



The Plight of Christians in Iraq
Field Trip Report
November 3 – 11, 2007
By
Dr. John Eibner

Save Christians of Iraq



Source of photo collage: www.christiansofiraq.com

Christian Solidarity International (CSI-USA)
870 Hampshire Road, Suite T
Westlake Village, CA 91361
(805) 777 7107 - tel, (805) 777 7508 – fax, csi@csi-usa.org - e-mail



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Iraqi Christians Face Extinction

In early November, my CSI-colleague, **Gunnar Wiebalck** and I traveled to Iraq. We were invited by Iraqi Christians, from both inside and outside the country, to undertake a human rights and humanitarian fact-finding visit. We accepted the invitation because we had been receiving accounts of a devastating wave of persecution of Christians driven mainly by Islamic extremists. **The Hamorabi Human Rights Organization** and many press reports carried news of the bombing of churches, kidnappings, murder, forced displacement and confiscation of property.



Some of the most powerful reports we received came from Iraqi refugees in Istanbul, whom we had encountered during a visit to Turkey in November 2006. The previous year, the UN High Commission for Refugees sounded a powerful warning when it reported that **since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 over 40% of all Iraqi refugees were Christians, even though they represented less than 4% of the population. This means that close to half of the approximately one million Christians living in Iraq in 2003 fled the country at the very time the United States has been conducting “Operation Freedom – Iraq”.** It also strongly supports claims that Christians are targeted by violent Muslims. Altogether, there was a growing body of evidence suggesting that Iraq’s ancient, Aramaic-speaking community could soon end up like Iraq’s still more ancient Jewish community, now reportedly numbering a mere eight people. At the time of the Islamic conquest in the 7th century, Christians constituted the majority of the population in Iraq. But they have been gradually reduced to a remnant following wave after wave of persecution, and constant denial of equality with Muslims.

A further worrying sign is to be found in the sectarian character of the Iraqi state. While on the one hand, the new Iraqi constitution proclaims religious liberty and other basic human rights, these rights are effectively subverted by Article 2 which declared that **“Islam is the official religion of the State”**, and that **“no law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established”**.



We made the visit notwithstanding alarming warnings from the U.S. State Department, which drew attention to the appalling security situation in the country, and to the killing and kidnapping of Americans. Our host was the Christian leader, the **Hon. Pascale Warda**, who served between June 2004 and April 2005 as Minister for Migration and the Displaced in the Transitional Government of Ayaad Alawi. We arrived in Baghdad on the 3rd of November where we remained until the 6th, when we flew to Erbil. We then spent the following four days traveling in the ancestral homeland of Iraq’s Christians in the north of the country. In the Nineveh Plain, near Mosul, we visited the village Keremlesh and the town Baghdeda (Hamdamiya). Further north in

Kurdistan, we visited the towns Erbil, Ainkawa, and Dohuk, and the villages Humziya, Gonde Kosa, Dawoodiya and **Chakala**. We met with senior government officials, representatives of the Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Yezidi and Mandeian communities, and victimized Christians.

Baghdad

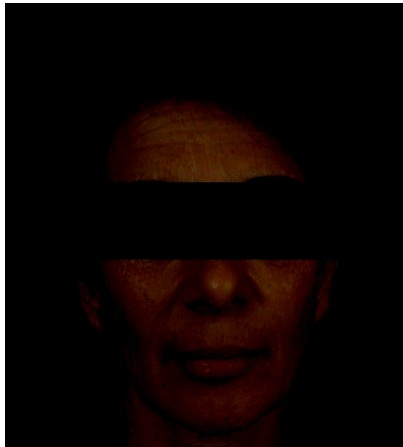
Baghdad, the capital of the federal Republic of Iraq, is a home to all of the country's many national and religious communities. Christians are fleeing Baghdad, especially the notoriously dangerous Dora district. Some leave the country altogether. Others move in with friends and relatives in more secure districts. In the prevailing chaos precise migration figures are not possible to come by. The mass displacement of Christians in Baghdad is prompted primarily by sectarian-inspired violence committed mainly by rival Sunni and Shiite terrorist cells. But Christians are not simply caught in the crossfire. They are targeted by Islamic extremists because they are non-Muslims. The recent U.S. military "surge" has brought down levels of violence, but many parts of Baghdad remain unsafe for Christians and other non-Muslims.

Rad Azzo Sabri: *On March 18, 2006, gunmen broke into our home and shot dead two of our five children. The children were shot when they tried to escape through a window. My wife, Senna, hid in the kitchen with two children. One child was out of the house with me. When the murderers burst in, they shouted my name. They said that I was engaged in anti-Islamic activity. After the killings, I received a written threat from a terrorist group called Ansar Islam. They warned us to leave our home or face dire consequences. We left in haste, without our belongings.*



