

Report Highlights Election Violations Against Assyrians in North Iraq

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(AINA) -- Following the allegations of election violations made by Assyrian Iraqi MP Yonadam Kanna (AINA [2-10-2009](#)), a report released by the [Assyria Council of Europe](#) (ACE) details the violations in north Iraq. Violence, threats and other means of pressure prevented thousands of Assyrians in the Nineveh plain from experiencing a free and fair election in Iraq, according to ACE, which, along with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), sent an election observation mission to the Nineveh plain area.

The [report](#), titled **Violations and Other Threats Against Assyrians During Pre-Election Period In Nineveh Plain**, details several claims about a pre-election campaign full of irregularities for Assyrians in the Nineveh province. The winning Ishtar slate, a Kurdish backed group, is accused of pressuring voters by a variety of means. The most severe violations are reported in the town of Qaraqosh in the Nineveh plain, where the group behind the Ishtar slate employs around 1200 militiamen. The ACE report states:



Firas Josef

By stopping campaign work of other political groups, intimidating members of other political groups, threaten poor people with economic sanctions and/or giving poor people economic incentives, intimidating and attacking members of other political groups and instilling fear in the local population: the Ishtar slate has violated several important articles of the Iraqi elections law and has deprived thousands of Assyrians the chance to experience free and fair elections.

Cases of economic threats against people were reported in the 2005 elections as well but the method seems to have been refined for the 2009 provincial elections as a local governor commented to AINA: "This time they did not only give people money to make them vote for a certain slate but they also threatened them they would lose their jobs and other kinds of social services. This time they used both carrots and sticks."

The report cites testimony from Assyrian campaign workers who were harassed and beaten by Kurdish-backed militia. Mr. Ammar Zeki Karim, a campaign worker for the Assyrian Democratic Movement, was ordered to stop. Mr. Karim states:

I was distributing calendars of the Assyrian Democratic Movement on the 24th January [2009] as part of the election campaign. I was standing close to the elementary school where the polling centre would be on Election Day. Members of the militia came up to me and asked me to stop the distribution. They pointed their guns on me. They told me I should leave the ADM and join them instead. They said they will give me 280 000 Iraqi Dinars⁹ as monthly salary if I leave the ADM. I refused, telling them I would never leave the ADM. They said: "If we see you distribute these again we will arrest you."



Ammar Zeki Karim

According to Mr. Petrus Mikhael, responsible for the Al Rafidain slate election campaign in the Al Hamdaniya district:

On the evening of 27 January [2009] I was visiting the house of my mother in law together with my wife. As I and my wife left we encountered Mr. Firas Josef outside in a miserable condition with blood on his face. He told me some militia members had beaten him because he had stopped by a wall full of election posters to make sure an Al Rafidain poster

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would not fall from the wall, trying to put it firmly on the wall.

In an apartment complex built by the Kurdish authorities, bribery in the form of lower rent payments was used to sway the tenants into voting for the Ishtar slate.

Militia members were given bonuses and encouraged to vote for certain slates.

Afram Yakoub, an international election observer, was detained by Kurdish paramilitary forces. According to Mr. Yakoub:

Just a few moments later we were stopped by armed militia members on the main road in Qaraqosh, very close to the church [shown in the picture]. They approached us from different directions with Kalashnikovs in their hands. They did not have any uniforms and they did not present themselves with any form of identification. My bodyguard had his ID card confiscated and I had my International Observer badge confiscated. We were told someone wanted to meet us. Two of them stepped into our car with their Kalashnikovs and told us to follow the car in front of us. They did not reply when we asked who it was that wanted to speak to us. They were obviously not suspecting us for being terrorists as they didn't bother to search us or our car.

The report concludes:

...there are enough indications that thousands of Assyrians who cast their votes on the 31st January 2009 didn't do it out of free will. By using the threat of economic sanctions against mainly poor families who depend on the apartment they live in and a low rent, others who feed an entire family on a salary as a militia member or students fearing they will lose their transportation means to the University, the Ishtar slate managed to gain the majority of votes in Qaraqosh.

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