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Human Rights Report Documents Plight of Assyrians in Iraq

The plight of the native Assyrian Christians of Iraq is a serious one that continues to worsen with time.

According to a report by the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), the Assyrians have suffered greatly for years. They have experienced genocide under an ailing Ottoman regime in Turkey and massacres by the ruling elites within their native homeland of Iraq.

AINA said a further threat to existence in their homeland has arisen with the rise of radical Islamists who are trying to cleanse the region of any Christian groups.

The Assyria Council of Europe (ACE) has collaborated with the Iraq based Hammurabi Human Rights Organization to produce a report detailing the experiences of Assyrians living in a new, democratic Iraq.

AINA reported the ACE board said, "We are very worried about the situation of Assyrians in Assyria, and if the European Union and other influential organizations do not intervene, there will be no Assyrians left in modern day Iraq."

The report is inspired by a six-week fact-finding mission in northern Iraq between Nov. 2009 and Jan. 2010.

AINA said it is divided into three separate papers, each with their own focus. Together, they represent a conclusive assessment of the problems facing the Assyrians. The report also contains h recommendations to the Iraqi government, the Kurdish Regional Government, and the international community.

AINA said the first part relates the tragic history of Assyrians and other ethno-religious minorities in Iraq. More than 1,300 Christian families fled Mosul in the wake of the 2008 terror campaign alone, with over 700 targeted killings committed post-2003.

Of the 750,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan for example, Assyrian Christians number up to a disproportionate 150,000 considering their population in Iraq. AINA said with this in mind, both past and present relevant legal standards are addressed, with deficiencies brought into focus.

AINA said the oil rich Nineveh Province is constitutionally under the jurisdiction of Iraq's central government with Kurds representing a minority. However, discoveries

within the report suggest the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is effectively trying to reshape the region with an influx of armed Kurdish fighters, and a widespread political campaign to gain favour with Nineveh's inhabitants.

AINA said it is imperative that all such attempts must be repelled to prevent a "Kurdification" of this area, with proper investigations undertaken regarding murders and illegal land seizures.

AINA said in part two of the report the focus shifts to an analysis of the violence committed against Assyrian Christians in the disputed territories.

AINA said Nineveh's minorities are described as "tormented" from all sides, suffering the most after 2003. The ruling dynastic KDP party is responsible for much of the civil unrest in the disputed territories alongside Islamists, who are to blame for the bombing of over 60 churches and the murder of hundreds of Assyrian Christians.

AINA said the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is said to deny many aid organisations funding for assistance programs unless they support the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). This has hampered development by giving it an extremely divisive political agenda in line with the forceful expansionist policies of the KRG which are described in this report.

Elections have also been an avenue for the KDP to exercise its authority, with many irregularities reported since free elections began.

AINA said central to the report, in part three, is the treatment of Assyrian Christians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The treatment of the Assyrians by the KRG is similar to how they were treated under the Ba'ath party who did not discriminate against Assyrians due to their (Christian) religion, but rather their ethnic identity. The same policies used by the Ba'athist regime to oppress the Kurds, are now being used by the Kurdish authorities against ethnic Assyrians.

AINA said oppressing the "largest minority" within their judicial boundaries by not practicing a genuine system of proportional representation also furthers the KDP goal of expanding their region to often oil rich areas such as Kirkuk. Many non-Kurds are discriminated against for not speaking Kurdish.

The issue of land seizures is becoming an overlooked one for the authorities, as Assyrians try to return and settle in their dispossessed homes and villages with little documentation other than their memories. AINA said Kurdish squatters often demand sums of \$20,000 in compensation to leave — unaffordable for desperate Assyrians. A reported 10,000 hectares of land has been taken illegally from Assyrian Christians in the region.

According to AINA, these three papers clearly document the struggle Assyrian Christians face living in their homeland. They are also a call for action to be taken by the Iraqi government, the KRG, and the international community to address this problem with urgency and commitment that has been severely lacking thus far.

AINA said each paper ends with a set of recommendations relevant to its focus, and it is imperative these recommendations be seriously considered by appropriate authorities.

AINA commented that Assyrians in Iraq are in desperate need of economic aid and political settlement. Many of the areas they inhabit are neglected, offered little funding, high in unemployment, and low on education and health facilities.

AINA said this combination of problems can only result in the eradication of the marginalised ancient Assyrian community of Iraq unless immediate action is taken. The Assyrians are being exploited from all sides while receiving nothing meaningful to improve their dire situation.

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