Pastor Bardelian Youssef, Jesus of Nazareth Church: *I was kidnapped on February 12, 2007. Masked men hijacked my car. My wife and I were on our way to visit some poor families. They beat both of us, but they let my wife go. They put a sack over my head, tied my hands and feet, and put me in the trunk of another car. When the car stopped we were outside Baghdad. I could tell because the place smelled of farm animals. At first, the kidnappers tortured me. But I prayed to God for protection, and he granted it. The beatings soon stopped. I could not see anything because of the sack. But I could hear what was going on around me. The kidnappers said they were "God's Warriors". They said Christians are America's spies, who opened the doors of Iraq to the United States. There were other prisoners at the same place. One was a Christian named "Sargon". He was there for only a short time. There was also a Shiite woman, who said she was pregnant. Our captors beheaded her. I could hear all the terrible sounds when it happened. I was there for 15 days, surviving on just a little bread and water each day. On the day before my release, someone came who*

sounded like their boss. He told the others I was not an American spy. The next day they put me in a car trunk and dumped me in the Asia neighborhood of Baghdad. Afterwards, I found out that I was released because my wife paid a ransom of 15 million dinars. The money was raised from poor church members. All those with some wealth already fled the area. We also left our home. All of our property is lost – the house, the car, the books, the computer, everything. If I went back to the house, I'm sure the terrorists would kill me. I am now wearing my clerical collar. But if I were to walk down the street wearing it, people would shout insults and throw filthy things at me.



Mariam Dawood Issa*: *On April 9, 2007, American soldiers killed my husband. He was driving our son to the hairdresser. My son was left with the body in the car for five hours before anybody came to help. American soldiers came later and said it was an accident. They gave me a compensation claim card. On the day of the funeral, terrorists came and looted our house. They probably did this because they knew that American soldiers had come to see me. Three days later, they bombed the house. We were staying with my brother when the house was bombed. We left Baghdad and went to the Nineveh Plain, but I could not get a job there. We came back to Baghdad. I have not been able to get a job here. I have not received any compensation from the Americans. They said I*

have to take the claim card to an office in a part of the city that is not safe. It is too dangerous for me to go there. My life has been turned around 180 degrees.

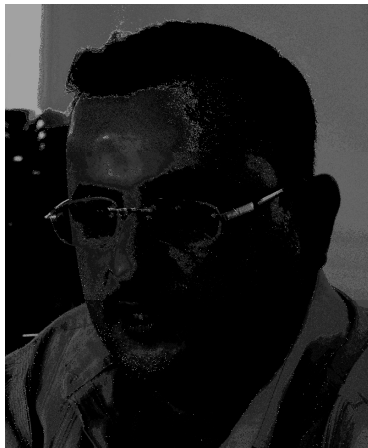
Salem Gorgies** : *I was shot by terrorists when I came home from work. I was just a few yards from the house when they opened fire. I was wounded in the head and in the chest. My wife and child were witnesses. It happened in September 2004. I am an agricultural engineer by profession. I had a business producing honey. After the war, armed men came and looted what they could carry away and destroyed what they had to leave behind. I had to earn a living as a driver. Sometimes the American military would use my services. I was probably targeted because of this. The Muslims have always looked down on us. Since my youth, I experienced insults. They have always called us “traitors”, “infidels” and “crusaders”. Now they accuse the Christians of collaborating with the Americans. To protect us, the Americans would have to put a tank in front of every house. Within just a few years, all the Christians will be gone from Baghdad, Basra, Mosul and Kirkuk. The few that will remain in Iraq will be found in some of the villages in the North. I don't see much chance of democracy succeeding in Iraq. Old fashioned Islam is too deeply embedded in the minds of most Iraqi Muslims.*



* Name changed for security reasons.

** Interviewed in Istanbul.

Majhed Zuheri*: *I am a Mandaean. We are followers of John the Baptist and the prophets. I established a Mandaean association. It has legal recognition in Iraq. Until the Arab Islamic invasion of the 7th century, all Iraqi culture was based on the Syriac-Aramaic language. Now, those of us who use that language are a small minority of Iraqis. There are about nine million members of Iraqi minority groups. But 75% of them live abroad because of persecution. They fear extinction. The Mandeans numbered about 60,000 in the 1970s. Two decade later, the number was down to 40,000. In 2000, there were 20,000 left. Now, only 3,500 remain in Iraq. In Baghdad we number a mere 150 families. We are victims of violence and discrimination. Today, the funeral took place of three murdered Mandeans. Members of our community were too afraid to go to the temple for the funeral. They fear for their lives.*



Nabeel Khnano*: *I was forced to leave my home in the Dora district last April, together with 8 other members of my family. A terrorist group demanded that we convert to Islam, or pay protection money, or leave our home without any belongings. We chose to leave. They agreed to let me take our furniture after I paid them \$800. The situation in Dora got much worse after the American invasion. The American army did not make a serious effort to secure the area. Islamic terrorists gained control of the neighborhood right under the nose of the U.S. army. The greatest wave of attacks against Christians in Dora started around September 2006. Iraq has become a country of religious conflict. Most of the Muslims consider us as foreigners – as aliens who do not really belong in our own country. The clergy were the first to suffer. They were kidnapped and killed. Things got worse when American troops used the monastery and Babylon College of Theology as a camp. This enraged the Muslims against us. My church, the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul is now closed because of the insecurity. I have been threatened many times because I am known to be a Christian journalist who dared speak the truth on Iraqi TV about what is happening to the Christians. The Iraqi government knows that Christians are attacked, but they do nothing to help us. We are unimportant to them. In Kurdistan, there is a dictatorship, and a lot of discrimination against Christians. My sister tried to get a place in a university in Kurdistan, but was told by the Rector that although she was qualified, she could not have a place because she is a Christian. I do not want to leave Iraq, but it is not clear that we have a future here.*

