize to their attackers in order to be released. Following an apology under duress, the brothers were released. Their neighbor's home has since been expropriated as the new KDP party office in Batnaya in the Nineveh Plain. The establishment of a KDP party office in an area without any Kurds is widely believed to be intended to "bring Christians in line" and dampen enthusiasm for any independent political expression.

Assyrians in other parts of Iraq have not fared much better due to a steadily deteriorating security situation ([AINA 4-28-2006](#)).

According to **Voices of Iraq**, the director of operations for the Nineveh governorate police stated during his briefing on June 5th, 2006, that another Assyrian has been murdered by armed gunmen in the city of Mosul. According to nearby shop owners, the director said, the unidentified gunmen entered Ms. Rahima Elias' shop, one of many in the commercial part of town, and opened fire immediately killing her. Mr. Elias owned a beauty supplies store in the Drakzliya District located west of the city of Mosul. The 33 year old was a native of Karimles, a ChaldoAssyrian town approximately 18 miles east of Mosul.

- On April 6, Mr. Samson Awisha was walking home in Baghdad when five men came out of a car and shot him dead. Earlier, presumably the same group of assailants had kidnapped Mr. Awisha's two children for ransom. After paying the ransom, Mr. Oisha's children were released and then quietly sent out of Iraq to Syria along with their mother for safety. The kidnapers had demanded that Mr. Awisha not take his children out of the country. After the murder, Mr. Awisha's family was threatened not to hold a funeral service lest the entire family be targeted. Mr. Awisha was laid to rest secretly and quietly, without a funeral.
- On May 30th, 2006, Ankawa.com and Nirgalgate.com reported that Ra'ad Joseph, born in 1976, was found murdered in the Industrial quarters of Mosul. Mr. Joseph was from Bartella in Northern Iraq. Mr. Joseph was married with one child and was an owner of a bodybuilding gym. Reports from Mosul indicate that the murder is suspected to be an act of revenge as the decision of ownership of the gym was awarded him after public bidding for the gym. He was threatened by the Kurds to withdraw his bid but he refused.
- on June 2nd, 2006, Ankawa.com and Nirgalgate.com also reported that The Evangelical Church of Ascension was attacked by a rocket bomb the night before. The bomb caused damage to the church building and caused a gaping hole in the church dome. No injuries were reported because the attack happened during the night.
- On June 3, 2006, Ankawa.com and Iraq4allnews.dk reported that armed men murdered a Christian engineer in front of his home in Basra the previous night. The Christian engineer, whose name has not yet been released, worked at the al-Najeabiyya Electrical Circuit Station in al-Ma'aqal. The murder seems to be due to religious reasons since the engineer was a Christian and there have been many killings against Christians in Basra and much effort made to force them to leave the city.

Assyrians are now in an untenable position, being targeted by many sides of an increasingly violent conflict in Iraq. Assyrians are targeted in northern Iraq as well as other areas. As one activist noted, "Christians are now targets of Islamic groups, gangs who accuse them (Assyrians) of links to the West, and the Ba'athists and nationalists who view them as traitors."

In their October 2005 report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted what Assyrians had already

known, namely, "While much of the hardship and harassment they (Assyrians) report that they face is symptomatic of the situation of general insecurity faced by all Iraqis in present-day Iraq, members of the Christian minority nevertheless appear to be particularly targeted. Iraqi Christians feel especially apprehensive about the overwhelming presence of extremist Islamic groups and armed militias, whose display of intolerance towards non-Muslims has become a nearly daily feature in Iraq."

Another report by Refugees International (RI) dated November 5th, 2005 noted that over 500,000 Iraqi refugees had left Iraq by November 2005. According to RI, the UNHCR is unable to register all refugees, but that of the Iraqi refugees registered in Syria "Nearly half... are Christians, although Christians comprise only about 5% of the population in Iraq."

In an earlier statement, the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission labeled Assyrians "endangered," stating "As people, groups, and whole communities start to identify by religious affiliations other than their common Iraqi nationality, the Christian minority find themselves increasingly despised, marginalized, and exposed. They are endangered, without equality before the (Islamic) law, having no clan networks and retaliation ideology, and lacking security in a lawless Islamic society." (AINA [2-7-2006](#))

While Assyrians recognize the general insecurity afflicting most Iraqis in and around Baghdad, the continued harassment and attacks in their homes in the north have been doubly taxing. Although some Assyrian families have fled from Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra back to their ancestral villages in the north, most -- as the UNHCR reports have documented -- have instead chosen to leave Iraq entirely. What had been designated a destination point for internally displaced Assyrians has instead been hijacked by KDP militants.

The example of the Jaro brothers illustrates difficulties faced by Assyrians living under a brutal tribal KDP occupation. As one analyst noted, "The confiscation of the Jaro home shows a double tragedy for the community. On the one hand, yet another family has forcibly and violently lost their home to KDP thugs with no recourse to the authorities. On another level, the entire community of Batnaya is now subjected to an armed KDP occupation."

The continued KDP hegemony into still more historically Assyrian areas has further increased tension between Assyrians and the tribal Behdanani Kurds of the KDP. According to the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) and the Iraqi Constitution, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administration and occupation would only extend to areas occupied by Kurds prior to the war. The steady encroachment of KDP paramilitary militants beyond the KRG occupied areas is viewed as illegal and provocative. One Assyrian leader recently asked, "There are no Kurds here; why do they need an armed presence to terrorize our people here?"

With the growing conflict following the Samarra mosque bombing on February 22nd, the already disproportionate impact on Assyrians has only intensified. The increasing insecurity and subsequent exodus of Assyrians has reinvigorated calls for an Assyrian Administered area. As one analyst summarized, "Only an Assyrian Administered Area, a safe zone in the Nineveh Plain that is secured by Assyrian police, will ensure the confidence of the populace to stay."