

ERASING ASSYRIANS:

How the KRG Abuses Human Rights, Undermines Democracy, and Conquers Minority Homelands



Erasing Assyrians: How the KRG Abuses Human Rights, Undermines Democracy, and Conquers Minority Homelands

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The Assyrian Confederation of Europe (ACE) represents the Assyrian European community and is made up of Assyrian national federations in European countries. The objective of ACE is to promote Assyrian culture and interests in Europe and to be a voice for deprived Assyrians in historical Assyria. The organization has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

Cover photo: 7th-century BCE Assyrian archaeological site in Dohuk vandalized with the Kurdish flag

NINEVEH PLAIN

The Nineveh Plain is the only region in Iraq where the largest segment of the inhabitants are Assyrians. The area is considered the original Assyrian heartland.



“ On January 21, 2014, in a landmark moment for Assyrians and other minorities in the Nineveh Plain, the Iraqi Council of Ministers voted for the creation of three new governorates in Iraq, among them a Nineveh Plain Governorate. This new governorate would ostensibly serve as a safe haven for minorities, including Assyrians, while remaining part of Iraq and under the authority of the Central Government.

★ BAGHDAD

SECURITY IN THE NINEVEH PLAIN

September 2017



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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

AAS.....	Assyrian Aid Society
ACE	Assyrian Confederation of Europe
ADM.....	Assyrian Democratic Movement
AGE.....	Assyrian General Conference
AWU	Assyrian Women’s Union
BNDP.....	Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party
IDP.....	Internally-displaced person, someone who has been forced to leave their home but has been displaced within a country, in contrast to a “refugee” who has crossed an international boundary
IS	Islamic State (jihadist movement)
ISDP	Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project
KDP.....	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI.....	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
NPGF.....	Nineveh Plain Guard Forces (NPGF)
NPF.....	Nineveh Protection Forces
NPU.....	Nineveh Plain Protection Units
PMU.....	Popular Mobilization Units
PUK.....	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
USIP.....	United States Institute of Peace

INTRODUCTION

The Assyrian Identity

An estimated 1.5 million Assyrians globally (and around 300,000 within Iraq today) comprise a distinct, indigenous ethnic group. Descendants of ancient Assyria, Assyrians speak an ancient language referred to as Assyrian, Syriac, Aramaic or Neo-Aramaic.

The contiguous territory that forms the traditional Assyrian homeland contains southern and southeastern Turkey, northwestern Iran, northern Iraq and northeastern Syria. The Assyrian population in Iraq constitutes the largest remaining concentration of the ethnic group in the Middle East.

Assyrians are predominantly Christian. Some ethnic Assyrians self-identify as Chaldeans or Syriacs, depending on church denomination. Assyrians have founded five Eastern Churches at different points during their long history: Ancient Church of the East, Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church, Syriac Catholic Church, and the Syriac Orthodox Church. The majority of Assyrians who remain in Iraq today adhere to the Chaldean and Syriac churches.

Background

Assyrians represent one of the most consistently targeted communities in Iraq throughout its modern history. This has included the state-sanctioned massacre at Simele in 1933; Saddam Hussein's

Anfal campaign, which included the targeting of Assyrians villages; ruthless campaigns of terror to which Christians were subjected following the U.S. invasion in 2003; and finally, the recent tragic chapter authored by the Islamic State (IS) jihadist organization.

Following the removal of Saddam's regime in 2003, but still years prior to the emergence of IS, the Assyrian experience in Iraq was already one of relentless persecution, bloodshed, and displacement.

As the large state system that had sustained the country for decades was collapsing all around ordinary Iraqis, sectarian groups and militias emerged who jostled, often violently, for power and influence. Assyrians were defenseless in this environment and were sadly overlooked by the Coalition forces who failed to provide them or other minorities any special considerations or protection amid the power vacuum.

Due to the policy of de-Ba'athification, the security apparatus in Iraq collapsed, leaving minority populations vulnerable to terror attacks. What followed was a wave of violence specifically targeting Assyrians for their Christian faith, as well as for their valuables and property. Assyrian priests were kidnapped and killed. Women were found dead. Ransoms were demanded. Many people went missing.¹ In 2008, then U.S. Senator Barack Obama wrote a letter to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, expressing concern about the status of Assyrians, Yazidis, and other Iraqi minorities and requesting to know what steps the U.S. government was taking to ensure their security and democratic participation within Iraq's political system.² Sadly, the situation continued to deteriorate during that administration as well as under President Obama's own administration.

Over 70 churches were attacked or bombed during these years and the violence against Assyrians seemingly climaxed in 2010 with a hor-

rific church massacre in Baghdad. Six jihadists belonging to the IS precursor organization called



Assyrians in Baghdad mourn the loss of loved ones killed by Islamic extremism. (2010)

the Islamic State in Iraq murdered over 60 people during a church service in the Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic Church.³

Emigration from Iraq intensified generally in the decade following the U.S. invasion, but Assyrians and other minorities were disproportionately more likely to emigrate, as they could not call upon influential or armed groups to protect them. Estimates for the Christian population, which were above a million before 2003, have now shrunk to around 300,000. Even the relatively high concentrations of Assyrians in Baghdad, the Nineveh Governorate, and areas administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) began to dwindle as Assyrians faced both physical violence and political marginalization. Arabic and Kurdish were made the two official languages of Iraq while the Assyrian language (sometimes referred to as “Syriac” or “Aramaic”) was ignored. With Iraq’s Central Government and the KRG locked in a bitter struggle over land and resource-

es, Assyrians and other minorities were caught in the middle and found themselves truly “On Vulnerable Ground,” as expressed by the title of an important Human Rights Watch report from 2009.⁴

The U.S. military presence in Iraq did its best to paper over the cracks forming in Iraqi society, but that did not stop the fractures among the various groups from deepening. Once Coalition forces had officially withdrawn from Iraq in December 2011 as per their set timeframe, the stage was set for these cracks to reemerge and widen: the war for Iraq had just begun. Violence dramatically escalated in all corners of the country as groups who had been biding their time seized the opportunity to assert themselves.

Assyrians in large numbers have been pushed out of areas where they had lived, notably the urban centers in Baghdad and Basra in the south, as well as Nohadra (Dohuk) and Nineveh, their ancestral homelands in the north. Iraqi authorities in both the south and in the north failed Assyrians, exhibiting increased sectarian behavior as the spoils of the ruined state went up for grabs. Large amounts of land were seized, not by their owners or those with the most legitimate claims, but by those who could exercise the most force or who enjoyed the backing of the political powers that controlled security.

While it was true that all Iraqis were affected by the Iraq war, the international community failed to sufficiently focus on or confront the specific vulnerabilities of minority communities. This meant that root problems that mainly affected minorities went unaddressed, including the large-scale theft of minority lands within urban centers and the disputed territories. It is important to highlight that these destructive processes began while the U.S. was still in-country and supervising the development of new forms of governance and security. Both the Iraqi Central Government and the KRG were beholden to Coalition instruc-

tion, support, and policy advice; nevertheless, a political approach toward minorities began to take shape that continues to victimize their communities in the disputed territories today.

Had a functional Central Government exerted the proper effort during these turbulent years, the phenomenon of IS and the growing problem of the disputed territories may have been at least partially averted. Instead, the Shia-dominated Central Government elected to pursue its influence in oil-rich Kirkuk as its main priority among the disputed territories, relinquishing nearly all interest in what they viewed as a Sunni north. This negligence facilitated the acceleration of KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) expansionism into minority-inhabited Nineveh and Sinjar, and into Mosul proper.

Part of this process involved KDP-affiliated personnel becoming overrepresented in local security institutions and important political offices. Though a deal was brokered with Sunni Arabs which saw Atheel Nujafi installed as Governor of Nineveh in April 2009, it is widely believed that the senior KDP figure and Deputy Governor of Nineveh, Khasro Goran, held the actual power in Mosul.

As the reach of the KDP grew within the disputed territories, minorities were forced into dependency on KDP security and became effectively governed by KDP appointees or members of their communities who had entered into patronage with the KDP. This opened the door for new problems that confronted minorities, as terrorism became replaced by more covert forms of political oppression and silencing. Privileged classes engaging in minority land theft could now be protected by powerful security forces linked to new political institutions. It is notable that minorities have continued to emigrate from Iraq even in cases where terrorism has not been the main concern.

The following sections address the recent phenomenon of IS and the effect that this movement has had on Assyrians, as well as the responses to it by relevant actors. Subsequent sections will discuss the future of the Nineveh Plain, as well as the KRG's role, including the systemic persecution and discrimination against Assyrians throughout their territories.

Objective

This report is produced with a concern for Assyrian human rights and longevity in their homeland. The Assyrians are a people who have existed in Mesopotamia for thousands of years, yet we may be witnessing the very disappearance of this community, in our time. The end of the Assyrians in Iraq means the eventual end of the Assyrians. This may sound dramatic, but it is a very real possibility and not an exaggeration: The situation of Assyrians in Iraq is beginning to resemble the previous situation of Assyrians in Turkey, Iran, and Syria, which is a terrifying thought. Iraq, and specifically the Nineveh Plain, represents the only hope for a sustainable future that maintains the vital connection of Assyrians to their heritage. Without it, the ancient language and culture of the Assyrians could die.

A number of serious abuses that victimize the Assyrian people are underway in their homeland but are not widely known among those in the international community who have a concern for the welfare of minorities in Iraq. This report endeavors to raise awareness about these human rights violations and about the political dynamics that seek to deliberately undermine Assyrian efforts to develop a stable framework of local administration and security in the Nineveh Plain.

Methodology

This report conveys and contextualizes findings

made by a representative of the Assyrian Confederation of Europe (ACE) during a research trip to Iraq in December 2016 and January 2017, in addition to data gathered on an ongoing basis from a wide range of members from many Assyrian communities in Iraq. It seeks to convey a detailed understanding of the current situation facing Assyrians in northern Iraq.

ACE has interviewed approximately 100 men and women of Assyrian communities in the Kurdistan Region and the Nineveh Plain. In addition, ACE continues to conduct follow-up telephone interviews. All individuals interviewed were informed of the purpose of the interview, and verbally consented to the use of information provided in this report. Names and identifying information of many interviewees have been withheld in the interest of their personal safety.

Organization of This Report

This report is divided into five parts, with Part Two and Part Three comprising the bulk of the report. Following the introduction provided in Part One, Part Two deals with the broad range of problems facing Assyrians in the disputed territory of Nineveh. Part Three then examines problems experienced by Assyrians living inside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). These sections are followed by a shorter Part Four that presents some examples of how the KRG has responded when human rights abuses have been publicized. The report is completed with some policy recommendations in the concluding Part Five.

PART TWO

CONQUEST MASKED AS LIBERATION: ASSYRIANS IN THE NINEVEH PLAIN

1. The Nineveh Plain: The Assyrian Heartland

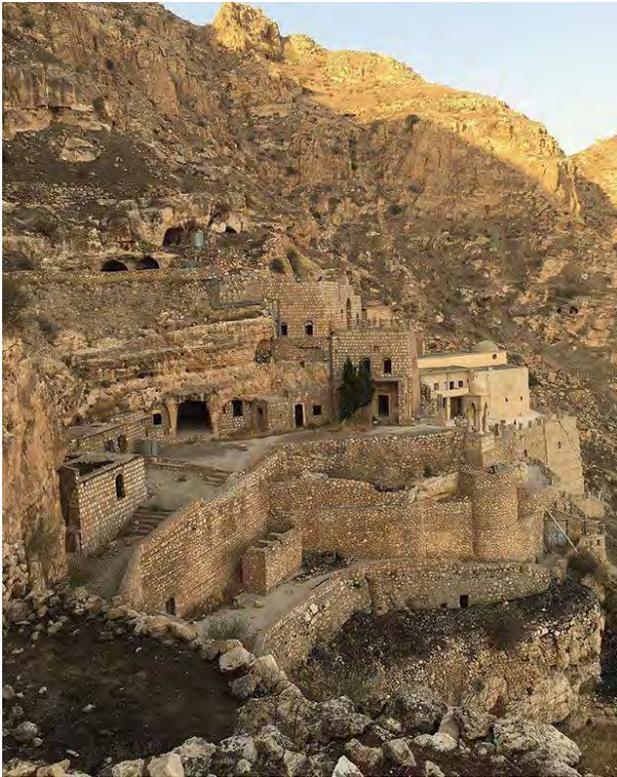
The Nineveh Plain is a region in Iraq's Nineveh Governorate located northeast of the city of Mosul. It abuts the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and is officially (though not entirely in practice) under the administration of the Central Government in Baghdad.

Prior to the advent of IS, the villages in the Nineveh Plain were inhabited by several ethnic and religious minority groups, the largest among them being the Assyrians.

The Nineveh Plain is the only region in Iraq where the largest demographic group is Christian. Before IS invaded Nineveh, Assyrians made up 40% of the population within the plains. The area is considered the ancient Assyrian heartland.

The area includes the ruins of the ancient Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Nimrud, and Dur-Sharrukin, as well as numerous ancient Assyrian religious sites, such as Mar Mattai Monastery and Rabban Hormizd Monastery.

The five patriarchal churches represented in the Nineveh Plain are the Ancient Church of the East, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Syriac Orthodox Church.



Rabban Hormizd Monastery in Alqosh, Nineveh Plain.

Since 2003, the Nineveh Plain has been the area in which an effort to form an autonomous Assyrian administrative entity has become concentrated. Assyrians have long believed that without a Nineveh Plain autonomous administration (or some type of internationally-protected “safe zone”), the indigenous Assyrian presence in the homeland will disappear. Many Assyrians from Baghdad sought refuge in the Nineveh Plain after escaping violence that targeted Christians in the south during the Iraq War years.

The unequal degree of suffering experienced by Iraq’s smaller communities is a reflection both of their being singled out for persecution—primarily by Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the case of the Assyrians—as well as the complete absence of a security apparatus deployed on their behalf.

Following the focused attacks on Assyrians in Iraq, exemplified by the simultaneous bombing of six churches throughout the country on August 1,

2004, the Assyrian leadership began to regard the Nineveh Plain as the only location where security for Assyrians may be possible.

KRG TERRITORIAL EXPANSIONISM INTO THE NINEVEH PLAIN

As sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni Arabs spread across the central and southern parts of Iraq, the KRG quietly consolidated its military and political presence in the Nineveh Plain, establishing control over the region.

The Nineveh Plain is included among a number of “disputed territories” due to the relatively new claim of the KRG that it is part of “Greater Kurdistan.” In 2004, the KRG published a first draft of a constitution for the Kurdistan Region. This first draft contained no mention of the Nineveh Plain; however, in a subsequent KRG draft constitution published in 2006, Article 2 claims that the Nineveh Plain rightfully belongs to the Kurdistan Region. In contrast with the KRG draft constitution’s unilateral language, the Iraqi Constitution that was adopted in 2005 contains a general provision on resolving the disputed territories. Article 140 of the Constitution states that the status of the disputed territories (i.e., whether they should fall under the administration of the Kurdistan Region or remain under the administration of the Central Government) should be resolved by the end of 2007, and that it should be the inhabitants of those territories who choose which administration they prefer. The disputed territories were not resolved by the deadline.

Over the last decade, the KRG has steadily worked to undermine the influence and political authority of Assyrians and other minorities that have remained independent of KRG patronage, and has endeavored to flood the Nineveh region with Kurdish citizens and security forces. The dominant Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which rules the portion of the Kurdistan Region adjacent to the Nineveh Plain, has pursued and

implemented a number of systematic strategies (that will be described in the later sections of this report) with the aim of dividing minority groups, weakening their solidarity, and quashing their political will in order to make possible the KDP's annexation of the Nineveh Plain.

A new report, *The Christians: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict* published by the Middle East Research Institute in September 2017 highlights the issue and its resulting impact:

“Another branch of Christian dissatisfaction is in relation to KRG's polices in the Nineveh Plains in general. Particular participants believed that the major Kurdish political parties politicized and divided the Christian community after 2003. They pressured existing Christian political parties to fall under their control, created new Kurdish-affiliated political parties, and alienated those who rejected Kurdish policies in the region. Moreover, the fact that the Peshmerga forces and the Kurdish Asayesh forces controlled security in Nineveh Plain while its administration was managed by the Central Government of Iraq (CGI) also contributed to deepening divisions as both actors pursued conflicting agendas regarding the future of the area.”⁵

According to Human Rights Watch, “KRG authorities have relied on intimidation, threats, and arbitrary arrests and detentions, more than actual violence, in their efforts to secure support of minority communities for their agenda regarding the disputed territories.”⁶ It is this harmful approach—which jeopardizes the future of minorities—that this report will address.

A New Governorate

On January 21, 2014, in a landmark moment for Assyrians and other minorities in the Nineveh Plain, the Iraqi Council of Ministers voted for the creation of three new governorates in Iraq,

among them a Nineveh Plain Governorate. This new governorate would ostensibly serve as a safe haven for minorities, including Assyrians, while remaining part of Iraq and under the authority of the Central Government.

The Central Government's decision renewed hopes for a sustainable future for Assyrians and other minorities in Iraq, but the mood changed drastically just months later as the towns of the Nineveh Plain were emptied, when IS invaded.

2. The Islamic State Conquest

Prior to the visible conquest of IS, a process of deterioration within Iraqi state structures was already underway; Mosul was already lost before it was taken. As local terrorist organizations became emboldened, they began to conduct their affairs in the open. When IS decided to incorporate Sunni (and later minority) areas of Iraq into its apocalyptic utopia, it swept through Mosul and the rest of the Nineveh Governorate almost entirely unopposed.

The minorities, long neglected and starved of any agency in these disputed territories had no way to defend themselves.

BAGHDAD'S RESPONSE

The Central Government in Baghdad was woefully unprepared to defend northern Iraq against the IS surge. Years of normalized corruption, governmental disinterest regarding entire regions of the country, and deepening political crises had resulted in the abandoning of significant areas to terrorist elements well before the media began posting their first articles about the onslaught of IS in Iraq. All things considered, the Iraqi Army's collapse and retreat from Mosul was inevitable, and when IS entered the city, many of the Iraq Army soldiers fled south, leaving behind weaponry and armor.⁷ Furthermore, while the govern-

ment's power was limited in Sunni areas dominated by radicals, Baghdad was similarly weak in the Nineveh Plain, where it was not expending any effort to "dispute" the disputed territories in 2014. The KDP had already infiltrated most political and security functions in the minority-inhabited districts of Sinjar and the Nineveh Plain.

After the fall of Mosul, no effective plan was made to rescue the thousands of captives taken by IS, or bring their captors to justice. There have been efforts by individuals working in an unofficial capacity and private organizations to locate captives and secure their release by paying bribes or ransoms. These have risked punishment themselves, since these ransoms are viewed by many as funding terrorism, but Baghdad has not provided any assistance to steer this endeavor into one undertaken and regulated by the state.

For Assyrians, the response from Baghdad to their plight has been negligible, but this is consistent with a historical trend. There is much to take from the almost daily rhetoric and displays of strength from the Central Government on the matter of crushing IS, but Assyrians have been ignored and abandoned by successive regimes since Iraq's liberation in 2003.

THE KRG RESPONSE

The Iraqi Army utterly collapsed in the major urban centers like Mosul and abandoned their weaponry and positions to IS, fleeing south. The KRG *Peshmerga* (Kurdish party militias whose name means "those who face death") actively disarmed⁸ and abandoned Yazidis,⁹ Assyrians, and other minorities before retreating north themselves with these weapons in tow.¹⁰

Despite these established facts, there is a huge disparity in perception between the rightfully maligned capitulation of Iraqi forces in Mosul and the wrongfully celebrated Peshmerga, who are hailed as the best fighting force against IS

on the ground by many Western observers. The reasons for this will be elaborated in the following sections.

The KRG has two primary parties that rule the KRI (Kurdistan Region of Iraq): the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Each of these tend to aggrandize their achievements in the war against IS while minimizing the sizes and capacity of their forces and emphasizing a lack of armament and training. For a Western audience, the KRG endeavors to project unity in order to secure the confidence of potential supporters, but what lies beneath this surface-level image is a bitter rivalry that involves the amassing of large personal armies in the tens of thousands and the scramble for weaponry and power within the KRI.

With each of these parties commanding their own Peshmerga militias, the war against IS was characterized by political posturing and strategic deployment, rather than by a unified defense and liberation operation. The PUK concentrated its forces on consolidating influence in Kirkuk, the seizure of which was facilitated by the withdrawal of Baghdad's forces, whereas the KDP saw an opportunity to deploy its forces into all of the areas they had worked on destabilizing in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plain for a decade.

After the Peshmerga had retreated from the disputed territories and held their line nearer Erbil, it was left to Coalition forces to deter IS from advancing further.

Though the KDP effectively controlled the Nineveh Plain prior to the advent of IS, its presence in the area looks very different in 2017 from how it appeared in early 2014. The territory in the Nineveh Plain currently occupied by Peshmerga is roughly half of what it was pre-2014, but their role in parts of the Nineveh Plain is now being politically normalized and legitimized, whereas previously it only held de facto control.

The KRG is now consolidating their hold on the northern parts of the Nineveh Plain, and boldly asserting their intention to maintain control by physically drawing a borderline with trenches and berms.

“‘It was our front line, now it’s our border, and we will stay forever,’ said peshmerga commander and business magnate Sirwan Barzani. He’s among a growing number of Kurdish leaders, including his uncle, the Kurdish region’s president Massoud Barzani, who say that lands taken from IS will remain in Kurdish hands.”¹¹

A man from Bakhdida (Qaraqosh) described the Peshmerga as having two faces, highlighting the disparity between the image that the KRG projects to the West and the way that it is perceived by minorities in the disputed territories: “To the world, they look like liberators. But we see them for what they really are. They’re conquerors.”¹²

Kurdish flags have been raised and large portraits of Masoud Barzani have been erected in the towns under KRG control, a move the locals say reminds them of Saddam Hussein.

In an interview, an elderly man in Alqosh commented on the massive Kurdish flag that now hovers over the main checkpoint at the town’s entrance. “Before IS, there isn’t a man in the world who would dare raise a Kurdish flag in this town. But now look at that flag.”¹³

In order to lay claim to and control the Assyrian response to the crisis, the KDP set up proxies via political parties¹⁴ and militias (profiled in the following sections). These serve an important propaganda function by promoting a picture of KRG benevolence regarding the “liberation” of Assyrian and other minority territories by Peshmerga forces. This false picture¹⁵ is being relentlessly promoted¹⁶ in order to secure sufficient external validation for the annexation of new territories to the Kurdistan Region¹⁷—lands rich with oil and

other resources.

IS ultimately presented an opportunity for the KRG. As one anonymous KRG official told Reuters in June 2014: “Everyone is worried, but this is a big chance for us. IS gave us in two weeks what Maliki has not given us in eight years.”¹⁸

Another KRG official said in a statement to Fox News: “The Peshmerga will not withdraw from areas we consider to be Kurdistan areas.”¹⁹

The consolidation of Peshmerga control over parts of the Nineveh Plain was supported by Turkish troops who entered the country at the invitation of Masoud Barzani. The presence of the Turkish military, which has now established over a dozen military bases in KDP areas of the Kurdistan Region and in the disputed territories, has been condemned by the Iraqi leadership in Baghdad and is even seen by some Kurds as a foreign occupying force. The Turkish military presence has offered training to KDP militias and also maintains its own troop presence in a number of locations on the ground.

IS did much harm to Assyrians—expelling them from their homelands, appropriating their property, and destroying their towns. Thankfully, the IS organization has no international legitimacy and governments around the world condemned its harmful actions. On the other hand, the political abuses of the KRG that victimize the Assyrian minority are being perpetrated by a government that is largely supported by Western powers. Because of the international legitimacy ascribed to the KRG, these abuses can be more hidden and often go unchallenged. Though this report focuses on the fact that the KRG is the actor that is currently most jeopardizing the future of minorities in several disputed territories, it is important to draw a distinction between the actions of this government and those of the Kurdish people, generally. When IS displaced minorities from Nineveh and Sinjar into the Dohuk Governorate,

local Kurdish people demonstrated immense compassion for the IDPs, opening their homes and businesses to allow the many thousands to take shelter. Some Kurds took leaves of absence from their workplaces or studies in order to temporarily focus on serving IDPs. Ordinary people purchased food and clothing—or collected it from others—and volunteered to transport this aid by the carload to locations where IDPs were gathering. At the community level, large tents to receive donations of food and clothing were erected in various locations around Dohuk, including at local mosques, and imams called upon their congregants to donate in support of the IDPs. The Christian mukhtar of one Assyrian village in Dohuk described (to one of the authors of this report) how the imam of a neighboring Muslim village came to offer the support of his community after his village witnessed the Assyrians taking in dozens of Christian families fleeing from Nineveh. Many stories of compassion will never be known and the care and goodwill that many Kurdish people extended to these IDPs in their gravest hour of need should be acknowledged.

LIBERATION

The Nineveh Liberation Operation Command was the campaign led by the Central Government to defeat IS and liberate Nineveh and other occupied territories. Headed by Iraqi General Najim al-Jubouri and backed by the U.S.-led international Coalition against IS, the campaign included Iraqi Security Forces, KRG Peshmerga, and their allied militias. The operation to liberate the Nineveh Plain began in September 2016, and spanned several months. The area was fully liberated in January 2017, after more than two years of IS occupation.

Eight months after the liberation of the Nineveh Plain, security in the area is divided between Iraqi and Kurdish forces and their proxy forces. Northern parts of the Nineveh Plain are controlled by Peshmerga, while southern parts are controlled by

a local Assyrian security force with the backing of the Central Government.

3. The Current Security Environment in the Post-IS Nineveh Plain

A number of forces are now involved in the security arrangement of the Nineveh Plain:

Kurdish Peshmerga and Zerevani (KDP militia special forces) hold the northern parts of the Nineveh Plain. Turkish forces are also stationed near Ba'shiqa (northeast of Mosul) in support of KDP Peshmerga.

Iraqi Army 16th Division troops are stationed at checkpoints along the Mosul-Erbil highway and on Mosul's outskirts.

Iraqi police have reassumed their pre-IS role in police districts across the Nineveh Plain.

The Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU) is a Christian Assyrian security force, formally registered with the PMU, but which operates independently of PMU leadership (a similar arrangement to that of the Yazidi YBŞ force in Sinjar). All of the NPU's soldiers are strictly local inhabitants of the Nineveh Plain and are members of the Chaldean and Syriac churches. The NPU receives support for non-munitions needs from the Nineveh Plain Defense Fund, a U.S.-based nonprofit, as well as other direct sources of assistance. The NPU was the only Assyrian force authorized by the Nineveh Liberation Operation Command to operate in the Nineveh Plain as its own force, and fought alongside the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi forces in the liberation of the Nineveh Plain. The 2017 U.S. Senate State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill called for direct support of the NPU.²⁰ The NPU now manages security in Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), the largest city in the Nineveh Plain (and also the largest Christian city in Iraq), as well as surrounding areas like Bartella and Karamlesh.

It has a base in Alqosh, and is currently constructing a second base in Bakhdida. The force was commanded by General Behnam Aboosh, a Bakhdida native, during the liberation phase of conflict. It currently operates under the command of a council of officers. The NPU's leadership includes a political council which advocates for the security force in Baghdad, chaired by Gevara Zia of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (the largest Christian/Assyrian party in Iraq), a Bakhdida resident. The political council does not influence operational decisions.