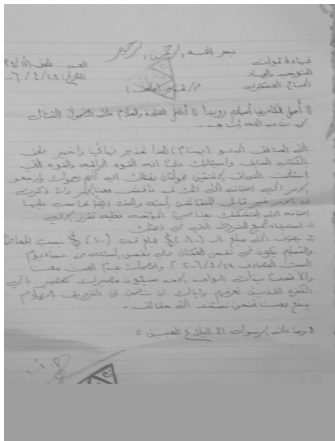
Hilda Israel was kidnapped in Baghdad on October 28, 2006. She managed to call her brother on a cell phone. She screamed that they were killing her. The call was disconnected. No one has ever heard from her again.



*Photo darkened for security reasons.



Archbishop Matti Shaba Matoka of Baghdad, Syrian Catholic Church: *The Syrian Catholic Church is one of the smaller Churches in Iraq. We have two diocese: Baghdad and Mosul. Before the last war, we had 70,000 members, about 26,000 lived in Baghdad. Many of our people have fled to the North and abroad. I don't know exactly how many people are left. But I can see that our once full churches are now almost empty. We used to have five masses every Sunday in the Cathedral. We have had to cut back to three, and those three are poorly attended. Our members have either fled, or they are too afraid to go to church. All Christians throughout the world should support the right of Iraqi Christians to live and practice their faith in peace and security in their own land.*



The following letter is typical of the many written threats made by jihad terrorists against Baghdad's Christians.

IN THE NAME OF GOD THE MERCIFUL

*Directorate of the Unity and Jihad Forces
The Army Wing
Date:: 26/04/2006*

"Allah throws away those who reject Him"

Best Salutations on Mohamed Son of Abdulla, Pray on Him

From the Unity and Jihad forces to the immoral person named Jakob,*

According to the purifying operations, which are run automatically in the area, and according to the attached reports, you have done shameful things such as:-

- 1. Throwing public insults at Muslims.*
- 2. Accepting the Holy Bible which disgraces and dishonors the Koran.*
- 3. Harassing Muslim women and describing the veiled ones as mentally retarded.*
- 4. Describing the Jihad fighters as destroyers, as well as terrorists.*

It has been noticed from the report that you have done the same things as the immoral person named Aziz, and according to our knowledge he is your neighbor.*

Therefore, being the consultants of the group Abou Thir, God protect him, we have decided to give you two alternatives. The first is death, i.e.; the same fate as Tarik.. The second is to fulfill our demands. We hereby clarify the second choice, which is better and these are our rules:-*

- 1. Write an apology addressed to the above referenced group, and give a a guarantee that none of these actions will be repeated*
- 2. Declare fidelity and obedience to Abou Mosaab.*

3. Pay the “Jizya” in the amount of USD 800.-

4. Enclose the money and written statements in a bag and put the bag on a table at the cigarettes kiosk, near the school Thanaa, in front of the school door of El Nahda school, exactly at 8:45 on Thursday evening the 27th of April 2006. This order is not negotiable. Be informed that you are under surveillance .

God is witness that I have informed you.

Abou Abbar

* Names changed for security reasons.

Northern Iraq

The autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with its capital in Erbil, is dominated by the allied militias of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Kurdish nationalism provided the ideological basis for these two parties. Kurdish nationalists aspire to have an independent Pan-Kurdish state that includes northern Iraq and Kurdish inhabited parts of Turkey, Iran and Syria. However, the immediate objective of the ascendant leadership of these parties is to consolidate power in Kurdistan and to annex oil-rich multi-religious and multi-ethnic districts of northern Iraq, such as Kirkuk, Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, that are not included in the KRG under the current Iraqi constitution. Kurdish militias occupy large swathes of land adjacent to, but outside the bounds of the KRG. Northern Iraq is regarded as the ancient homeland of the country’s historic Christian population. Christian villages are scattered throughout the mountains of the KRG. There is also a concentration of Christians in the Nineveh Plain, Mosul and Kirkuk. Security in the KDP and PUK-controlled parts of northern Iraq is considerably better than in Baghdad, and the leadership of the KRG is relatively tolerant of western missionary activity. But indigenous Christians face pressure to leave because of violence, threats of violence, confiscation of property and discrimination arising from the prevalence in Kurdish society of Muslim supremacism and Kurdish ethnic chauvinism. Shortly before our arrival, Christians in northern Iraq were unnerved by a press statement by Mulla Bakhtiyal, Head of Foreign Relations Bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) denying that Christians possess land in Kurdistan or in the rest of Iraq and therefore rejecting their constitutional right to have their own administrative units. (AINA, October 22, 2007)

