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# Preventing the De-Christianization of Iraq:

## How to Stop the Exodus of Iraq's Indigenous ChaldoAssyrian Christians

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## I. Introduction

Iraq's Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac people (herein ChaldoAssyrians) are facing total cleansing from Iraq if the crisis remains ignored by the US Government and action is not taken immediately.

The ChaldoAssyrians, who celebrated their 6,757th New Year in April of this year, are the indigenous people of Iraq, who directly connect that land to its Mesopotamian roots with their continued physical presence. They remain the last people who speak Aramaic, the language of Christ, as their primary language. The great majority of them still reside in close proximity to the ancient capitol city of Nineveh – located in northern Iraq.

ChaldoAssyrians are inherently pro-Western people in terms of respect and appreciation for ideas such as democracy, pluralism and human rights.

As Christians, they belong to various ancient Churches, mainly the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac/Jacobite Orthodox Church, and the Church of the East (recently renamed the Assyrian Church of the East). However, they also belong to various Protestant churches and denominations. The names Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac all reflect one people.

Iraq is, admittedly, a country mired in deep political and security problems. For the US this can consume all its attention, to the detriment of recognizing other crises in Iraq that are solvable.

The crisis facing Iraq's Christian ChaldoAssyrians is today unacknowledged by the US Government, blinding it to the pragmatic, feasible policy solutions that can be implemented today, with immediate positive impact.

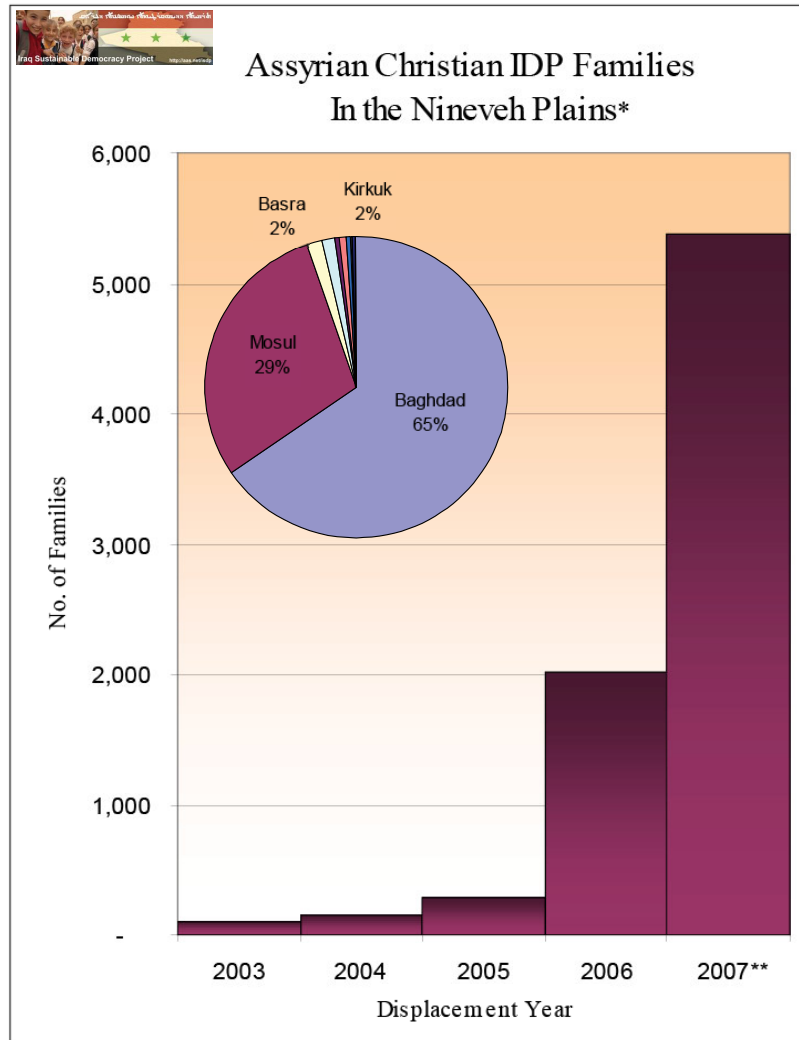
The ethnic and religious cleansing of Iraq's indigenous Christian ChaldoAssyrians cannot be held hostage to the US Government's inability to end the Sunni and Shi'a Arab conflict.

The United States must understand that these people are disproportionately represented in Iraq's professional and educated elite. The depletion of Iraq's human capital, ready-to-hand, is going to have devastating effects throughout the country. Moreover, the more ChaldoAssyrians flee, the less it can be expected for Iraq to stand-up, thereby allowing the United States to stand-down.

The rest of this document describes this people's current situation and the necessary solutions to prevent the annihilation of Iraq's Christian ChaldoAssyrians from their homeland.