The Nineveh Plain Guard Forces (NPGF) is a Kurdish proxy force linked to the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (a KDP affiliate created by Assyrian KDP leader and former KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan). The force is also known as the Tiger Guards. It was formed out of the remnants of an Assyrian force first created in 2008 by the KDP called the Church Guardians, also formed by Aghajan. The NPGF continues to operate under Peshmerga command, and currently has a presence in the northern parts of the Nineveh Plain. The NPGF participated in the liberation of the Nineveh Plain under Peshmerga command.

The Nineveh Protection Forces (NPF) is a Kurdish proxy force with ties to Bet Nahrain Democratic Party, a KDP affiliate led by Romeo Hakkari. Hakkari is native to an Assyrian town in Erbil Governorate. The group claims 500 soldiers²¹, but eyewitness reports put numbers as low as 50. The NPF operated under Peshmerga forces in the liberation effort, and now has a small presence in Peshmerga-controlled areas.

Led by a Christian militiaman from Baghdad (not a current resident of the Nineveh Plain) named Rayan al-Kildani, the Babylon Brigades is part of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). Supported by the Iran-backed Badr Organization, the 1,000-strong force does not include locals and only includes a handful of Christian soldiers—these are also not from the area. Its ranks are

primarily comprised of Shabaks and Shia Arabs. The Babylon Brigades is funded by Baghdad and currently operates exclusively in Tel Keppe (Tal Kayf). The force entered the Nineveh Plain only at the end of its liberation.

INHIBITIONS TO ASSYRIAN SECURITY AND POLICING

The various ethnic communities that comprise the Nineveh Plain have been historically marginalized and abused by larger, more dominant groups, and have for years sought to establish a local security force to protect themselves. The various security forces that are now contesting for control of the area have competing interests: Kurdish Peshmerga and their allied forces seek its annexation by the KRG, while the Baghdad-backed Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU) advances the creation of a Nineveh Plain Governorate linked directly to the Central Government giving Christian Assyrians and other peoples of the Nineveh Plain parity with other sub-national federal units in Iraq's burgeoning federal system. In this sense, the new division between the northern and southern parts of the Nineveh Plain reflects warring interests.

Since the NPU's formation in November 2014, its leadership has complained that the Peshmerga and KDP *asaisb* have impeded their progress, in direct contradiction of the mandate provided to the NPU by both the Iraqi state and the international anti-IS coalition.

From the Babylon Brigades

The Babylon Brigades are something of a wild card, not aligned with the interests of the local Assyrians in whose region they have established a presence, but also not aligned with the KDP. Baghdad resident and Babylon Brigade leader Rayan al-Kildani has openly voiced his desire to eliminate the NPU's presence in the Nineveh Plain, and has unsuccessfully sought support from residents and local church leaders.



NPU soldiers stand guard in Bakhdida, Nineveh Plain.

On July 15, 2017, the Babylon Brigades attacked an NPU base in the town of Bakhdida (Qaraqosh). Two days prior, the NPU had detained six Babylon Brigades soldiers for theft after they were caught stealing ancient artifacts from religious sites and looting homes in the area. At the time of the attack, NPU soldiers were reportedly on duty. Additional men were needed to provide security for visiting Iraqi ministers and commanders of the Iraqi Special Forces, leaving less soldiers at the base. According to sources, only a half-dozen soldiers remained at the base, when the Babylon Brigades descended on it in broad daylight.

They approached in as many as twelve vehicles, accompanied by other Shia Arab forces registered under PMU. After a clash between the two groups, the Babylon Brigades fled with stolen weapons and one NPU truck. The stolen weaponry and the truck were later returned.²²

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi ordered an investigation of the incident.²³ The Babylon Brigades and allied PMU-forces were immediately expelled from the district.²⁴

The incident was incorrectly reported by several media outlets as a clash between Christian groups, despite the fact that the Babylon Brigades is mainly comprised of Shia Arabs and some Shabaks. The incident is now cited by KDP and its affiliates to suggest NPU's presence in the Nineveh Plain causes disarray.

From the KDP

Unlike the NPGF and the NPF which are embedded within Peshmerga ranks, the NPU is a security force aligned with the majority segment of the Assyrian community that is directly opposed to the KRG's agenda to annex the Nineveh Plain.

According to the New York Times: "The Kurds are looking to integrate all the Christian militias into their force; they have succeeded with the N.P.F. and two others. But the N.P.U. remains wary. They fear that the Kurds are using the Christian cause to seize territory for a greater Kurdistan. And because the Kurdish forces abandoned them as IS approached, the militias want the right to protect their own people."²⁵

As expressed in the NPU's mission statement: "The NPU strengthens our political claim to normalize control and jurisdiction of the Nineveh Plain in favor of independent Assyrians who wish to maximize their autonomy. Our long-term goal is the creation of a new Nineveh Province [i.e. a governorate] separate of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and equal to other provinces under the Government of Iraq. We believe that only through a separate Nineveh Plain Province independent of the KRG may Assyrians realize their potential as free and equal citizens of the Government of Iraq."²⁶

Since the establishment of the NPU, the Assyrian-led security force has faced pressure from the Kurdistan Regional Government, which has increased following the liberation of the Nineveh Plain:

The NPU was met with opposition from the KRG when it attempted to build a base in the Nineveh Plain. The process was delayed more than two months as NPU leadership and the Assyrian Democratic Movement negotiated with the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. The KRG tried to force NPU recruits to serve within Peshmerga ranks. It was not until the U.S. Consulate Erbil intervened that the NPU obtained approval in May of 2015 to construct its base in Erbil.

The Peshmerga delayed access to weapons distributed by the Central Government designated for the NPU by harboring them on bases controlled by Peshmerga. The NPU was forced to travel south in order to acquire weaponry.

The KRG has used its influence in the U.S.-backed coalition to prevent the growth of the NPU. The approval of 1,000 new NPU recruits was stalled for months until the Central Government made a decision to freeze the growth of all forces registered under PMU.

In the early months of 2017, restrictions were imposed on NPU soldiers at checkpoints under Peshmerga control. There were numerous complaints of harassment and of NPU soldiers being illegally held at Peshmerga or *asaish* checkpoints in various locations. Off-duty NPU soldiers living in parts of the Kurdistan Region were blocked from traveling to the Nineveh Plain, and were turned back at checkpoints. The issue was eventually resolved after negotiations with KRG officials.

Peshmerga have blocked the NPU from entering Tel Keppe and Ba'shiqa, and from assuming its full security role in these villages as mandated by the Central Government since their liberation in January 2017, ultimately leading to the Babylon Brigades developing a de facto presence in the former. NPU leadership approached KRG officials in March to resolve the situation, but claim



NPU checkpoint in Al-Hamdaniya District.

that they never received a response.

NPU fighters, under strict conditions of anonymity, expressed serious concern for the implicit threats to their families who are IDP's within the Kurdistan Region and may one day become targets of pressure, intimidation or reprisals.

The KRG's ongoing attempts to marginalize the NPU, the only obstacle to its goal to dominate security in the Nineveh Plain, are part of a long-standing KDP strategy to prevent Assyrians from meaningfully contributing to their own security.

The most significant aspect of these restrictions is that the deployment of the NPU to Assyrian towns in the Sheikhan and Tel Keppe districts of the Nineveh Plain has been impeded, signaling a return to the pre-IS security politics (namely, Peshmerga occupation), a situation that threatens the prospect of the return and long-term presence of Assyrians in these parts of the Plain. The kind of interference in Assyrian security being witnessed today had a precedent prior to the advent of IS; this is dealt with in the next section.

4. Pre-2014 KDP Security Interference in the Nineveh Plain and Its 2014 Consequences

In 2006, the Iraqi Minister of Interior agreed to the creation of a police force in the Nineveh Plain drawn from the local population,²⁷ but the order was blocked twice by the Nineveh Deputy Governor, KDP member Khasro Goran.

Though the Nineveh Governorate is under Baghdad's authority, the KDP successfully achieved control of the area by securing key positions within its political framework: "The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) became *primus inter pares* in Ninawa via Khasro Goran, ostensibly the deputy governor but actually the power behind the throne in Mosul and Ninawa. Goran and the Iraqi military chief of staff, Babakir Zebari, who was also a KDP member, worked directly with the Kurdish commander of the 2nd Iraqi Army division, Maj. Gen. Jamal Muhammad, to achieve de facto Kurdish domination of city's security. With Kurdish staffing levels of 63 percent versus the city's 27 percent Kurdish population, the division unnerved locals but at the same time lacked the manpower to fully control the city."²⁸

Goran initially blocked the force from operating in the Nineveh Plain by relocating it to Mosul.²⁹ The order remained blocked for two years, until former U.S. Senator Mark Kirk confronted the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker on the issue in a State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs hearing in Washington D.C. in April 2008,³⁰ in which he stated for the record:

"On June 14 [2006], the Iraqi Minister of Interior ordered the creation of a local police for the Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain. They issued Order 1793 authorizing a force of about 700 policemen to patrol the nine Christian villages there in the Nineveh Province. Two years after the order, the police force doesn't exist... Central Command tells my office that they support the standing

orders of the Iraqi Government. And the Kurdish Regional representative here, Mr. Barzani, told me that the KRG supports the creation of this police force. The community has issued detailed planning of the police force to protect them. I don't think we had detailed planning like this for any other villages in Iraq, but we certainly have it for these villages. So what's the holdup here?"³¹

With pressure from the U.S. Government, the block was lifted, but months after training began, the Nineveh Governorate, acting on the directives of the KDP elements in its leadership, again banished the force.

An October 24, 2008 statement by the Assyrian Democratic Movement read:

"The June 2006 original order was blocked by the prejudicial policies of neighboring parties who say they will protect our people with their militias while denying us the right to [our own] policing in order to keep us dependent on them... The dominant parties [a common local euphemism for the KDP] controlling Nineveh Governorate deny us our basic right to security."³²

In November 2008, hundreds of Assyrian policemen protested in the city of Bakhdida, against what they perceived to be attempts to rid the area of the Assyrian-led police force.³³ The protestors also delivered a statement to the Governor of Nineveh.³⁴ The force was ultimately dismantled.

To further undermine the Assyrian effort to establish a police force in the Nineveh Plain, the KDP used then KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan, an Assyrian KDP figure, to establish a security force called the Church Guardians, which were organized around local churches.³⁵ The problem with this force, from an Assyrian point of view, was that rather than being a legitimate Assyrian entity, it in fact represented an extension of KDP control in Nineveh. In 2009, Human Rights Watch described the force thus:

“Some Christian representatives said that KRG money also finances private militias in villages under the pretext of providing protection, but in reality extends Kurdish influence by creating a local armed group that is ultimately loyal to its paymaster. Critics argue that the militias are another means of KRG control on the region. At the entrance of each Christian village that Human Rights Watch drove by in the Nineveh Plain, Christian militiamen, known as the ‘Churches’ Guardians,’ guarded checkpoints. The militia, funded by Aghajan, has 1,200 members deployed in Bakhdida (Qaraqosh) and surrounding villages. Kurdish authorities insist that if there were no Christian militia and Kurdish peshmerga forces to secure Nineveh’s disputed territories, Sunni Arab armed groups would have an easier time launching devastating times against minorities.”³⁶

Basim Bello, mayor of Tel Keppe at the time, opposed the presence of the KRG-funded militia; he considered it illegitimate as it was outside the structure of the official Iraqi government security hierarchy. He also stated that such groups were far more likely to support the KDP as they were on the payroll of the political party.

Bello and other Assyrian representatives demanded that the Peshmerga and KDP *asayish* forces be removed from the Nineveh Plain due to their role in “intimidating political opponents, restricting access to services, and engaging in extrajudicial detentions.”³⁷

He was quoted in 2009 saying, “They detain people without any arrest warrant or judicial proceeding. Why are *asayish* and Peshmerga even here in Iraqi territory? There’s no reason for it. They want to show they have power and control of our areas.”³⁸

Upon the IS attack in 2014—when security was most needed—the Church Guardians were ordered by Peshmerga command to vacate their posts. They obeyed their orders.

In an interview, NPU’s General Behnam Aboosh, a Bakhdida native, explained that the people of the Nineveh Plain were left defenseless against IS. He blames the KRG for blocking the creation of an independent, Assyrian-led security force. “[The KRG] had not allowed us to create a force to defend Bakhdida. So, we fled when abandoned by Peshmerga as IS approached. We had no other choice.”³⁹

The Peshmerga and *asayish* have asserted their security presence in multiple towns in the Nineveh Plain without the consent of local populations. Insofar as the individuals in the relevant units of the NPU are drawn from the populations of the towns in question and operate independently of the Peshmerga, they represent a crucial element in the repopulation of these towns and the building of trust in security and political frameworks. This process is threatened by the unilateral aggression of Kurdish security forces in relation to the NPU and the citizens of the Nineveh Plain.

IS Reconstruction

Except for Alqosh and a few other villages in its northernmost reaches, the Nineveh Plain is in ruins. In Bakhdida and Karamlesh, the majority of homes, buildings, schools, churches, and clinics have been looted and destroyed by IS. Some buildings have been reduced to rubble; others have been vandalized. In March of 2017, there was no elec-



Bakhdida, the largest Assyrian town in the Nineveh Plain, in ruins.

tricity or access to water in these villages. Post-liberation, the Iraqi Army has led an effort to clear the roads, allowing access to the area.

The Iraqi Central Government has funded initiatives to repair roads, restore electricity, and reinstall water networks, but Noor Matti, founder of the Shlama Foundation, an NGO that operates mainly in the Nineveh Plain, says that is far from enough. Baghdad has also pledged financial support to help rebuild public facilities like schools and churches, but has yet to follow through on that promise.

According to the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS) headquartered in Dohuk, of approximately 10,000 homes in the Bakhdida, 3,000 have been burned from the inside, which in many cases has destroyed the homes beyond repair. Since the town's liberation, there has been very little effort put forward by international actors to begin the restoration of these villages.

Matti says, "These people have been forgotten. There is more assistance offered to those who leave Iraq than those who want to stay and rebuild."⁴⁰

The foundations of many homes were also damaged as IS developed a tunnel system during their occupation. In the weeks following the liberation of Bakhdida, IS fighters continued to use the tunnel system to stage attacks on NPU soldiers.

Matti explains that homes in the Nineveh Plain have been classified according to three categories:

- Group A: Some repairs required, including replacing doors, windows, and floor tiles, repainting walls, etc. (Estimated cost for renovations per home: \$1,500 to \$3,000 USD)
- Group B: Home has been burned from the inside. (Estimated cost for renovations per home: \$8,000 to \$14,000 USD)
- Group C: Home has been completely levelled



A home in Karemlash post-IS.

(due to bombings). (Estimated cost for renovations per home: as much as \$20,000 USD)

Matti explains that various churches are supporting renovations for homes categorized as Group A. The rest, he says, are on their own. The Shlama Foundation is currently sponsoring the renovations of two Group B homes, and is fundraising to sponsor a third.

According to an AAS proposal for the "Rehabilitation of Houses in the Nineveh Plain," the total estimated cost to repair damaged homes in the



Members of the Chaldo-Assyrian Student Union volunteering with rehabilitation efforts in Alqosh.



The Shlama Foundation funded the creation of a fish farm in Bandawaya, which is now the main source of income for two families.



A group of Assyrian artists in Bakhdida painting a mural over IS graffiti.

Nineveh Plain exceeds 75 million USD.

AAS has organized and funded various restoration projects across the Nineveh Plain. It also coordinates with NGOs such as the U.S.-based Iraqi Christian Relief Council (ICRC) to perform reconstruction in the destroyed villages. In April of 2017, AAS facilitated the installation of a water network in Teleskof, providing access to clean water to returning residents. The \$19,500 USD project was funded by ICRC.

Local actors like the Shlama Foundation have also launched initiatives to promote economic development. Examples include the creation of a fish farm near Alqosh and the renovation of stores in Teleskof.

Beautification efforts have been launched by Nineveh Plain residents in Bakhdida. Assyrian artist and Bakhdida native Thabet Mikhael led an effort to paint murals over IS graffiti, eliminating messages of hate and replacing them with hopeful images including Christian symbols and the Assyrian flag.

Unsurprisingly, restoration and reconstruction are politicized wherever the KRG is endeavoring to gain control of these broken areas. Restoration projects launched by groups like the Chaldo-Assyrian Student Union (Khoyada) were blocked by Peshmerga and *asaish*. For months, the students were not permitted entry into liberated towns under KRG control. They were held for hours at checkpoints and asked to present documentation, only to be turned away. In March 2016, the group publicly condemned these practices in an official statement.⁴¹

Ashur Eskarya, President of the AAS, explains that the KRG is politicizing the liberation and restoration efforts in order to produce political gain. By actively courting Western NGOs and in-



Three women in Teleskof started a small pickle business after returning home with the support of the Shlama Foundation.

dividuals who support humanitarian work, many are led to unknowingly operate locally in Iraq with a strong political bias, though their close association or cooperation with the KDP. The KDP appears to attempt to control restoration efforts in order to create dependency of communities in the disputed territories on the KDP.

6. Resettlement

The overwhelming majority of Assyrian refugees and IDPs from the Nineveh Plain have plans to return home. Those who do not want to return have either started new lives by resettling in the Kurdistan Region or by emigrating abroad, or are still attempting to migrate elsewhere. Many who have yet to return, however, fear that they have nothing to return to.

A small percentage of those from the city of Mosul have expressed a desire to return but concede that they may never feel safe there again as they were betrayed by their own neighbors. Security is the main concern for these families.

Of its pre-2014 population that included nearly 200,000 Assyrians, approximately 20,000 Assyrians have returned to the Nineveh Plain since its liberation. Unfortunately, Assyrians find themselves in a catch-22 situation: many cannot return to towns reduced to rubble with no water and electricity, but they are often told by authorities that rebuilding and restoration can only take place if they do. This impossible choice, forced onto displaced Assyrians, is also made against the backdrop of a politically divided Nineveh Plain. Short journeys to and from neighboring towns, commonly made by local residents in the past, can now take hours as permission to pass the new Peshmerga checkpoints is often awarded unreliably and arbitrarily.

Many Assyrians from the Nineveh Plain remark that they would feel safer with Assyrian-adminis-

tered security. This is especially true of Assyrians living in Alqosh and those parts of the Nineveh Plain controlled by Peshmerga forces, who frequently speak of how they were abandoned by the Peshmerga when IS approached in 2014.

Sipya Kado, an Alqosh native who witnessed the Peshmerga withdrawal firsthand, later stated in an interview by Assyrian National Broadcasting: “The Peshmerga didn’t tell anyone [IS] was coming. They didn’t fire a single bullet. They just left the villages.”⁴²

IS never entered Alqosh, the northernmost town of the Nineveh Plain, but the town remained partially empty until the later months of 2016, after the liberation of the Nineveh Plain commenced. The majority of Alqosh residents have since returned, and the current population is roughly 5,000. It is estimated that about 200 families have not returned to the village.

Noor Matti, founder of the Shlama Foundation, says, “Those who have stuck it out the past few years are committed to their future in Iraq. They don’t want to leave.” Matti says the number of Nineveh Plain residents who have returned is far greater than what had been expected.⁴³

Various churches that had been supporting IDPs inside the KRI have now recently stopped subsidizing rent for families to encourage them to go home. A substantial number of Assyrians have returned to the Nineveh Plain over the course of the past month. Matti explained that a mass migration of the remaining IDPs is expected to take place before October as families prepare for the new school year. Schools will be reopening in the Nineveh Plain this fall “even if the kids have to sit on the floor.” According to Matti, families do not want their children to miss another school year.

The resettlement process has gone relatively smoothly over the last month. Unfortunately, Tel Keppe and Bartella have yet to see significant



Entrance to Bartella, Nineveh Plain. (September 2017)

numbers of residents return due to the presence of Iran-backed Shia militias in both towns.

In Tel Keppe, the town is controlled by Shia Arabs under the banner of the PMU. The Babylon Brigades maintain a small presence within the town, controlling a single checkpoint. It is unlikely that a substantial resettlement effort will occur before former residents feel at ease with the security situation.

In Bartella, there are 50 Shabak soldiers who also

authorized to operate in the town by the PMU. The Shabak militia is stationed at the entrance, while the NPU manage security within the town. Approximately 200 families have returned thus far.

Those that have returned describe the town’s main checkpoint as “disturbing” given the Islamic messaging and portraits of Muslim clerics now placed at the entrance of a Christian town. One woman described the checkpoint as “nerve wracking” and claimed that residents are harassed.

On September 14, 2017, a renovated school sponsored by Iran was unveiled in Bartella, renamed Imam Khomeini Primary School, which alarmed local residents concerned about Iran’s influence in their town. Iraqi and Iranian flags hang outside the school.

Reports that the KDP was blocking minorities from returning to the Nineveh Plain and other areas claimed by the KRG emerged in March of 2017.⁴⁴

Gevara Zia, political chair of the Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU), was quoted saying: “The Peshmerga and other Kurdish security forces...did not allow the people to go to their areas which [were] liberated from [IS] three month[s] ago.”⁴⁵



Newly-unveiled “Imam Khomeini Primary School” in Bartella.

Loay Mikhael, the Washington D.C. representative of the KDP-funded Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council, responded to reports claiming that they were unsubstantiated. He added that they were politically motivated by the Assyrian Democratic Movement, a group he described as his party's main opposition.⁴⁶

7. Political Abuses against Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain

Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain who voice opposition to the KRG's annexation of the Nineveh Plain over the course of the last decade have been targeted by the KDP. Several prominent Assyrian leaders from the area have been threatened and attacked. Some were illegally detained for prolonged periods of time by *asaisb*.

A resident of Alqosh said, "We don't want the Peshmerga in our towns. But no one is listening to what we want. So why would we risk saying it?"⁴⁷

The Nineveh Plain experiences a variety of political abuses that will be dealt with in this section. Some occurred in the post-Saddam years up to 2014 while others are occurring in the present.

BLOCKING U.S. AID TO THE NINEVEH PLAIN

United States aid to minority communities in the Nineveh Plain between the years of 2005 and 2012 was funneled through the KRG Ministry of Finance.

In a bill entitled "Making Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2007, and for Other Purposes,"⁴⁸ Congress raised questions about assistance not reaching minorities in Iraq:

"The Committee is concerned regarding reports of U.S. reconstruction and relief assistance in Iraq

not reaching all segments of the Iraq population, particularly minority populations. The Committee has heard reports of villages in the Nineveh Plain region not receiving assistance. Therefore, the Committee directs the Secretary of State to report no later than 45 days after the date of enactment of this Act on the ethnic and geographic distribution of U.S. assistance programs and specifically a report on all U.S. assistance reaching the Nineveh Plain region."

The congressionally-mandated State Department report found that aid specifically earmarked to aid Christians in the Nineveh Plain was being distributed unevenly by the KRG Ministry of Finance. "The State Department has singled out the KRG Finance Ministry as a source of the 'considerable hardship' faced by Christians in the Nineveh Plain."⁴⁹

In the Fiscal Year 2008 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill,⁵⁰ the Committee authorized millions of dollars in U.S. aid to "be provided to assist religious minorities in the Nineveh Plain region of Iraq." The aid failed to reach legitimate and proven local aid organizations independent of the KRG. Organizations serving the interests of the KRG were given preferential access to the funding.

VOTER FRAUD AND INTIMIDATION

The KDP prevented Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain from voting in the 2005 provincial elections.⁵¹ According to a series of reports, the KDP blocked the delivery of ballot boxes to six major Assyrian towns and villages, including Bakhdi-da (Qaraqosh), the largest town in the Nineveh Plain. The man charged with facilitating their delivery was Khasro Goran (Deputy Governor of Nineveh and senior KDP official). The ballot boxes were illegally held in Erbil. Up to 100,000 Assyrian voters and tens of thousands of other minorities were denied their right to vote.⁵²



Thousands of Assyrian residents denied ballots took to the streets of Bakhdida in protest.

Thousands of voters waited outside of polling places, and were told by voting authorities that the ballot boxes were en route, but they never arrived. Some towns and villages never received their ballots, or were allowed to vote only when it was already too late. Others received ballot boxes that were already full.⁵³

Assyrians took to the streets of Bakhdida in protest. Following an investigation, the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq acknowledged that voter fraud and intimidation had occurred, and acknowledged that voting facilities in the Nineveh Plain were inadequate. The KDP's interference tampered with votes which would have secured more seats for Assyrian representatives.

In the 2009 elections, the voter fraud continued.⁵⁴

Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain were pressured to vote for the Ishtar Patriotic List. The list was comprised of Assyrians who were either members of the KDP or compliant toward KDP policy. In some cases, the KDP offered incentives in order to secure votes for the Ishtar Patriotic List. There were promises of money and employment. In other cases, the KDP relied on threats. University students were told their school bus services would end. Ration cards were confiscated. Locals were

told they would lose their jobs if they did not vote as directed.⁵⁵

After the election, multiple voters reported that they had been fired from their jobs after voting against the KDP.⁵⁶ Testimonies included Sabri Lisha Shaya, a resident of Teleskof, who was employed as a security guard by the KDP-funded Council for Christian Affairs for eighteen months. Prior to the election, he was told by two local officials to vote in favor of the KDP-backed slate, and to ensure his family voted the same way. Instead, Shaya chose to vote for the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), and consequently lost his job.

Shaya stated, "When I went back to stand guard on Monday, two days after the elections, I was told by other guards that I had been fired from my job. I went to the office and asked...about the reason for my dismissal. He replied, 'Because you voted for the [ADM] slate.' Because of my fear to lose my income, I denied it in the beginning, telling them I had voted for Ishtar, but [he] said to me 'You are a liar and I know for sure you voted for [ADM].' I replied that I am a free man and we live in a democratic country and I am free to vote for the party I believe will be best for our people. He said to me, 'Then let the Assyrian Democratic Movement give you a job and feed you. You can go and complain to whoever you want.'"⁵⁷

Human Rights Watch reported similar findings that same year, "In Qaraqosh, Human Rights Watch spoke with members of an Assyrian militia financed by the KRG. They said that representatives from the Kurdish list told them they would lose their jobs and face eviction from their subsidized housing complex if they did not vote for the Kurdish alliance. Kurdish officials also instructed them to inform other displaced Christians living in the area that they would also face eviction if they did not vote for the Kurdish list."⁵⁸

The Al-Rafedain list (backed by the ADM) filed

complaints with the Independent Election Commission of Iraq about these intimidation tactics. They also reported that the KDP was informing Kurdish residents to vote for the Ishtar Patriotic list. Election results showed that Kurdish villages with no Assyrian population had voted for the Ishtar Patriotic list.

REMOVAL OF ASSYRIAN MAYORS IN NINEVEH

Ahead of the upcoming KRG referendum on Kurdistan's independence, to be held September 25, 2017, the KDP has been conducting a number of maneuvers in the Nineveh Plain to maximize its political advantage and control. The KDP's removal of the two elected and longstanding mayors, both of who are unsympathetic to the aims and policies of the KDP, suggest a strategy of preparing to annex the region to Kurdistan.

Between July and August 2017, two mayors of townships in the Nineveh Plain were expelled by the Nineveh Provincial Council: Faiez Abed Jahwareh of Alqosh and Basim Bello of Tel Keppe. This was accomplished through the KDP takeover of the Nineveh Provincial Council, which is led by Bashar al-Kiki, a member of the KDP. Thirty-one of the council's forty-one members belong to the KDP.⁵⁹

The KDP has worked to install its own loyalists in the Nineveh Governorate for years, and it often succeeded in doing so in local districts within Nineveh (Sinjar being a prime example). However, the Nineveh Governorate became increasingly vulnerable to this manipulation following the events of 2014, when governance in Mosul collapsed and government offices serving the then-displaced residents of Nineveh had to be reopened in Dohuk. The affiliation of the Nineveh Governorate with the Central Government in Baghdad is therefore becoming progressively more illusory, as the KDP is able to implement policy through Nineveh while pretending to

remain separate from it.