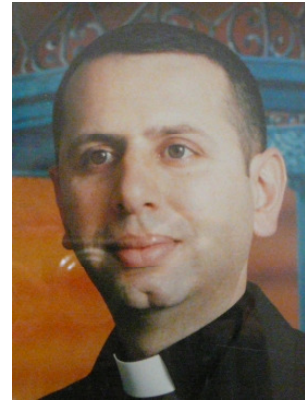
Nineveh Plain



Aziz Matti Ganni (father of murdered Catholic priest **Fr. Ragheed Aziz Ganni**): *My son was shot to death in Mosul on the 3rd of June, 2007. He was executed together with three deacons, **Ghassan Assam, Basman Youssef and Wahid Hanna**. They were leaving the Church of the Holy Spirit when armed men, shouting Allahu Akhbar (God is Great), started shooting at them. Ragheed was an engineer before becoming a priest. He went to Rome to study theology. But he chose to come back to Iraq rather than stay abroad because he wanted to strengthen the suffering Christians here. He was targeted because he stood firm in the Christian faith and encouraged the Church. He had had a number of death threats, but he was not intimidated. Not long before he was murdered his church was bombed.*

Fr. Ragheed sent an alarming message to a friend, Fr. Christian, in Rome less than six months before his death:

“The situation, as you can follow in the news, is dreadful. Christians are suffering twice, first because of the situation, second because of their religion. The Pope's speech lit a fire in the city. A Syrian Orthodox priest was beheaded; my parish church was attacked five times. I was threatened even before that priest was kidnapped, but I was very careful about moving around. I postponed my vacation twice because I couldn't leave the city under such conditions. Ramadan was a disaster for us in Mosul. Hundreds of Christian families fled outside the city including my family and uncles. About 30 people left all their properties and fled, having been threatened. It is not easy but the grace of the Lord gives support and strength. We face death every day here”



The day before his death he sent another message to Fr. Christian:

“The situation here is worse than hell, and my church has been attacked a few more times since we last met. Last week two guards in it were wounded after an attack. We shall meet in the near future and have a chat about all these events. God bless, Ragheed.”

The chat never took place. At Fr. Ragheed's funeral, his colleague **Fr. Philip Najim** delivered another clear message to the world about the desperate plight of Iraqi Christians:

“Closed churches, car bombs, forced conversions, kidnappings: in Iraq Christians are dying. The church is disappearing because of persecutions, threats and violence from extremists who leave no other option: convert or flee”.

Apart from the loss of their son, Aziz and his wife **Gurjia** were forced to flee their home in Mosul. According to Aziz: *My wife, Gurjia, and I had a house in Mosul, but had to move out. On September 19, 2006, a letter was pushed under our gate. It was from the Shura Council of Ansar Islam. They demanded payment of \$50,000 as a jizya (Islamic protection tax) payment to enable us to remain in our home. The note said “don't bother complaining to the Americans, because they will not stop us and we will come to kill you”. We fled Mosul and came back to our ancestral village, Keramlesh. We live according to the will of God. Our family wants to stay in our own land.*



Baghdeda (Hamdamiya)

In Baghdeda, we met with a group of local Christians who did not wish to be identified for fear of violent reprisals. They expressed the following statements.

** We had a very bad experience with the Kurds after the fall of Saddam. The Kurdish fighters were here and treated us in a way that did not inspire confidence. For example, in 2005, during elections, we were not allowed to vote because ballots and ballot boxes did not come on time. The obstruction of the elections was carried out by PDK militiamen. Once they arrested and beat me. Even though the PDK is only a political party, its acts like a government. They have their secret police here, and intimidate the Christians. They use violence to punish the local people. On the 17th of October, three Kurdish militiamen followed a car carrying Christians to a wedding. They beat the driver and the brother of the groom right at the church. They want to show that they are the authority. The area of Nineveh does not belong to Kurdistan. These militias should not be here. We would like to have our own administrative unit. But we cannot see how its laws would be respected by more powerful neighbors. Since 2003, we have been meeting regularly with American soldiers and officials. Not long ago we met with General Twitty. The meetings are always friendly, and they say that will take corrective action. But nothing ever happens. Maybe it's because the personnel always keep changing.*

** We were so happy when Saddam Hussein was overthrown. But we have been dismayed by what has followed. The United States has encouraged and supported the Kurds, not us. The Nineveh Governorate is a dictatorship. Kurdish militias deny us freedom to speak out. We are regarded as a dhimmi people. We are forced, against our will, to finance terrorism because we are forced to pay the jiyza. This means we are paying for our own demise. Our people are kidnapped. Christian students are forced out of the University because they are not Muslim. There is very open persecution of Christians here. But the Government turns a blind eye. In the mosques, they preach that Christians are infidels, and that their property can be confiscated without payment. We have to conclude that the Government agrees because it does nothing to stop this kind of hateful preaching. We are accused of supporting the Americans, but they do nothing to help us. They help rebuild mosques instead.*