## II. Population/Demographics – The Statistics

- By the late 1980's, there were approximately 1.4 million Christians in Iraq, the vast majority of which would be ChaldoAssyrians (but included roughly 30,000 Armenians).
- Upon liberation from Saddam Hussein, that figure declined to roughly 1.1 million.
- From liberation in 2003 to the present, over 350,000 Iraqi Christians have fled (at least 1 in 3). This rate of attrition will soon cross a threshold and empty the country of its indigenous ChaldoAssyrian population.
- An even greater percentage is dislocated within the country (internally displaced persons). The great majority of these people are returning to their lands in the Nineveh Plain and to other areas of northern Iraq. Their numbers are poorly documented.
- In September 2006 ChaldoAssyrian NGOs lost track of the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Nineveh Plain when the amount exceeded 10,000 families – which is a massive absorption rate for the area.



\* Figures represent partial data based on only those families that registered with the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq. The average family size is 5.  
 \*\*The 2007 figures are based on data collected from January to June, 15th, 2007 which are then linearly extrapolated to represent 12 months.

### III. Refugees – Reflections of US Government Policy Failures in Iraq

ChaldoAssyrian refugees now in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon were interviewed in an ISDP field mission in March 2007. They were interviewed as indicators of US Government policy failures in Iraq; considered unintended outcomes of the liberation. It is in that light which their insights were captured in detailed interviews, with a view to discerning those policies needed to prevent more ChaldoAssyrians from having to flee.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees began indicating in mid-2005 that this community is particularly targeted. They also identified that over 36 percent of registered refugees were Christian, despite comprising +/- 5 percent of the

population.<sup>1</sup> As indicated above, the figure of 36 percent has declined to roughly 20 percent, but this still places the amount at over 350,000 refugees – far exceeding their proportion of the population.

The statements/assertions of refugees regarding what drove them out of Iraq can be summarized as follows:

- ‘We are being targeted as co-religionists and collaborators with the Americans’;
- ‘The Arab, Kurdish and Islamist militias know that we have no deterrent capacity and that no one will protect us when we are targeted – there are no concerns of reprisals when attacking Christian ChaldoAssyrians’;
- ‘We are politically not competing for anything, we do not control anything, so they attack us simply because they hate us’;
- ‘There are signs everywhere, and reminders brought to our doors – even delivered with bullets and/or blood – stating that Iraq is not for Christians any longer’;
- ‘I tried to go north, to the Nineveh Plain or the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. I could not get a job, I had to join the Kurdistan Democratic Party, to work’;
- ‘I wanted to go back to my lands in the north, but there were Kurds on my land, they would not leave and the government would not allow me to reclaim my land’;
- ‘The north would be nice, but there is nothing there for us, nothing developed to survive there. If it was developed to allow us to live, I would stay’.

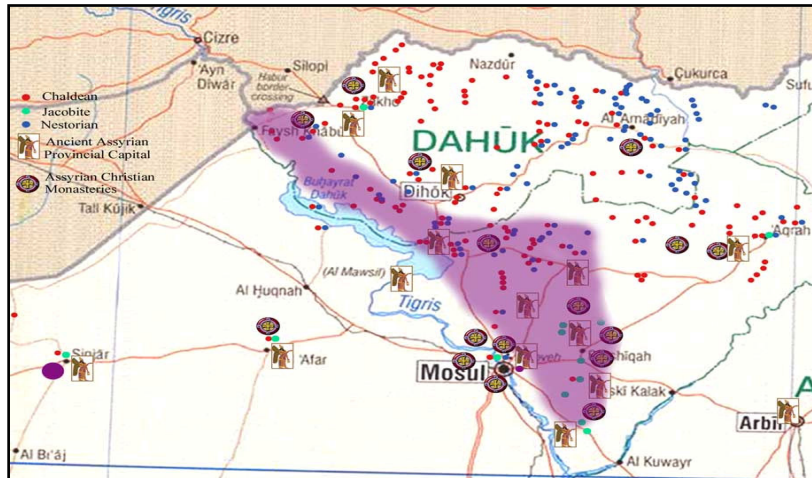
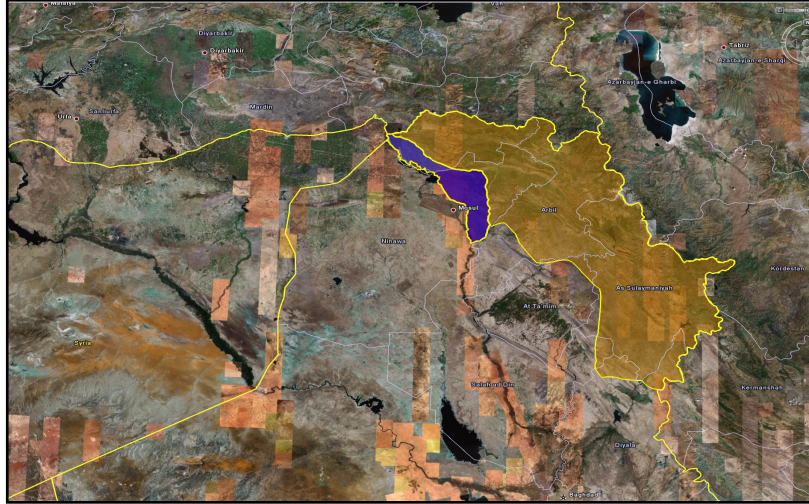
These comments represent a synthesis of the types of comments made by ChaldoAssyrian refugee families interviewed over 2 weeks across Amman, Damascus and Beirut.