The fact that the KDP has infiltrated one of Baghdad's governorates and is now using that platform to "legally" migrate disputed territories out of that same governorate's jurisdiction and into the sphere of KRG administrative and security structures amounts to the KRG using Iraq's own institutions of governance in non-Kurdish areas to prepare parts of Iraqi territory—outside of the KRI—for eventual secession from Iraq.

The Removal of Alqosh's Mayor

The KDP had previously attempted to remove Faiez Abed Jahwareh in June 2014 after Mosul fell to IS, and briefly succeeding in doing so, but he was reinstated two days later following outcry and protests from local Alqosh residents.

Now ahead of the independence referendum, the KDP has pursued the same objective a second time, with more determination. Jahwareh was removed from office on July 16, 2017 on the orders of Bashar al-Kiki. His dismissal followed an interrogation centering on seemingly baseless charges of corruption. No statement has been published publicly by the Nineveh Provincial Council to explain its decision.

After deposing Jahwareh, the Nineveh Provincial Council initially appointed Kurdish KDP member Abdel Amin Omar to serve as Alqosh's mayor, not waiting to secure an Assyrian replacement. However, Omar was merely a placeholder; the KDP began seeking an Assyrian replacement who could add more legitimacy to the takeover of Alqosh. Lara Yousif, an Assyrian member of the KDP, was appointed 11 days later to the position by the Alqosh District Council. Lara Yousif was a schoolteacher who has not served in the military, but she was presented in official photos wearing a Peshmerga officer's uniform. She also has no experience in politics and has never held a public



KDP-appointed Mayor of Alqosh, Lara Yousif.

office, but she was unilaterally appointed to lead a town without the local people being allowed to hold an election to choose their leadership.

Town residents have expressed frustration at the media's misguided portrayal⁶⁰ of Yousif's appointment.⁶¹ Being appointed by a powerful political apparatus—rather than achieving a post through one's own accomplishment and merit—is not a victory for women's status in Iraq.

After her appointment, Yousif has remained absent from the public eye and has refused to give interviews.

The Alqosh District Council is required to have a total of seven members, but is currently operating with six, after one of its former members left Iraq following the IS invasion of the Nineveh Plain in



Protestors in Alqosh demanding the reinstatement of the town's rightful mayor. (August 2017)

2014. The council now consists of the following members:

- Sleman Hassan Rasho, Council President (Yazidi, KDP)
- Khalil Shammo Khidida (Yazidi, KDP)
- Marwan Hussein (Yazidi, KDP)
- Faisal Sliman Khalf (Yazidi, PUK)
- Fathy Jassim Awad (Arab, Independent)
- Thaer Hurmiz Polis (Assyrian, KDP)

The demography of this council reveals much. Alqosh is a Christian-majority town whose people in their majority do not favor annexation by the KRI, but its council has been almost entirely filled with non-Christians and those on the payroll of Kurdish parties.

The residents of Alqosh have staged three protests since Jahwareh was removed. The first took place on July 20, 2017. The second was held on August 2, 2017 following Yousif's appointment, and the third was held on August 18, 2017. In all three protests, residents carried Iraqi flags in response to the KRG's stated objective to conduct its upcoming independence referendum in the Nineveh Plain. A petition was also signed by thousands of Alqosh residents and delivered to the District Council, but they have failed to

respond to the petition or the protests.

The petition states, “What happened was exactly the opposite of what [al-Kiki] promised, and was an affront to democracy and the will, culture, and dignity of the people of Alqosh.”⁶²

The petition cited the following violations:

- The decision to dismiss Jahwareh was ordered by the Nineveh Provincial Council leader Bashar al-Kiki and accepted by the Alqosh District Council without holding a formal meeting with the council members.
- Abed Amin Omar was appointed as the town’s mayor on July 16, 2017 just two days after dismissing Jahwareh from his position.
- Lara Yousif was appointed as the town’s new mayor on July 27, 2017 before the end of the period of legal court appeal, followed by the issuance of an administrative order from the Nineveh Governor on July 31, 2017 confirming Yousif as mayor.
- The council stipulated that the nomination of the new candidate for the position of mayor “must be Christian and from the center of Alqosh District (Alqoshian) exclusively,” despite the fact that no such stipulation is mandated by any law, exacerbating racial and sectarian tensions in the area in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of Alqoshians.
- The constitutional rights of Alqosh’s residents have been violated and there has been a failure to address their demands.

Jahwareh has also filed a complaint with the Administrative Court in Baghdad. He has a hearing scheduled on August 30, 2017. Alqosh residents are disappointed in the lack of response from the Central Government.

Alqosh native Athra Kado stated in an interview conducted in preparation of this report: “The whole world is watching [the KDP] break laws and violate the people’s will. And yet they’re still

supporting them.”

According to the village’s inhabitants, the decision to replace the town’s mayor was part of the KRG’s strategy to force their referendum on the people of the Nineveh Plain. “This appointment contributes to completing the task of obtaining total administrative power over the Nineveh Governorate: the Director of Alqosh District, the head of Alqosh’s District Council with the majority of its members, the head of Nineveh Governorate Council, and the first Vice Governor of Nineveh now all belong to the same political party: the KDP.”⁶³

On August 18, just hours before Alqosh residents protested for the third time, portraits of Masoud Barzani were installed throughout the town, paired with signs reading, “Yes to Referendum.” Residents expressed feelings of anger and despair. On August 24, 2017, reports surfaced that the portraits and signs installed by the KDP in favor of the referendum had been vandalized by anonymous village residents.

On August 30, 2017, Alqosh police delivered individual notices⁶⁴ to eleven Alqosh residents, warning them against further protests, threatening consequences. The notices were sent by the office



Signs reading “yes to referendum” erected in Alqosh were vandalized.

of the town's newly-appointed mayor, Lara Yousif.

Below is a list of the 11 individuals who received the notices:

- Sameer Toma Tomas
- Falah Oraham Alqas Younan
- Amel Qoda
- Mazin Harbi
- Sahir Habib Kalla
- Vastin Jalal Alnajar
- Rani Falah Alqas Younan
- Mrayma Mansur Kado
- Athra Mansur Kado
- Sanae Mansur Kado
- Sargon Qoryaqos Eramia

The above-listed individuals were identified as the “ring leaders” of the Alqosh resistance. They were asked to sign a notice acknowledging they understood there would be consequences if they failed to comply. All eleven initially refused, but a few signed the following day after being pressured by officers in their own homes.

Documentation was secured from the local police station confirming that the order to threaten the protestors came from the Tel Keppe District Council, and had been approved by the Nineveh Provincial Council leader.⁶⁵

In an interview conducted during the preparation of this report, one of the individuals targeted with the notices reported receiving death threats from Yousif's husband, Duraid Jameel Tezi, also a KDP member.

The Removal of Tel Keppe's Mayor

Basim Bello was removed from office on August 3, 2017, just 19 days after Jahwareh was deposed, though Bello says he was made aware of the council's intention in June 2017. In July, he received a letter outlining charges of corruption

against him, and was given one week to prepare his defense before appearing before the committee. In a phone conversation with an ACE representative on August 12, 2017, Bello described the charges as “unfounded,” and explained that he issued his response disputing all claims in writing to the council before his appearance.

Bello appeared before the Tel Keppe District Council which includes 11 members:

- Abdulsalam Shaban Mohammed, Council President (Arab, KDP)
- Amjad Hassan Rasho (Yazidi, KDP)
- Saed Khudida Khalil (Yazidi, KDP)
- Nadhir Bebee Saadon (Yazidi, KDP)
- Nuri Musa Nuri (Kaka'i, KDP)
- Evin Yahia Tela (Assyrian, KDP)
- Bashar Habbo Giwargis (Assyrian, KDP)
- Saeed Mohammed Saeed Alurshan (Arab, Independent)
- Bashar Yaseen Mohammed (Arab, Independent)
- Luis Estifo Sliman Hanna (Assyrian, ADM)
- Adel Mikha Dawod Jabbo (Assyrian, Independent)

Bello explained he felt the council was not interested in his presentation and did not give any meaningful consideration to his response to their claims.⁶⁶

His dismissal was decided by an eight-to-three Council vote. Tela and Giwargis were added to the Council at the end of 2016, prior to the town's liberation. Two former members who had been elected with the backing of the Assyrian Democratic Movement left the country after their town was invaded by IS. Bello and two other members on the Council unsuccessfully attempted to stall the replacement of the members who had emigrated, believing that the decision should be made after displaced residents were able to return to the town. (Bear in mind that these decisions were being pushed forward while the voter base of the



Basim Bello, deposed mayor of Tel Keppe, pictured with Nineveh Provincial Council leader Bashar al-Kiki post-liberation.

District remained displaced from the area.)

Bello is appealing the council's decision.

In an interview with Assyria TV, he stated that the reason for both his removal and Faeiz Abed Jahwareh's removal in Alqosh are part of the KDP's plan to eliminate opposition to KRG annexation.⁶⁷

Bello feels that he was specifically targeted as he has been an outspoken critic of the KDP for many years. WikiLeaks cables that surfaced documented meetings between Bello and U.S. officials that reflected his position on the KRG's growing presence in the Nineveh Plain; the KDP has a pattern of reacting harshly when it becomes aware of internal critics.

"In a July 3 [2009] meeting with PRT [Nineveh Provincial Reconstruction Team] and U.S. Army Civil Affairs personnel, Mayor of Tal Kaif District Basim Bello said that Assyrians in Ninewa Province feel intimidated by the Kurds and suffer from a lack of essential services."⁶⁸

He was quoted in another WikiLeaks cable from 2008:

"According to Bello, the rift between the ADM and the Kurdish parties began in 2003 as the KRG attempted to expand its political control further into Christian areas of the Ninewa plain. Bello said that the KRG is following a policy of encroachment into the Ninewa plain by attempting to establish "facts on the ground" by moving Kurds into Christian areas; stacking district and sub district councils with un-elected Kurdish members; and, in the case of Al Qosh, spending lavishly, particularly on the church and church-related construction."⁶⁹

In the same cable, Bello expressed concerns over a potential monopoly of authority by the KDP in the Nineveh Plain district councils:

"His own personal security aside—he believes he is under direct threat from the senior leadership in the KDP—Bello said his greatest concern is the prospect of irreversible modifications to councils that would give the KRG political control to go along with its effective occupation of the area...Bello also raised continuing Kurdish intimidation, including a personal threat made against him by KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Bello explained what he sees as an increasingly bellicose KRG policy as the result of the Kurds' desire not to lose what was gained in terms of self-rule after the first Gulf War. As a result, there is an ongoing trend toward authoritarianism in the KRG..."⁷⁰

In 2007, Bello was "publicly reprimanded"⁷¹ by the KDP-led Nineveh Provincial Council for authorized trips taken overseas. Official documentation obtained accused Bello of "trespassing the limits of his position" and threatened "severe" penalties,⁷² but the former mayor believes the reason for their disapproval stemmed from their concerns about his engagement with foreign officials. Bello issued a formal statement in response to the accusations,⁷³ but the matter was resolved after intervention from U.S. officials. In an interview, Bello explained he believes his relationship

with certain U.S. officials is what has protected him from harm all this time.

Following Bello's removal, tensions immediately intensified as Babylon Brigades leader Rayan al-Kildani endorsed Raad Nasser for the position, while the KDP backed Bartella native Adel Marogy Jajou (also known as Adel Kiryakoza). On August 23, 2017, the Tel Keppe District Council appointed Jajou as Bello's successor. Jajou was previously a candidate for mayor in 2004, the year Bello was elected.

Sources confirm that Jajou was nominated for the position by Detroit businessman Asaad Kalasho in a May 19, 2017 meeting with Masrour Barzani,⁷⁴ the Chancellor of the KRG's Security Council, in Washington, D.C. The meeting also included the official Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (KDP-funded political party) representative to the United States Loay Mikhail. Confirming the other sources, Kalasho—infamous for his illegal, multi-million dollar business dealings with Saddam Hussein⁷⁵—himself takes credit for Jajou's appointment,⁷⁶ describing him as “a brother”⁷⁷ in his public Facebook posts.

Various sources reported that in the week that followed Basim Bello's removal from office, the KDP pressured other Nineveh Plain mayors and council members to publicly voice their support for conducting the Kurdistan independence referendum in their towns. Council members who had voted in Bello's favor were harassed. These local leaders were approached and told sign a document in support of the KRG's referendum. Some felt threatened and were forced to sign the document, after being warned against resisting. One official reported being told that, “it was in his best interest to sign.”¹¹⁰

On September 9, 2017, Adel Jajou, who was appointed in Bello's place, attended an event endorsing the KRG referendum.



KDP-appointed Mayor of Tel Keppe, Adel Marogy Jajou (far right), attending an event endorsing the KRG referendum.

The Earlier Removal of Karemlash's Mayor

In October 2008, the Governor of Nineveh dismissed the Assyrian mayor of Karemlash⁷⁸ (part of the Nineveh Governorate's al-Hamdaniya District), George Yacoub Al-Kikhwa. Al-Kikhwa is a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement.

His removal was requested by three members of the Karemlash Affairs Committee, a group of eleven town residents that managed local matters. The individuals who made the request were part of the KDP-sponsored Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council. They included: George Mayya (head of the committee), Dhiya Khidir (an employee of KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan), and Reverend Yousif Shamon of the Chaldean Catholic Church. The three of them sent a formal complaint to the Hamdaniya District Council, which made a recommendation to the Nineveh Governorate without an investigation.

When asked about the decision to depose Al-Kikhwa, the Governorate deferred to Al-Hamdaniya's District Council.

The people of Karemlash rejected the Governorate's decision. They collected upwards of 800 signatures from local town residents calling for his reinstatement. The petition was later delivered

to the governor's office.

Following Al-Kikhwa's ousting, a member of the Karemlesh Affairs Committee, Mattay Ismael al-Kaddo, resigned in protest. He explained that Mayya acted despite disapproval from the majority of the committee, citing the committee's bylaws which require a majority vote in order to recommend the removal of the town's mayor.

The decision was later reversed. Al-Kikhwa remains the town's mayor today.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER: THE KDP PATRONAGE SYSTEM

To strengthen their prospects of incorporating the Nineveh Plain into the Kurdistan Region, Kurdish authorities have for more than a decade practiced a strategy of offering incentives to minority communities in exchange for their support for the KRG's claims to the Nineveh Plain, while imposing restrictions on those who do not. The KDP buys the allegiances of many Assyrian tribal and political leaders through a patronage system that fosters political divisions within the community; this also has the effect of obfuscating and muddling the voices of the Assyrian majority, making advocates, NGOs, and Western government officials less able to understand the local dynamics that harm the minority.

The patronage system involves offering visible community figures a regular cash payment that is often referred to by people in the country as a "party salary." These figures are then expected to publicly and privately endorse and promote the KDP and its agendas within the community. This process has the destructive effect of eroding the legitimacy of both spiritual and political leadership within minority communities, as clergy and political leaders are alike targeted with this "political conversion" effort, amid the deep frustration of the people who then feel abandoned by

their representation. The pattern is that without this financial bribery, it is difficult for the KDP to make inroads with communities whose interests are not served by KDP objectives. Usually, only the loyalty of the figure receiving the salary—and that of his inner circle of friends and relatives—is bought by the party; these figures are then generally rejected by a majority of their community, but because the KDP is able to "convert" most of the visible leadership figures, it still succeeds in creating the illusion that a sizable portion of the minority population stands with the party.

In the case of the Yazidis, the effects of this patronage system have so destabilized traditional leadership structures that the people often express despair at not having anyone in their community to speak for them. Yazidi tribal heads, religious leaders, intellectuals, and professional figures are all targeted with this form of politicization. This has had the long-term effect of eliminating any prominent voices within the community that are critical of the KDP and that could rally broad support for Yazidi interests, even though the Yazidi people frequently share with concerned outsiders that this is what they most need. All Yazidis MPs in the Kurdistan Parliament are KDP members—as are Yazidi MPs in the Iraqi Parliament who represent the KRG—but they enjoy little esteem from the Yazidi community and are often the objects of scorn.

The existence of independent Assyrian parties has allowed Assyrians to resist this process somewhat more effectively than the Yazidis, whom the KRG denies the right to create parties, using the rationalization that "Yazidis are Kurds, therefore they can participate in Kurdish parties and have no need for separate representation." This justification for proscribing the Yazidi political voice is ironic in light of the fact that three main Islamist parties legally function in the KRG and hold seats in the Kurdish Parliament—these are Kurdish parties whose platform is religion and religious identity. The KRG has entrenched an order

by which Yazidis who want to participate in politics are forced to join the established Kurdish parties that are not sensitive to the unique concerns of the minority, but which advance the broad Kurdish interests that constitute their platforms. The only alternative to this for Yazidis has been one Yazidi party in Sinjar (called The Movement of Reform and Progress) that has sought to work directly with the Central Government in Baghdad. It holds one seat in the Baghdad Parliament, but for more than a decade it was harshly suppressed by KDP as aish who threatened, abused, and arrested most of its members. This was possible because of the de facto security control that the KDP maintained in the disputed territory of Sinjar until the Peshmerga withdrawal upon the Yazidi Genocide of August 3, 2014. Successfully thwarted and stifled by the KDP, which used its militarized security forces (something that small parties do not possess) to forcefully establish hegemony in Sinjar, the Movement of Reform and Progress is seen as a failure by Yazidis today.

That the KRG has been forced to recognize the ethnic distinctiveness of Assyrians is one factor that has allowed Christians to resist KDP encroachment in the Nineveh Plain more successfully than has been the case for Yazidis in Sinjar. However, as this report explains, this resistance is weakening as the KDP continues to pursue increasingly aggressive tactics to annex the disputed territories, while shielded by the ongoing absence of sufficient external accountability that the international community could provide. This is exemplified by the cases of the removal of Nineveh district mayors, described in the previous section, which involved the KDP's use of a number of minority beneficiaries of KDP patronage that had been appointed to Nineveh district and provincial councils. Though Assyrians hoped that the U.S. would immediately ensure the reinstatement of the mayors and pressure the KDP into backing off, visiting U.S. dignitaries instead posed for public photographs with one of the unelected mayors that had been appointed by the party.

Many Western officials do not fully understand the destructive character and far-reaching effects of the patronage system, and the U.S. in particular, though voicing "concern" about its commitment to promoting democracy and protecting the freedoms of minorities often ends up playing the role of an enabler with the KDP.

In addition to the co-optation of community figures is the creation and funding of alternative civil society groups that favor Kurdish annexation of the Nineveh Plain. This aspect of the patronage strategy was documented in 2009 by Human Rights Watch:

"The goal of these tactics is...for Christians to abide by the Kurdish government's plan of securing a Kurdish victory in any referendum concerning the future of the disputed territories. Kurdish authorities have tried to win favor with the minority communities by spending millions of Iraqi dinars to build a pro-Kurdish system of patronage in minority communities, financing alternative civil society organizations to compete with, undermine, and challenge the authority of established groups, many of which oppose Kurdish rule. The KRG also funds private militias created ostensibly to protect minority communities from outside violence, which in reality serve to entrench Kurdish influence. Finally, the Kurdish leadership has enriched the coffers of some minority religious leaders, and paid for expensive new places of worship in order to win over minority religious establishments.

This policy exacerbated rifts within each community. Many have welcomed the cash influx—the disputed territories of Nineveh comprise one of Iraq's poorest, most ignored, and most underdeveloped areas, lacking many basic services and job prospects; for many impoverished families in northern Iraq, Kurdish patronage is often the only support available to families."⁷⁹

In order to buy the support of Assyrian churches,

the KRG will bankroll clergy, having the effect of politicizing religion and the religious leaders who should be serving the spiritual needs of the people. In 2009, a priest from Bakhdida told Human Rights Watch: “Before 2005, no one cared about our communities or churches and then overnight we started to receive funding. The Kurds have a hidden agenda and are using money to co-opt Christians—it’s not because they want to help our people...I believe that anyone who disagrees with their agenda puts their life at risk.”⁸⁰

Examples of Patronage in Action

These practices, described a number of years ago by Human Rights Watch, have not ceased, and even continue unabated at present, despite the ongoing pleading of minorities with the international community to hold the KRG accountable. A prime example of the type of KDP strategy described above is the “Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council” (known by its short form “Majlis Sha’bi”) founded in March 2007 by Assyrian KDP leader and former KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghajan, and the affiliated Nineveh Plain Church Guards and broadcasting station Ishtar TV. The party, the proxy force, and the television station are funded by the KDP.

Waheeda Yaku Hormuz, an Assyrian MP representing the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council affirms KDP policy agendas and since Nineveh’s liberation from IS she has publicly endorsed the creation of a Nineveh Plain Governorate annexed to the Kurdistan Region. Contrary to the will of her supposed constituency, she has also demanded that only Peshmerga forces protect Christian areas.⁸¹

Similarly, Aghajan funded the creation of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Student and Youth Center (which received financial assistance and material possessions⁸²) to rival the Chaldo-Assyrian Student Union, a group of young activists that

opposed the KRG’s expansionist policy.⁸³

Aghajan also founded and poured millions of KRG dollars into Ishtar TV, a broadcasting station linked to the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council, to compete with Ashur TV which is affiliated with the Assyrian Democratic Movement.⁸⁴

In addition to these projects, Aghajan founded the Christian Affairs Committee in 2007 to undermine the work of the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS) an Assyrian NGO which has existed since 1991. Through the newly-founded committee, known to have spent millions of dollars with the KRG’s backing, he funded the construction of housing units and churches in the Nineveh Plain and distributed aid.⁸⁵

A 2009 KRG Cabinet Report authored by Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman and entitled “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region” confirms what is already known among local Nineveh Plain residents: “In fact, while many Christians readily give credit to Sarkis Aghajan and speak as if it is his money, this is incorrect. When Mr. Aghajan was Finance Minister, all such efforts were fully funded by the KRG under the instructions of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.”⁸⁶

Kurdish officials frequently applaud Assyrians who are members of the KDP or affiliated groups, promoting them as “true representatives of the Assyrian people.” For example, Ano Abdoka, an ethnic Assyrian and the head of the KDP’s office in Ankawa, has never held an elected office but is upheld by the KRG as a legitimate political representative of the Assyrian people.

In a recent interview with the Clarion Project, Abdoka was identified as a “Kurdish Christian Leader” and voiced his support for a Nineveh Plain Governorate administered by the KRG.⁸⁷ These statements, though pleasing to KDP officials and loyalists, are in direct contradiction with the will of the vast majority of Assyrians.



Ano Abdoka, Head of KDP Ankawa Committee.

On September 8, 2017, a Kurdistan 24 reporter tweeted⁸⁸ photos of Assyrians participating in a pro-referendum parade in Erbil. The group photographed carried Assyrian and Kurdish flags and was organized by Abdoka.⁸⁹

Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) is a small⁹⁰ Assyrian political party based in Erbil headed by Romeo Hakkari and openly allied with the KDP. Its affiliated militia, the Nineveh Protection Forces (NPF), is funded by the KRG and operates under the command of the Peshmerga. Assyrians in the KRI suspect that Hakkari is bankrolled by the KDP; several eyewitnesses point to his massive mansion in Erbil and his personal security detail. BNDP members do not hold any elected office, and yet Hakkari was selected by the KRG to take part in the “Kurdistani referendum delegation” to Baghdad, where he was presented as a representative of Assyrians.⁹¹

Hakkari voices support for the upcoming KRG referendum: “Hakkari also acknowledged the vital role of the President of the Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, in promoting harmony and

coexistence in the Kurdistan Region. Importantly, he stated that Christians have always supported Kurdish independence, and Christians believe they can only attain more rights if and when the Kurdistan Region becomes an independent state.”⁹²

Kaldo Oghanna, spokesperson of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, expressed frustration over the political parties created and supported by the KDP in a phone interview with an ACE representative.⁹³ “It’s embarrassing and frustrating. We seemingly have more political parties than the Kurds themselves, and yet we’re only competing for five seats, while they’re fighting over hundreds.”

In September 2017, a member of Abnaa Nahrain expressed frustration over a comment made by a U.S. State Department official.⁹⁴ While discussing a number of the concerns outlined here, she was told by the official that she was “part of the minority [of political opinion].” The U.S. official pointed to seven political parties endorsing KRG annexation of the Nineveh Plain, compared to only three that oppose it. This is an important example of the effects of KRG lobbying and propaganda in Washington, which involves the patronage system, as co-opted minorities are paraded before officials and audiences at conferences on “human rights,” “peace,” and other such topics. Lacking a true picture of the political landscape in Iraq, Western officials are often misled by KDP lobbyists.⁹⁵

Though the number of Assyrian political parties aligned with the KDP are greater in number, the majority of seats in the KRG Parliament are held by parties opposed to it. Three of the five seats allotted for minorities in the KRI are held by opponents of KDP policy (the Assyrian Democratic Movement holds two seats and Abnaa al-Nahrain holds one). That politics and the government in Erbil are generally manipulated by the KDP to the detriment of critics and minorities, it is not

surprising that the other two seats should be held by the KDP-created Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council; that Assyrian voices opposing KDP agendas and annexation in Nineveh hold three seats—within a political framework that is often illegitimate to begin with—should be a telling indicator as to the actual sentiments of the Assyrian majority.

The following table provides the names of the various Assyrian parties in Iraq, with the names of their leaders, a brief description, and the number of seats held in the parliaments of both the KRG and Baghdad:

Political Party	Leader	Description	Seats in Parliament
Abnaa al-Nahrain	Galeta Shaba	A splinter group of the ADM, the independent political party was formed in 2013 after disagreements with ADM leadership resulted in a split. It has an office in Ankawa and an office in Dohuk.	0 Iraq 1 KRG
Assyrian Democratic Movement (“Zowaa”)	Yonadam Kanna	Founded in 1979, the ADM is the largest “Christian” political party in Iraq. The independent party is headquartered in Baghdad, and has offices in nearly every Assyrian city/village in the KRI and the Nineveh Plain.	2 Iraq 2 KRG
Assyrian Patriotic Party (“Atranya”)	Emmanuel Khoshaba	Founded in 1973, the Assyrian Patriotic Party is loosely tied to the Assyrian Universal Alliance. It has one office in Ankawa.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Bet Nahrain Democratic Party	Romeo Hakkari	Founded in 1974, the party was part of the Democratic Alliance of Kurdistan, and remains a KDP affiliate. The group also has ties to the Dawronoye (a fringe group aligned with Kurdish factions in Iraq and Syria). It has one office in Erbil.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Bet Nahrain Democratic Union	Yousif Yacoob Matti	The party is the official Dawronoye affiliate in Iraq and is linked to the KDP.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Chaldean Democracy Forum	Saeed Shamaya	Founded after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq with the help of the KDP, the party is a component of the Kurdistan Alliance.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Chaldean National Congress	Sameer Azzo Dawood Kozel	Founded in the United States in 2002, the fringe group is a KDP affiliate, and is funded by the KDP via the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (“Majlis Sha’bi”)	Shamsadeen Gorgees	Founded by the KDP in 2007, the party is funded by the KDP. It has one office in Erbil.	2 Iraq 2 KRG

ChaldoAshor Communist Party	Sabah Yousif Jajo	ChaldoAshor is an affiliate of the Communist Party of Kurdistan.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Syriac Assembly Movement	John Anwar Hadaya	Also known as the Syriac Gathering Movement, the party was founded in Bakh-dida as a Dawronoye affiliate and later started receiving funding from the KDP.	0 Iraq 0 KRG
Syriac Democratic Union	Salwan Momika	Founded by the KDP, the party also has ties to the Dawronoye.	0 Iraq 0 KRG

Oghanna explains that in the 2013 parliamentary elections, seven parties aligned with the KDP ran under a single slate, led by the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council, and yet they failed to earn the majority of seats. He points to the election results:⁹⁶

- The Assyrian Democratic Movement (opposed to KDP) ran its own slate, earning 6,345 votes and securing two seats.
- Abnaa al-Nahrain (opposed to KDP) ran its own slate, earning 1,093 votes and securing one seat.
- Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (KDP affiliate—backed by seven parties) earned 5,730 votes and secured two seats.