Ameen Jijo, Yezidi Member of Iraqi Parliament: *Greetings from all Yezidi people. I am the only Yezidi representative in the Iraqi Parliament. The Yezidis are one of the most ancient of Iraq's religious communities. We have been persecuted repeatedly in the past. We are still persecuted today. Over 250 Yezidis were murdered by car bombs in several Yezidi villages on the 15th of August, 2007. Our religion is not regarded by Muslims as a "heavenly religion". We are therefore thought of as mere infidels, who have no rights under Islamic law. Our people have been Arabized by force. We are happy that Saddam is gone. But we have been shocked to see how the Kurds now try to impose their nationality on us. We represent an ancient civilization and have the right to stay in our country. There are about one million Yezidis. 90% are from around Mosul. Most of the rest are from around Dohuk. About half a million have fled abroad, and more leave every day. In the North, they are*

subjected to Kurdification. All the administration, the police, the army, the bureaucracy is all Kurdish. The Kurds also confiscate our lands. The Kurds play a trick in their attempt to annex the Mosul and the Nineveh Plain to Kurdistan. It is to claim that there are a lot of Kurds living there. But the 90% of these so-called “Kurds” are really Yezidis who don’t want to be Kurdified. The Kurds are now reorganizing their system for their own exclusive benefit, and the United States is supporting this because the Kurds are influential allies. This American policy is paving the way for the destruction of all Iraq’s religious minorities, including the Christians. I don’t understand what the United States is doing. They will spend millions to preserve the artistic treasures of ancient civilizations, but they have no interest of the people who are the heirs of those civilizations. The Turkoman minority are vigorously defended by Turkey. But we have no one on the outside to protect us. We want Mosul and the Nineveh Plain to be organized into an administrative unit for minorities, especially non-Muslims. But the Kurds don’t want this. Even though these areas are not in Kurdistan, they are occupied by Kurdish militias. The Iraqi army is nowhere to be seen. It is asleep.

Kurdistan

Ainkawa

** In Ainkawa, now a suburb of Erbil, we also met with a group of local Christians who did not wish to be identified for fear of violent reprisals. They expressed the following statements: Since the fall of Saddam, we have been faced with a whole range of new problems that threaten our existence. We were in the front line of those who worked to bring about the fall of Saddam. But now the Americans and others have no interest in us. We speak to international organizations, but they show no real interest and ultimately do nothing. The Iraqi Government shows increasing hostility. The problem is that we are Christians and view ourselves as a distinct nationality. We participated in all elections. But we are left with only one member of parliament. We cooperated closely with the Kurds in the struggle against Saddam. But we always protected our own independence from them. Our rights will never be realized if we subordinate ourselves to them. They all try to bring us under their leadership.*

** The biggest problem with the Kurds is the fact that they come in large numbers and settle on our land. The authorities do nothing to stop them. Many Kurdish villages were built, both before and after the fall of Saddam, with international financial support. But we are given just a few showcase housing projects built with international funds. Most of the international money is lost in corruption. The Kurds started moving into our areas in 1961, at the beginning of the Kurdish rebellion. They were displaced by the Iraqi military and resettled on our villages. These Christian villages were then attacked and burned down by Kurdish militias loyal to the regime in Baghdad. These Kurdish militias were called “Fourssan” in Arabic and “Jata” or “Jahsh” in Kurdish. In the 1980’s, Saddam’s regime displaced Kurds and Christians from their villages and resettled them both on Christian owned land, sometimes in collective villages, like Berseve, Hizawa and Deralok. In these places the nationalities were all mixed together.*

** The government of Kurdistan boasts that it prevents Muslims from buying land in Ainkawa. But the Kurdish authorities confiscated my grandfather’s land near the Erbil airport without compensation. Sometimes they give the confiscated land to their Muslim friends and relatives.*

** Many displaced Christians from Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk are coming here. But they do not receive from the Kurdish government permits to work and buy land, even though their region is part of Iraq, unless they join one of the two ruling Kurdish political parties.*

** Kurdish political leaders try to weaken us by exploiting religious divisions within our community. There is nothing we can do. Violence would be counter-productive. If our people were to kill one Kurd, they would respond by killing 100 Christians. The United States could do something about this. The Americans created and now protect the Kurdish region. If Washington were to seriously correct this situation, the Kurds would listen and comply.*

Fr. Bashar Warda: *I am the rector of the Chaldean Catholic seminary in Baghdad. The Churches in Baghdad have been bombed and the seminary is now closed. I am now working here in Ainkawa. We will not be able to go back anytime soon. It is no exaggeration to say that Iraq's Christian community faces extinction. Some say that Saddam did not persecute the Church, but he did. In the 1970's, he arrested many of the clergy and confiscated Christian schools. But greater persecution came after his overthrow. Many political leaders claim that violence is not directed against Christians. But it is. The Government will not protect us. They are part of the problem. All the people are afraid of the future. There is no security. There are no jobs for Christians. Many small businesses owned by Christians have been forced to close. The people don't trust the government. We try to encourage people to stay in Iraq through humanitarian projects. We asked the government five months ago to provide financial aid to the displaced Christians. But nothing comes from that source.*



Humziya Village



Behnam N Goriel: *My ancestors came from this village. The Christians were first displaced from here in 1961. We tried to reclaim our land in the mid-1970's, but conflict again forced us away. Some of us came back from Baghdad in the summer of 2006. 15 houses have now been built. 23 families live in them. There are 137 families in Baghdad that want to come back here. We have received some funds from the Minister of Finance of Kurdistan. But our water supply was cut and the authorities refuse to link our village with the power grid, less than one mile from here. In 1990-1 a group of Kurds came from near the border with Turkey. The Mifty family settled on my land. They say there were sent there by their "Agha" (tribal chief). They continue to expand their areas of cultivation. The provincial government administration in Dohuk has acknowledged that our deeds to the land are valid. But they do not allow us to reclaim our land. If the Kurds were paid*

some compensation by the government, they would leave and go elsewhere. In former times, the Kurds did not have much of a tradition of building mosques. But since the first Gulf War, Saudi Arabia started to finance mosque building. Kurdish women are now encouraged to copy the Wahabists and wear the veil. In Dohuk, the Saudis built a first class medical facility. There is a Saudi-financed organization called El Igatta Islamiya (Islamic Aid) that is behind this promotion of Wahabism. There is no such support coming from outside for the promotion of Christianity. I wrote to John Negroponte when he was the Ambassador in Baghdad, but never received a reply.