Interviews with refugees also sought to examine their needs where they were residing, in order to assist them until such time as they can return to Iraq in general, or specifically to a Nineveh Plain with the infrastructural readiness to absorb them. Their major concern was the absence of any formal legal status to preserve basic rights while in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, or Turkey. Some form of legal refugee status is required to protect them.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Background Information on the Situation of Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Iraq (October 2005)”, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.pdf?tbl=RSDLEGAL&id=4371cf5b4> (last accessed September 10, 2007).

Additionally, they require access to employment to survive and meet their basic needs (food, shelter, healthcare and access to education for their children). If this is not acceptable, then they require provision of those basic needs by aid/relief agencies and humanitarian interventions.



The Nineveh Plain (southern part of highlighted area) and the Plains of the Cross (northern part of highlighted area) are focal points for ChaldoAssyrian return.

The UNHCR best described, albeit implicitly, the territorial issues between indigenous ChaldoAssyrians and Kurds in their recent Dohuk Governorate IDP needs assessment. ChaldoAssyrians make-up 10,969 IDP families of the total 12,905, or 85 percent of IDPs.

This dramatically high number is explained by UNHCR in the following passage of their needs assessment:

*Of the three northern governorates of Iraq administered by the KRG, Dohuk is home to the highest number and concentration of IDPs, hosting 67 percent of the total IDP population. [...] 85% of IDPs are Christian, the majority of whom originate*

*from Christian villages in Dohuk [...] Dohuk is historically home to more Christian villages than the two other Governorates and also experienced a displacement of Christians during the Ba'ath regime. Consequently, Christians in Dohuk are predominantly a returning Diaspora staying with relatives and friends. 10% are Kurds and the remaining 5% are Arabs... ”<sup>2</sup>*

The 10,000s fleeing to the north must be seen in light of the 100,000s fleeing the country. It is this fact that compels a determined policy to secure this population in Iraq.

#### **IV. Life in Iraq: ChaldoAssyrian Realities**

“**Death to US Agents**” – that is the standard Al-Qaeda message that particularly targets Christian ChaldoAssyrians. They are seen as co-religionists and collaborators. It is undeniable, however, that they supported and continue to support the liberation of Iraq. What they could not have foreseen is complete US Government disregard for their security.

The disillusionment expressed by ChaldoAssyrian refugees interviewed in March/April of 2007, centered around their perception of complete US Government disregard for their security.

“Iraq is not for Christians” is now a common expression painted on walls, delivered on notes stained with blood or received with a bullet. Over four months ago, Al-Qaeda and others began a focused program of cleansing ChaldoAssyrian Christians from Dora (a district with over 20,000 ChaldoAssyrian homes in 2003). The Christians were given the following options:

- Convert to Islam, and to demonstrate commitment, assist in targeting other Christians;
- Not only pay the jizya (non-Muslim tax), but pay tens and hundreds of thousands extra, on demand, to fund the insurgency;
- Send a daughter or sister to the local Mosque to be married to a Muslim;
- Leave, or, Die.

Dora neighborhood now has only roughly 3,000 homes left, but these are termed ‘partial/broken’ homes. The men of fighting strength, who can somewhat defend themselves have sent away the children, women and elderly. The community there is effectively decimated and Al-Qaeda has moved in.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) of Recently Displaced Persons in the Kurdistan Region”, January 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=45db09052>. (last accessed September 24, 2007).



Every family has been threatened with kidnappings, murders, and torture through letters. Phone calls and visits to places of work (especially shops) are favored means of intimidation in person by Islamists and insurgents.

Threats are for the lucky ones, most are kidnapped, or have members of their family kidnapped. Kidnappings often end in tragedy, as discovered in the interviews. These cold-blooded murders spur immediate flight; although many of those released after a ransom is paid also opt to run fearing recapture. In numerous cases, botched kidnap attempts simply result in the shooting death of the intended kidnap victim. Kidnapped children are tortured while negotiations with parents take place to maximize pressure.

Targeting churches and religious figures is also so pervasive as to send a broad signal to all Iraqi Christians. The bombings/attacks on 33 churches, the regular kidnapping of priests, and gruesome murdering of priests, sets in motion total panic and flight by this vulnerable minority.<sup>3</sup>

Several types of attacks cause extraordinary fear and place immense pressure on the community, such as the crucifixion of a boy in October of 2006 and the beheading and dismemberment of a priest, who was returned to his parish with a note explaining that His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI should have apologized for his remarks offending Islam.

Flight from Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk involves the arrangement of a taxi, carrying only what fits into pockets, bags and items placed on laps. It is the total abandonment of all else they have built-up. It is an act of total desperation, the main goal being to stay alive.

It is critical to understand that this not only produces IDPs in great numbers, but ones that are entirely impoverished and vulnerable from the onset.