Oghanna explained that the KDP-aligned parties have far more resources and essentially unlimited funding with which to campaign and further added that there are towns with no Assyrian populations that voted for the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council. This underscores that in order to prevent fraud, there must be a procedure implemented to ensure that only Assyrians vote for seats reserved for Assyrian minorities.

Three Assyrian political parties have formally announced opposition to the upcoming KRG referendum: The Assyrian Democratic Movement, Abnaa al-Nahrain, and the Assyrian Patriotic Party.

On September 15, 2017, the KRI Parliament held its first session in more than two years to enforce the proposed independence referendum. Assyrian representatives Yacoob G. Yaco, Lina Ezarya, and Dr. Srood Maqdasy did not attend.

That same day, Yaco and Ezarya (both elected through the Al-Rafedain slate backed by the ADM) held a press conference outside the KRI Parliament building announcing their boycott.

Yaco delivered the official statement: “We have demanded from day one, when the referendum date was scheduled in the KRI, that there should be political assurances guaranteeing the rights of our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian nation in the region. The policies in the KRI for the past 25 years have not served the interests of our people. There are several unresolved issues and no real intention to solve them. 25 years have passed without resolving issues related to theft of our land and our villages and no justice for our leaders killed in political assassinations. We have never experienced a true political partnership in the Kurdistan Region; rather we have only been exploited as part of an attempt to portray a positive image

of the KRG. We reject that.”⁹⁷

On the KRG’s attempt to force a referendum in the Nineveh Plain, Yaco stated, “. . .we reject any referendum in the Nineveh Plain. A referendum in the Nineveh Plain is illegal and unconstitutional. The Nineveh Plain is outside the KRG’s jurisdiction.”⁹⁸

Representatives of the KDP-sponsored Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council attended the September 15 parliament meeting and endorsed the referendum. MP Waheeda Yaku Hormuz delivered their party’s statement in Assyrian, stating, “We know we will be granted all of our rights after the referendum.”⁹⁹

THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF IDENTITY POLITICS

The last decade has seen the formation of a new array of political and civil society organizations promoting separatist Chaldean and Syriac identities, all of which are supported by the KDP. Though multiple church denominations exist, Assyrians have long considered themselves a single people united by a common ethnicity. Ironically, those espousing “Chaldean” ethnicity usually also believe that all those who identify as Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac comprise a single ethnicity; the disagreement therefore has more to do with the superficial question of the name, rather than any substantive matter of ethnicity itself, but this contention is abused in order to weaken the identity and solidarity of this people.

The interference of the KDP is designed to exploit and exacerbate existing rifts to promote inorganic and artificial schisms in order to further divide and conquer the Assyrian people. While Kurdish authorities are not the architects of these rifts—many of which have to do with church politics—they have exploited them and benefited from the damage done to the Assyrian identity.

In the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion, Assyrians founded the Nineveh Center for Research and Development, which brought together Assyrians of all denominations. The institution was built on the unifying commonalities of all Assyrians, and was established to promote human rights for ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and to ensure their effective political and economic participation in the country. The group conducts research on issues affecting minorities and organizes conferences, seminars, and workshops to help minority communities develop their capacity to advocate for their own rights. It was not long after its establishment that the KDP funded the creation of the Syriac Center for Research and Development with the same ostensible purpose, only focused on members of the Syriac Church.¹⁰⁰

Recent examples of organizations established by the KDP for this purpose include the Syriac Union Party, headed by Salwan Momika, a former member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, and funded by the KDP. Momika is now a strong proponent of “Syriac identity” as distinct from the Assyrian identity.

A report published by the Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project first documented the issue in 2006:¹⁰¹

“It is an effort purely driven to reinforce divisions in the Assyrian nation that will produce entrenched, newly formed, ethnicities. It is worth repeating, once again, that funding for these efforts is primarily channeled through religious leaders and religious institutions who appear to share in the desire to prevent any organic process of surmounting the divisions in the Assyrian nation by overcoming denominational differences.”

KRG intervention to promote the fracturing of a people and their identity by artificially nurturing separatist identities raises questions of cultural genocide. The KRG continues to engage in practices that deprive Assyrians of their identity

by financially supporting the development and solidification of other identities rooted in religious denominational affiliation. Their policies deny Assyrians the chance to heal artificial divides and reconcile, thereby recognizing their full political and social potential in Iraq.

8. The KRG's Independence Referendum in the Nineveh Plain

On March 6, 2017, ten political parties held a press conference and released a joint statement outlining their demands for the Nineveh Plain, calling for the activation and implementation of the January 2014 decision to initiate the creation of a Nineveh Plain Governorate administered by the Central Government.¹⁰²

The statement declared that the Nineveh Plain should be excluded from all political and military conflicts arising between the Central Government and the KRG, adding: “We demand that its people are given the right to shape the future of their region independent from any pressure.”¹⁰³

The statement also rejected KDP interference in the region: “We reject all practices that are aimed at imposing de facto policies on minority areas that contradict the vision and aspirations [of the people] for their future. We also reject all political schemes designed to divide minority areas.”¹⁰⁴

Despite ardent opposition from both international observers and local residents of the disputed territories, the KRG has announced its plan to include the Nineveh Plain in its upcoming independence referendum scheduled for September 25, 2017,¹⁰⁵ referring to it as a “Kurdistani area” despite the fact that the Nineveh Plain is outside its jurisdiction and has never had a sizeable Kurdish population.

Analysts have noted that it is extremely problematic to unilaterally conduct an independence

referendum in disputed territories that have not yet been established as part of the Kurdistan Region¹⁰⁶—how can inhabitants of areas outside of the KRI legitimately decide whether Kurdistan should secede from Iraq?

Recognizing the dangers posed by the referendum, the U.S. government (in addition to many other governments around the world), including the White House, has declared its opposition to it on multiple occasions. The U.S. State Department published a statement on the referendum on Sept. 20, 2017 stressing that “The status of disputed areas and their boundaries must be resolved through dialogue, in accordance with Iraq’s constitution, not by unilateral action or force.”¹⁰⁷

In recent months, the Assyrian Democratic Movement has repeatedly called for the Nineveh Plain to be excluded from the controversial referendum,¹⁰⁸ given the current situation. Assyrian politicians have maintained that the people of the Nineveh Plain should not be asked to participate in any such referendum until they have had the opportunity to return home, rebuild their towns, and regain stability.

Nineveh Plain residents feel that KRG authorities are exploiting the suffering of minority communities to advance their own interests, but recent developments described in this report are only the latest actions in a long-term strategy to annex the region.

Even as early as eight years ago, the potential for a referendum to be abused in order to push forward an annexation agenda was noted by observers: “Kurdish officials demand the incorporation of these lands into the semiautonomous Kurdish region through a referendum... For its part, the KRG is adamantly demanding implementation of a constitutionally-mandated referendum on the future of the disputed territories—a referendum that Kurdish officials, with their political and security presence in the area, will make every effort

to ensure goes their way.”¹⁰⁹

We are now witnessing the full fruition of these long-term strategies ahead of the current independence referendum.

PART THREE

DESPOTISM MASKED AS DEMOCRACY: ASSYRIANS INSIDE THE KRI

The areas in northern Iraq now considered parts of the Kurdistan Region have been home to Assyrians for thousands of years. Continued persecution and encroachment of land over the last century have led to significant demographic changes. Some towns and villages that were once inhabited entirely by Assyrians now bear no trace of them.

An Assyrian IDP living in Ankawa, native to the Nineveh Plain said in an interview conducted for this report, “This is our homeland. It’s frustrating to see the KRG praised for welcoming us into their lands, as though we are foreigners. As though this isn’t our land, too.”¹¹¹

Contrary to popular perceptions of the KRI’s treatment of minorities, since its founding the KRG has marginalized Assyrians through a number of harmful policies, patterns of governance, and other practices; these will be elaborated in subsequent sections. In 2016, rising reports of discrimination led Senator John McCain¹¹² and former Senator Mark Kirk¹¹³ to write letters to KRG President Masoud Barzani that questioned the KRG’s treatment of Assyrians. Former Congressman Robert Dold wrote to then Secretary of State John Kerry regarding the matter.¹¹⁴

Many Assyrians living in the KRI fear the next decade will see the end of their presence in northern Iraq. The KRG has exhibited aggressive and

discriminatory practices that have driven Assyrians and other minorities from the region.

“There are incentives to ‘Kurdify’ mixed provinces in the north in order to gain greater national resources within a national political system that rewards groups on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity.”¹¹⁵

KRG officials often point to the growing number of churches¹¹⁶ in the KRI as a sign of prosperity for Assyrians,¹¹⁷ but no number of churches will change the lives of Assyrians who are victims of political repression, or the lives of those Assyrians suffering from deep poverty and experience despair.

“We were allies with the Kurds against Saddam,” said an Assyrian man in Dohuk¹¹⁸ who served in the Assyrian Democratic Movement’s militia in the 1980s. “We fought alongside them. We didn’t think we’d see the day where they became our new oppressors.”

1. Land Theft

The chronic and systematic expropriation of Assyrian land¹¹⁹ in the Duhok Governorate has been a long-term problem that continues unabated in the present.

Mikhael Benjamin, an expert on Assyrian villages,¹²⁰ states that out of 96 locations in Duhok alone in which Assyrians live—beginning with very small villages to areas of the city of Duhok, 53 locations¹²¹ (involving at least 76 distinct cases) have been targeted with illegal encroachments by Kurds, comprising a total of 47,000 dunams¹²² of land. This analysis pertains to ongoing cases; there are additionally scores of Assyrian villages that have been fully taken over, the deeds for which are also frequently still possessed by their original Assyrian owners.

Expropriation takes various forms, including: 1) encroachment by neighboring Kurdish villages upon the most arable portions of Assyrian farmland; 2) the confiscation of lucrative orchards; 3) the illegal construction of homes on Assyrian property or territory; 4) entire villages seized through outright aggression.

Two facts are essential in understanding the nature of the land-theft process.

Firstly, politics in the KRI are often characterized by corruption, nepotism, tribal gangsterism, and an absence of legitimate political institutions and rule of law. It is these conditions that facilitate the theft of Assyrian land. The intention and scale of the process constitutes a targeted and systematic attempt to ethnically cleanse the Assyrian population from their ancestral homelands, by appropriating property to which they are legally entitled and for which they possess deeds.

Second, Assyrians seeking to overturn the occupation of their land have exhausted all available legal and political means of seeking recourse against illegal confiscations, including frequent appeals to KRG courts and other bodies. From 1991 to 2016, not a single order (the majority of which have decreed that the original Assyrian inhabitants are the rightful owners of the land being discussed in a given case), whether produced by agricultural committees, courts, by political decree, or through other administrative bodies—has been honored and enforced by KRG authorities.

There are over 130 illegal village and farmland seizures across the KRI¹²³ perpetrated by ethnic Kurds and facilitated through active involvement or passive endorsement of KRG authorities. Official KRG documents ordering an end to Kurdish encroachments of Assyrian land date back to 1992.¹²⁴

The following examples were provided to the

KRG by then-U.S. Congressman Mark Kirk in 2007; these remain unresolved today:

Debade – A town roughly 30-40 miles north of Dohuk City. The people involved in the illegal land seizure in this area were led by Sayed Hussein Rajab. This case began in 1992-1993. In late August 2007, the courts handed down a second decision in favor of the Assyrian landowners. This decision was never enforced.

Sarsing – After the traumatic and immensely tragic period of the Anfal campaigns, and the subsequent optimism created by the U.S.’ establishment of the no-fly-zone, many Kurds, Assyrians, Yazidis and others could begin returning to their lands. For some, lands were not ready for returnees. It is because of this that in the early 1990s, KRG President Masoud Barzani asked if the people of Sarsing could host Kurdish families in their town until the original hometowns of the incoming Kurds could be rebuilt. In a spirit of neighborliness, goodwill, and good faith, the people of Sarsing opened their town to the refugees. Prior to their arrival, Sarsing’s population was exclusively Assyrian. Today, with the backing of the KRG, the Kurdish families have seized those lands, have built on them at an alarming rate and declared the town and its land theirs. This case is exceptional in that Barzani himself facilitated the seizure of the lands. The Assyrians cannot reclaim their lands, cannot get the Kurds to leave and have now seen their town and its lands Kurdified through a process of forced relocation under the supervision of the KRG President. Assyrians are now a minority in the town: As of 2017, there are only 118 Assyrian households in Sarsing, compared to upwards of 2,000 Kurdish homes.

Dere/Koumaneh/Maristek – These towns have had lands seized within them, by Mohamed Mohsen Falah. He is a KDP official. His father, Mohsen Falah, is a Member of Parliament in the KRG’s legislature, and is father-in-law to Hoshiyar

Zebari, the current Foreign Minister of Iraq. 600 lots of substantial size have been illegally seized and placed for sale through Mohamed Falah, also facilitated by the Governor’s office based in Amadiya. Sizable portions of this stolen land also belong to two churches, St. George’s Church of Maristek and St. Odisho’s of Dere. There have been several court decisions in favor of the community, but the illegal land seizure, development and re-selling of the land by Mohamed Falah has not been stopped. Indeed, senior members of the KDP are directly related to the illegal land seizure.

Chembre Bethkeh – In the Nahla Valley region of Dohuk, the town of Chembre Bethkeh has seen close to half of its village lands illegally seized by neighboring Kurds. Due to the remoteness of the area and other logistical difficulties, village residents sought redress through appeals to Masoud Barzani himself. He assured the villagers that the problems would be resolved. Instead, the seizures have continued unabated and development of the seized lands by the Kurds who seized them is continuing unchecked.

Chaqala Khtatha – This town has won two court decisions in their favor affirming that they are the rightful owners of the land. Vast tracts of their farmland have been seized by the Omar Karim family. These men served as bodyguards for Masoud Barzani and are able to operate in the area with impunity. Coinciding with the seizure of economically productive farmland surrounding the village are illegal seizures within the village itself. As early as August 12, 1993, a special committee tasked to investigate this issue found that the land belonged to Assyrians from ancient times, and that the people of neighboring Berifkeh had at that time already encroached on more than one square kilometer of land. That process has continued to this day and remains unchecked and unresolved.

The scale of land theft is sufficiently vast to have

been recently described by Yacoob G. Yaco, an Assyrian politician, as “a genocide, like that perpetrated by IS, only more slowly.”

The Middle Eastern Research Institute recently discussed the ongoing problem of land theft in the KRI:

“Christian representatives have claimed that large swathes of land in Erbil that are owned by Christians have been appropriated by the KRG and used for various purposes, including private investment. Despite numerous promises and even official court and KRG rulings, they claim no restitution has been granted. The unresolved land disputes in the KRI have incited grievances against the authorities to the extent that Christians have referred to this issue as ‘Kurdification.’”¹²⁵

It also highlights the KRG’s failure to resolve the issue:

“In addition, Christians have expressed not only frustration but also privation of hope for the governments’ will to apply laws that advance equality. An example is Law No. 5 issued in 2015 by the Kurdistan Parliament and signed by the president of the KRI to address appropriated Christian land. However, it is yet to be enforced.”¹²⁶

In April 2016, Assyrian residents of the Nahla Valley seeking to protest the latest illegal construction of a home on their land were blocked from leaving to join a protest in Erbil. The incident is detailed later in this report.

One of the protestors, when held at a barricade, stated in a live video, “The Kurds are taking our lands. They’re building houses on our lands. They’ve taken Kashkawa and Rabatkeh, now all that’s left is part of Nahla. And they want to take it.”

On July 12, 2013, the *mukhtar* (an official similar to a mayor at the level of a village) of the Assyrian

village of Rabatkeh in Nahla, Zaya Barcham Khoshaba, confronted a Kurdish Peshmerga lieutenant who was attempting to build a home on stolen land that belonged to Assyrians. The Peshmerga lieutenant declared that the land was his. Khoshaba demanded official government documents to back his claim. The lieutenant replied, “I am the government.”¹²⁷

Khoshaba called the police office in Aqrah. The police told them to allow the lieutenant to build the home. Despite this, the people of Rabatkeh refused, and blocked him from entering the town.

The residents later realized the lieutenant was sneaking construction supplies into Rabatkeh during the night, and illegally began construction. Khoshaba confronted him late one night, and told him what he was doing was wrong. The lieutenant struck him with his pistol.

The community appealed to the court system, but the situation has not changed. Though the lieutenant never finished the construction of his home, the land is understood to be his.

It should be kept in mind that the Nineveh Plain has also been targeted for land theft. The U.S. Department of State 2006 International Religious Freedom Report stated: “Christians living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated



Zaya Barcham Khoshaba after being attacked by a Peshmerga officer.

their property without compensation and began building settlements on their land. Assyrians also alleged that KDP-dominated judiciary routinely discriminated against non-Muslims and failed to enforce judgements in their favor.¹²⁸

In an interview, Benjamin said, “There is nothing more important for the existence of our nation than our land. Much of our land has been stolen and occupied, and hundreds of resolutions have been put forward, but not one of them has made a single difference for the situation on the ground.”¹²⁹

2. The KRG Draft Constitution

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq’s Constitution Drafting Committee commenced its work on May 25, 2015. The designated representative of the Christian Assyrian people, Dr. Muna Yaku, felt compelled to walk off the committee as a form of protest only a few months later on August 11, 2015.

Yaku is a Professor of International Human Rights Law at Salahaddin University in Erbil. She was chosen to serve on the committee by the three Assyrian parties that hold seats in the KRG Parliament—the Assyrian Democratic Movement, Abnaa al-Nahrain, and the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council.

Her withdrawal inspired both the Yazidi and Turkmen representatives to do the same.

In an August 13, 2015 interview on Nohadra Radio¹³⁰ (an Assyrian radio program of the diaspora community in Australia), following her withdrawal from the committee, Yaku stated, “For days during this process, I told myself to be patient. I kept telling myself to try again, to try and find a compromise. But it became clear that we wouldn’t even come close to an agreement, quite the opposite actually...I will not take part in the exploita-

tion of my people.”

In terms of principles, according to Yaku,¹³¹ the draft constitution is majoritarian and sees majority rule as legitimating the denial of minority rights. This majoritarianism underpins the denial of a right to even be sufficiently heard by the committee in making the case for certain rights to be included in the constitution. The current draft not only rejects key rights being sought by vulnerable non-Kurdish minorities, but dismantles rights gained by these minorities in the KRI since 1992. The irony of this posture by the KRG is that when Iraq’s Constitution was being drafted, the Kurds, though a demographic minority, were accorded equal rights as the majority in the drafting process, yet deny this right to Assyrians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabaks, and other non-Kurdish minorities.

Yaku outlined the following concerns:¹³²

- The draft constitution ascribes a numeric value to each minority as if the value of a people is derived from a headcount instead of possessing intrinsic worth.
- The historic lands of specific minorities, namely Assyrians and Yazidis, are being unilaterally annexed to the KRI without provision for legal processes allowing for these peoples to determine their future.
- For several years now, Article 35 of the working draft constitution accorded Assyrians the right to autonomy “wherever they are a majority of the population.” Today, this designation refers to no actual place, since due to persecution and demographic change, Assyrians are no longer a majority in any governorate.
- Quota seats guaranteed to Assyrians are now being curtailed with the qualification “when-ever necessary,” leaving Assyrians politically beholden to whomever decides when such a right is “necessary,” effectively making the quota seats a source of political coercion.
- The draft constitution establishes Islam as

the official religion of the KRI, making it a foundation for legislation, and disallows any legislative measures that contradict the “provisions of Islam.”

Yaku explained that the committee’s head met with her following her withdrawal and tried to negotiate her return. She refused unless he agreed to her terms in writing.¹³³

The committee had been allotted a period of three months to complete the draft. When the minority representatives withdrew, the committee was left with no choice but to request an extension from the KRG Parliament, but the Parliament was effectively shut down later that month when Masoud Barzani exiled the Speaker (a member of Gorran) after he called for Barzani to step down due to the expiration of his term as president. The KRG Parliament has been inactive since August 2015, but has recently held session ahead of the independence referendum.

3. Religious Freedom

There is a shared feeling among Assyrians living in northern Iraq that they are foreigners in their own lands. Though the treatment of Christians in the Kurdistan Region is “progressive” when compared to the treatment of Christians in some other parts of the Middle East, Assyrians still feel that they are treated as second class citizens, in part due to their faith.

Islamic institutions and shari’a principles influence KRG laws. Through the KRG’s Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government funds around 5,000 mosques and more than 2,800 religious public speakers—many of whom promote Salafism.¹³⁴ Secular Kurds have complained about the growing conservatism of the Kurdistan Region as the state supports the increased role and power of religious elements.¹³⁵

In some larger towns like Sarsing (where it is worth noting that the majority of the population is now Kurdish), an exorbitant number of *asaish* officers surrounded the church during Christmas mass in 2016. Town residents felt that the excessive security presence was designed to project a positive image of the KRG as protectors of Christians, rather than to genuinely fend off terror threats. Despite the fact that the KRG has established its reputation internationally as “tolerant” of minorities and committed to their protection, the actions of the KRG police, *asaish*, and Peshmerga documented in this report suggest a very different reality and agenda. It is therefore unsurprising that Assyrians do not trust their intentions.

Residents of Sarsing and Inishke explained that garbage pickup has often been refused when the trash includes alcohol bottles.

Two female students attending different universities in Erbil stated that they have been humiliated by Kurdish professors for not wearing hijabs, adding that this has also affected some Kurdish women as well. Several students complained that Islamic religious views have too great a presence in university classrooms—from instructor-led discussions to course material and textbooks.¹³⁶

KURDISH CLERICS INCITING VIOLENCE

Earlier this year, an Assyrian priest from Ankawa was walking in Erbil and overheard a Kurdish imam preach hate against Assyrians during a mosque service held on the Assyrian New Year (April 1), referring to the Christians as “infidels” and stating they should have “no place in Kurdistan.” The imam declared that he was sickened by the fact that Assyrians were permitted to celebrate the Assyrian New Year in the streets. Celebrations generally include parades and musical performances with locals performing folk dances in traditional Assyrian wear.¹³⁷



Assyrian New Year celebrations in Dohuk in April 2017.

In December of 2011, Kurdish clerics instigated a series of riots against Assyrian- and Yazidi-owned properties. Ismail Osman Sindai, a radical Kurdish imam, called for attacks against the non-Muslim communities on December 2, 2011.¹³⁸

Hundreds of young Kurdish men attacked establishments owned by Assyrians and Yazidis, including stores, hotels, casinos, social clubs, and church properties. The violence spread into nearby towns in Dohuk and Simele. More than fifty businesses owned by Assyrians were looted and torched. The mobs chanted “Allahu Akbar.”

The riots lasted for three days, terrifying the local population, and caused more than four million dollars in damages. At least thirty people were



Assyrian-owned establishments attacked by mobs of Kurdish men in the 2011 Dohuk riots.



Assyrian-owned establishments attacked by mobs of Kurdish men in the 2011 Dohuk riots.

wounded. Shop owners received threatening letters warning against reopening.¹³⁹

Kurdish authorities did not react until the violence reached the city of Dohuk. KRG President Masoud Barzani ordered an investigation into the incident, but the perpetrators were never prosecuted, and the shop owners who sustained major losses were never compensated.

Assyrians who complain about the treatment of Christians in the Kurdistan Region are often told to move to Baghdad or to read about the treatment of Christians in countries like Egypt. In some cases, Assyrians interviewed for this report mentioned that they were told they deserved to be conquered by IS.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN KURDISH SOCIETY

For the most part, Assyrians see the KRI as a more progressive Muslim region than some other Muslim countries in the Middle East. Many Assyrians who formerly lived in Baghdad note that Kurdish society has demonstrated a greater degree of religious tolerance than has Iraqi society in southern parts of the country.

Nevertheless, a number of the informants in-

interviewed for this report recounted incidents of religious discrimination. For example, taxi drivers in the Kurdistan Region sometimes refuse to transport Assyrians due to their Christian faith, or they refuse to go to Assyrian areas (i.e. Anka-wa)—describing the inhabitants as infidels.

4. Kurdish Secret Police Cracking Down on Freedom of Speech

The two main parties of the KRG, the KDP and PUK, each have their own separate, party-affiliated secret police and intelligence services. While the purpose of these *asaish* and *parastin* is ostensibly to provide security and safety to the citizens of the Kurdistan Region, they perform the additional function of enforcing compliance with party policies and silencing oppositional voices. Assyrians who speak out publicly against discrimination, injustice, prejudice, political coercion, and annexation, or who are critical of other KRG policies and practices, even on social media, are frequently threatened with violence via phone calls and messages from the *asaish*. In such situations, the *asaish* sometimes approach people openly, not disguising their affiliation with the secret police. In other cases, people receive anonymous threats via mysterious calls. The anonymous threats are a common response to any form of perceived opposition to KDP agendas; they are not seen as random incidents carried out by civilians, but are usually understood to originate with the organized intelligence apparatus of the KDP. In some cases, people are followed and attacked.

The KRG has long sought to silence dissidents, regardless of ethnic identity:

“...limitations on the freedom of the press prevent issues of corruption from being discussed openly, and several journalists have been harassed or even detained following articles that they wrote about corruption involving Kurdistan officials. Public opposition to corruption has also been

suppressed. A series of peaceful demonstrations involving thousands of people broke out in July 2006 in a number of Kurdish towns, protesting government corruption and the lack of basic goods and services, such as fuel and water. Several hundred people were arrested, while two people were killed by police who fired on the demonstrators.”¹⁴⁰

Kurdish journalists who criticize the KDP have been killed; such cases have occurred as recently as last year, believed to have been carried out by the *asaish*.¹⁴¹ Such cases serve as “examples” to others who might express dissent or critique the government and are particularly effective at deterring minorities from exercising free speech, as minorities already feel more vulnerable and are more susceptible to terrorization and intimidation.

One Assyrian interviewed for this report appealed to a KRG official in Erbil last year after having received death threats from *asaish* after anti-KDP remarks made in an interview, imploring the official to acknowledge that democracy should protect freedom of speech. The official responded to him: “There is no democracy. We are the law.”

Following the decision of Abnaa al-Nahrain (one of the Assyrian political parties) to boycott a June 7, 2017 meeting with Masoud Barzani regarding the Kurdistan Independence Referendum, members of the party received direct threats. One of their representatives came home to a letter left on his doorstep that threatened the safety of his family.¹⁴²

Assyrian politicians in Erbil who helped organize the protest have reported to the authors of this report that they received direct threats from KRG officials and were warned against participating. Despite these threats, about thirty Assyrians gathered outside the parliament building and protested. There were no arrests, but protestors feel they were only protected by the international attention

the incident received.

In early 2017, a young Assyrian wrote a post on Facebook criticizing Masoud Barzani for exceeding his term. Not long afterwards, the leader of the KDP office in his hometown posted a screenshot of the post on his own personal Facebook page. The Assyrian received numerous death threats via Facebook and on his cell phone, including from individuals who openly identified themselves as part of the *asaish*. He was told to delete his original post or face consequences, and complied. While he was never attacked or detained as a result, he reports that he has not felt safe since that day.¹⁴³

In late 2016, an Assyrian man working at his family's store located in the Dohuk Governorate was complaining about the KRG not paying salaries, cursing the names of government officials. Word got around town, and not long afterwards, two *asaish* officers came into the store and told him he needed to go with them. An Assyrian who happened to be in the store at the time filmed them leading him out of the store.

