

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	564
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International
Titel:	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 – Iraq
Udgivet:	6. juli 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	29. august 2011

Title	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Iraq
Publisher	Minority Rights Group International
Country	Iraq
Publication Date	6 July 2011
Cite as	Minority Rights Group International, <i>State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Iraq</i> , 6 July 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e16d36e5f.html [accessed 29 August 2011]
Disclaimer	This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher.

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Iraq

Around 3 per cent of Iraq's population is made up of Christians including Armenian, Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac minorities. Religious and other ethnic minorities include Bahá'ís, Bedouin, Black-Iraqis, Circassians, Kaka'is, Palestinians, Roma, Sabeen Mandaean, Shabaks and Yezidis. There are just eight remaining members of the Jewish community. Sunni Muslim Turkmen are the third largest ethnic group in Iraq, while the Kurdish community makes up 15-20 per cent of the population.

Exact numbers of minorities remaining in Iraq are very difficult to establish due to ongoing displacement, internal migration and violence. In 2010, religious and ethnic minority communities continued to suffer targeted killings and abductions, the destruction of their places of worship, homes and businesses, and, according to the USCIRF 2010, insufficient government protection. A national census that was scheduled to take place in October was postponed for the third time since 1987, re-scheduled for 5 December and then postponed indefinitely. The ongoing dispute over territories in northern Iraq, including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, that affects Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Turkmen, Yezidis and other vulnerable minorities, is at the centre of this delay.

Political representation

The rising tension in this volatile northern region was also at the heart of disputes over Iraq's electoral law, which was debated in October 2009, delaying the country's parliamentary election, which was scheduled to take place in January 2010. The amended law, which attempts to reach a compromise on how the vote should be conducted in the disputed territory, was passed in November 2009. The new law increases minority representation to eight seats, with Christians allocated five seats, Shabaks and Yezidis one each, and Mandaean electing their first ever parliamentary representative – Khalid Ahmed Roumi. However, minority representatives criticized the scope of the amended law. The Mandaean seat is restricted to the Baghdad governorate, meaning only those who live in the city, or have proof of residency, can vote for the Mandaean candidate. This does not reflect the fact that Mandaean have also traditionally lived in Basra and Kirkuk, but have since 2003 been displaced all over the country. Many have fled abroad. Mandaean community representatives in Jordan said that the electoral law should recognize them as one national constituency (as is the case with Iraqi Christians) so they could vote for their chosen candidate, regardless of their governorate of origin. According to the *Jordan Times*, a case was brought before an Iraqi federal court by the Mandaean Council to challenge the amendment in early February.

Yezidi leaders meanwhile pointed out that, given the size of the Yezidi population (estimated at between 300,00 and 400,000, according to MRG sources) and the

constitutional provision that there should be one seat for every 100,000 people, the community should have been granted a higher number of seats. Black Iraqis, who number around 2 million according to community estimates, also raised objections. Speaking to Al-Jazeera news in January 2010, activist Tahir Yahya said, 'We want to be like the Christians and Mandaean and other white minorities who have fixed representation in parliament – we the black people in Iraq have rights.'

In addition to quotas based on ethnicity, the Iraqi Constitution also holds that parliament should include a 25 per cent quota of female candidates (82 representatives). To ensure this, each party and coalition list must have 25 per cent female candidates.

Elections finally took place on 7 March 2010. However, due to investigations into allegations of fraud and wrangling between parties, it took until November for a power-sharing agreement to be announced, and for Nouri al-Maliki to be reappointed as prime minister. The Council of Ministers includes two Christian ministers (human rights, and industry and minerals), but only one of the 38 ministers is female (Minister Without Portfolio Bushra Hussain Salih)

Attacks on Christian minorities

During this 10-month political vacuum, a period that also saw the end of US combat operations in Iraq, violence against minorities continued. The UK's *Guardian* newspaper called 2010, 'the worst year since 2003 for Iraq's Christians', stating that more Christians fled in 2010 than any other year since the US-led invasion began. In the second week of February, ten Christians were killed in Mosul, in five separate incidents. The USCIRF 2010 reported that this caused 43,000 Christians to flee the city for villages in the Nineveh plains, the Kurdistan Regional Governorates and Syria. Christian news websites reported that four people had been arrested for the crimes in early March.