As noted above in the insights of Christian refugees, the ChaldoAssyrians have no ability to deter attacks because they are not able to become an effective part of the policing services in Iraq, if at all. They are not even able to establish formal, legitimate, representative policing forces in areas where they predominate such as the Nineveh Plain.

In late 2005 and mid-2006, two efforts were made at securing a representative police force for the Nineveh Plain, drawn from the local population, facilitated by legitimate local representatives. The first effort consisting of 1,000 names was undermined politically by the Kurdistan Democratic Party's Deputy Governor in Mosul who would not accept the formation of such a force – deriding the idea and

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<sup>3</sup> Readers are encouraged to read the detailed report of specific targeting in, "Incipient Genocide: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq", by Peter BetBasoo, June 20, 2007, Assyrian International News Agency. [www.aina.org/reports/ig.pdf](http://www.aina.org/reports/ig.pdf) (last accessed October 1, 2007).

referring to it as the formation of a “Christian militia.” The second effort involved 700 names, which were ultimately sent for training, but were threatened out of the process, finally being told that they would be trained and then deployed to a Sunni insurgent stronghold in Mosul, and not the intended area of the Nineveh Plain, at which point they abandoned the important program.

With respect to Baghdad-controlled Iraq, the following excerpt from a George Will column in the Washington Post earlier this year best reflects the situation:

*“Senator Gordon Smith had lunch with three soldiers from his state, one of whom had been working with an Iraqi officer training police cadets. That soldier told Smith that when the cadets learned that the Iraqi officer was Catholic, they stoned him to death.”*<sup>4</sup>

## V. Life in Northern Iraq: ChaldoAssyrian Experiences

The situation in northern Iraq, and KRG-controlled areas (where they have formal jurisdiction and where they are seeking to dominate), can be likened to a return of Saddam-era authoritarianism and pressure.

The community has long felt the pressure and intimidation of the Peshmerga, particularly from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Peshmerga, however, are an extension of their political masters in the KDP, and the problem is political.

The formative experience in post-liberation Iraq for Christian ChaldoAssyrians was the deliberate disenfranchisement of their people, particularly in the Nineveh Plain. This happened in the January and December 2005 elections (more effectively in January), and also during the October referendum. It was a simple yet powerful message: you have no right to decide your future – the KDP will decide.<sup>5</sup>

The Department of State’s 2005 Human Rights Country Report for Iraq bluntly indicated, “In the January elections, many of the mostly non-Muslim residents on the Nineveh Plain were unable to vote. Some polling places did not open, ballot boxes were not delivered, and incidents of voter fraud and intimidation occurred. These problems resulted from administrative breakdowns on voting day and the

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, Gordon. “An Iraq Caucus of One”. Washington Post. June 17, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061501981.html> (last accessed September 28, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Interested readers are encouraged to read the following media reports by journalist Gareth Porter: “Voting Shenanigans Cloud Key Province”, InterPress Service, September 28, 2005 (<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30451>); “Vote Figures for Crucial Province Don’t Add Up” InterPress Service, October 19, 2005 (<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30692>); “Witnesses Describe Ballot Fraud in Nineveh”, InterPress Service, November 4, 2005 (<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30888>).

refusal of Kurdish security forces to allow ballot boxes to pass to predominantly Christian villages.”<sup>6</sup>

Unable to realize their electoral potential, ChaldoAssyrians have seen the suffocation and atrophying of their legitimate, local political groups – some whom were declared allies by the President of the United States. For example, the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), is recognized as an ally and included in the Iraq Liberation Act<sup>7</sup> as such at the request of a coalition that included the Assyrian Democratic Organization, Assyrian Universal Alliance, Assyrian National Organization and Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party.

Concurrently, the civil society networks and aid/relief organizations that are independent of the KDP have all witnessed the same rapid deterioration as the KDP prevents any resources to reach them so they may help the people. Instead, the modest amounts of aid that does reach Christian ChaldoAssyrians comes with extraordinary political conditionalities. Membership and demonstrable support for the KDP is the primary requirement. Rejection of any independent positions outside of the KDP is demanded.



The situation in northern Iraq is tangibly that of a new Apartheid-like development track for Christian ChaldoAssyrians as they widely choose not to succumb to KDP authoritarianism. However, it appears that US Government neglect of this community in terms of equitable reconstruction and development is literally aiding their starvation into the KRG. By all accounts, US Government disregard for the development needs of Christian ChaldoAssyrians forces them to fall prey to the

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<sup>6</sup> Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 2005”. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. March 8, 2006.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61689.htm> (last accessed September 23, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Presidential Determination 2003-05 to the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998; which states, “I hereby determine that each of the following groups is a democratic opposition organization and that each satisfies the criteria set forth in section 5(c) of the Act: the Assyrian Democratic Movement ... I hereby designate each of these organizations as eligible to receive assistance under Section 4 of this Act.”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021209-4.html> (last accessed October 2, 2007).

predatory behavior of the KDP. It is as yet unknown whether this is deliberate or not.