The man was taken to a mountaintop, where he was forced onto his knees. A gun was held to his head and he was warned against ever speaking out against the government. The *asaish* told him that they would send him home as a corpse. The man believes that the only reason he was not killed was because the two men had been recorded on film.¹⁴⁴

On April 13, 2016, Assyrian residents of Nahla Valley seeking to protest the latest illegal construction of a home on their land were blocked from leaving Nahla to join a protest outside the KRG Parliament in Erbil.¹⁴⁵ In order to minimize the size of the protest, the KDP *asaish* set up roadblocks and hundreds of Assyrians—potential protesters—were turned away at checkpoints leading into the city. Any individual bearing a

Christian identification card was not allowed to pass, including those Assyrians who had no intention to protest but simply needed to travel to Erbil for work. Assyrians from other parts of Iraq, including Dohuk and Kirkuk, were also blocked from entering Erbil.



Residents of Nahla blocked by Kurdish *asaish* from entering Erbil to participate in protest against land theft outside parliament building on April 13, 2016.



Assyrians ignore warnings and hold protest outside of KRG Parliament building in Erbil on April 13, 2016.

During the 2015-16 academic year, an Assyrian student living in the Dohuk Governorate was illegally detained by *asaish* officers after writing a critical comment in response to a Rudaw (KDP-affiliated¹⁴⁶ Kurdish news outlet) article. He was picked up at his university and detained for one week. He was held in a home in Dohuk,

but refused to discuss details related to his treatment while imprisoned.¹⁴⁷

Following a 2015 interview in which a young Assyrian man described the Peshmerga abandoning his village in the Nineveh Plain to IS, his father was arrested and brutally beaten by *asaish* for “failing to control his son.”¹⁴⁸

In June 2014, following protests against the KDP’s first attempt to remove Alqosh Mayor Faeiz Abed Jahwareh (outside KRG jurisdiction), six Assyrian students were detained by *asaish*.¹⁴⁹ The students were verbally and physically assaulted, and taken to an *asaish* base in Alqosh. One of the students who attempted to call a family member for help was beaten on the spot. They were forced to sit on their knees for several hours, and were later beaten and threatened before they were released in the middle of the night, without their wallets or cell phones. They were told to return to the office in the morning to collect their belongings.

The students were not given reasons for their arrests, but most Assyrians believe the incident occurred in response to Alqosh’s protest (which did end up resulting in the reinstatement of the town’s mayor) and to instill fear in the local population.

Ahead of the 2009 provincial elections, Nimrod Sheba, an Assyrian from Komaneh in the KRI, spoke out openly against the KDP intimidation that targeted prospective Assyrian voters in order to force them to vote in favor of the KDP. In an interview on Ashur TV, Sheba highlighted these tactics, adding that the KDP was instructing Kurdish residents to vote in favor of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (a KDP created and funded party). He explained that this information had been reported to the Iraqi High Electoral Commission. He was detained for fourteen days by *asaish* in Amadiya,¹⁵⁰ and later transferred to a prison in Dohuk.

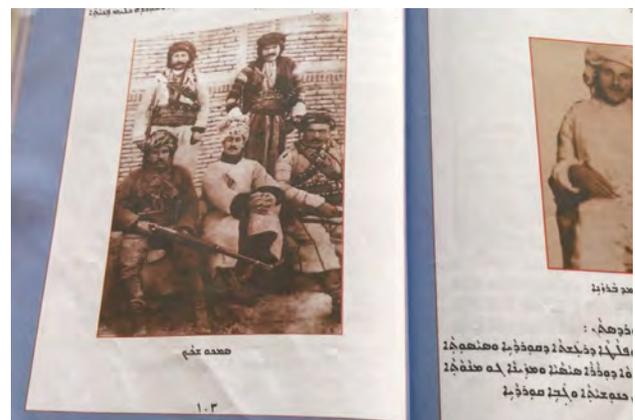
One man living in Ankawa was harassed by *asaish* for displaying an Assyrian flag outside his home. He moved to Ankawa in 2008, and just a week afterwards began to receive threats because of the flag. He refused to remove it. *Asaish* trespassed on his property and took down the flag. He was warned against flying it again.¹⁵¹

During the course of the research for this report, many Assyrians were interviewed who had been targeted in more serious ways than in those examples listed here, but they were too afraid to allow their accounts to be included in this report.

5. Public Manifestations of Anti-Assyrian Prejudice

STATE-SANCTIONED SYMBOLS OF HATE

Representations of hatred and racism towards Assyrians are promoted within the Kurdistan Region. Required textbooks are provided to Assyrian schools in northern Iraq by the KRG, which include sections on Kurdish warlord Simko Shikak describing him as a hero. Shikak led multiple massacres of Assyrians during the 1915 Assyrian Genocide (coinciding with the Armenian Genocide) resulting in the slaughter of thousands. He is notorious for the assassination of Assyrian Patri-



A page from an Assyrian school history textbook required by KRG, depicting Simko Shikak as a hero.



Street sign near Ankawa named in honor of Simko Shikak.

arch Mar Benyamin Shimun XXI in 1918 under false pretenses, under a flag of truce.

Tributes to Shikak in the KRI have also taken the form of streets named in his honor, including a street deliberately located near the Christian neighborhood of Ankawa and given its name in 2013. Assyrians feel that by honoring Shikak, the KRG is glorifying their genocide and promoting racism towards their community.

Similarly, the KRG recently unveiled a massive mural in Inishke honoring known KDP assassin Wahid Kovali. Kovali was part of the assassina-



A mural dedicated to known KDP assassin Wahid Kovali in 2016, infamous for the murder of Assyrian MP Francis Shabo.



Monument of Assyrian hero Hurmiz Malik Chikko adorned with Kurdish flags ahead of referendum.

tion of Assyrian MP Francis Shabo in 1993, but was never prosecuted for his crime. Following his death earlier this year, Kovali was hailed a Kurdish hero by KRG officials. Assyrians are offended and deeply disturbed by the mural, which has been intentionally placed near an Assyrian village.

DISHONORING ASSYRIAN HISTORICAL FIGURES

In September of 2017, residents of Kore Gavana, an Assyrian town in Dohuk, expressed anger over Kurdish flags placed on a monument erected in tribute to the Assyrian hero Hurmiz Malik Chikko ahead of the September 25, 2017 Kurdistan independence referendum.

Chikko was known for commanding the Assyrian front against the Ba'athist Iraqi Regime in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His goal was to defend the territorial integrity of Assyrian lands in northern Iraq from Arab and Kurdish infringement and to protect the local Assyrian and Yazidi communities from Arabization policies.

Though allied with the Kurdish resistance and greatly admired by Mustafa Barzani, Chikko worked to ensure the Assyrian resistance remained independent:

“Kheit Kheit Allap II [Assyrian underground organization] was able, ideologically, to recruit Hurmiz Malik Chikko along with fifty of his followers to join the armed uprising in the north. Chikko accepted on the condition of monetary support, which he hoped would allow the Assyrian resistance to be independent of the Kurdish parties, having his men receive financial assistance directly rather than through the KDP.”¹⁵²

Chikko was killed on December 2, 1963 at the age of 29. Locals are angry about the KDP’s blatant attempt to distort and exploit his sacrifice, viewing the politicization as an insult to his emory.

NEGLECT AND DEFACEMENT OF ASSYRIAN HERITAGE SITES

A number of Assyrian archaeological sites inside the KRI are currently unprotected, and as a result, are frequently vandalized, sometimes with political intent.



Damage to the Maltai Reliefs in February 2016.

In February 2016, photos surfaced online showing the vandalism of a 7th-century BCE Assyrian archaeological site in Dohuk, known as the Maltai Reliefs¹⁵³ or the Khinnis Reliefs.¹⁵⁴ A Kurdish flag had been spray-painted over the nearly 3,000-year-old relief.¹⁵⁵

The vandalism was later removed but left a permanent stain on the relief. Then, in July 2016, photos surfaced of a new Kurdish flag painted on



A new flag painted on the Maltai Reliefs in July 2016.

the same site.

In October 2016, a team of professional volunteers from Italy traveled to Iraq to attend to the site.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it was vandalized again the following year. In May 2017, Assyrians discovered that the same relief had been deliberately damaged, leading to new breakage.¹⁵⁷

A small protest was organized at the site on May 12, 2017, organized by the Chaldo-Assyrian Student Union, the Assyrian Women’s Union, the Assyrian Cultural Center, and the Assyrian Democratic Movement calling for an end to the defacement of Assyrian heritage sites.¹⁵⁸

Between February 2016 and May 2017, multiple

Assyrian organizations have complained to government officials about the racist attacks on this site. Assyrian MP Yacoob G. Yaco sent a letter to the head of the KRG Parliament.¹⁵⁹ In his letter, he blamed the KRG for the damage due to its neglect and failure to protect these sites.

The KRG has failed to condemn the acts and take necessary steps to protect these sites. Assyrians feel that the KRG is not committed to preserving and protecting their heritage.

6. Harmful Politics in the KRI

KURDIFYING THE MEMORY OF ASSYRIAN SUFFERING

Assyrians in Iraq have expressed widespread frustration over KRG President Masoud Barzani's attempts to politicize the 1933 Simele Massacre in Dohuk to benefit the Kurdish nationalist agenda.¹⁶⁰ The genocidal campaign was led by Iraqi General Bakr Sidqi, an ethnic Kurd,¹⁶¹ and led to the death of thousands of innocent Assyrians in the region.

In his 2013 official statement on Assyrian Martyrs Day, held annually on August 7, Barzani referred to the victims of the Simele Massacre as “martyrs of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement.”¹⁶²

This year, in 2017, he used the solemn holiday as an opportunity to promote the KRG referendum, writing in a published statement: “The only medicine for all of our pains and the only guarantee to ensure that disasters are not repeated is to take steps toward independence.”¹⁶³

Many Assyrians are offended by his remarks and understand them to constitute part of the KRG's ongoing effort to “Kurdify” Assyrians in the region.

KDP PATRONAGE AMONG ASSYRIANS WITHIN THE KRI

The lengthy section in Part Two on patronage dealt mainly with the KDP's manipulation of the Assyrian political landscape to eliminate opposition and to generate artificial support for KDP policies—or the illusion of that support. Much of that section applies to the KRI, as well as to the Nineveh Plain. Not only does the KDP target Assyrians in the KRI with the same tactics, but instances exist where the KDP inhibits or interferes with the democratic process in other ways, as well.

The KDP has for years attempted to marginalize groups inside the KRI that disagree with party agendas. For example, ahead of the 2005 elections in the KRI, the Assyrian General Conference (AGE) was not allowed to publicly campaign for its list of candidates. A statement¹⁶⁴ published by the political party in December 2005 explains that when AGE representatives traveled to Mangeshe (a village in the Dohuk Governorate) and put up posters promoting their slate, they were approached by armed Kurdish KDP members. These individuals ripped down their posters and told them to leave the town, threatening them with violence. The AGE subsequently filed a complaint with the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq.

The KDP also interferes in smaller elections. In some Assyrian villages (an example being Sarsing, a village in the Dohuk Governorate), there are elected officials who manage local affairs. These elections take place even in areas where Assyrians are the minority. For example, Sarsing has an Assyrian *mukhtar* (an official similar to a mayor at the level of a village) to represent the Assyrian population there, who serves in addition to a Kurdish mayor elected by the majority Kurdish population. Many Assyrians reported KDP interference in local elections, by promoting Assyrian KDP candidates and intimidating

the locals. Though the current *mukhtar* in Sarsing is not affiliated with the KDP, in previous elections, KDP officials would warn independent (i.e., non-KDP affiliated) Assyrians against running. In interviews conducted for this report, residents added that there have been elections where the KDP-backed candidate ran unopposed, because independent Assyrians were intimidated into not participating in the election.

RISKS POSED BY THE PKK PRESENCE IN NAHLA

In Nahla, there is a growing PKK presence. They are slowly moving into homes, making neighbors feel uncomfortable and unsafe. In some cases, they are believed to have inhabited homes illegally. The KDP is aware of their presence, as residents have complained, but have done nothing in response. Residents fear that an attack on PKK in Nahla by Turkish forces is possible, and worry that they could be caught in the crossfire.

Many men in Nahla hunt in the surrounding mountains to provide for their families and or do so recreationally. They explained that it is now a risk to do so because Turkish planes are always circling above Nahla looking for PKK militants and the local Assyrians fear that they might be mistaken for them, especially if armed.

7. Discrimination in Business

The KRG has demonstrated discriminatory practices when granting permits for new businesses. Assyrian applications for permits can be denied without a reasonable basis for their rejection, or simply without being given a valid explanation. For example, several years ago, the Assyrian Aid Society looked to open a hotel in Duhok to serve as a constant source of income for their organization. They had previously acquired land that they intended to use for this purpose and met all legal requirements, but they were denied a permit.

They were told that their land could only be used for a facility that would serve as a community resource, and suggested creating a community center in its place, despite knowing that the AAS already has a functioning community center and student center adjacent to the land. The land still belongs to AAS but is vacant.

In order to get and keep jobs, Assyrians are often forced to assume KDP membership. This is a longstanding practice that was reported in 2007 by Minority Rights Group and Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project (ISDP). According to ISDP, “Assyrians applying to work at the Sheraton Hotel in Erbil were required to become members of the KDP; those who refused had their job offers withdrawn.”¹⁶⁵ It is common to be pressured into officially joining the KDP before being granted a good position in a significant institution, such as a hospital or a university.

Many Nineveh Plain residents seeking work in the KRI also testified to this practice in 2008 claiming that they “were told to join the Kurdish Democratic Party of KRG President Massoud Barzani if they wanted to find a job. Most refused, and joblessness remains high.”¹⁶⁶

The Assyrians struggle to succeed in entrepreneurial endeavors is exacerbated as store owners operate under the constant threats and harassment of KDP *asaish*. They are referred to as “Barzani’s mafia” by local people. Some Assyrian store owners reported being forced to turn over up to 51% of their earnings monthly to the *asaish*.¹⁶⁷ Those that refuse to comply see their utility bills skyrocket or are threatened with violence. Many understand this as the *asaish* making clear that they will get their money by any means. This makes it very difficult for many Assyrian businesses to make a profit.

The collections are made regularly but arbitrarily. This mafia-style extortion occurs in both the Erbil and Dohuk Governorates; it was reported



A portrait of Masoud Barzani on display in an Assyrian-owned print shop in Ankawa.

by several former and current store owners interviewed during the preparation of this report, and many other Assyrian locals reported being aware of the practice.

Many Assyrian businesses are forced to display photos depicting Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish flag, or both. In some cases, stores are forced to sell KRG or KDP memorabilia (buttons, pins, flags, etc. with Kurdish nationalist emblems). Those that refuse to comply are harassed and threatened with violence.

Some business owners have been directly approached by *asaish* and told that they are required to display or sell such items. Other business owners do so as a precautionary measure, knowing that there is an unwritten rule that businesses must display such items and fearing backlash if they do not.

One Assyrian man interviewed for this report¹⁶⁸ explained that when he first opened his shop in Ankawa, he promised himself that he would not cave to pressure and would never display KDP propaganda. He was soon after told by an *asaish* officer to display a Kurdish flag, but he did not comply. When the officer returned a week later, he fined the store owner for not having a fire extinguisher. The Assyrian man purchased a fire extinguisher. When the same officer returned some days later, he fined the store owner, claiming that

the fire extinguisher was expired even though it was brand new. This intimidation continued and the officer would return weekly and collect a fine, each time citing the fire extinguisher's expiration date. The harassment went on for two months and the illegal fine increased each time, before the store owner finally resorted to putting a Kurdish flag in his window.

Another Assyrian store owner in Ankawa offered only a few words when asked why he sells KDP memorabilia: "It's not a choice."¹⁶⁹

A man who runs a small toy store in Dohuk said he was threatened with physical violence if he did not comply in displaying such items.¹⁷⁰

One older Assyrian man mocked a portrait of Barzani on display in an ice cream parlor in Dohuk. He added, "This is what Saddam used to do. All that's changed is the man in the photo."¹⁷¹

All shops selling alcohol are owned by Christians or Yazidis, as Iraqi law prohibits Muslims from selling alcohol. Anyone is able to purchase alcohol, however. For this reason, Assyrian liquor store owners are constantly harassed and threatened by conservative elements. In interviews, they often refer to the riots that took place in 2011, in which religious Kurds launched an assault on liquor stores run by Assyrians and Yazidis. Many do not feel safe and worry that an attack may happen again at any time.

Many Assyrians have closed their businesses due to the various pressures outlined above, and these factors have likewise discouraged many prospective entrepreneurs from opening businesses.

8. Services

Assyrians living in villages across the Kurdistan Region (such as Nahla, villages near Zakho, or villages between Sarsing and Amedi) have fre-

quently internalized second-class status and hold minimal expectations as to what the state should provide. While conducting research for this report, after a long conversation with a family who described the horrible conditions in which they live, they stated, “But everything is fine. They [the Kurds] are not harming us. So we’re fine.”¹⁷² The economic and infrastructural neglect of certain non-Kurdish areas is therefore accepted by many minorities.

As Assyrian politician and former Iraqi Minister for Displacement and Migration Pascale Warda said, “Human rights are not part of the Iraqi consciousness. People don’t know how to demand their rights, and even if they do, they don’t speak out.”¹⁷³

There appears to be a lack of formal education among majority of adults residing in the villages. Those who had received more education previously seem to have relocated to major cities (e.g. Duhok or Erbil). In some villages, families viewed education as having less importance than skillsets needed for farming and housework.

Many families living in villages (especially in the Zakho District) are living in poverty, lacking even basic necessities. Many of these are without any real prospects of improving their socioeconomic status. Children were observed lacking clothing suitable for the wintertime.

A sizeable number of Assyrians and Yazidis who fled the Nineveh Plain in 2014 have taken refuge in Assyrian villages in the Dohuk Governorate. Given the crushing poverty and lack of options, Assyrians are slowly but steadily abandoning the villages in which they took refuge.

One man native to Peshkhabour (also known as Faysh Khabour) explained how the rise of IS further marginalized Assyrians in the area: “After the IDPs from the Nineveh Plain came [to the north], the focus has been solely on them and

their needs. We were already second-class citizens, now we’re half of that... but we’re still standing and we’ll keep standing.”¹⁷⁴

MEDICAL CARE

Many families lack access to adequate medical care. Occasionally, they will receive assistance from humanitarian organizations such as Assyrian Aid Society, Assyrians Without Borders, Help Iraq, and others, but for the most part they are left to fend for themselves. Often times they are left without vital medicines or medical attention and instead utilize home remedies, or are forced to use their very limited funds to pay for private medical care.

Most villages do not have a hospital or medical center. In case of emergencies, hospitals are sometimes more than an hour’s drive away. Some



Assyrian Aid Society distributes medicine to Assyrians and Yazidis living in Peshkhabour and surrounding areas.

villages in the Nahla region have makeshift clinics that are underequipped and not properly staffed. Many families spoken to during the research for this report stressed the need for local medical centers.

BASIC NEEDS

Many displaced Assyrian families who have taken up residence in villages in the KRI do not have access to clean drinking water, as the tap water is sometimes not potable. They are therefore forced to use their limited funds to purchase bottled water and sometimes drink water sparingly. Assyrian families lacking access to clean water are sometimes forced to purchase expensive faucet filters in order to sanitize water so that they are able to use it for everyday tasks such as laundry and cooking. However, this is not extended to all functions: one woman explained that it is humiliating to have to shower in dirty water.

Although all residents of the KRI experience frequent and random power outages varying in length, Assyrians living in rural villages sometimes have almost no access to electricity. According to one family, they only receive electricity for a few hours each day. This causes many problems, including:

- Inability to cook meals as appliances cannot be used
- Unable to shower in winter as water is too cold
- Difficulty preserving perishable foods
- Freezing conditions in the winter with heat provided only by portable kerosene stoves
- Major inconvenience for high school and college students who require internet access for their studies
- Children have difficulty sleeping through the cold

Assyrian families in villages often do not receive electricity until midday. They use old-fashioned stoves for warmth during the winter. For many families living in villages, this is the only source of heat. Two kinds of heating stoves are often



A young Assyrian woman in Mirokeh, Nahla lights a firewood stove to keep warm in January 2017.



Kerosene mini-stoves are used by Assyrians across northern Iraq to keep warm during winter months.

used: those that require firewood and kerosene mini-stoves. Both of these methods pose serious health risks and safety concerns, but families are desperate and therefore use them despite their disadvantages.

The woodstoves are only found in some of the rural villages (e.g. Nahla). The kerosene stoves are used in both villages and cities but are costly and also produce fumes that can be harmful to breathe. The KRG provides one canister of kerosene to each family for approximately \$40 USD. A single canister of kerosene generally lasts only 15 to 20 days. Most families require more than one kerosene mini-stove, depending on the number of bedrooms and family members. Refills are provided by a government-sanctioned company.



A dangerous dirt road in Nahla.

Residents in various Assyrian villages in the Dohuk Governorate complained about price gouging the cost of kerosene. Some families have consistently been forced to pay double the standard rate. The highest reported payment made towards a kerosene refill was \$140 USD.

Price gouging the cost of kerosene was not an issue for Assyrians living in urban areas like Ankawa, but seemed to be a phenomenon targeting rural villages where families had little ability to travel to cities to make purchases.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Most Assyrian villages inside the KRI lack proper infrastructure including but not limited to electricity, hospitals, adequate schools, acceptable roads, water supply, waste management, parks, bridges, and other public services.

Roads leading to and within Assyrian villages are often in very poor condition, creating hazardous conditions for drivers, especially when there is rain or snow. It is also dangerous to drive at night as streets are not lit. Many roads also lack clear sign-posting. Not only are the roads unsafe, but they create serious obstacles for those who work (or who are seeking employment) in other villages and cities, as they do not provide easy access when commuting to other areas. According to

village residents, complaints to KRG officials about such deficiencies have resulted in no action to address them, and in a context of favoritism, residents do not expect any change.

The historical neglect of Assyrian villages in the KRI when compared to the millions of dollars funneled by the KRG into the Nineveh Plain (outside KRG jurisdiction and part of the annexation effort) is unacceptable.

Lack of infrastructure has also resulted in minimal economic opportunities within villages. Children lack proper and safe play areas, and as a result often play in the streets. A non-Assyrian NGO gifted a playground to one of the villages in Nahla. Interviewed for this report, residents described the playground as having given them hope, and another said “it opened our hearts.”

PUBLIC WORKS

Though Assyrian villages are kept very clean and maintained by residents, there are surrounding areas that appear to be treated as a garbage dump for others. These areas are ridden with trash and are neglected much to the frustration of residents. There is garbage pickup but it is sporadic. In



A snowplow finally arrives in the Assyrian parts of Sarsing five days after a blizzard.

some cases, residents are forced to burn their own trash to be rid of it.

In villages where it snows heavily, roads are not ploughed for days at a time, creating hazardous conditions for drivers. During these times of heavy snowfall, residents are trapped. This creates serious problems in the event of an emergency.

There is no public transportation to and from the villages, making it difficult for many Assyrians to find work and attend school elsewhere. Those who do not own vehicles are forced to rely on family members when looking to travel to other parts of the region, or to hire private taxi services.

EMERGENCY SERVICES



Photo of fire in Dehe captured by an eyewitness.

Assyrians in most villages do not have access to emergency services such as fire and law enforcement. Assyrians do not feel secure and do not feel protected by Kurdish authorities or policing. Police reports filed by Assyrians rarely result in any action by law enforcement. Based on their experiences, Assyrians believe that Kurdish police will not come to their aid. As a result, many crimes go unreported.

There was an incident in the Assyrian village of

Dehe on July 13, 2016 where a huge fire began mysteriously and engulfed the village. The fire started at 11:00 p.m. and continued until 8:00 a.m. the next day. When firefighters came, they momentarily stopped in the village but did not do anything to address the fire. Instead, they went to the nearby Kurdish village to block the fire from spreading there—this was despite the fact that the fire was only in Dehe at the time. Eyewitnesses report that nothing was done to help put the fire out. Crops valued at tens of thousands of dollars were destroyed. The fire burned everything in its path that was owned by Assyrians, including many homes and buildings.¹⁷⁵

ASSYRIAN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Following the First Gulf War, Assyrians successfully advocated for the establishment of the Assyrian school system in northern Iraq. The Assyrian Aid Society (AAS), an NGO headquartered in Dohuk, played an integral role in the effort.

More than 60 schools (from primary school to high school) across the region are designated for Assyrian students, where students have the opportunity to study in their own language. Approximately 10,000¹⁷⁶ Assyrian children are currently enrolled in the Assyrian school system today. School sizes vary.

These schools are seriously underfunded, and rely on the support of the AAS to address their needs. As a result, Assyrian students must endure inadequate facilities and equipment, and struggle to overcome educational barriers.

Conditions

Assyrian schools in the Kurdistan Region are in disrepair. Many schools are falling apart, and despite their state, receive little to no assistance from the KRG. One teacher anonymously claimed “we receive nothing from the govern-



Assyrian school children spend their recess gathered around a kerosene stove.

ment except for promises.”¹⁷⁷

The schools are in need of new desks, chairs, and other furniture as many are old and damaged. Renovations are also needed for the windows, doors, floors, and bathrooms in a majority of the schools, primarily for safety but also to improve recruitment, retention, commitment, and effort. Teachers have noted that school facilities deeply affect the health, behavior, engagement, learning, and growth of their students.

During the winter, the only source of heat in classrooms is the kerosene stoves described earlier. Some of the schools still use woodstoves.

In many of the schools, the stoves are older and do not work well. Not only do these stoves pose health and safety concerns for the students, they



Two Assyrian students wear their winter coats inside the classroom to keep warm during their lesson.

are costly for the schools to use. Stoves are only used in classrooms, leaving hallways and bathrooms in freezing conditions. Students in all schools wear their coats and hats throughout the school day in the wintertime. They all reiterate their desperate need of adequate heating.

The KRG provides a limited amount of oil for kerosene stoves that is insufficient for the need. Several teachers cited that their inability to control classroom temperatures affects student concentration and engagement levels. There are frequent power outages at the schools which disrupt lessons, activities, and administrative work. Teachers often have to rely on natural lighting in the classrooms and plan according to these limitations.

In addition to these necessities, teachers in these schools have called for them to be equipped with up-to-date technology to ensure that students have equal opportunities to succeed across the region. This includes, but is not limited to, computers and projectors.

Teachers have also stressed the need for laptop computers (in addition to or as opposed to desktop computers) to ensure that they are able to continue work even when electricity is cut off. Low-income students need assistance to purchase necessary school supplies.

Additionally, students do not have proper play ar-



Assyrian schoolchildren use a parking lot as a playground during recess in Nohadra (Dohuk).

eas for recess, and instead are left playing in areas that are unsafe and not appropriately furnished or contained.

There are a limited number of Assyrian schools available to Assyrian students. Assyrian students who reside in villages where there is no school must travel to the nearest school.

School-related transportation expenses are not covered by the KRG. Transportation to schools is facilitated by Assyrian Aid Society (AAS). AAS used to cover transportation expenses for all students, but can no longer afford it given current demands for aid.