On 31 October, the Christian community suffered its worst atrocity since the conflict began in 2003. According to international media reports, five suicide bombers passed through police and military checkpoints, and attacked the Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad. The attack took place during a Sunday evening service when about 100 worshippers were at the church. Gunmen held siege to the church for four hours, and witnesses reported hearing explosions and shooting. One hostage reported that worshippers were beaten by the militants. The BBC said many of the worshippers were women. Many were injured, while 56 Christians including two priests were killed, along with 12 others. The al-Qaeda linked group, the Islamic State of Iraq, claimed responsibility for the attack.

International and national political and religious leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI and Grand Ayatollah Sistani, Iraq's highest Shi'a cleric, condemned the attacks. But in November the group continued to terrorize the minority community, detonating 11 roadside bombs in three Christian areas of Baghdad. Five people were killed. Finally, on 31 December, international media reported that two people were killed and eight injured in bomb and grenade attacks on Christian homes across Baghdad, by militants linked to al-Qaeda.

Numerous Christian and Yezidi businesses, particularly those thought to be selling alcohol, were targeted and attacked during the year. Mandaean, who are traditionally goldsmiths, reported that their shops continued to be targeted with threats and bombings.

Minority women

Women from minority communities have increasingly reported that they wear Islamic *hijab* for security reasons when they are in public. The IRFR 2010 stated that, regardless of religious affiliation, women and girls are often threatened for wearing 'Western-style clothing, or for failing to adhere sufficiently to strict interpretations of conservative Islamic norms governing public behavior'. According to the report, women from the

Mandaean community have told of being 'pressured' from outside to marry outside their faith, which is forbidden according to Mandaean religious practices. (For more information, see special report, below.)

Northern Iraq

Tension in northern Iraq continued to affect minorities. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution calls for a referendum to determine whether citizens of territories across parts of five governorates from the Syrian border to the Iranian border east of Baghdad wish to formally join the autonomous Kurdistan region. As a result, Christians, Shabaks, Yezidis and other minority groups living in the region have been subject to pressure from different political groupings seeking to force minorities to identify as either Arab or Kurd, or pledge support for a particular political party. This pressure includes intimidation, arbitrary arrests, political disenfranchisement and the threat of blocking access to employment and resources. Minorities have also reported property being confiscated with no compensation by Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

Targeted and random killings also occurred across the year in the region. In January 2010, Christians and Shabaks were injured in a bomb explosion in the town of Bartellah in Nineveh. Another car bomb was also exploded in Mosul on 10 January, and a Shabak man was shot on the same day. From January to March, MRG reported that more than 13 Christians were killed, with many describing the attacks as an attempt to drive minorities from the region ahead of the elections. Louis Sako, Archbishop of Kirkuk, described the attacks in Mosul as 'ugly and organized'.

The USCIRF 2010 reported that in February, the Iraqi government said it had established an investigative committee into the attacks. The governor of Nineveh ordered increased security and called for an international investigation, the report said, but by the end of 2010, no perpetrators were known to have been arrested or charged. Also in February 2010, church leaders established the Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq in an attempt to promote religious acceptance, strengthen their community and engage in dialogue with the state and other religious leaders.

Iraq's Bahá'ís continue to suffer repression, as the faith remains prohibited by Law 105 of 1970. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution which allow for freedom of religion, the IRFR 2010 points out that no court challenges have been brought to have Law 105 invalidated, and no legislation has been proposed to repeal it.

Forced returns of rejected Iraqi asylum seekers are occurring despite repeated calls from NGOs and UNHCR not to return people, particularly minorities, who are from high-risk governorates including Baghdad, Kirkuk and Nineveh. UNHCR stated that internal flight was not an option, given access and residency restrictions in other governorates as well as hardship faced by returnees. In 2010, forced returns of rejected asylum seekers including Christians, Shabak and Yezidis took place from the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK. In December, Sweden forcibly returned around 20 Iraqis, including five Christians from Baghdad. UNHCR condemned the action and expressed its concern at the message forced returns from third countries give to Middle Eastern countries hosting Iraqi refugees. Following a December 2010 seminar in Stockholm, involving NGO representatives including MRG, members of the Swedish parliament and Migration Board officials, the Swedish government instructed the Migration Board to take more care in analysing the claims of asylum seekers from Iraq's religious minorities.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.