Disenfranchisement and Apartheid-like development as policies implemented by the KDP are matched by summary arrests/detentions, physical abuse, killings with impunity, and most importantly, illegal land/property seizures.

As reported by so many refugees, most would like to return to the lands and villages from which they were Arabized by the Ba'ath in northern Iraq; primarily in the Nineveh Plain, throughout Dohuk and Irbil governorates. Kurds either directly connected to the KDP (sometimes at senior-most levels), or simply backed by the KDP, have illegally seized or stolen substantial amounts of village and farming lands belonging to ChaldoAssyrians.

Whereas the KRG has sought to aggressively reverse Arabization policies that impacted Kurdish villages, they have stone-walled the resolution of ChaldoAssyrian land return and been complicit or actively involved in Kurdish illegal expropriation of ChaldoAssyrian lands.

The KDP publicizes that 10,000s of ChaldoAssyrian Christian families are coming to the safety of the north, but 100,000s are leaving the country entirely. This reality is directly connected to the problems of illegal land seizures.

In effect, they are locking into place the Ba'athist's Arabization program, but against non-Kurdish minorities. This has two primary effects: first, it prevents thousands of ChaldoAssyrian families from returning to their lands, and second it compels a great number of them to live in urban centers if they choose not to leave the region – for a minority like ChaldoAssyrians, this generates natural pressure for assimilation akin to those created by Saddam Hussein. Kurdification appears to be the desired outcome, or at least the thinning-out of the indigenous ChaldoAssyrian Christians.

## **VI. Understanding the Sources of Problems in North Iraq**

Most decision-makers are perplexed by the problems outlined above, clearly feeling that as representatives of a persecuted minority the KDP would not be expected to implement such policies, but instead nurture and protect the minorities in their midst.

Problems with dominant Kurdish political parties and the KRG are ethnically driven. This is distinct from the religious-based targeting in the Arab center and south. However, in the Middle East, where identity is defined in different ways, religion and ethnicity are fused in ways that Washington decision-makers may have trouble understanding. This should not make it any less real.

ChaldoAssyrians, as the indigenous ethnic group represent the most serious threat to Kurdish claims of rights to the land and thus statehood, given the Kurds' relative 'new comer' status compared to the ChaldoAssyrians (who have at least 6,757 years of continuous history/presence on the ground). Artifacts, dominant landmarks, and widespread historical consensus reinforce the area as belonging to ChaldoAssyrians. This requires KRG control and ultimate silence of these people at such a critical period of transition in order to consolidate control.

Land, property and its relevance for Kurdish nation-building seems the most relevant factor explaining that government's behavior. The Kurdistan Regional Government's draft constitution indicates that the Nineveh Plain – an area demographically dominated by ChaldoAssyrians, Shabaks and Yezidis – must become part of the Kurdistan region according to Art. 2(1/first). It specifically names key towns in the Nineveh Plain, such as Tel Kaif, Qara Qosh and Ba'shiqa as areas requiring absorption into the KRG.

As a consequence, the rights of the minorities living there and in surrounding areas are denied in order to ensure Kurdistan Region expansionism. The established political and civic groups of this community are brought under control, and if they do not accept such an arrangement, they face complete marginalization, intimidation and are suffocated out of existence through KRG control of resources and the lack of equitable use of American resources.

Nineveh Plains Demographic Distribution  
1997 Census

<i>District</i>	<i>Chaldo-Assyrian</i>	<i>Arab</i>	<i>Yazidi</i>	<i>Shabak</i>	<i>Turkmen</i>	<i>Kakani</i>	<i>Kurd</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Ba'shiqa</b>	4,351	2,821	16,000	43,232	1,288	-	3,190	70,882
	6%	4%	23%	61%	2%	0%	5%	
<b>Bakhdeda</b>	34,000	11,794	-	4,783	800	3,846	502	55,725
	61%	21%	0%	9%	1%	7%	1%	
<b>Al-Khither</b>	-	25,356	-	3,753	1,738	1,412	-	32,259
	0%	79%	0%	12%	5%	4%	0%	
<b>BarTilla</b>	12,500	1,228	-	15,471	588	-	-	29,787
	42%	4%	0%	52%	2%	0%	0%	
<b>Telkaif</b>	16,916	28,198	427	4,679	12,873	300	1,073	64,466
	26%	44%	1%	7%	20%	0%	2%	
<b>Alqosh</b>	5,718	3,103	32,860	-	-	-	315	41,996
	14%	7%	78%	0%	0%	0%	1%	
<b>Al-Shaikhan</b>	1,282	4,384	14,355	-	-	-	15,150	35,171
	4%	12%	41%	0%	0%	0%	43%	
<b>Total</b>	74,767	76,884	63,642	71,918	17,287	5,558	20,230	330,286
	23%	23%	19%	22%	5%	2%	6%	

Due to a total lack of meaningful US spending in the Nineveh Plain and in making use of established, legitimate and representative ChaldoAssyrian NGOs, civic and political assets on the ground, the ChaldoAssyrians and the Nineveh Plain are being starved. As a consequence, this increases the KRG's ability to leverage its resources provided to this community that come with extraordinary political conditionalities.