Families are now responsible for paying transportation fees, though AAS still facilitates their transport. The cost is \$25 per child. This is especially costly for families with multiple children attending school. Many Assyrian students from low-income families are not able to pay these costs themselves. In some cases, teachers are paying their expenses out-of-pocket to ensure they can attend.

Ashur Eskarya, President of the AAS, believes KRG should assist with transportation costs (if not fully, partially), as Assyrian schools are not available in each town, making this travel necessary. As mentioned, Kurdish families do not have this problem, as there are usually schools accessible to them in their areas.

Poor roads leading to Assyrian villages create obstacles for the school when recruiting new teachers. For example, it is unlikely that a teacher who resides in Duhok will be willing to teach at a school in Gondekosa due to the commute. Not only is it hazardous and likely to cause damage to their vehicle, it is incredibly time consuming. Often times due to the roads, what should be a 20-minute commute becomes an hour-long drive. This deters many prospective teachers, leaving some schools with staff shortages.



Assyrian Aid Society distributes partial salaries to teachers at Assyrian schools.

Since the beginning of the financial crisis in the KRI, teachers across the region began receiving only a percentage of their due salary.¹⁷⁸ Hundreds of teachers participated in a strike and protested, demanding their full salaries. The KRG Ministry of Education threatened consequences against any teachers who did not resume work.¹⁷⁹

Since October 2016, Assyrian teachers have gone completely unpaid by the KRG. They continue to work due to their commitment to their students and the school. AAS now pays partial salaries of teachers.

Teachers at Assyrian schools feel that they cannot complain about the lack of KRG funding, even though they believe it to be discriminatory, as they fear potential backlash from the KDP.

Higher Education

Similar to universities under the Ba’thist regime, universities in the KRI are considered by many Assyrians to be vehicles for political indoctrination. Most universities in the KRI were founded or sponsored by one of the two dominant parties in the region, the KDP or PUK. High-ranking positions in these universities are given to party members. One Assyrian student from Ankawa explained, “These institutions weren’t created to

promote free and critical thinking and scientific research. Their purpose is to create more members for the KDP.¹⁸⁰

Assyrian students complain that universities in Erbil and Dohuk privilege members of the KDP while marginalizing independent academics or those who have opposing political affiliations. A young Assyrian woman attending a university in Erbil said, “Our universities don’t value our knowledge and abilities. If you’re not with the KDP, they don’t want to see you succeed.”¹⁸¹

Instructors and students from various schools explain that it is common knowledge that universities are filled with KDP informants whose presence on campuses allows the KDP to maintain control over student discourse.

In an interview for this report, Dr. Muna Yaku, a Professor at Salahaddin University in Erbil, expressed her hope that the KRI will move towards a depoliticized education system.¹⁸²

Some Assyrian students at the university level are pressured to assume KDP membership in order to graduate; others experience the same in regards to admission. One student attending a university in Erbil was told he would only be admitted into the school’s fine arts program if he accepted KDP membership. He was given a KDP membership form along with the program’s application.

“When I refused to sign, they asked me, ‘Don’t you want to continue Mullah Mustafa’s mission?’” he said. When he again refused, he was expelled from the school after having studied nearly three years. He was not reimbursed, nor were his credits transferred to any new institution.¹⁸³

In some cases, Assyrian graduates have been forced to carry Kurdish flags against their wishes when walking the stage at their graduation ceremonies. Those who refuse to comply are told they will not receive their diplomas.¹⁸⁴

Assyrian students who fail Kurdish language courses at the university level are forced to repeat the entire school year, regardless of how well they performed in their other classes, despite the fact that the rest of their studies are in English. Also, most undergraduate programs require that students study “Kurdology,” a subject dealing with Kurdish history and identity that is heavily imbued with Kurdish nationalist thought, even when completely unrelated to their field of study. Kurdology courses can be difficult for Assyrians if they do not speak the Kurdish language well; Kurdish is not the native language of many Assyrians.

Assyrian families struggle to pay college expenses for their children, especially given the recent financial crisis in the Kurdistan Region. Many Assyrian students expressed the desire for financial aid and scholarships to be able to continue their studies, and look to the diaspora for help. Currently, organizations like Assyria Foundation of America and Assyrians Without Borders offer Assyrians in Iraq scholarship opportunities.

Assyrians who obtain degrees in Iraq claim to be less motivated to migrate elsewhere.

Unemployment in the KRI is rapidly increasing. Many graduates have been unemployed for years. Parents and students interviewed for this report expressed frustration over the lack of opportunities for those with college degrees. Yaku says this is an issue for all graduates in the KRI.

9. Status of Women

KRG and KDP officials claim that the Kurdistan Region recognizes and promotes gender equality, but many Assyrian women spoken to while conducting research for this report disagree and feel that any advancements are only surface-level superficialities.

Dr. Muna Yaku, Professor of Human Rights Law at Salahaddin University, believes that the KRG has made commendable progress towards gender equality, particularly when compared to Baghdad. Yaku points to three laws in particular. In 2008, the KRG made it almost impossible to legally practice polygamy.¹⁸⁵ In 2011 it passed a law to combat domestic violence¹⁸⁶ and another to criminalize female genital mutilation. “But the problem isn’t passing the laws. It’s enforcing those laws,” she says.¹⁸⁷

She believes most of the sexist practices stem from the Kurdish society’s attachment to Islamic laws. For example, Islamic law equates the testimony of two women to that of one man. Consequently, in many cases before a KRG court, the same law applies. “It doesn’t matter what the law says,” she explains, “not if it’s only on paper.”

Many Assyrian women believe that the KRG’s policies on gender equality are linked to its desire to gain international legitimacy as it seeks statehood. Still, less discrimination against women in laws and regulations in the KRI is a step forward, but much work remains to eliminate discriminatory practices, and to implement the laws with the aim of making a real improvement in the lives of women.

ASSYRIAN WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

According to the World Bank Group, the female labor force participation in the KRI is among the lowest in the region, at only 11 percent, and only one out of 100 working-age women are employed in the private sector.¹⁸⁸

The KRI contains a conservative Muslim majority; unfortunately, a sexist culture is often tolerated in the sphere of business as well as in the general society. Gender roles remain traditional within the KRI: Men are the breadwinners and women are the caregivers. Furthermore, Assyrian women accompanied by men in public places are expect-

ed to allow men to speak for them in social or commercial exchanges, like restaurants or taxi services.

Kurdish society often looks down on working women, given the hours spent away from home and the necessary interactions that will inevitably occur between men and women. These social norms create barriers for women looking to enter the workforce.

Assyrian women interviewed for this report noted that both sexual harassment and racism are common in the workplace. One woman who worked in a government office in Erbil explained (in an interview for this report) that she was constantly subjected to unwanted sexual advances by her former supervisor. Given that there was no internal mechanism to report the harassment, she felt she had no option but to resign. Other women reported verbal harassment of a sexual nature by male colleagues, as well as offensive comments about women in general.¹⁸⁹

Several reported similar verbal abuse on the basis of their faith and ethnicity. One woman said that her former colleagues would refer to her as an infidel. Another described an incident where her coworker once told her that Kurdistan will soon be free of all Assyrians, calling them “cowards” for fleeing the country (referring to the emigration of Assyrians after the campaign of IS terror).

A very small number of Assyrian women are business owners. ACE learned of only around a dozen shops in Ankawa run by women, most of them beauty salons and flower shops. Two of the beauty salons were observed, while researching this report, with female employees and clientele present.

The World Bank Group reported similar findings: “As we walked through the souk in Erbil, the capital of the KRG, we noticed that women were only the shoppers and sometimes the bill-payers

in restaurants—but rarely did we see women who were shopkeepers.”¹⁹⁰

As noted in a previous section (see “Discrimination in Business”), Assyrian women looking to join the workforce also face pressure to join the KDP in order to secure a job. Most Assyrian women refuse KDP membership, which results in limited career opportunities.

A great number of Assyrian women have college degrees, but have no prospects for employment. As such, their role in society is reduced to that of housewives—not because their families desire it, but because they have no other opportunities.

There are a number of initiatives in Iraq focused on empowering Assyrian women and equipping them with the tools they need to achieve economic independence, including the Assyrian Women’s Union (AWU) which has branches in most Assyrian villages and cities. Since its establishment in 1992, the AWU’s objectives and activities have promoted education and political participation among Assyrian women. For example, parts of their centers serve as educational daycares for children to enable Assyrian women



A workshop held by the Assyrian Women’s Union in September 2017 sought to empower Assyrian mothers.

to enter the workforce. One of its past presidents, Pascale Warda, went on to become Iraq’s Minister of Immigration and Refugees in the interim government.

Etuti Institute, an Erbil-based nonprofit lists the empowerment of Assyrian women in the region as one of its main goals. The organization has launched several initiatives to provide job training and economic opportunities for women that utilize their various skillsets. The organization also hosts educational workshops, and encourages girls and young women to pursue higher education.

There is a common belief that women are responsible for much of the migration of Assyrians out of the north of Iraq. The sentiment expressed by many is that the men always want to stay, but their wives are the ones who force them to leave. When considering this issue, it becomes clear that women are contemplating three things: first, their careers and the lack of opportunities for Assyrian women in the Kurdistan Region; second, their children and their desire to provide a better life for them; third, the ongoing security dilemmas detailed in this report, which cause significant fear among men and women alike.

One woman living in Sarsing who was interviewed for this report graduated four years ago with a degree in administrative law. She has never been employed and has since experienced depression. She has been married for years and wants to start a family, but refuses to have children in Iraq. She stated firmly that she will only have children if she is able to migrate, because she does not want her children to suffer the way that their parents have.¹⁹¹

She has since left Iraq with her husband.

ASSYRIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS

Galeta Shaba, President of Abnaa al-Nahrain



Galeta Shaba, the first woman ever elected to lead a political party in Iraq.

(Assyrian political party) is the first woman in Iraq's history to have been elected to lead a political party, in a country where women are mostly absent from the political scene. She is also the first Assyrian woman to ever lead a political party. A former MP in the KRI Parliament, she was elected to lead Abnaa al-Nahrain in a conference that involved more than 100 party members, the majority of whom were men. She considers it an honor to be the first female political party leader in Iraq, but is proud that she was elected based on merit—and by her own people. Since her election in 2013, two more Iraq-based political organizations elected women to head their parties.

In an interview for this report,¹⁹² Shaba explained that there has been significant progress made towards women's rights in Iraq during her lifetime. She cited higher graduation rates among women, and a greater number of Assyrian women pursuing higher education. "Assyrian families view their children equally—it was never that a male's education was more valuable than a woman's. It was merely a matter of accessibility—and safety," she explained, when asked about rising levels of education among Assyrian women.

Shaba also references higher percentages of women in the workforce and female politicians as

a sign of progress. "There have been a lot of positive changes, but we are still not where we need to be. In Iraq, women's rights are not viewed as human rights."

While quota seats in both the Iraqi and KRI Parliaments guarantee female representation at the parliamentary level, Shaba believes some political parties have used the quota merely to earn a greater number of seats, nominating women who lack the background and skills needed to fulfill such a position.

Given that Iraqi politics are dominated by men, Shaba adds that she is often discounted by men, but that she does not let that discourage her, though she does believe it is one of the main reasons women in Iraq stay away from politics and consequently lack proper representation.

"The road to equality is never lined with roses. You can't win battles you aren't willing to fight," she says.

10. Mass Migration of Assyrians—from Both the KRI and Nineveh

The mass migration of Assyrians has had a serious psychological effect on those remaining in Iraq, often leading to depression. Many have adopted the idea that in time they will be forced to migrate, as well.

Many Assyrians report watching as their villages have been emptied, which they describe as leaving them feeling that migration will be inevitable for them also, since they see no sign of their lives improving, their rights being protected, or their culture being respected.

Migration has divided families, leaving a majority of Assyrians with a deep desire to reunite with parents, siblings, or children. It appears that the migration of one family member increases the

likelihood that additional family members will follow.

For those who remain in Iraq, there is a shared sense of loneliness and abandonment. Assyrians have developed a saying that is repeated by many: “Every Assyrian who passes Zakho [on their way out of Iraq] takes a pill and forgets.”

A majority of Assyrians in Iraq do not feel any connection with the diaspora community outside of their own family members who have migrated. Overall, there is very low morale among Assyrians living in northern Iraq, and little hope for a future.

11. Problems Specific to Ankawa

Ankawa, also known as Ainkawa, is a predominantly Assyrian-populated suburb of Erbil. Its population is now estimated to be approximately 70,000, following an influx of IDPs from the Nineveh Plain. Up until recently, there were about 30,000 Nineveh Plain residents living in Ankawa alone. Roughly 80% of the town’s population is Christian. The majority of its Christian residents are adherents to the Chaldean Catholic Church.

Located just outside Erbil, the town is considered to be the last Christian Assyrian stronghold in the KRI.

SECURITY IN ANKAWA

Prior to 2007, there were checkpoints at every entry point leading into Ankawa, but these checkpoints were removed a decade ago, leaving residents feeling unsafe and vulnerable to attacks. Residents have made formal requests for checkpoints to be reinstated, but the city remains unprotected.

In April 2015, the U.S. Consulate in Ankawa was bombed by IS,¹⁹³ killing three civilians and wounding more than a dozen. While the area

surrounding the consulate is now heavily guarded, Kurdish authorities have still failed to reinstall the checkpoints around the city.

The majority of Ankawa’s residents do not have confidence in the local police force. Many claimed to have filed police reports that resulted in no action or investigation. Residents note that liquor stores in Ankawa often draw individuals from neighboring cities, as alcohol is only sold by Christians and other non-Muslim minorities. These individuals often cause problems for liquor store owners and nearby residents, but the police do not come to their aid.

There was an incident in July of 2017¹⁹⁴ where two Kurdish men from a neighboring town attacked two Assyrians outside their home in Ankawa. The attackers were intoxicated, and the fight ended in gunfire with serious injuries sustained on both sides.

One of the Assyrians was hospitalized for a bullet wound in his leg. The same night, a mob of Kurdish men, including family members the attackers, gathered outside the hospital demanding entry, threatening to murder him. The Assyrian was covertly transported to another hospital after Ankawa residents pressured local officials.

A police report was filed with authorities, but the victim’s family was threatened and warned against pressing charges. The family decided not to pursue the case out of fear, and the attackers were not charged.

In 2016, an Assyrian restaurant owner in Ankawa called the police after a group of Kurds from a neighboring village refused to pay their bill. The men were intoxicated, and threatened the restaurant owner with violence if he did not let them leave. The response he received from the police station was that these were “dangerous men” and that the police could do nothing about it.¹⁹⁵

One Assyrian man interviewed for this report described an incident that occurred in 2010¹⁹⁶ where he and his brother accompanied their father to the police station to file a noise complaint against a local bar (owned by a Christian KDP member) near their home that disturbed the local neighborhood. When the local police station refused to take action, the three of them went to the bar and approached the owner directly, asking him to be mindful to nearby residents.

The confrontation became physical when the owner attacked the man's father. At the time, there was a high ranking Kurdish KDP official at the bar. This KDP official got involved, and pointed a gun to the father's head. Others at the bar then pulled guns on the two brothers.

He went on to explain that police were present during the incident, but did not intervene. Local residents managed to deescalate the situation. "Why do you think no one in Ankawa calls the police?" he says. "I had a gun pointed to my head in front of a police officer, and he did nothing."

Ankawa residents are not allowed to serve in the local police force unless they are KDP members. Many young Assyrian men have the desire to enter the police force, but refuse KDP membership and are therefore disqualified.

As a result, despite its overwhelmingly Christian population, there is only one Christian police officer in Ankawa. He is a registered KDP member.

"Even if the force was entirely Christian, what difference would it make if they're all KDP members?" said an Ankawa resident interviewed for this report.

ERBIL INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Erbil International Airport is located in Ankawa. The airport was rebuilt and reopened in 2010 on farmlands that belonged to Assyrians living in

Ankawa. The land was seized by the KRG, and the legal owners received no compensation despite the hundreds of millions of dollars invested in the project. Many of these farmers lost their only source of income as a result.

There is also a holy site, a shrine to the Virgin Mary (known to the locals as Mariamana), now surrounded by the airport. It is one of the most important holy places for the people of Ankawa, and residents visit many times throughout the year. It is now only accessible after traveling through multiple airport security checkpoints. This has created a major inconvenience for Christians in the area, and to them represents a lack of respect. One Ankawa resident said in an interview, "In order for us to reach the site, we have to go through all these checkpoints where we are humiliated."¹⁹⁷

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN ANKAWA

Vast areas of land in Ankawa belonging to Assyrians have been confiscated by the KRG over the last decade and awarded to Kurdish contractors for housing projects. These homes were later sold to non-Assyrians, and the original owners of the lands were never compensated.

These housing projects have led to a sharp increase in non-Assyrian populations in Ankawa. Whereas the population of non-Assyrians in Ankawa was just 5% in 2006, this population has now risen to about 20%. Residents feel that these housing projects are part of a KRG strategy of calculated demographic change, already successfully implemented in other parts of northern Iraq.

In 2011, KRG officials introduced a plan to build four apartment complexes to house 400 families from outside Ankawa, known as the "4 Towers."¹⁹⁸ The plan also included a proposal for Ankawa's first mosque. Churches, political organizations, and civil society groups organized against the proposed complexes, viewing it as another



The “4 Towers” construction site in Ankawa.

part of the ongoing strategy to gradually convert Ankawa to a non-Assyrian majority. A community petition gathered upwards of 4,000 signatures against the plan, and thousands protested in the streets of Ankawa.¹⁹⁹

Despite their objections, officials moved forward with the plan and began construction. However, the project was halted in 2013 due to the KRG economic crisis.

Just last year, officials implemented a plan to build a new highway that has divided Ankawa. Residents supported the initiative but asked for highway to be constructed outside the city, presenting alternative locations in open lands. Again their opposition was disregarded, and the highway was built. Residents feel this is part of the KRG’s plan to change the makeup of Ankawa.

TAXATION IN ANKAWA

Ankawa’s capital gains tax on property sales are the highest in the Kurdistan Region. Officials justify the tax difference by pointing to Ankawa’s growing tourism, as many foreigners elect to stay in Ankawa when visiting the region.

An unlawful tax amount is collected from Ankawa residents when they sell their property. According to residents and representatives, this tax rate for Ankawa is ten percent of the sale, whereas in all other parts of the KRI, the tax is only six percent.²⁰⁰

Complaints have been filed with KRG officials about the excess taxes. One Assyrian politician interviewed for this report was told by a KRG official that this was a form of *jizya* tax, justified because Ankawa is a Christian town.

BUSINESSES IN ANKAWA

Business owners in Ankawa expressed the same fears and frustrations regarding discriminatory practices discussed earlier in this report (see “Discrimination in Business”), including denial of permits based on political affiliation, required display of KRG/KDP memorabilia, and *asaish* harassment.

In addition, KRG law mandates that all establishments in Ankawa have signs written in the Kurdish language. The majority of Ankawa’s residents are literate only in Arabic and Assyrian. Ankawa residents respect this law despite the fact that a sizeable portion of their population does not speak Kurdish. For years, they advocated for a law in Ankawa that would also require all establishments to display signs in Assyrian. The law was passed last year in 2016, but is not enforced by officials, whereas the law regarding Kurdish signage is enforced.

On September 19, 2017, multiple business owners



Thousands of Ankawa residents protested corruption in their town, demand mayor's removal.

reported to ACE representatives that KDP *asaish* had approached their stores and ordered them to place Kurdish flags and signs in favor of the upcoming referendum in their storefront windows. Some stated they were threatened with violence should they fail to comply.

POLITICS IN ANKAWA

The Christian Assyrian community in Ankawa has consistently resisted the KDP.

In 2007, Ankawa residents voted strongly against the KDP. One Ankawa resident explains that they were punished for it. Ankawa's checkpoints were removed following the 2007 elections in what is understood as a punitive gesture where protection against terror attacks is contingent upon political compliance. He says that the residents are constantly reminded by KDP officials that they are “not loyal” and that they “voted for Arabs.”²⁰¹

Despite the fact that the majority of Ankawa's residents are members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, they rejected the separatist Chaldean identity espoused by KDP-backed fringe groups. The clearest example of this was reflected in the 2009 election result in the city of Ankawa. In a

city of tens of thousands, the combined slate of the two exclusive Chaldean political parties—the Chaldean Democratic Union and the Chaldean National Council (KDP-sponsored)—garnered just over 200 votes.

Ankawa's inhabitants have long sought to have the city's mayor Jalal Habib removed, a KDP member appointed by the Governor of Erbil's office. Habib was not elected by the people of Ankawa. One resident said he was “literally imposed on Ankawa's people against their will.”

In October of 2015, thousands of Ankawa residents took to the streets,²⁰² demanding the mayor's resignation. They claimed Habib was corrupt and did not represent the people's interests. Ankawa residents nominated three potential and qualified candidates to replace him.



Thousands of Ankawa residents protested corruption in their town, demand mayor's removal.

At the same protest, the residents made additional demands:²⁰³

- Shutting down all bars and nightclubs located near churches and other holy sites, many of which are owned by KRG officials
- Compensation for those whose land had been stolen from them by KRG officials
- Compensation for the farmers whose land was seized for the establishment of the Erbil International Airport
- Taking steps to prevent land seizure in the future
- Establishing a security force for Ankawa that employs Ankawa residents
- Holding corrupt officials responsible for deliberate efforts to advance demographic change
- Reducing taxes to the same rates as other cities in the KRI

The list of demands was delivered to the Governor of Erbil and the KRG Minister of Interior, as well as to the U.S. Consulate. All of their demands went unanswered. Habib remains the city's mayor.

In an interview conducted while preparing this report, a well-known Ankawa activist said that hope for their future in the city is dwindling. He said, "We continue to resist, but we do so without any hope that things will change. Many people have given up. We are tired. It's hard to stay motivated when you don't have hope."²⁰⁴

A high percentage of Ankawa residents are expected to vote "no" in the upcoming KRG independence referendum. An Ankawa native explained in an interview, "With the referendum nearing, [Masoud] Barzani is making all sorts of promises to our community. But he's had twenty-three years to prove that he means what he says. We have no reason to believe him. We won't control the outcome of the referendum, but the KRG certainly hasn't earned our support."²⁰⁵

Regarding the scheduled referendum, Dr. Muna

Yaku, a Professor of Human Rights Law explained, "Self-determination is the right of all people. They have the right to ask us. But if Ankawa votes no to the referendum, the KRG must honor that. If you ask the question, you have to accept the answer. I don't know that they will." She predicts that approximately 75% of Ankawa will vote "no."²⁰⁶

One young Assyrian man living in Ankawa posted a Facebook status against the referendum, and calling for all of his friends to vote "no." The following day, the post had been deleted. The same young man had instead posted a status in favor of the referendum, encouraging people to vote "yes." When asked why he seemingly changed his mind overnight, he explained that he had received threatening messages from *asaisb* telling him to remove it.²⁰⁷

In late August 2017, Masoud Barzani promised that an independent Kurdistan would have a new flag and national anthem that represent all ethnic components of the region. He also issued an order to close the nightclubs and bars. Ankawa residents feel that these are merely empty promises meant to appease the locals in order to secure support for the upcoming referendum. One man noted that the community has been petitioning for the closure of these establishments for years, and finds it insulting that the KRG has obliged just weeks before the referendum.

"They'll reopen after the referendum," he says.²⁰⁸

KRG RESPONSES TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The KRG insists that the Kurdistan Region is built on a framework of tolerance and inclusion and KDP-controlled media outlets regularly boast about “an unparalleled coexistence of different social and religious components in the Kurdistan Region.”²⁰⁹ KRG mouthpieces profess the existence of a fictitious ethnic and religious harmony in the KRI; this façade undermines any meaningful appraisal of the problems and policies which, in very real terms, instigate ethnic cleansing and demographic change. Those who are responsible for the KRG’s public relations in the West often follow refined strategies to avoid and deflect important questions and criticism about the political realities back in Iraq.

One of the favorite talking points parroted by KRG lobbyists when issues of human rights abuses are raised runs along these lines: “We know that we’re not perfect, but we’re making so much progress, and we hope that others will note that we are doing so much better than other regimes in the region.” This is quite the weak standard of comparison. It is unacceptable to invoke Bashar al-Assad, Erdogan, Saddam or Maliki, and Iran to avoid facing one’s own human rights failures. This deflection tactic has been repeated to the point that it is now tired and clichéd. KRG officials must cease their sidestepping of legitimate critique regarding the erosion of democracy and harmful government policies that are resulting

in the decline of minorities in the region. At the current rate, Iraq’s minorities could nearly disappear by the time the KRG completes its “journey of progress.”

The atrocities, purges, and mass arrests performed by other regimes are not an excuse to look the other way on one’s own abuses, even if they are “not as bad.” Instead of using such a low bar of comparison, the KRG should take responsibility for the unacceptable patterns that have been detailed in this report, and the international community should hold them accountable.

KDP officials also like to point out that the KRI has expended significant effort in hosting IDPs who feel safe there. This observation is used to make two points, the first being a denial of abuses: *If we have a problem of extremism, why do the IDPs come to us? It is clear that Kurdistan is a wonderful place for minorities.* Though minorities are able to take shelter from extremist violence in the KRI, this is not a reason to close our eyes regarding the other, more hidden forms of insidious violations that this report has detailed. The second point made by Kurdish officials in regard to the hosting of IDPs bears an attitude of entitlement: *Since we’ve helped these poor IDPs out, they should feel obligated to have their areas be annexed to the KRI. We deserve to rule their areas after all we have done for them.* This is the not the spirit in which help should be offered. If a neighbor flees their home because of a safety problem, and a friend gives them refuge in their home, the friend does not later tell them: “Now your land and home should be under my control because I helped you—disagreeing means that you’re ungrateful.”

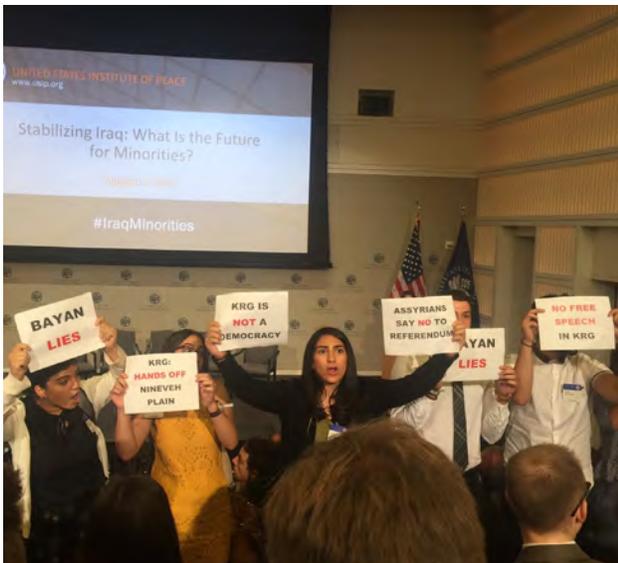
One way that KRG officials deflect critique is to deny the validity of the oppositional voice. Any Assyrian who is critical of the KRG is deemed “unrepresentative of the majority”²¹⁰ by KRG/KDP officials in media interviews.

Another common response is to merely ignore the critique. A panel that included representa-

tives of various minority groups at an event held at Georgetown University in July of 2016 raised concerns about KRG treatment of Assyrians, Yazidis, and other minorities in Iraq. KRG Representative to the United States and high-ranking KDP member Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman was in attendance and responded to allegations saying, “We’re very frustrated because some accusations have been made and they’re inaccurate, but we can deal with that another time.”²¹¹

On August 1, 2017, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) held an event that focused on the future of Iraq’s minorities,²¹² but the event failed to represent the voices of the minorities whose lives will be affected by the outcome of the referendum. KRG spokespersons usually define the content of these events, which are devoid of any critical discussion of the real issues in Iraq or the actual views and attitudes of the people being discussed. As the event began, a group of Assyrian students stood up and protested²¹³ as Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman took to the stage, holding up signs reading “No Free Speech in KRG” and “KRG Is Not a Democracy.”