Dohuk

In Dohuk, we met with another group of local Christians who did not wish to be identified for fear of violent reprisals. They expressed the following statements;

** The main problem in Kurdistan is the absence of the rule of law. Within the organs of government, money, religion and race take precedence over the law. Our people are killed by the Kurds. The Kurds confiscate land belonging to Christians. The authorities do nothing to stop it.*



** Christian businessmen have big problems here. Kurds in power demand allegiance to their political party and a share of profits in return for freedom to engage in business activity. A mafia system based on Kurdish clans and political parties prevails here.*

** We know that the Kurdish militias and political parties are dependent on the United States. If the USA and its allies want to change the behavior of the Kurdish authorities, they have the power to do so.*

** We have become so weak that it is increasingly difficult to defend our interests, especially since those that oppose our interests have become much stronger. If we carry on like this we will soon be finished. But if we were to succeed in recovering some of our rights, many who have left the country would be encouraged to return home.*



** I sought refuge in Dohuk after Islamic extremists forced my family to leave Baghdad. Our value in the eyes of Muslims is now nothing. In the past, Christians had some value because our people generally possess a high level of education and good business skills. But these days even these qualities are not appreciated. When I came to Dohuk, I set up a laundry business. It could have been very successful. But Kurds interfered, and I had to close it.*

**I am also displaced from Baghdad. It has been impossible to find a job here. I am an engineer. I should be able to get employment. The economy in Kurdistan is growing. There is a lot of new building. But wherever I go, the first thing Kurdish employers ask is whether I belong to one of the two big Kurdish political parties and whether I speak Kurdish. I will not join one of those parties, and I speak Arabic, not Kurdish. It is new for Christians to have to meet these Kurdish conditions for employment in their own country.*

** Kurdish political leaders claim that there is great freedom for Christians in Kurdistan, because they allow Christians to sell alcohol in their shops. But they discriminate against us. My brother was rejected for higher education because he would not join the PUK. The Kurds want to take away our own identity and to Kurdify us.*

** The Kurdish political leadership has succeeded in co-opting some Christians. They have been given positions in the government. But they have to do the bidding of the Kurds. They cannot really defend the real interests of their fellow Christians.*

** I am a lawyer and have been dealing with Christian property claims for the past four years. In Kurdistan it is virtually unknown for Christians to receive back their land as a result of legal proceedings. The land of Christians has been confiscated by individuals and by the state. In the few cases where Christians receive something, it has been a small amount of money as compensation. The land is never returned. The rule of law simply does not apply here. As a result the Christians are losing their lands.*

Gonde Kosa Village



Yonadan Giwargis:
Our village was caught up in the Kurdish uprising against the government in Baghdad. Saddam bombed and used chemical weapons against the villages in this area. During his “Al-Anfal Operation”¹ in 1988, 38 people from



our village fell into the hands of Saddam’s troops and were never seen

¹ “Al-Anfal is the eighth sura or chapter of the Qur’an which explains the triumph of 319 followers of the new Muslim faith over almost 900 pagans at the battle of Badr in 642 AD. Al Anfal literally means the spoils (of war) and was perhaps quite fitting for a military campaign of extermination and looting commanded by [Saddam Hussein’s officer] Ali Hassan al-Majid. His orders informed jash (literally “donkey’s foal” in Kurdish) units that taking cattle, sheep, goats, money, weapons and even Kurdish women were halal or legal in Islamic terms.[3] The verse 12 of al-Anfal sura of Koran reads: ‘God revealed his will to the angels saying: I shall cast terror into the hearts of the infidels. Strike off their heads. Strike off the very tips of their fingers!’” (Wikipedia, “Al-Anfal”)

alive again. Our people had to live in nearby caves in those days. Men from the village cooperated with the Kurds and some fought together with Barzani's Kurdish militia. Even though we helped them during that time of trial, the Kurds of Ekada (a neighboring village) hate us. They hate us because they want our land, and we don't want to yield it to them. They say the land belongs to them because land in Kurdistan should belong to the Kurds. They think that people who are not Kurds have no right to anything in Kurdistan. If we would rent an orchard to them for a year or two, we would never be able to recover it. About one and a half years ago, one of our shepherds, Nissa Younan was attacked by four Kurds from a neighboring village. They grabbed him and slashed him with a knife. Nissa survived and reported the attack to the authorities. But they have done nothing to bring justice. Nissa has now fled the country. A few years ago, there was an incident where Kurdish children were quarrelling with children from our village. Kurdish parent heard about the quarrel and called their militia to intervene. The Kurdish militiamen, with automatic weapons, came at 3:00 am, and surrounded the village. These kinds of things are done in the hope that we will seek a more peaceful life somewhere else and leave the land to them. This area was exclusively Christian and Jewish before 1948. That is when they started to push out the Jews. Now we are experiencing the fate of the Jews. I blame the British for putting this paradise in the hands of such brutal people.