It is unlikely that the KRG could be expected to stop such behavior, especially if there is silence and lack of criticism from the US Government regarding these KRG/KDP policies that are prejudicial to minority development and reconstruction.

While the US Government may not be deliberately driving such a policy, the outcomes are clear, and are therefore taken at face value. The outcome of this persecution by the KRG and deliberate targeting at the hands of jihadis and insurgents is the eradication of this community.

The critical question is whether this is an acceptable situation or not.

## **VII. The Impact of ChaldoAssyrian Christian Flight on Iraq**

ChaldoAssyrian flight from Iraq represents the loss of Iraq's indigenous Christian population and the decimation of a community "of antiquity" with a continuous connection to ancient Mesopotamia.

More importantly, however, is the loss of a minority integral to maintaining a meaningful degree of ethnic and religious pluralism in Iraq. They are a moderating force inside an increasingly radicalized Iraq.

Christian ChaldoAssyrians represent Iraq's third largest ethnic group (after Arab and Kurd respectively) and by far the largest Christian community. As a result, the loss of this community would mean an Iraq that is effectively polarized between Shi'a and Sunni Muslim in terms of religion and bipolar ethnically between Arab and Kurd.

*Lastly, this community is disproportionately part of Iraq's educated and professional elite. Their complete abandonment of Iraq means a real loss of Iraqi human capital. That in turn, creates an Iraq even less able to stand-up so that Americans can stand-down.*

## **VIII. US Strategic Interests and the ChaldoAssyrian Christian Exodus**

ChaldoAssyrians represent an entirely under-utilized, underestimated asset to Americans in Iraq. Their intimate awareness of the workings of the country and familiarity with all aspects of Iraqi society make them vital partners in navigating Iraq's political, economic and social landscape. Additionally, with a great percentage having family in the United States, they represent a natural, human bridge/connection, constantly transmitting American norms and values to Iraq at the grassroots level of the Iraqi social fabric.

That potential is rapidly dwindling.

ChaldoAssyrians also represent one of the last significant Christian populations in the Middle East. The loss of this population will mean ever-increasing pressure on remaining populations in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the region as a whole. The latter are already under great stress and American inaction to protect and adequately work with Christians in Iraq is sending a devastatingly powerful message to Islamists and others in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, adding to their hubris in targeting this vulnerable minority.

Moderation in all aspects of Iraqi life is a natural contribution provided by the Christian ChaldoAssyrians. As Iraq's 'lowest-common-denominator' and its most truly indigenous population as the "Sons of Mesopotamia", this population provides the United States a powerful ally in disseminating ideas and political solutions that seek to mitigate more pernicious ethnic and sectarian trends in Iraqi politics. This opportunity is being lost with the departure of every Iraqi ChaldoAssyrian family.

If this outcome develops despite the presence of 160,000 US troops in Iraq, and the Christian ChaldoAssyrian presence there is terminated, what can other Christians in the region expect in terms of their safety and future?

The single most important policy solution is referred to as the "Art. 125 Solution" or the "Nineveh Plain Solution". This policy involves operationalizing Art. 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, which provides minorities with the right to establish some form of federal unit that is to be determined by law. This solution was immediately developed following the liberation of Iraq, when the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), along with other notable community representatives, gathered en masse in Baghdad on the 22nd and 23rd of October 2003. That gathering fully mandated the objective of forming a federal unit in the Nineveh Plain.<sup>8</sup>

Since the Assyrian Democratic Movement's initial spearheading of this objective, it has gained almost complete community support. Kurdish media sources are still reporting on the "Nineveh Plain Solution" and the ADM's concerted effort behind it. In January of 2007, the Kurdish Aspect News, in an interview with ADM representatives in the KRG's legislature reported that, "the [Nineveh] Plain ... should be treated as a special autonomous region. It is special, they say, because of its multinational and religious nature and that under Art. 125 of the new Iraqi Constitution, they should be allowed to achieve these rights."<sup>9</sup>

The political destabilization and hardship arises from conflicting KRG intentions towards the area. The KRG's Finance Minister, a senior member of the KDP, Mr. Sarkis Aghajan, has been publicly promulgating the Nineveh Plain Solution too. It is unclear whether he sees this as part of the KRG or outside of KRG jurisdiction.

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<sup>8</sup> Assyrian Democratic Movement, <http://zowaa.org/news/news/english/pr4eng.pdf>, October 25, 2003. (last accessed September 13, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Kurdish Aspect, "Christians Call for Political Autonomy", January 21, 2007. <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc0121AE.html> (last accessed September 20, 2007).

However, the KRG's draft Constitution, as noted above, seeks to incorporate the area as part of an extended KRG. Indeed, Minister Aghajan even financed his own conference held in Ankawa, Irbil in 2006 advocating the idea of the Nineveh Plain Solution.

Despite the discrepancy on jurisdiction, it must be borne in mind that the underlying principle of autonomy first articulated in the new Iraqi political context by the ADM in October of 2003 is now also being adopted and advocated by all groups in the community, including senior ChaldoAssyrian members of the KRG/KDP.