Rahman responded to the protest saying, “I have no idea what that was about.”



Assyrian student protest staged at USIP on August 1, 2017.

ON THE ABANDONMENT OF ASSYRIANS TO GENOCIDE

Regarding the Peshmerga retreat when faced with the threat of IS, KRG officials claim their forces were ill-equipped. Secretary General of the Peshmerga Jabbar Yawar later justified their quiet withdrawal saying, “We didn’t have the weapons to stop them.”²¹⁴

When asked about the KRG’s systematic disarmament of Assyrians and other minorities prior to the IS invasion at the August USIP event, KRG Representative to the U.S. Bayan Abdul Rahman stated, “The peshmerga did not disarm anybody. They did not disarm the Assyrians. Nobody said this at the time; this is something that lobbyists in Washington are raising.”

Numerous Assyrian eyewitnesses have testified to the Peshmerga’s disarmament of Assyrians in July 2016. Peshmerga forces went door-to-door in the Nineveh Plain, confiscating weapons owned by Assyrians. Notices were distributed throughout the town, threatening consequences for those who failed to comply.²¹⁵ In an interview on Assyrian National Broadcasting, one Assyrian from Alqosh recounted how Peshmerga soldiers had assured them that they would not need the weapons because that the Peshmerga would protect them. He said that the Peshmerga promised them that they would “let Erbil fall before anyone took the Nineveh Plain.”²¹⁶

ON LAND THEFT

Despite overwhelming evidence of chronic theft of Assyrian land, much of which was facilitated by the KRG, Kurdish officials deny any involvement. According to a 2009 report entitled “The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq,” the KRG claims it “has never had a policy of taking lands or properties of Christians, and believes that land disputes between individuals must be resolved by through the courts of law.” The report denies any politically-motivated Kurdish

encroachment of Assyrian land.²¹⁷

ON BLOCKED PROTESTS

Because of the degree of reporting produced on KRG abuses and policies that undermine the growth of democracy, the KRG maintains its own “Committee to Evaluate and Respond to International Reports.” The head of this office, Dr. Dindar Zebari, responded to criticism of how the Assyrian demonstration was blocked by Kurdish *asaish* in April 2016, citing security concerns. Zebari claims that the Kurdistan Region at the time was in a critical security situation.

According to Human Rights Watch, Zebari said that the protesters had been told to “await official action before deciding to demonstrate” and that a “single case [of land theft] did not warrant a demonstration in the capital, Erbil.”²¹⁸

ON PREVENTING ASSYRIANS FROM RETURNING TO NINEVEH PLAIN

In response to reports that the KRG was preventing Assyrians from returning to their villages in the Nineveh Plain, Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman denied the claims, stating: “A small but vocal group that is unrepresentative of the majority and out of touch with the reality on the ground misguidedly believe that they can garner international support and sympathy by demonizing the Kurdistan Regional Government and its leadership. They are wrong in doing this. We have a good, close and cooperative relationship with all sections of our society, whatever faith or ethnicity they may have, and our interests are aligned. It is better to look to the future in unity rather to create division.”²¹⁹

In reference to another report that detailed KRG attempts to prevent Assyrians and Yazidis from returning to their villages, Fox News reported that in a statement provided to them, “[a]n official with the KRG’s representation office in

Washington dismissed the claims of the report as the views of a disreputable group and said KRG fighters liberated land from ISIS control and did not engage in a “land grab.”²²⁰

ON THE REMOVAL OF NINEVEH PLAIN MAYORS

At the USIP event in August of 2017 (described above), Rahman responded to questions about the KRG’s role in the Nineveh Provincial Council’s decision to depose Mayor of Alqosh Faiez Abed Jahwareh. Rahman denied any KRG involvement and stated that the decision was not politically-motivated.²²¹

CONCLUSION

The findings of this report indicate widespread abuses of human rights, attacks on democratic political processes, the denial of freedom of speech and opinion, state-level organized crime targeting minorities, other forms of racially and religiously-motivated prejudice, and a long-term project to break the Assyrian aspirations of self-governance and to appropriate the Assyrian homeland for the Kurdistan Region. The incidents and examples including in this report constitute only a small sample of the serious abuses that are rampant in northern Iraq, the majority of which go unreported. Future research exploring these issues more deeply will undoubtedly reveal abuses more serious than those described here. It is common for the most terrifying instances of intimidation to be the most difficult to uncover, as their targets are often successfully silenced by the violence. As can be seen from the sheer range and number of abuses documented in this report, significant problems beset the Assyrian community, problems that are going unaddressed by the international community, and which are, in fact, intensifying.

The abuses reported here—not the conduct of IS or other terror groups, but of the official Kurdish power structures legitimized and supported by many Western actors—jeopardize in very real terms the future survival of the Assyrian people in their homeland. If the cohesiveness of the Assyrian community and their reasonable aspirations for self-administration and self-managed security within their Nineveh homeland are successfully crushed, the Assyrians will no longer have a distinct and intact homeland within Iraq.

Recommendations

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Reject any referendum on KRI independence, in 2017 or after, held in the Nineveh Plain and other minority-inhabited territories. The population must first be resettled and have their rights to property, free assembly and speech restored. Devastated areas must be rejuvenated and residents must have access to the full spectrum of state provided services present elsewhere in the country. All suggestions pertaining to holding any kind of referendum before all of this work is undertaken is premature.
- Make international support for the KRG conditional, including contingencies on fair treatment of minority communities and the return of expropriated Assyrian land to its rightful owners, wherever and as much as possible.
- Recognize that the expropriation of Assyrian land within the KRI is systematic and constitutes ethnic cleansing.
- Recognize the Nineveh Plain Protection Units as the only legitimate current expression of Assyrian participation in the anti-IS coalition and the legitimate military and security force of the Assyrian people in Iraq and support them accordingly, in both material and logistical terms.
- Channel aid allocated for Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain directly to Assyrian-led NGOs independent of the KRG, politically or otherwise.
- Assist the Assyrian people in developing sustainable, functional, and democratic forms of local administration and security, within the framework of the united, federal, Iraqi state, in order to preserve the continuity of the Assyrian culture within the Assyrian homeland.
- Condemn the KRG's strategies of political manipulation that target the Assyrian community, rejecting the tactics employed

through the patronage system.

- Condemn the oppressive measures employed by the *asaiish* to silence and terrorize ordinary people.
- Hold the KRG accountable for its unacceptable treatment of minorities, which violate many principles of human rights enshrined by international law.
- Work with the Central Government in Baghdad to better serve the needs of the disputed territories and alleviate their political crises.
- Assist Baghdad in implementing Resolution No. 16 issued by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in its meeting on January 21, 2014 (described below).

FOR THE IRAQI CENTRAL GOVERNMENT:

- Facilitate the rebuilding of the Iraqi state by reducing violence in the country and striving toward stability, working toward a functional, non-discriminative centralized Iraq.
- Become more involved in northern Iraq and the disputed territories, making the inhabitants of those regions a priority, not ignoring and neglecting them while focusing exclusively on problems further south.
- Implement Resolution No. 16 issued by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in its meeting on January 21, 2014, which gave preliminary approval for the creation of the Nineveh Plain Governorate, as well as the authorization of legislative and administrative procedures required to implement the Resolution.
- Enable the minority communities in the Nineveh Plain to defend themselves and protect their lands with the integration of all private security forces formed by minorities under Iraqi federal forces and local police.
- Integrate the Nineveh Plain Protection Units into the Iraqi federal forces, and transition PMU-affiliated forces out of the Nineveh Plain.
- Assume control over security in the northern

Nineveh Plain until a security force derived from the local Nineveh Plain population, as described above, can be formed and maintained.

- Reject the proposed KRG referendum to be held on September 25, 2017 in the Nineveh Plain and the partition of the Nineveh Plain by the KRG.
- Dissolve the Nineveh Provincial Council—it is no longer an Iraqi entity but has become a partisan façade serving a secessionist agenda.
- Reinstate the rightful mayors of Alqosh and Tel Keppe in the Nineveh Plain, appealing to international governments for support.
- Invite the UN Mission in Iraq to monitor the security situation in the Nineveh Plain and oversee rehabilitation efforts, reducing exploitation and preventing the imposition of single-party hegemonic policies across the Nineveh Plain. Ensure that the people of the Nineveh Plain are granted their constitutional right to administer their areas.
- Fulfil the Central Government's constitutional obligations and expedite the reconstruction and rehabilitation of towns in the Nineveh Plain.
- Recognize the events that have taken place from 2003 until this day, including murders, kidnappings, and displacement of Assyrians as a systematic project seeking to uproot Assyrians from their lands.
- Emphasize to the KRG the need to remedy injustices caused by its various practices in altering the demographics of certain regions in and near the KRI.
- Pressure the KDP to end electoral fraud in the KRI and the Nineveh Plain and invite neutral foreign observers to guarantee legitimate elections (ending the practice of party appointments and foreign beneficiaries), to monitor the election process, and to count votes in these areas.

FOR THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT:

- Recognize the Nineveh Governorate's 2003 boundaries, and withdraw the intention to hold a referendum in the Nineveh Plain until after the statuses of disputed territories have been legally, fairly, and transparently resolved. Referendums must take place only in an environment of stability, after the return of IDPs, and when the local people are free from intimidation and threats.
- Issue a formal apology to minority communities in the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar for abandoning them to the genocidal intent of the Islamic State.
- Initiate an internationally overseen process of holding individual officials within the security and political apparatus of the KRG accountable for their actions prior to and during the Islamic State invasion of Sinjar and the Nineveh Plain in summer of 2014.
- End the harassment and intimidation of Assyrians opposed to the proposed referendum to be held on September 25, 2017, and to government policies, generally, that they may disagree with.
- Implement Article 3, Sections 4 and 5 of Law No. 5 for the year 2015 regarding the protection of minority rights living in the KRI by addressing issues concerning land encroachment, and call for immediate action in the affected areas to provide solutions to resolve these issues. Return land to rightful owners wherever possible and appropriate; where this is unfeasible, provide just compensation.
- Compensate the Assyrians in Ankawa whose land has been expropriated for the creation of Erbil International Airport.
- Remedy the injustice caused by the KRG's policy to alter the demographic character of parts of the KRI, and cease such practices. End the "4 Towers" project in Ankawa. Hold the officials who are responsible for such practices accountable for their actions.
- Cease interference in municipal elections both in the KRI and in areas outside its jurisdiction. Remove the mayor of Ankawa and allow the local population to nominate candidates and democratically vote on a replacement. Respect the free will of the Assyrian community.
- Cease the repression of political and civil society organizations that oppose Kurdish nationalist policies in the KRI and the Nineveh Plain. Allow these organizations to operate freely and without fear.
- End all funding to political and civil society groups that divide the Assyrian community and serve as KDP proxies that undermine the work of organizations independent of the KDP.
- Cease the funding of armed militias in the Nineveh Plain that operate under Peshmerga command, and allow the Assyrian people to assume their full security role in the region, as mandated by the Central Government.
- Initiate an investigation into asaish abuses; end practices of racketeering and extortion.
- Allow independent Assyrians to participate in public affairs without fearing retribution for holding opposing political views. Cease the harassment and arbitrary arrests of Assyrian activists.
- Increase funding to Assyrian schools in the KRI.
- Guarantee and protect the dignity and empowerment of Assyrians at all levels of government, including provincial, regional, and local administrations.
- End electoral fraud and allow neutral foreign observers to monitor the election process and subsequently count the votes in the KRI and the Nineveh Plain.
- Remove all racist symbols and representations of hatred towards Assyrians from educational curricula and the public space.
- Promote employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Assyrians who have been deprived of work due to their political views.
- Amend the newest KRI draft constitution to

address the issues raised by Dr. Muna Yaku on behalf of the Assyrian community.

- Address unfair legislation and educational curricula related to Assyrians that demean their importance and reduce their role as an indigenous component of Iraq. Correct the educational curriculum required at Assyrian schools and take historical evidence into consideration.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1:

2006 Order from the Iraqi Minister of Interior authorizing the creation of a Nineveh Plain Police force.

Appendix 2:

Order to Reassign Nineveh Plain Police Force to Mosul issued by Khasro Goran.

Appendix 3:

Copy of Alqosh petition statement (English and Assyrian) delivered to Iraqi Parliament, Iraqi High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nineveh Governorate Council, Governor of Nineveh, Alqosh Sub-District Council, United Nations Office in Baghdad, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Appendix 4:

An example of the Alqosh Police notices delivered individually to 11 protestors.

Appendix 5:

Photograph of the order from Tel Keppe District Council to Lara Yousif taken at the Alqosh Police station.

Appendix 6:

Letter from KDP member and Chairman of the Council of the Judiciary of Tel Keppe, Durman Haji Suleiman, to KDP member and Governor of Nineveh, Dored Mohammed Kashmoola regarding Basim Bello (with translation).

Appendix 7:

Letter from Governor of Nineveh to Mayor of Tel Keppe Basim Bello, 2007 (with translation).

Appendix 8:

Response from Mayor of Tel Keppe Basim Bello to Governor of Nineveh (with translation).

Appendix 9:

March 2017 joint statement (official English version) signed by ten Assyrian political parties (signed by three additional parties after initial publication) delivered to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi.

Appendix 10:

Letter from U.S. Senator John McCain to KRG President Masoud Barzani, 25 May 2016.

Appendix 11:

Letter from former U.S. Senator Mark Kirk to KRG President Masoud Barzani, 26 June 2016.

Appendix 12:

Letter from former Congressman Robert J. Dold to then-Secretary of State John Kerry, 16 August 2016.

Appendix 13:

Dr. Muna Yaku statement (official English version) on withdrawal from KRG constitution committee, 1 October 2015.

Appendix 14:

An example of threat letters received by Assyrian and Yezidi business owners whose establishments were attacked during the 2011 Dohuk riots (with translation).

Appendix 15:

Ankawa Protest Statement, 9 October 2015 (with translation).

Appendix 16:

KRG Disarmament Order distributed to villages in the Nineveh Plain in July 2014 (with translation).

وزارة الداخلية
الجمهورية العربية السورية
دمشق ٢٠٠٦/٤/١٣

وزارة الداخلية
مديرية
شرطة محافظة نينوى
الإدارة
العدد ٥٧٧٣

التاريخ ٢٠٠٦/٤/١٣

امر اداري ((١٧٩٣))

تنفيذ امر السيد الوزير واستناداً الى الحكام المادة (١٤) من قانون الخدمة والتقاعد لقوى الامن الداخلي رقم (١) لسنة ١٩٧٨ المعدل وبناءاً على ماجاء بامر مكتب الوكالة للشؤون الادارية / شعبة التعيين المرقم ٦٣٦٤ في ٢٠٠٦/٤/٦ والمبلغ اليها بكتاب مكتب السيد وكيل الوزارة لشؤون الشرطة المرقم ١٢٨٨٩ في ٢٠٠٦/٤/١٣ تقرر تعيين المواطنين المدرجة أسمائهم بالقوائم المرفقة طياً والتي تبدأ بالتسلسل (١) ابراهيم احمد صابر سليم وتنتهي بالتسلسل (٧١١) يونس سالم يونس على ملاك هذه المديرية وبصفة شرطي دائمى وينسبون حسب المديرية المؤشرة ازاء كل منهم للتنفيذ...

اللواء الركن

وانثى محمد عبدالقادر

مدير شرطة محافظة نينوى

٢٠٠٦/٣/

نسخه منه الى :

وزارة الداخلية/ مكتب السيد الوكيل للشؤون الادارية امرم اعلاه للتفضل بالاطلاع مع التقدير
وزارة الداخلية/ مكتب السيد وكيل الوزارة لشؤون الشرطة كتابكم اعلاه للتفضل بالاطلاع مع التقدير
مديرية خزينة محافظة نينوى/ لاتخاذ مايلزم ... مسع التقدير .
مديرية شرطة () لاتخاذ مايلزم واعلامنا بتاريخ الالتحاق وارسال الاضابير خلال مدة (١٥) يوماً من تاريخ صدور الامر وبعمسة يعتبر الامر لاغياً
مديرية شرطة (الحرارية) لتبليغ المذكورين بالالتحاق حسب المديرية المؤشرة ازاء كل منهم رجاء
الشؤون الداخلية/ الحسابات/ الحاسبة / السجل/ الملاك / د . ق/ الاضابير

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Republic of Iraq
Ministry of Interior
Agency of Supported Forces Affairs
The GENERAL Directorate Of Facilities
Protection
Assistance Of Governorates F. P.
Directorate Of F. P. In Ninawa



جمهورية العراق
وزارة الداخلية
وكالة شؤون القوى المساندة
الهيئة العامة لحماية منشآت الحيوية
المديرية العامة لشؤون المحافظات
مديرية حماية منشآت نينوى
(الادارة)
العدد/م/ ١٦ / ٢٥٥
التاريخ ١٤ آب ٢٠٠٨ م

No :
Date : / /

الى / قاطع حماية منشآت الحدائقية
الموضوع / امر اداري

- كتاب لمديرية العامة لادارة الافراد / التعيين / ٣٤٩٢٦ / ٢٠٠٨/٧/٨
المبلغ بكتاب هيئة التدريب والتأهيل المرقم ١١٨٢٤ / ٢٠٠٨/٧/١٧
المبلغ بكتاب الهيئة العامة لحماية المنشآت الحيوية / ٧٧٧/٤/٥٤ / ١١٠٩٧ / ٢٠٠٨/٧/٢٨
المبلغ ايضا بكتاب مديرية شؤون المحافظات / ٤٦٣٣ / ٤٧٢/٤ / ٢٠٠٨/٨/٥
١- حصلت الموافقة على تعيين المدرجة اسمائهم بالقوائم المرفقة طيا المبلغ عددهم (٢٦٧) قسدا بالتسلسل (١) اثير سالم بحر وتنتهي بالتسلسل (٢٦٧) وسام امير كوركي حته ويلقبون بحماية الكنائس والاديرة في مدينة الموصل والاقضية والنواحي التابعة لها ولا يجوز استخدامهم او نقلهم خارج نطاق ذلك.
- ٢- تبينا تشكيل لجنة برئاسة المقدم وليد خالد محمد عبد والرائد عبد الباري احمد اسماعيل ضابط الشؤون الداخلية والأمن مديرينا والرائد ابراهيم محمود حسين
٣- اكمل مستسكات المقبولين مع استمارة الفحص الطبي .
٤- تزويدنا بقوائم المشمولين بالتعيين لأعلام المراجع بالتحالفهم .
لرجو الاطلاع واتخاذ مايلزم واعلامنا ٠٠٠ مع التقدير

المرفقات
قوائم اسماء

لعميد الركن
علي عطالله ملوح
مدير حماية منشآت نينوى
٢٠٠٨/٨/١

نسخة الى

مديرية شؤون المحافظات / التدريب / كتابكم اعلاه . لرجو التفضل بالاطلاع ٠٠٠ مع التقدير
رئيسين واعضاء اللجنة / لاتخاذ مايلزم واجراء مقابلة المذكورين وتزويدنا بقوائم المشمولين بضوابط
التعيين ليتسنا لنا مفاصلة مركز تدريب الموصل لاشراكتهم بالتورات الاساسية
واعلامنا ٠٠٠ مع التقدير

To the Honorable Administrative Court of Justice

Protest Statement.

The people of Alqosh District, comprising our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people in the homeland and diaspora, expressed their rejection and indignation regarding the decision made by the Alqosh District Council after questioning and then dismissing Mr. Faiz Abed Mikha Jahwareh, the rightful mayor of Alqosh, from his duties. We have expressed this rejection by organizing peaceful protests including a large number of our people together with NGO's in an observer capacity and with the support of our people's representatives in Iraqi and KRG Parliaments. On Thursday 20th July 2017, we presented a protest statement that described the illegal and illegitimate dismissal to the head of Alqosh District Council, and that this decision issued from the Alqosh District Council was political in nature and not based on any legal material that authorizes an obligation or necessity to dismiss him. It represented an imposition of de facto policy and exploitation which benefited individuals and groups outside of Alqosh, namely by subjugating the area to KRG rule to accommodate the referendum which is planned to take place on 25th September 2017. This policy is also clearly being imposed on the other towns of the Nineveh Plain for the same purpose.

After the head of Alqosh District Council received the protest statement, he promised to deliver it to the Nineveh Governorate Council with a view to respecting the will of Alqosh residents. What happened was exactly the opposite of what he promised and was an affront to democracy and the will, culture, and dignity of the people of Alqosh. They proved their true intentions by imposing this de facto policy: to take possession of political power and confiscate our freedom of speech. The decision to appoint to the post of mayor, Mrs. Lara Zara, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), was voted by the District Council and signed by the governor of Nineveh Governorate. This appointment contributes to completing the task of obtaining total administrative power over Nineveh Governorate: the Director of Alqosh District, the head of Alqosh's District Council with the majority of its members, the head of Nineveh Governorate council and the first Vice Governor of Nineveh now all belong to the same political party: the KDP.

We must mention that the head and majority of members of Alqosh District Council are politically affiliated with the KDP and that they are illegally implementing the directives and policies of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). These affiliations provide evidence of the illegitimacy of Alqosh District Council and illegality of their decision to dismiss Mr. Jahwareh who had been elected legitimately. We hope to return this administrative right to the people and prevent such illegal procedures and directives in order to avoid a recurrence of any sectarian or political conflicts, when we are living the joys and triumphs of victory and the ultimate elimination of the terrorist group ISIS.

Despite that, the Alqosh District Council abused the will of Alqosh masses by appointing a new mayor. The head of Nineveh Governorate Council and the Vice Governor of Nineveh violated many administrative laws, including;

1 – Ratifying the decision to dismiss Mr Jahwareh had been taken by the Alqosh District Council and by the head of Nineveh Governorate council, Bashar Al-Kiki, without holding a formal meeting with the council members.

2 – Announcing for the appointment of the new mayor on 16th July 2017 two days after exercising the decision to dismiss Mr. Jahwareh from his position.

3 – Appointing of the new mayor, Mrs Lara Yousif Zara occurred on 27th July, before the end of the period of legal court appeal, followed by the issuance of administrative order from the Nineveh Governor on 31st July to accept Mrs. Lara Yousif Zara for the position of mayor.

4 – Stipulating that the nomination that the new candidate for the position of mayor "must be Christian and from the center of Alqosh District (Alqoshian) exclusively", despite that stipulation not being contained in any law. Putting this point in this form may raise sectarian and racial prejudice among the people of Alqosh town and the villages that belongs to Alqosh District among our (Chaldean Syriac Assyrian) people, as well as the neighboring components of Yezidis and Arabs. This stipulation is made to win the hearts of Alqoshians, even though the seat of mayor of the district is an agreement reached by the people of the district as a share of Alqosh's administrative participation. This is not present in any legal text so this declaration casts the administrative court of Iraq as racial and sectarian in nature.

5 – Not fulfilling their duty towards the demonstrators by depriving us of our constitutional right and not addressing our demands. They instead continued with their own political plan and elected a new mayor for the district.

We demand all relevant authorities to cease these actions by revoking the decision issued against Mr. Faiz Abed Mikha Jahwareh, the rightful mayor of the district, and to enforce the rule of law and respect the will of Alqosh district people.

Attachment:

- Signatures of thousands of Alqosh district residents.

Copy to:

- Iraqi Parliament.

- High Commissioner for Human Rights.

- Nineveh Governorate Council.

- Governor of Nineveh Office.

- Alqosh District Council.

- United Nations Office in Baghdad.

- The Ambassador of the United States of America in Baghdad.

مركز شرطة القوش

٢٠١٧/٨/٢٨

الى / المدعو
م / تبليغ

بناء على ما جاء بكتاب مديرية ناحية القوش المرقم ٨٢٩ في ٢٠١٧/٨/٢٤ والمتضمن :-
(نظرا لقيام مجموعة من المواطنين في مركز قصبية القوش بتنظيم مظاهرات غير شرعية وغير قانونية وذلك (بتاريخ ٢٠١٧/٨/٢٠ وكذلك في ٢٠١٧/٨/١٩) مظاهرات غير شرعية بسبب عدم حصولهم على الموافقات الاصولية الخاصة باقامة المظاهرات) . عليه تنسب تبليغكم بعدم اقامة مثل هذه التجمعات الغير القانونية وبعبءه ستتخذ الاجراءات القانونية بحق المخالفين .

وزارة الداخلية
مديرية شرطة محافظة
نيبوك
مديرية شرطة نكيف
مركز شرطة القوش
مند
٢٠١١
العقيد
عارف ميرخان علي
ضابط المركز

المبلغ
رغ



تبليغ
تبلغ بالذات

٢٠١٧/٨/٢٨

إلى / مركز شرطة القوش
م / تبليغ

نظرا لقيام مجموعة من المواطنين في مركز قصبه القوش بتنظيم مظاهرات
{ ٢٠١٧/٨/٢ } وكذلك في { ٢٠١٧/٨/١٩ } مظاهرات غير شرعية وذلك لعدم حصولهم علم
الاصولية الخاصة باقامة المظاهرات لذي تنسب تبليغهم بعدم اقامة مثل هذه التجمعات
الغير قانونية وبعبارة سوف تتخذ الاجراءات القانونية بحق المخالفين .
منظمين المظاهرات :

- ١- سميرتوما توماس
- ٢- فلاح اوراها القس يونان
- ٣- عامل قودا
- ٤- مازن حربي
- ٥- ساهر حبيب كلا
- ٦- فاستن جلال النجار
- ٧- راني فلاح القس يونان
- ٨- حريصا مبراهيم كادو
- ٩- اثرى منصور كادو
- ١٠- ستاي منصور كادو
- ١١- مبراهيم مبراهيم ابراهيم
- ١٢- حسن بده صرح و صرح مع صبح

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
جمهورية العراق



مجلس قضاء تلييف
العدد / ٤ / ٧٧
التاريخ / ٢ / ٩ / ٢٠٠٧

الى / رئاسة مجلس محافظة نينوى
الموضوع / معلومات

نود إعلامكم بقيام السيد باسم يعقوب ججو قائممقام قضاء تلييف بعدة زيارات خارج
القطر (أردن - تركيا - أمريكا) وكذلك عقد اجتماعات مع جهات مجهولة في ناحية القوش
وندرج لكم أدناه قسم من تواريخ هذه الاجتماعات . مع التقدير .

٢٠٠٧/٧/٢٦ - ١

٢٠٠٧/٩/١ - ٢

درمان حاجي سليمان
رئيس مجلس القضاء
٢٠٠٧/٩/٢

Judiciary Council of Tel Keppe

Date: 09-02-07

File Number: 873/4

We would like to inform you that Mr. Bassem Jacob Jejo, the head of Tel Keppe District, has made several trips that were out of bounds (Jordan, Turkey, America). Furthermore, he convened meetings with unknown parties from Alqosh. Listed below are some dates of the meetings:

1. 07-26-07

2. 09-01-07

[Signature of Durman Haji Suleiman]

Chairman of the Judiciary Council

09/02/07

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

العدد: ١٨ / ١٢١٧
التاريخ: ١٩ / ٩ / ٢٠٠٧



محافظة نينوى

مكتب المحافظ

(سري وشخصي)

تلكيف

إلى / السيد قائممقام قضاء تلكيف

م / عقوبة

كثرت في الآونة الأخيرة تجاوزاتك حدود منصبك ذلك بالسفر إلى خارج العراق
ولأكثر من مرة دون اخذ الموافقات الأصولية وعدم إشعار المحافظة بذلك تضع عليك
علامات استفهام كثيرة وكذلك قيامك بعقد اجتماعات في ناحية القوش التابعة لك وعدم
السماح لمدير الناحية بحضور الاجتماع رغم أن الاجتماع في وحدته الإدارية لذا نوجه
لك عقوبة التوبيخ العلني وستكون العقوبة أشد في المستقبل نطلب منك الالتزام الكامل
بحدود منصبك وعدم تجاوزها مستقبلاً .