Amire Khamis: *My husband, Akiqar Giwargis Odisho, was murdered on August 8, 2006. We have three children. He was out with the sheep. It was around 7:00 in the evening. The murderer came by car. He got out and shot him with an automatic weapon. He then ran to a waiting pick truck and drove away with other men. His car was left behind. The identity of the killer is known. His name is Sherdel Taha, and he lives in Ekada. My husband recognized the Kurd. He told us in the hospital just before he died that Shedel had shot him. Akiqar's brother, **Yonadan** (see preceding interviewee.), is trying to pursue justice. He has been receiving threats since taking up the matter. Kurdish militiamen once tried to kill him. They hijacked his car and were about to kill him, when they realized that they had not caught the right man. Yonadan was not in the car. It was one of his Kurdish business associates. The militiamen let the Kurd go, boasting that they would one day kill Yonadan. We cannot get justice.*

Dawoodiya Village: On the day of our arrival in Dawoodiya, a nearby Christian village was shelled from across the border in Turkey. We briefly stopped to call on **Dalya Zaya Toma**, the grieving mother of **Johnny Youhanna Daodd**, who was murdered in Baghdad, together with three other body guards of our host, Pascale Warda.



We stopped briefly at the largely ruined Christian village of Chakala. It is the ancestral home of Pascale Warda's husband **William Warda** of the **Hamorabi Human Rights Organization**:



The inhabitants of Chakala were forced to flee in 1961 and again in 1978. After the fall of Saddam, some of the displaced returned to their village to plant new orchards and start rebuilding. Just about everything in the village had been destroyed. They found that displaced Kurds had been resettled nearby, especially in a large model village, Berefka, which was financed by the UN. Some of the Kurds from that village confiscated large tracks of land belonging to Christians, and now they can't re-possess it. International organizations built for the Kurds of Berefka - on Christian owned land - a pumping station to provide

water from the river to the Berefka. But the local Kurdish authorities refuse to allow the pumping station to serve Chakala. When Mme. Mitterand – the wife of the former President of France - became aware of the Kurds' refusal to allow the pumping station to serve Chakala, she raised funds for the construction of a pumping station for the Christian village. But the Kurds of Berefka and the local Kurdish authority have prevented its construction. There is another Kurdish village nearby. Kurdish families have lived there for a long time. They maintain friendly, respectful relations with the Christians of Chakala. It is a shame that the Kurdish newcomers in Berefka are so hostile.

Representatives of Iraq's Political Establishment



Vice-President Adil Abd Al-Madhi, (member of the Shiite Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution:

Islam is a peaceful and tolerant religion. But there are bad Muslims who are ruining this. Jews thrived in Iraq before the creation of the state of Israel. Our government is serious about addressing human rights issues and the problems of the displaced. There is no reason why there should not be a special administrative unit for Christians and other minorities. It is a constitutional right.²

(An aid to the Vice-President mentioned that many of the government's problems addressing the humanitarian crisis related to the mass displacement of people are compounded by the fact that UN agencies and NGOs are based in Jordan

and maintain only a low level presence in Iraq because of security concerns. He expressed optimism that they would soon raise their profile inside the country.)

²“This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural and educational rights for the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians and all other components. This will be organized by law.” (Article 121, Iraqi Constitution).

Widjan M. Salim, Iraqi Minister for Human Rights: *I am a Christian, and am on the political ticket of the party of the former Prime Minister Ayad Alawi. The biggest problem in Iraq is increasing sectarianism. Islam is the point of reference for everything. Christians are under great pressure. The improvement in security is just a lull. There has been no real reconciliation between enemies. Kurds are applying constant pressure to try to incorporate Mosul and Kirkuk in a greater Kurdistan. They send NGOs to go to these places and conduct bogus polls about preference for being annexed to Kurdistan. They also use financial incentives, and make great promises about how they will protect Christians. The issue of an administrative unit for Christians and other religious minorities is not on the agenda of the Council of Ministers. The Council will not do anything about it until a study of the area has been conducted, and there is no study in progress. NGO leadership of such a study would be helpful.*



Abdel Samad Rahman Sultan, Iraqi Minister for Immigration and Refugees (Shiite):



Christians are targeted. They are peaceful people. They were not prepared for what was to come. We believe the Christian community is in need. Christians are not in the habit of asking for help. They were always self-sufficient. We will seek them out and help them. What we do though is minimal. It is not nearly enough. People are also afraid to go to government offices for help. They have security fears. There are also bureaucratic problems. People who do go are often just sent away and told to come back another time. We have a new program to give \$120 dollars per month to every displaced family, but it is not yet fully

operational. (None of the displaced people with whom we spoke had received any financial assistance from the government. Some suggested that the money probably disappeared because of corruption – one of the powerful factors that hinder the development of strong, effective government in Iraq.)