## **IX. NGO Capabilities and Work**

It is unknown exactly how much relief work has been completed by NGOs and other actors for Christian ChaldoAssyrians.

What is known is that the KRG is providing some relief, particularly channeled through the KRG's ChaldoAssyrian Finance Minister. However, given the widely acknowledged and unacceptable political conditionalities attached to KRG aid, and that government's predatory actions in terms of political and human rights towards this community, the aid is neither seen as equitable or sufficient.

The Assyrian Aid Society (AAS) has served as the implementing agent for at least three major relief efforts, specifically in the Nineveh Plain, with US or international relief and development partners. These involved the repair and re-equipping of several primary schools, at least one primary health care center, modest job creation redevelopment efforts, and the distribution of essential non-food item relief to upwards of 3,000 families.

However, while this has certainly helped some, it does not make a dent in the urgent demand for aid and relief needed by tens of thousands of families and the original inhabitants of areas like the Nineveh Plain. The Nineveh Plain was dilapidated since Saddam's rule due to his discriminatory policies (as with the KRG now and its discriminatory policies in its effort to exert control over the area).

Organizations like AAS, which USAID used to rebuild whole villages and provide essential aid during the mid-1990's are now finding themselves unable to work with the US (whether through Provincial Reconstruction Teams or USAID) for reasons unknown to analysts. This is also the case for many other credible and trusted aid organizations and civic/NGO groups.

An array of other, well-established and capable organizations are ready partners to work with the US Government to secure the necessary aid for minorities. They also have not been utilized; remaining marginalized from the development process.



The development and reconstruction organization, Nahrain for Development and Construction (NDC), was established in 2003. It is forced to operate as two entities within it, doing reconstruction work. It cannot do its work as NDC, it does its work as Al-Bazi Construction and Firas Electrical. The KRG will not allow NDC to work as such because its directors reject all requirements to support or affiliate with the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

It has developed and delivered drinking water projects in northern Iraq that are now providing water to three separate villages. It is a capable development partner that rejects the political coercion of the KDP/KRG and therefore is formally marginalized.

The Nineveh Center for Research and Development (NCRD) is an organization committed to researching and defining the development needs of minority communities, particularly those in northern Iraq (in the Nineveh Plain, KRG jurisdiction, and Nineveh Governorate, among others). Consisting of over 1000 professionals with development expertise ranging from medicine/health care to engineering to democracy and human rights analysis/activism. They are capable of providing the most in-depth understanding of the situation in their areas of concern.

They are also capable of implementing development initiatives but in all these respects remain excluded as partners and face the same form of targeting and marginalization from the KRG.

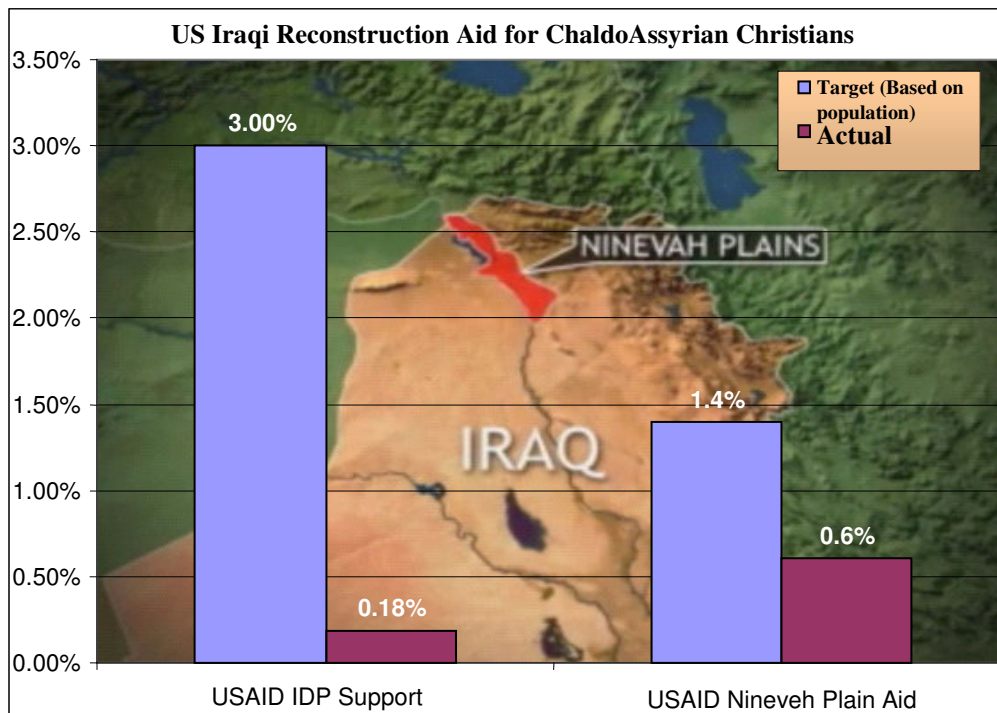
Other, active, major organizations capable and ready to serve as US Government development and reconstruction partners include:

- Assyrian Woman's Union
- ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union
- Hamurabi Organization for Human Rights
- UR Center for Rights and Democracy Enlightenment
- ChaldoAssyrian Syriac National Council – Nineveh Branch
- Akitu Organization for Development of Karimles

Authorities of the KRG, particularly through the KDP, use their own representatives that target these communities – especially IDPs – explaining that if they accept aid from anyone other than KRG appointed agencies, they will receive no governmental aid and face other extraordinary pressures, such as denial of work and obstacles from the KRG.