إبريد محمد كشمولة

محافظ نينوى

٢٠٠٧/٩/١٩

نسخة إلى

رئاسة مجلس محافظة نينوى لإخبار مجلس قضاء تلكيف - لاتخاذ الإجراءات القانونية بحقه ..
مع التقدير

الاقضية كافة للإطلاع .. مع التقدير

النواحي كافة - للإطلاع .. مع التقدير

قسم الأفراد - الذاتية - لاتخاذ ما يلزم

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Governorate of Nineveh
Office of the Governor

Date: 09-19-07
File Number: 1217/18

(Secret and Confidential)

To the District Mayor of Tel Keppe:

Subject: Penalty

There have been many recent trespasses to the limits of your position by travelling abroad

without receiving the appropriate approvals and without informing the governorate which raises question marks. In addition to a multitude of meetings in Alqosh, that is in your area, where you denied the presence of the director of the county though it was within his administrative right. This is why we are penalizing you by public reprimanding and be informed that the penalty will be more severe. In the future, we ask of you adhere fully to the limits of your position.

[Signature of Dored Mohammed Kashmoola]
Governor of Nineveh
09-19-07

Copied the following Parties:

- Head of the Governorate of Nineveh to inform the Judiciary Council of Tel Keppe to take legal action against him (with respect)
- Judicial authorities for notification
- The towns for notification
- The counties for notifications
- Section of individuals for action

السيد محافظ نينوى المحترم
م / تظلم

وجهت لي عقوبة التوبيخ على اثر كتابين رفعا من المجلس المحلي لقضاء تليكيف والمجلس المحلي لناحية القوش ذاكرين فيهما سفري إلى خارج العراق واجتماعي مع قوات التحالف وجهات أخرى أوضح لسيادتكم ما يلي :-

- ١- سفري إلى الخارج كان في ٢٧ / ١١ / ٢٠٠٥ وبموجب إجازة رسمية صادرة من المحافظة / قسم الأفراد المرقم ٤٠٦٢ في ٢٣ / ١١ / ٢٠٠٥ وبموافقة سيادتكم المباشرة أثناء تقديم طلب الإجازة في مكتب سيادتكم وتم إخباركم شخصيا بان هناك دعوة موجهة لي من قبل برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي والاتحاد الأوربي لحضور الندوة المقامة في عمان حول برنامج (إعادة الأعمار وتوظيف العمالة في العراق) والمرفقة نسخة منها طياً وكان حاضراً في هذه الندوة معالي السيدة وزيرة البلديات والأشغال العامة السابقة (نسرين البرواري) ومعالي الدكتور ليث كبة الناطق الرسمي بأسم دولة رئيس الوزراء السابق .
 - ٢- سفري إلى الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية كان بتاريخ ٧ / ١١ / ٢٠٠٦ ولمدة ثلاثون يوماً وبموجب كتاب محافظ نينوى / الأفراد المرقم ٣٧٧٦ في ٩ / ١١ / ٢٠٠٦ وبموافقة سيادتكم على الإجازة أثناء حضوري في مكتبكم وإخباركم شفهيّاً بأنني سأسافر لغرض إجراء بعض الفحوصات الطبية وكذلك زيارة الأقارب . وتم تمديد الإجازة لمدة خمسة عشر يوماً أخرى أثناء تواجدي في الخارج وبموافقة سيادتكم وبموجب كتاب محافظة نينوى / الأفراد ٤٣٥٦ في ١١ / ١٢ / ٢٠٠٦ .
 - ٣- إن سفري إلى عمان وأميركا لم يكن بصورة سرية ويعلم به كافة أعضاء المجلس المحلي للقضاء والناحية ورؤساء الوحدات الإدارية العاملة معنا . وكانت السفارة الأولى قبل حوالي سنتين والسفيرة الأخيرة قبل حوالي سنة ولم يثر في حينها ولم يكتب به .
 - ٤- الاجتماعات التي تعقدها قوات التحالف هي التي تحدد الزمان والمكان والأشخاص المدعويين للاجتماع وكان حاضراً في الاجتماع السيد قائممقام قضاء الحمدانية وقسم من أعضاء المجلس البلدي للحمدانية وبرطلة وتليكيف وأنا وان قوات التحالف هي التي حددت المدعويين وقد طلب المسؤول عن الاجتماع من القوات الأمريكية من السيد مدير ناحية القوش واحد أعضاء مجلسها مغادرة الاجتماع لكونهم ليسوا مدعويين .
 - أما ما ورد عن اجتماعات مع جهات مجهولة . فمن هي هذه الجهات وليثبتوا جهة واحدة مجهولة اجتمعت معها .
 - ٥- لقد اشير في طلبات مجلس القضاء ومجلس الناحية إشارة للأمر (٧١) والذي وضعه السفير بريمر علماً بان القرار انهي العمل به مع نيل السيادة والعمل ساري حالياً بموجب قانون المحافظات رقم (١٥٩) لسنة (١٩٦٩) وكوني قائممقام قضاء تليكيف وتتبع للقضاء نواحي القوش ووانه وفايدة فليس هناك ممانعة أن يتم عقد الاجتماع في إحدى النواحي التابعة لإدارتي .
 - ٦- لقد تمت معاقبتي على اثر كتاب المجلس المحلي للقضاء ومجلس الناحية بدون تشكيل لجنة تحقيقية وبهذا اشير سيادتكم إلى المادة (١٠) الفقرات (أولاً وثانياً وثالثاً) من قانون انضباط موظفي الدولة والقطاع الاشتراكي رقم ١٤ لسنة (١٩٩١) وكذلك لم يتم استجابي إشارة للفقرة رابعاً من المادة (١٠) من نفس القانون وعليه لما تقدم اتظلم أمامكم راجياً إلغاء العقوبة .
- مع وافر شكري وتقديري .

المرفقات

دعوة حضور

نسخة من الإجازات الرسمية / ٣

باسم يعقوب ججو
قائم مقام قضاء تليكيف

٢٠٠٧ / ١٠ / ١١

To the respectable Governor of Ninewa:

Subject: Appeal

After initiating both cases in the local Judiciary Council of Tel Keppe and the local judiciary council of the county of Alqosh, you have penalized me by public reprimanding. You mentioned my trips abroad and my meetings with the coalition forces and other unknown parties. I would like to state the following:

1. Regarding my trip abroad that took place on 11-27-2005. The trip was legitimate and I was on leave that was issued by the section of individuals number 4062 issued on 11-23-2005 which you yourself approved. I informed you in your office, personally, of the invitation from UNDP and the EU to attend the symposium on the program of "Reconstruction and employment in Iraq" that took place in Amman Jordan. I have enclosed a copy of the invitation with this letter. The symposium was attended by the former Minister of Public Works (Nasrin Barwari) and Dr. Laith Kubba the official spokesperson of His Excellence the former Prime Minister.
2. Regarding my trip to the United States that took place on 11-07-2006 that lasted for thirty days was authorized by the section of individuals number 3776 on 11-09-2006 of which I personally informed you about in your office. I told you that I was going to conduct some tests and to visit some relatives. I extended the trip for an additional fifteen days with your approval by the letter whose number is 4356 issued on 12-11-2006.
3. My trips to America and Jordan were not held in secret, and all the members of the local District Council, the county, and the local officials that work with us were aware of the trip. The first trip was two years ago, and the latter one year ago. No complaints were issued at the time.
4. The coalition forces dictate the locations and the attendees of the meetings they convene. The deputy governor of Al Hamdaniya and a number of the members of the council of the municipality of Al Hamdaniya, Bartella, and Tel Keppe and me were invited. The coalition forces asked the director of the county Alqosh and one of the members of its council to leave because they were not invited. With regards to the meetings with the "unknown entities", I ask that proof be submitted that I met with one unknown party.
5. The cases in the Judiciary Council and the District Council make mention of the Order (71) that was placed by Ambassador Bremer. Knowing that the order was no longer valid with the achievement of independence, according to the current active law of the governorates number (159) issued in 1969, I am entitled, as mayor of Tel Keppe, the sub-district of Alqosh, and all towns that fall within that jurisdiction, to conduct meetings in my governorate and within counties under my jurisdiction.
6. I have been penalized based on the case in the local Judicial Council and the District Council without a proper investigation, and for that reason I would like to make note of Article 10 of the Code (clauses 1, 2, and 3) from the disciplinary law of government employees and the local sector number 14 of the year 1991. I would also like to indicate that I have not been questioned as mandated in the 4th clause of Article 10 from the same law cited above. I appeal your decision and ask that you reverse the penalty.

With my regards and thanks,

[Signature of Basim Bello]
Mayor of Tel Keppe
10-01-07

Attachments:

Copy of the invitation of UNDP and the EU
My 3 vacations requests

Dr. Haider Al-Abadi
Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq

Dr. Haider Al-Abadi:

Your Excellency, It is no secret that the situation of our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian (Christian) people in their homeland has worsened since 2003. As a result of the weaknesses in [Iraqi] laws, the lack of security at times, the continued targeting of our people, concerted attacks, forced displacement, as well as the latest Islamist terror group *Daesh* and its occupation of our areas in Mosul and the Nineveh Plain since August 2014—where disaster struck individuals, villages, and towns—we have suffered many consequences that threaten our existence in our ancestral homeland as an authentic component of the Iraqi people.

Mr. Prime Minister, in the midst of our suffering and dangerous reality, we make this appeal to your office jointly as Chaldean Syriac Assyrian political organizations, along with other parties and institutions, together as representatives of our people. Out of a sense of responsibility towards our people, particularly given all the dangers they are now faced with, we ask that you use the constitutional powers vested in your position to recognize the following demands, as they will inspire confidence and restore hope for a better tomorrow under a democratic, pluralistic, federal Iraq which honors the dignity of all its children of all sects and minorities.

1. [We demand] the activation and implementation of Resolution No. 16 issued by the [Iraqi] Council of Ministers in its meeting on January 21, 2014, which gave preliminary approval for the creation of the Nineveh Plain Province, as well as the authorization of legislative and administrative procedures required to implement the Resolution.
2. Given the fact that democracy in Iraq is still in its early stages and is resulting in obstacles and conflicts between major political blocs at the expense of the smaller minorities of the Iraqi people, we call on the UN Security Council to issue a decision in order to protect the [minorities] of the Nineveh Plain. United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) will have the right to monitor the security situation and rehabilitation efforts, reducing exploitation and preventing the imposition of hegemonic policies across the Nineveh Plain. This can be achieved through the establishment of offices designated for this purpose in coordination with international observers to train and rehabilitate the people of the region in order to keep its security in the hands of its own people to ensure the protection of the Nineveh Plain.
3. Given the circumstances, noting that our suffering began in 2003 and has continued until the present day, and taking into account the fact that the [Nineveh Plain] province has witnessed political conflicts between the

Kurdistan Regional Government and the Central Government—as well as sectarian conflicts between the various components of the Iraqi people—disregarding the will of its people in shaping the region's future, we demand that the Nineveh Plain be excluded from all political and military conflicts and that [its borders] be considered a Green Line (demarcation line—politically and militarily neutral). We demand that its people are given the right to shape the future of their region independent from any pressure. The people of the [Nineveh Plain] region should be granted their constitutional right to administer their areas, and should be enabled to defend themselves and protect their properties with the integration of all private security forces formed by minorities under [Iraqi] federal forces and local police.

4. The Iraqi Government must fulfill its constitutional obligations and expedite the reconstruction and rehabilitation of our towns by restoring infrastructure and reconstructing destroyed homes in the Nineveh Plain. [The Iraqi Government] must also ensure the safe return of the people [of the Nineveh Plain] and offer compensation in order for them to start new, dignified lives protected by the [Iraqi] State. This process should be implemented through accredited and reliable groups with experience and efficiency in managing such affairs. Also, the [Iraqi Government] should host an international conference involving all reputable countries in order to secure the necessary financial support [for the above].
5. We recognize the events that have taken place since 2003 until this day, including murders, kidnappings, and displacement of our people as systematic targeting, seeking to uproot our people from our homeland. This is especially true in what we experienced at the hands of the terrorist organization *Daesh* in June of 2014. After all that our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian (Christian) people have been forced to endure, it is imperative that the Iraqi State assume its responsibilities and address this matter in accordance with ethical and legal standards, as well as issue consequences and non-repudiation of a crime such as Genocide.
6. We ask that you address unfair legislation and educational curriculums related to our Chaldean Syriac Assyrian (Christian) people that demean our importance and reduce our role as an indigenous component and partner in the homeland, affecting the rest of the components that make up a minority in Iraq. We ask that you correct the educational curriculum and take into consideration historical evidence, as well as religious and nationalistic pluralism. We ask that you modify racial and religious discriminatory laws, specifically the National Card Law (Article 26 which imposes the Islamization of minors). We also ask that you modify laws that restrict personal freedoms, and end policies that permit the exclusion and marginalization of [Chaldean Syriac Assyrians] in receiving special honors or positions in the State. Lastly, we ask that you lead the [Iraqi] State

towards achieving civil peace and a sense of community, and that you spread the spirit of solidarity, coexistence, and unity among all Iraq's people through legislation renouncing the denigration of [minority] religions and criminalizing violations in order to address religious and sectarian intolerance.

7. We reject all practices that are aimed to impose de facto policies on minority areas that contrast the vision and aspirations [of the people] for their future. We also reject all political schemes designed to divide minority areas.

As for the demands of our people (Chaldean Syriac Assyrian) residing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, we as parties and political organizations include the following:

1. [We demand] the implementation of Article (3) Sections (4) and (5) of Law No. 5 for the year 2015 regarding the protection of the minority rights living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by addressing issues concerning land encroachment, and calling for immediate action in the affected areas to provide solutions to resolve [these issues]; especially since these cases have been introduced to official government channels and four officials have been involved (Regional President, Chairman of the Parliament, Prime Minister, and Public Prosecutor), but we have yet to see any concrete solutions applied on the ground to solve this ongoing problem.
2. [We demand] the inclusion and installation of Article 35 of the Kurdistan Regional Constitution draft in the final version of the Constitution, guaranteeing the right of autonomy to Chaldean Syriac Assyrians wherever they represent a majority of the population.

Mr. Prime Minister, as we present you with these demands, we are confident that you will preserve the unity of the Iraqi people as well as [Iraq's] Constitution, and remain assured that you are the voice of all Iraqis—especially the oppressed, who have suffered the most, and are struggling to remain in their homeland and live with dignity, freedom, and as real partners.

[Signed by] Political Organizations and Parties:

Assyrian Democratic Movement
Chaldean Democratic Forum
Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Popular Council
Chaldean National Council
Syriac Assembly Movement
ChaldoAshor Organization
Assyrian Patriotic Party

March 6, 2017

JOHN McCAIN
ARIZONA

CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON IRAN AFFAIRS

United States Senate

May 25, 2016

218 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0302
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SUITE 108
PHOENIX, AZ 85001
(602) 441-0102

307 WEST CONGRESS STREET
SUITE 100
TUCSON, AZ 85701
(520) 870-8334

7 HAWKINS FLY BRANDED BARBERS
1001 150-0170

President Massoud Barzani
Kurdistan Region
Diwan
P.O. BOX 60
Iraqi Kurdistan
Erbil-Iraq

President Massoud Barzani,

I write to you to express my concerns regarding alarming new reports that allege the mistreatment of the Christian Assyrian community in the Nineveh Plains region by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Despite heightened political instability and violence in the region, it remains essential to not only protect, but also respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Assyrian community and similarly vulnerable peoples in Iraq.

I recently had the pleasure to meet with the Christian Assyrian community in Phoenix, Arizona, many of whom have relatives and loved ones living in Iraq, and they expressed their collective concerns regarding the treatment of Christians in Northern Iraq. While listening to their testimony, I was troubled by their reports that the KRG has denied basic services to the Assyrian community, prevented their freedom of movement and assembly, and confiscated weapons desperately needed to defend the community from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Of further concern were their reports of land confiscation and statements you have made regarding Kurdish territorial claims to the Nineveh Plains region. I hope you will address these allegations and I ask for your clarification on these important issues.

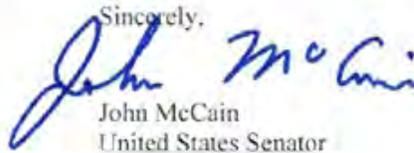
The Christian Assyrian community has a long history in Iraq and they have contributed significantly to the country's unique social fabric. They deserve the same rights and protection as other groups and minority communities in the region, including the Kurdish community. Therefore, I encourage you and your government to respect and protect their fundamental rights and freedom, and work with local Assyrian community leaders on communal governance initiatives.

The United States deeply values its strong relationship with the KRG and Peshmerga forces, and we are proud to provide assistance to your government including up to \$480 million for food, fuel, medical supplies and stipends for Peshmerga fighters as well as two brigade sets of equipment. The Peshmerga forces have been instrumental in the fight against ISIL, and the KRG has routinely proven itself a reliable ally. But as ISIL continues to threaten our collective security, we cannot afford to endanger our partnership through actions that could undermine the shared values at its foundation. I hope you will work towards a more cooperative relationship with the Christian Assyrian community and honor the commitment you made to protect the

PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85001-1000

Assyrians and similarly vulnerable peoples in the Nineveh Plains. I look forward to continuing my support for your government's efforts and working with you to fulfill our collective humanitarian obligations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John McCain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and the last name "McCain" clearly legible.

John McCain
United States Senator

June 23, 2016

President Massoud Barzani
Kurdistan Region
Diwan
P.O. Box 60
Iraqi Kurdistan
Erbil, Iraq

Dear President Barzani:

I write regarding troubling reports of alleged mistreatment of Christian Assyrians by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). For over fifteen years, I have had the privilege of representing the Assyrian community of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate, many of whom regularly communicate with family and friends in Iraq. They recently expressed their concerns to me regarding the KRG's treatment of their community in the Nineveh Plains region. I request that you please provide clarification on the matters detailed below.

Allegations include the denial of basic services, the appropriation of Assyrian lands with no recourse to fair treatment and resolution by the courts, the KRG Constitution Drafting Committee's lack of meaningful consideration of Assyrian constitutional objectives, and increased restrictions on their right to organize and openly protest. I am further troubled by reports of Peshmerga forces confiscating weapons held by Christian Assyrians that were needed to defend themselves against ISIS, and of emerging KRG territorial claims encompassing all lands in the Nineveh Plains and beyond.

Christian Assyrians and other vulnerable minorities have suffered immensely at the hands of ISIS. Despite their unimaginable suffering, these communities still resolutely claim their place in the tapestry of Iraq. As such, they deserve the same basic rights and civil liberties enjoyed by the Kurdish people and other citizens in northern Iraq. The strong partnership between the United States and the KRG is built on shared values and mutual respect for all peoples. It is imperative to continue this tradition in the face of adversity.

I am grateful for the friendship and alliance between the United States and the KRG. I welcome the recent U.S. commitment to provide a further \$480 million in aid and military equipment toward the effort to defeat and destroy ISIS. However, if we fail to protect all who are in ISIS's crosshairs, we risk neutralizing current and future gains.

Thank you for your attention to my letter. I look forward to hearing from you and continuing my support for the KRG as it fights to protect its territory and secure a future for the Kurdistan Region and all who live within it.

Sincerely,



Mark Kirk
United States Senator

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 16, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Recently, members of the Assyrian-American community in my congressional district expressed grave concerns regarding the Kurdistan Regional Government's treatment of the Christian Assyrian community in the Nineveh Plains region of northern Iraq. I would like to inform you of their concerns and ask for the State Department's assistance in addressing them.

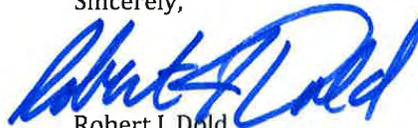
Informed by their conversations with relatives in the Nineveh Plains region, my constituents are alarmed at the denial of basic services to Christian Assyrians, the seizing of Assyrian lands, the lack of meaningful consideration of the Assyrian community in the constitution drafting process, and increased restrictions on their right to assemble. I am further troubled by reports that Kurdish Peshmerga forces are confiscating weapons that the Christian Assyrians use to defend themselves against ISIS.

Christian Assyrians and other vulnerable minorities have suffered immensely at the hands of ISIS and other radical terrorist groups. Despite their ongoing suffering, these communities still deeply believe in their right to live in peace in northern Iraq. As such, they deserve the same basic rights and civil liberties enjoyed by the Kurdish people and other citizens in northern Iraq. The strong partnership between the United States and the KRG is built on shared values and mutual respect for all peoples. It is imperative that this tradition is maintained going forward.

I am grateful for the work that you have done to maintain friendship and an alliance between the United States and the KRG. I welcome the recent U.S. commitment to provide further aid and military equipment toward the effort to defeat and destroy ISIS. However, if we fail to protect all who are in ISIS's crosshairs, we risk neutralizing current and future progress.

Thank you for looking into the concerns raised in this letter. I look forward to hearing from you and working with the State Department to affirm our nation's commitment to helping Assyrian Christians.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Dold
Member of Congress

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To:
Whom it may concern

I represent Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrians and Armenians in the committee for preparing a draft constitution for the Kurdistan Region – Iraq. The committee began its work on 25/05/2015. I would like to let you know that during the drafting of the first chapter of the constitution (the basic principles) I pointed out some important observations, but the committee ignored them altogether. On discussing the third chapter on the rights of religious and ethnic components of the region (the minorities) I found out that:

1. As religious and ethnic minorities, we were not treated as a component of the Iraqi society with equal rights. Rather, we were treated as minorities vis a vis a majority that applies the rule that the majority has the right to defeat the minority.
2. There was a package of rights that they decided to impose on us in advance with an objective to make the constitution look appealing while ignoring at the same time the basic rights that we asserted to be important to us, as components, and which they found as not worthy of being debated.
3. They insisted on excluding from the draft constitution some of the rights we have gained since the formation of the parliament and the regional government in Kurdistan for the first time in 1992. That would mean the upcoming constitution would be detrimental to us rather than beneficial.
4. The constitution contains some glamorous terms and slogans like citizenship, peaceful coexistence and equality. These concept, however, have not found their way into the provisions of the Constitution.
5. The principle of consensus has been adopted as the basis for drafting the constitution, meaning that each committee member in effect has the right to veto. However, I was denied such right as the representative of the minorities, despite the fact that I am the sole representative of all the religious and ethnic components in Iraqi Kurdistan, when I had to reject a number of articles that I found to encroach upon the rights of our religious and ethnic minorities. Thus, the principle of consensus has been undermined. Therefore, we have decided to suspend our membership in the Committee and withdraw from the meetings, until we are provided with sufficient guarantees to entrench the rights of our people in the constitution, as these rights have been approved by the international conventions on the rights of minorities, more notably: i) The UN declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1992. ii) The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. We call upon you to support us in order to consolidate the established principles of human rights law, which are universal and applicable to all humanity.

ئاگه هدارى

ئە م ئاگه هداريا هە مە خودان دکانیت مە شروبی دکه بین کو
هە رکه سی دکانا خو فه که ته فه ئە ف جارە گازنداش خو نه که ته
فه دگه ل ریز گرتتی جنکو ئە ف جارە بفی ره نگی نابت دی مرن
گه لبت

A warning to shop owners selling alcohol:

Remove these items and respect those around you, or next time your punishment will be death.

الى: السيد محافظ اربيل المحترم

بعد التحية

اهداف و شعارات المظاهرة

1- اغلاق جميع البارات و الملاهي و اماكن شرب الخمر القريبة من الكنائس و ^{اماكن} المسكن المقنسة و المناطق السكنية و خاصة تلك الموجودة في الفنادق باسرع وقت, و اصدار قرارات خاصة من اجل تنفيذ مطالب اهل عنكاوا.

2- تطبيق نظام الاصلاحى في ادارة عنكاوا و خاصة ادارة الناحية و وضع شخص شجاع و كفاءة و مخلص في هذا المنصب و تنفيذ هذا التغيير باسرع وقت.

3- توفير مشاريع سكنية لشباب عنكاوا في داخل عنكاوا.

4- رفع التجاوزات على اراضي عنكاوا و تعويض جميع اهالي عنكاوا الذين اخذت اراضيهم و ارجاع الاراضي الموجودة داخل الناحية و التي تم الاستيلاء عليها من قبل بعض الاشخاص المتكفنين و استغلالها لخدمة شباب المنطقة.

5- تعيين مجموعة من شباب عنكاوا في السلك الامنى من الشرطة و الامن و شرطة المرور و ان يكون مكان عملهم داخل عنكاوا فهم اولى بحمايتهم.

6- تعويض الفلاحين الذين اخذت اراضيهم لانشاء مطار اربيل الدولي.

7- تقديم المسؤولين الفاسدين الذين كان لهم يد في التغيير الديمغرافى و المتاجرة بعقارات عنكاوا.

8- معاملة عنكاوا كبقية النواحي في اربيل في ما يتعلق باخذ الضريبة.



To the Governor of Erbil:

Below are our protest demands:

1. We demand the closure of all bars and nightclubs that are located near churches, other holy places, and residential areas—especially those found in hotels—as soon as possible.
2. We demand a change in Ankawa’s administration, and want the mayor replaced with someone who is brave, professional, and faithful to his constituency.
3. We demand the establishment of residential projects for the youth of Ankawa.
4. We demand the implementation of policies that prevent the seizure of our land.
5. We demand that a group of local residents control the town’s security and traffic police in order to protect the town.
6. We demand compensation for the farmers whose lands were seized by the KRG in order to build the Erbil International Airport.
7. We demand that the corrupt officials responsible for policies of democratic change in Ankawa be held accountable for their actions.
8. We demand that unjust tax rates in Ankawa be reduced to match the tax rates in other regions.

إعلان

إلى المواطنين في قره قوش (بغديدا) وكرمليس
وبرطلة .

على من بحوزته أي سلاح متوسط أو ثقيل أو
ذخيرة لهذه الأسلحة تسليمها إلى اللجنة الأمنية
وفي حالة عدم التسليم وحصول عملية التفتيش
والعتور على مثل هذه الأسلحة يتعرض لأقصى
العقوبات القانونية .

لذا نهيب بجميع المواطنين للتعاون مع اللجنة
الأمنية مع التقدير

عبد

رئيس اللجنة الأمنية في

قضاء الحفدانية

To the citizens of Bakhdida, Karamlish,
and Bartella:

Anyone who owns any middle-caliber weapons, heavy
weapons, or ammunitions of the said weapons must deliver
them to the Security Committee.

In case of inspection and finding the said weapons, the
person possessing them will be subject to the maximum
legal penalties.

We hereby call on all citizens to cooperate with the Securi-
ty Committee.

Kindest regards,

Head of the Security Committee

[Signature]

Al-Hamdaniya District
14 JUL 2014

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After the many years of suffering endured by this people, a small piece of their homeland—governed and secured by them—is not too much to ask for. Many sacrifices have been made by generations of Assyrians who believed in the survival and future of their community. May their sacrifices not have been in vain.

ASSYRIAN * * * *
CONFEDERATION *
OF EUROPE * * * *