Dilshad Miran, Minister of KRD in Baghdad: *I don't believe Turkey will launch a major invasion of northern Iraq. They may continue with small-scale incursion and commando raids. They have been doing this for some time. The Turks need to solve their own political and security situation in Turkey before launching an invasion of Iraq. Kurds have a strong tradition of toleration. Christians can feel secure in Kurdistan. We do not have any special law to regulate relations with other nationalities. Nothing can be done to push forward such a law until Baghdad and Erbil settle the issues of jurisdiction over contested territory [i.e., Mosul, Nineveh Plain and Kirkuk].*





Nawzad Hadi, Governor of Erbil, KRG: *We have no problems with Christians here in Kurdistan. Violence is forcing them to flee Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk. They come here for refuge. The situation of the displaced Christians is better than that of displaced Kurds. We are trying to protect the Christian character of Ainkawa. There is now a moratorium on the purchase of land there by Muslims. Iraq will remain a weak state. Shiites and Sunnis will never cooperate sufficiently to create a strong state. The Shiites will never again allow the Sunnis to lead Iraq. Christians will find their future in Kurdistan. The rest of Iraq has a religious basis that works against the Christians.*



Dr. Shiwan M. El Aziz, Minister for Human Rights, KDR: *We defend article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights³ For the first time, all groups, Kurds, Christians, and Turkomans have political representation and their own schools. We have not received any complaints that Christians are disadvantaged. The situation here is much better than in other countries of the region. We have a commission for human rights. UN agencies are members of the advisory board. We have no law for nationalities. Perhaps we might one day have a law for “minorities”, [as opposed to “nationalities”]. If there is to be an initiative for a law to guarantee rights of nationalities, it must come from the representatives of the minority communities.*

Drs. Saleh Al Augely, Tassim Tahii and Ramula Dori, Members of the Shiite Al Sadr faction in the Iraqi Parliament: *We represent a large popular movement that has entered the political field. We want a country in which the rule of law prevails. But many terrorist groups were permitted to operate in Iraq. The Sadr group was the first to be punished by them. We try to help the migrant, the displaced, the freed prisoners and other victims of Saddam. We protect the churches and try to help displaced Christians. We also fight against widespread corruption in government. All the death and destruction that is taking place now only serves Jewish interests. The USA and the Iraqi government target us because we have opposed the occupation from the beginning. We are not calling for an Islamic state, but instead a state whose laws are respectful of Islamic law.*



³ Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.)

Conclusions

1. Iraq is currently a failed state, unable to fulfill the most basic function of government – security for its citizens. The United States’ efforts at “nation-building” through the investment of massive American military, political and financial support have not yet produced a fully functional state.
2. The existence of Iraq’s Christian, Yezidi and Mandaean communities are under threat. The majority of Christians have fled their homes. Nearly half live abroad as refugees. Many, possibly the majority of those remaining in Iraq are internally displaced people (IDPs)
3. Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities are not just caught in the crossfire, nor are they only victims of indiscriminate acts of terror. They are targeted for acts of violence and discrimination because they are non-Muslim and are not Kurdish.
4. Neither the Iraqi government, the United States, nor the United Nations have been able or willing to establish effective programs to assist either the refugees outside Iraq or the internally displaced.
5. Unless the current trajectory of persecution changes radically, Iraq’s ancient Christian community will become virtually extinct within one generation.
6. The ability of Iraq’s Christians and other minorities to live in peace and security in their own home is a litmus test for the success of the United States’ “Operation Freedom – Iraq”.

Recommendations

1. The United States should recognize the mass displacement of Iraqis as a catastrophe, similar in scale to displacement caused by the genocide process in Darfur or the Tsunami in 2004⁴, and provide emergency humanitarian aid and make provision for the mass voluntary return of refugees in the event the security improves substantially. Coordination of this emergency aid operation should be undertaken by an interagency task force, headed by the U.S. Secretary of State.
2. The United States, as the occupying power in Iraq, should use its power to encourage the federal Iraqi government in Baghdad and the authorities in the Kurdistan to:
 - a. Establish self-governing local administrative units for Christians and other national and religious minorities, as permitted by Iraq’s Constitution.
 - b. Establish programs designed to advance the security, administration and economic development of those units.
 - c. Establish direct relations with Christian community leaders who represent Christian interests, as opposed to Christians who have been co-opted to represent other political parties, to guarantee that support for the administrative units.
 - d. Establish an ethnically and religiously balanced and transparent land claims commission, especially in Kurdistan, for the purpose of returning confiscated or otherwise occupied land to rightful owners.
 - e. Provide residence and work permits for displaced Christians who have fled to Kurdistan, and end the practice of requiring special travel permits - i.e., internal visas - for Iraqi citizens from outside Kurdistan who wish to travel to the region.

⁴ According to the UN: 2.2 million Iraqi`s are refugees outside Iraq, while over 2 million are internally displaced; 2.2 million people have been displaced in Darfur; and over one million have been displaced by the Tsunami of 2004.

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Our dedicated, courageous and tireless bodyguards, who have already lost four their colleagues – Johnny Youhanna Dawood, Maher Moneeb Hanna, Danny Nissan Philipos, and his brother Ninos Nissan Philipos - to assassins;



My able CSI colleague and travel companion Gunnar Wiebalck.



Dr. John Eibner
November 15, 2007