This is a deliberate system of targeting/pressuring the community, causing the marginalization and atrophy of all its independent civil society and aid organizations.

Aid and reconstruction is thus rendered an entirely politicized process by the KRG at the expense of the urgent needs of minorities such as ChaldoAssyrian Christians. Breaking the bottleneck requires a deliberate policy by the US Government to reach out to these organizations directly and seek their assistance as partners sharing the same strategic interests and vision.



## X. Solutions

1. Work to support, in constructive ways and consultation with the community, the pursuit of federalism solutions such as the formation of the Nineveh Plain Administrative Unit, tied directly to the central government, as per Art. 125 of Iraq's Constitution.
  - This includes removing obstacles such as the lack of development, reconstruction and even consultation with independent and legitimate political parties, civic organizations and NGOs which further marginalizes and suffocates the community.

2. Work to overcome the political blockages to the formation of a Nineveh Plain formal policing force based on the original 1000 names – as a starting point – provided by legitimate local representatives.
3. Establish direct US training for this police force and ensure a system of oversight/supervision to prevent further undue pressures from KRG and other authorities on this police force.
4. Urgently target IDPs fleeing to the north, especially the Nineveh Plain, for relief and aid, to prevent them from having to leave the country. The policy approach here should be that of: “Prevention is the Cure”. If we can prevent them from having to leave the country, a major part of the struggle to prevent the de-Christianization of Iraq would have been met.
5. Work with legitimate and credible NGOs that are presently marginalized in working with US authorities;
6. Provide short and medium-term needs that include security, housing and economic development;
7. Specifically prioritize ensuring passage and maximum impact of the “not less than \$10 million” in aid to IDPs in the Nineveh Plain, proposed by Congressman Mark Kirk and adopted in Congress unanimously in the 2008 Foreign Operations Appropriation.
8. Increase aid to meet the disproportionate suffering of these people, particularly in areas such as the Nineveh Plain.
9. Apply direct and indirect forms of pressure on the KRG and the dominant political groups there to remove the barriers they have created to the political, economic and social development of this and other minority communities.

## **XI. Conclusion**

Each of the solutions put forth is within US Government direct capacity to implement. They simply require the political will and proper coordination to be achieved.

However, the formation of the Nineveh Plain Administrative Area as per Art. 125, and to be defined by Iraqi legislation, is a far more complex objective. It is, nonetheless, the most necessary and assured solution for providing a future for these people in Iraq. Therefore, it must be approached with this understanding in mind.

Many others have recognized this reality. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom has now formally listed this as a necessary measure in its

recommendations following a hearing on the plight of Iraq's minorities of antiquity in late July, 2007.<sup>10</sup> The US Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a letter to the Honorable Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice stated, "we hope that the US Government will consider the creation of a new "Administrative Region" in the Nineveh Plain Area that would be directly related to the central government in Baghdad."

Analysts, such as Walid Phares, in an interview with Pat Robertson also called for the formation of such a federal unit in Iraq, as has the Washington representative of Christian Solidarity International, Dr. Fr. Keith Roderick.

Two recent pieces of appropriations legislation, the 2007 Supplemental and the 2008 budget carried report language explicitly targeting the Nineveh Plain and expressing concern over its future. In two separate hearings (one in the Appropriations Committee, the other in the Foreign Affairs Committee), the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Mr. Stuart Bowen, was confronted with questions on the future of Iraq's ChaldoAssyrian Christians, with specific emphasis on the Nineveh Plains.

This reflects growing legislative awareness of the reality that the US Government requires a policy with respect to this and other vulnerable minorities and that the Nineveh Plain is the primary element of that solution.

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<sup>10</sup> See US Commission on International Religious Freedom September 6, 2007 letter to the Hon. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, indicating this solution among others should be discussed with minority community leaders. <http://www.uscirf.gov/mediaroom/press/2007/september/20070906RiceLetterIraq.html> (last accessed October 4, 2007). Also, see US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Public Hearing: Threats to Iraq's Communities of Antiquity", Testimony by Former Displacement and Migration Minister and Human Rights Activist, Pascale Warda; Testimony by Former Chairman of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities, Dr. Donny George; Testimony by the Project Director of the Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project, Michael Youash <http://www.uscirf.gov/events/hearings/2007/July/iraq%20link%20page%202.html>. The testimonies do not reflect the views of USCIRF, but informed the letter above. July 25, 2007. (last accessed September 23, 2007).